



## Conscious Life presents

### How Attachment Shows Up At Work

**Guest: Heather Monroe**

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#### **[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson**

Welcome to this interview, I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Heather Monroe, a Psychotherapist and wellness educator, with over 15 years of experience working with trauma.

She specializes in the healing of attachment and relational trauma, and guides her clients through a holistic and transformative process. Her approach is creative, open and flexible, recognizing that healing requires an individualized approach. Heather Monroe, thank you so much for being with us today.

#### **Heather Monroe**

I'm so excited to be here again.

#### **Meagen Gibson**

Heather, everyone, including stay-at-home parents, has a relationship to work. Some of us get paid for our labor and others don't, but make no mistake, we're all working in some way. With that context to set us up, what is attachment and how does it relate to our work?

#### **Heather Monroe**

I love this subject, first of all, because so many conversations with my clients stem around work, because that is where we spend most of our time, unfortunately, in our adult lives. There is this theory that we all have around, I think culturally, you leave your stuff at home when you come to work.

As social beings, that are hardwired for connection, that isn't how it works with attachment theory. We take all of our attachment stuff with us to work, and all of our other neuroses and mental health stuff, we take it to our workplace.

**[00:01:48] Heather Monroe**

The way that attachment looks in the workplace is, attachment theory is about how we connect to the social world, how we connect to others. We are going to take that attachment theory into work as well. How do we connect to our co-workers? And how do we connect to our business partners? And how do we connect to our leaders? Our bosses at work as well.

**Meagen Gibson**

So true, I literally was just having a conversation with my husband, they had an office party last night, and he was like, I was totally having to process through somebody's attachment stuff with them, surprisingly, because when I told them I would meet them in the front of the building, they were like, I felt totally abandoned. I was like, oh my God, you really were working through... He was like, I didn't know I was going to deal with that today.

It's true, we do things, we have interactions with people, and if we don't speak the language, or have the knowledge, or have the background running, it can be really surprising when people do show up fully and disclose what's hard for them, or behave in ways that are indicative of their attachment stuff that we're not aware of. I just imagine all these people without all of this framework, bumping into each other all day long, not understanding what all these interactions, what's at the core of all of them.

**Heather Monroe**

Oh, my gosh. 100%. We might look at co-workers as annoying to work with, or infuriating to work with, but a lot of that is our layman's terms for attachment things, styles, triggers that are going on without us having the language for why is it infuriating? Why is that person annoying?

A lot of the time when I dig a little deeper with clients, it's like, oh, because this person is highly insecure, and constantly asking for if their work is okay, and you're their supervisor, and it's like, oh, my gosh, get away from me. Can't you just do work on your own? Well, no, they can't, because their anxious attachment is being constantly triggered by the work, and the interpersonal relationships themselves in the workplace.

**Meagen Gibson**

I love that you just put that into context, too, of like, here's how it's going to feel when you're having it, or when you're running into it, because we can talk about the theory all we want, but how does it actually look at work? You just did such a great job of describing that. When you were like, this person's driving me nuts, I related to so many of them, not necessarily this job, at this job everyone is perfect. I love everyone, but...

**Heather Monroe**

It's really attached, it's wonderful.

**[00:04:37] Meagen Gibson**

Our whole organization is completely healed and securely attached. But it does remind me of one of our production managers, who I absolutely adore and can't live without. She had this revelation several months ago where she said, I have a way of doing things, and I just assumed everyone did them that way too. She was having all this conflict because not everyone does everything the way that she does, that's not how their workflow works.

**Heather Monroe**

Yeah, or someone might be difficult to work with because they don't coalesce with the group, meaning that when there's a group project, they just want to work by themselves, and they're nonconformist, and they think that the group doesn't matter, isn't important. It's like, well, that person might have avoidant attachment, and that's why they're difficult, because it's very hard for avoidant attachment to work well with others.

**Meagen Gibson**

I think especially, and you let me know what's going on, what you're seeing at work, post-Covid, the idea that our workplace is a family, and we're all a family, everybody's distanced themselves from that mentality. Work is very much like, here is where I come to work, and we're less intertwined. Our identities are less intertwined in our work, in our work environment, and the people that we work with.

From my 30,000-foot view, with that comes some of these behaviors that we're talking about. Where we're not going to work as hard to overcome our avoidance to work in a group project, because we don't want to think of our work as our family anymore.

**Heather Monroe**

That's interesting. We're much more siloed because of Covid, it siloed us a lot more, which might be great for someone who's avoidant. It might have been hell, and nervous breakdown producing for someone who has a highly anxious attachment system.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely anxious, and maybe extroverted, like those poor folks during lockdowns, I was always checking on my extroverts.

**Heather Monroe**

Shout out to all the extroverted people, you poor things. I was thriving as an introvert.

**Meagen Gibson**

Me too. I was having a great time.

**[00:06:58] Heather Monroe**

I was living my best life, but my extroverted friends were really suffering. Yeah, it's true.

**Meagen Gibson**

When you're working with clients on attachment, do they typically come to you with romantic, familial, or work issues first?

**Heather Monroe**

Always romantic first, and there's a real reason, it makes a lot of sense why, because we are hardwired to procreate. Even if that's not our goal, we don't want kids, that primary connection is what has kept us surviving all these years, and evolving as a human species.

The first issue that people come with me for is romantic partnership. Either they continue to have the same romantic issues, finding the same person, just looks different. That is what we talked about in the last conference, of just why that is, why do we keep cycling through the same toxic dynamic? Which is really just an insecure attachment style.

Then if that dissipates, and I will say anxiously attached people tend to focus more on the romantic relationship. My clients with avoidant attachment actually tend to focus more on their work relationships. Which makes a lot of sense, because it's not their... Love and intimacy isn't necessarily their primary focus, but work might be, and they're showing up at work with some real issues around personalities at work, but also the work itself.

I can go through what anxious attachment looks like at work, and what negative attachment looks like at work, and why that is, that avoidance for work stuff.

**Meagen Gibson**

I would love to, let's just go into it right now, what does avoidant attachment look like at work? What does anxious attachment look like at work specifically? You already named a couple of ways, but especially since that's what normally brings avoidance in, I would love if we start there.

**Heather Monroe**

A quick review, with avoidant attachment, for people tuning in and are like, what is attachment? What is that? Avoidant attachment comes when caretakers, when you were younger, almost never were attuned to your emotional or physical needs. What emotional mis-attunement looks like is denying your reality like, I didn't just yell at you, what are you talking about? When they clearly just yelled. You ask for something and it's like, no, you don't want that. What are you talking about? You don't think that. There's a constant denial of reality.

It can also look like when you're upset about something, that caretaker cannot process it with you, so they either deny that you're upset about it, or they become so dysregulated by you being upset, that they can't calm your body down. Because we're always looking to co-regulate as humans, to co-regulate with another nervous system. So if your caregiver isn't equipped to help you co-regulate, you're going to give up on co-regulation altogether. What happens is you're going to

stunt your emotional regulation skills, and go into numbness, so that you don't really know what you're feeling in order to survive.

**[00:10:46] Heather Monroe**

I don't know what my needs are, I don't know what my wants are, I'm highly independent, I'm highly non-conformist, I'm an island unto myself, I am anti-dependent, like inter-dependence is weakness. An avoidant person avoids emotions, and is aloof in relationships, is avoidant of interpersonal connection in general.

With that being said, which is a huge mouthful, if you look at that in the workplace. I'm going to do the cons and the pros, because there are cons and pros for each style of attachment.

Some of the cons for avoidantly attached, how they show up in the workplace, are that they seek less support from others. Which means that they tend to, if they need that support in work, in order to get results, and in order to provide overall results, they're not going to look for it, and they're going to be highly defensive in their work not showing the results that are needed. They don't take blame or criticism well, they are very much like, well, that was the fault of someone else, or this is why that happened, because they don't seek support, they don't know how to seek support.

Like I said before they don't conform to groups well. If there's a new time change, like, hey, guys, I know Covid happened, but we're getting back into the office, and I need everyone here by 10:00. Your avoidantly attached person might keep strolling in around 10:30, with a real sense of disregard, that this is what the group is doing. That's an example of being non-conformist.

Or you have a group meeting and you all have your certain tasks, and the avoidant goes rogue, and just does their own thing. It's like, hold on this isn't what we spoke about. They can also have glazed looks in their eyes during meetings, because they're just focusing on what their task is, they're not focusing on the group's overall result, they're focusing on what their result is. That's a survival mechanism, they have to be focused on what their results are, because when they were little, that was the only way they survived, was like, okay, I know that primary caregivers aren't going to save me, so I need to save myself. I'm going to become super focused on the tasks that I have to do.

They have distrust towards co-workers intentions as well as leaders intentions. They tend to be distrustful, more negative emotions than positive emotions in general, a little bit jaded, distrustful, suspicious. They have negative views of their leaders a lot of the time, like, I could do that better, that's not right, because they can't see how a leader might be concentrating on the group as a whole, and that doesn't really make sense to them a lot of the time as an employee.

They are distant, so they'll make up work excuses to not socialize. They're not really going to be going out to lunch, or they might be, but as soon as it gets too personal, you're going to see them pull away. They might be great as extroverted and social, but as soon as it gets too deep or too personal, they're going to go away a little bit, and put you at an arm's length. They like their anonymity, they avoid personal closeness.

**[00:14:34] Heather Monroe**

And they avoid group tasks, they're not great at teamwork. That's like the negatives of the avoidant attachment style, any questions about that?

**Meagen Gibson**

No, but I'm resonating with every single thing that you're saying, and not at all thinking of people that I work with, and how this explains their behavior. I was thinking about something else too, but I was listening so intently, and normally I make little notes while you're talking so that I don't forget, but now I can't remember.

I can see how the hyper-focus, on their job, and their goals, and their work is advantageous to them. It might be a con to the system that they're in, and it ends up having other people feel like the anxious people, not the secure people, feeling like they don't like them, or that they're just not interested in them. When really it's, I'm just focused over here, I'm getting my stuff done.

**Heather Monroe**

Yes. And as leaders, they aren't sensitive to their employees' needs. There's a lot of research that shows that a good leader, an overall well-rounded leader, is sensitive to the needs of the group. It doesn't mean that they'll always go with what everyone needs, because that wouldn't be a good leader. They take in what the group is saying, and then they make a decision for the better of what they think is going to be best for the group.

An avoidant leader isn't going to be able to take in the needs of the group, they're really thinking about the company, and they're not realizing that the company is built on people. People, when they have avoidant bosses, feel really distant from them, they feel not appreciated by them very much. It can lead to high turnover with employees because it's like, I don't know what the head of the snake is doing, what it thinks about me or my performance, I don't get any feedback, and I feel underappreciated at work. That's the feel of employees around avoidant leaders.

**Meagen Gibson**

Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, but it's so fitting to me, too, because I'm thinking of sales jobs, where people are really good at sales and where it's an independent job, they go out, they land a sale. Then those people, the successful salespeople, are then promoted to managers, where they are now in charge of people, when that's not what they excel at, that doesn't make them necessarily good at... I'm sure lots of salespeople are great managers, but the ones that aren't, it sounds textbook, like this is what's going on.

**Heather Monroe**

Yes.

**Meagen Gibson**

Then the other thing I wanted to ask while we're here. Sorry, what were you going to say?

**[00:17:35] Heather Monroe**

I was thinking about siloed tech people could be very good at being, have an avoidant attachment style, and be great at that, because they're given a task to program something, it works in a silo, no one else, their work is being graded just on them alone. It could do very well in certain companies as well.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely, I also want to at some point, touch on, and this might not be it, you might want to come to it later, and we can put a pin in it. But things like panic disorder at work, things like panic attacks, and things where you are having to perform, but you can be extraordinarily good in a lot of situations. And then a weird, something will come up where you have to go on a bus for a group trip, or you're asked to speak in front of a bunch of people, and how you might respond from those different types of attachment given higher pressure situations at work.

**Heather Monroe**

Yes, I think I spoke about this in the last talk, how if you put an avoidantly attached person through a divorce, or a death, they become anxiously attached, their attachment can flip. High-stress situations can create a flip of the attachment style. That is a great point.

Given higher stress situations for an avoidantly attached person, they are absolutely capable of having panic attacks at work. Whether it's like you have to go to a conference and socialize with everyone, and go to all these dinners, an avoidant person may be like, oh, my God, this is literally my living hell, I'm not capable of this, and I have to perform. It's a great point, our attachment styles can flip under high stress.

**Meagen Gibson**

Great. Okay, so now that we've talked about the cons, what are the pros of avoidant attachment at work?

**Heather Monroe**

Pros would be if you flip the cons. You're going to have an ability to have sustained focus on a task, a lot more than an anxiously attached person is, because you don't care what anyone else is doing or thinking. It's like you are just zeroed in on what the task at hand is. You tend to get the job done, you tend to be very efficient at getting the job done.

You work independently, and that's a great thing. There's a great side to that, to not have to go to your supervisor all the time to have your work checked, and you have a real security around your skills. That can be a great thing about working independently.

You orient at work around promoting results. Your focus at work isn't interpersonal like an anxiously attached person's is, your focus at work is promoting results, and you're going to be the quickest person to respond effectively in a crisis situation. All of this is backed by research, there's research now being studied about attachment theories and work, everything I'm naming is pretty well documented and science-backed around effectively responding to crisis.

**[00:21:04] Heather Monroe**

All of those things, which I think is very interesting because when we spoke about relationships with avoidantly attached people, they respond well to intensity. That is what tends to glue the anxious and the avoidant together at first, is mistaking intensity for intimacy. That makes sense to me, that at work they're going to be a really quick responder and effective responder to intensity, to crisis.

**Meagen Gibson**

Bridging on that, zoom is weird, I apologize for the interruptions. Occupations like first responders, I've got several EMTs and firefighters in the conference for the first time, I've been trying to get those folks in. All of the same things, like the intensity factor, and having incredible calm in chaos and emergency situations, the personality profile of people that go into those lines of work is very, normally, I'm over-generalizing, very avoidant, sometimes...

**Heather Monroe**

100% to have that calm and that almost numbing towards a crisis in order to really focus on what needs to be done is essential. It does well with avoidant attachments.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely.

**Heather Monroe**

I actually want to make this statement, that this talk isn't meant to go and diagnose any of your co-workers. It's just about where people might be operating from, until they take an attachment test and all that stuff. I would say that we're all on the spectrum, and I am going to talk about when our attachment systems are triggered, because we all have attachment systems. If we veer on the side of anxious attachment, or we veer on the side of avoidant, we might be seeing more of the anxiously attached qualities in ourselves. Doesn't mean we have anxious attachment, it just means that we're on the spectrum of that side.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, I'm glad that you said that, because the last thing that you should do, you've got your co-workers and you go in and you're like, "You're making my life a problem because you're so avoidantly attached. I think you need to go see a therapist and fix that so that I'm more comfortable."

That's the last thing we need people doing. It's a mode of understanding both yourself and the obstacles you might be facing, or the feedback you're getting that you feel powerless to change, or the people that you're interacting with creating a little compassion around their orientation, and the things that you can do to maneuver around their center of gravity, if you will.



### **[00:23:59] Heather Monroe**

Exactly, and some workspaces are more triggering attachment system-wise than other workspaces. That's interesting as well. I worked with a client who had a lot of anxious attachment that was compiled, made worse with the fact that she was in a job that she wasn't just passionate about.

It had a lot of math, and stuff that her brain can't process well. It made her extra anxiously attached because things just didn't stick. It didn't make sense to her, it wasn't the best fit with her brain. On top of that, she struggled with anxious attachment. Whereas if she was in a job that was more humanitarian, her anxious attachment wouldn't be so inflated, because there would be some stability in the work she was doing.

### **Meagen Gibson**

It's interesting, too, because just situationally, I'm a person who is riding an edge of growth around change I did not initiate, and as you were describing avoidant behaviors, I was like, I don't relate to a lot of that, except for when change is thrust upon me, without me being the initiator of the change, I was like, all of that sounds like what I do. Somebody changes things and I'm like, I'm a skeptic, I'm going to rebel, I'm going to do whatever I want anyway. Outing myself.

To give people an example, you might not be relating to the description of where you land on the attachment scale, but then in certain situations, under certain stressors, under things that aren't in your control, that's when this stuff pops up and you're like, oh.

### **Heather Monroe**

Exactly, so going to anxious attachment, I'll give a good example of when our anxious attachment system has been triggered, and what that can look like, even though we aren't necessarily anxiously attached in our romantic relationship, per se.

Anxiously attached, our caretakers almost never got it, they got it right sometimes, but most of the time they didn't, which always left us guessing when our needs were going to be met in the most simple terms.

If we're always guessing as a child, is mom, or dad, or grandma, or whoever, our primary caretaker, are they going to meet my needs this time? Or is my reality going to be denied? Am I going to be dismissed? Or is their system going to be so dysregulated they can't regulate mine?

That, just talking about it gives a lot of anxiety, it's like, I'm going to be hyper-vigilant around connection and my self-esteem. My self-worth is going to be highly dependent on whether my self-esteem, or self-worth is going to be highly dependent upon that connection. But since that connection was so fickle, that means my self-esteem is not going to be solid.

I'm going to have lower self-esteem, I'm going to have higher insecurities, a lot of worry, a lot of self-doubt, and these are all going to show up at work. I'm constantly going to be seeking approval from colleagues, from supervisors, and from bosses. It's going to be very hard for me to know that I did a good job, without someone telling me I did a good job.

**[00:27:17] Heather Monroe**

I'm going to have a hard time working on my own because I don't have a lot of confidence in myself to work on my own, or to work by myself. I'm going to have a strong fear of rejection. That means when I have a strong fear of rejection, it means I'm always going to be looking at the holes, like poking holes in, looking for disconnection in some way.

Even something that isn't a rejection, like at a review, you're doing such a great job, you're one of our hardest workers, you conform to the group, you do such a great job. And here's something I'd like you to work on.

All I hear is the and. Oh, my gosh, I'm going to get fired, my job, I'm not worth anything. Everything else is thrown out the window, there's always looking for the holes in where I can be abandoned.

Strong fear of disconnection, conform to the group, but can almost be to a fault, where I lose myself in the group. We have a group meeting and it's, okay, what the group's going to do? And then what am I going to do individually within the group? That can give me a lot of anxiety about, I'm the weakest link. And if this is the group's goal, and I need to do this thing by myself, oh, my gosh, if I mess up, that's going to mess the whole group up.

Then you're preoccupied, and then you need people to soothe you, and you need to co-regulate, and then people are taking up time, just regulating your nervous system, instead of getting the work done. It can look like a lot of interpersonal drama and exhaustion. People can feel a little exhausted as co-workers by needing to reassure you.

Overwhelming longing and desire for closeness in the co-working space. I need to have a work wife, I need to have a best working buddy, I need to be padded with friendships all around me, to buoy me up to compensate for the fact that I feel like I'm drowning by myself. If that makes sense.

There's interestingly, higher burnout levels, which is understandable because you're expending so much energy in the interpersonal systems, and drama in your own mind and system. There's interestingly, negative expectations of leaders. That makes sense when you think about it, because you're always looking that someone's going to abandon you, and you're transferring your caregiver experiences into your leadership experiences.

A boss for anxiously attached person is going to mean danger in a certain way. It's like, I don't trust that this person is going to listen to me, show up for me, and be attuned to my needs. The moment I sense that they aren't, it's like, aha, see, I told you they're an awful boss. They tend to have negative views of leadership for different reasons than the avoidance.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, because both of them have negative views of leadership, poor leadership, getting a bad rap, but for totally different reasons, interesting. I'm imagining you're a manager, and you give somebody a review, like you said that yearly review, there's a growth spot, here's where you could grow a little, that's all they're thinking about. As the leader, you're like, I gave them a great review, I'll see you next year. And they're, I need constant check-ins.

**[00:31:46] Heather Monroe**

And they are still in that room a month later, still thinking about all the...

**Meagen Gibson**

I was just going to ask, they're the ones that lay in bed at night replaying conversations that they had, whether they be about work or not. These could be water cooler conversations, like, oh, my God, I looked so stupid when I said that blah, blah, blah.

**Heather Monroe**

100%. Yes, because they're hyper-vigilant and highly anxious around interpersonal relationships. So, oh, my gosh, I can't believe I said that, I wonder if that person's mad at me for some reason, they weren't looking, interacting with me a lot today. Again, high burnout, you're spending a lot of energy outside of work thinking about these things.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah and also always fearing being fired. The slightest mistake, the slightest misunderstanding or miscommunication, you're like, that's it, here I go.

**Heather Monroe**

Exactly. The pros of anxiously attached is some of the negatives too. They're not going to be troublemakers, we are going to coalesce, conform, just tell us what to do and we will do it. We're not going to be troublemakers, we're not going to be non-conformist.

We're better at detecting risks because we're hyper-vigilant around risks, and pitfalls and downfalls. We're really good at poking, being able to see, oh, I don't know if this is going to work, I don't know if this system needs some tweaking at the company. And that's really great, everyone needs someone like that to be able to sit around and look at the negatives, and where improvement can be made.

**Meagen Gibson**

They should be assigned to risk management.

**Heather Monroe**

Exactly. HR, just doing.

**Meagen Gibson**

Exactly.

**[00:33:46] Heather Monroe**

Because we are self-reflective, almost too self-reflective, we're always seeking ways to improve our performance. During the review, when someone says, and these are the ways you can improve, you better believe that we are going to be on it. But also looking for reassurance around that, do you think that I've improved this way? Did you see how I did that yesterday? I'm actually trying to do what you said. I'm going to ask more questions, and then it becomes, okay, I want you to take that, and internalize all that conversation, and just improve. You don't need to take...

**Meagen Gibson**

An inside work, not a collaborative thing.

**Heather Monroe**

This is an internal monolog, it doesn't have to be an external.

**Meagen Gibson**

This is not a group project.

**Heather Monroe**

Yeah, exactly. But we will be looking for ways to improve, and we are high performers at work, because we're very scared of getting fired, or rejected. We are going to be grade A for effort, like A for effort. Just attachment, we're always going to be looking to be high performers, and get those compliments and praise from our co-workers and our supervisors.

**Meagen Gibson**

Do you find that anxiously attached workers have a harder time with work-life boundaries, or are both equally guilty of overworking and having too much permeability there?

**Heather Monroe**

That's a great question. Anxiously attached people have much harder time with interpersonal boundaries at work, much harder time with that. And avoidantly attached people can be boundaryless in a different way. They would have no problem going through a co-worker's stuff, being uncontained around privacy of others.

I always look at boundaries as protecting myself from the world, but also protecting the world from me. Avoidantly attached people tend to be more uncontained, they have more of a problem protecting the world from themselves. And anxiously attached people have more of a problem protecting themselves from the outside world. Does that make sense?

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Yeah.

### **[00:36:23] Heather Monroe**

Other people's thoughts, and ideas, and feelings penetrate their boundary as anxiously attached person. And as an avoidantly attached person, I am not careful with my words, and thoughts, and physical boundaries with other people.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I think we touched on it before, but most of the people that find their way into your office are dealing with romantic problems, not necessarily work problems. Their boss didn't say, you know, you should go see an attachment expert. But I do wish that that would happen more at work.

When they're coming in, how do they integrate this type of work towards secure attachment then into their work life? Does it happen naturally, or do you find that people have to also go, oh, I can also work on this in this separate place?

### **Heather Monroe**

I'll give you an example, I was working with a client who is recovering from anxious attachment. She was able to be in a securely attached relationship. That anxious attachment in the securely attached romantic relationship has really been healing, and she's been doing so well with that.

In business, someone who wants to be her business partner, she was telling me about the dynamic. And I'm thinking to myself, this sounds toxic, this sounds like all of a sudden she's questioning herself, she's questioning if she's right, she feels very convinced by this person every time she leaves a conversation. This person wants more power in the company, they want more money, they want more equity. She's not comfortable giving it to the person. But every time, just all these things.

A lot of our talks were around, this isn't a romantic, insecure relationship, but it is mimicking an anxiously attached. You are becoming anxiously attached in this relationship. You have the choice to now leave and say, you know what I'm going to look elsewhere for a business partner, or stay, knowing that this will continue to happen, and you may lose more and more agency and power within the working relationship.

That's a great representation of how attachment gets healed in one sector, or is healing in one sector, and yet it gets beat up in another sector, or comes to fruition. Remember how I said, in the last talk I had said, that attachment styles are malleable, they can change, they can become secure, earned secure attachment, but they can also become insecure.

So a securely attached person can go into a relationship, and if they stay long enough, with all the red flags that are telling them to leave, if they stay long enough, they could become insecurely attached. It's the same decision in a work relationship. If you're intimately involved, like a business partner, it's like you want to look at who you're getting married to very closely. If it shows that there's a toxic dynamic between the two of you, do not sign the papers, do not pass go, because it's going to turn into that insecure attachment style dance.

**[00:39:49] Meagen Gibson**

It's interesting because we actually have less time to date an employer than we do to date our spouses. It's really hard, how do we both, as employers and employees, vet our workplaces, and our work people for these types of things, and try to suss out how somebody's going to fit into culture?

**Heather Monroe**

Also what I work with, with clients, is anxiously attached people, we tend to have a theory of lack, I have to make this person love me because this is the only person that's going to love me, because I'm so unlovable and unworthy.

That's also going to come into a job meaning, I have to work for this person who's abusive towards me, because I'll never find another job that'll pay me this much. I'll never find another job that has these benefits. And it's scarier, because we are talking about money here, we're talking about financial security. It's harder for people to take that jump and say, I'm going to look for another job, while I'm in this job I'm going to look for another job, because the financial insecurity is so great in a job and workspace.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, absolutely, we can talk about how it feels to be in a work environment, all these things that people, when they're listening to us, can say, oh, that doesn't sound that like that big of a deal. But when we're talking about the actual security of your life, your ability to take care of your health, and eat good food, and have a roof over your head, and provide for the people that you love, those are deep needs, primary needs, not small things.

It's one thing to insecure attachment, especially if you're in your career, if you've been working for a while, you're like, I know things, I know I can pivot in the world, I know I have capability, and that I'll find the right place, and believe in that. It's another thing to not have that, and to just be like, I'm not going to risk what I know, even if it's awful, and a terrible fit, it makes me hate myself. I'm not going to risk the terrible I know for the potential of something better.

**Heather Monroe**

I've also noticed that people get in the same cycles as they do in a romantic relationship. They keep finding bosses that are just awful to them, and they keep staying for too long and then leaving, but then finding the next boss that is the same thing, the same pattern.

I know that we're running low on time. I wanted to talk a little bit about the healing of these things. Good news is our attachment styles are changeable, very changeable, and with anxious, let's just start with anxious. If you identify yourself as having an anxious attachment style, you're going to be doing a lot of individual work around cognitive behavioral therapy type work, like reframing thoughts like, I can't do this, this is terrible work, I need someone to help me with this.

### **[00:43:03] Heather Monroe**

Start reframing those thoughts of, I have the inner resources to do as much as I can without the help of somebody, and if you ask for help on any given project at least ten times, what I start working with clients with anxious attachment, try getting down those ten times, down to five times.

Let's do harm reduction, it's all about harm reduction, so nothing too big, not all or nothing. But if you ask your co-worker ten questions an hour, just make it one, and try and synthesize everything.

A lot of work around evidence, like where's the evidence that you do have the resources? Let's look for the evidence that your work has never been awful, your work has always done really well. You've outperformed every time. Maybe, just maybe, you can take a little bit more credit than you're giving yourself for this. So really looking at the belief systems at play, and being able to reframe those belief systems.

As far as emotional regulation, that is going to be the work of using breath work, learning how to breathe through anxiety with diaphragm breathing, and all those things are really helpful for anxious attachment.

Also not going to the lemon trees expecting oranges. Meaning are you continuously going to the people that are going to not give you what you need? You always have to go back to them because sometimes you get what you need, but most of the time you don't. You probably are doing that because that's what's familiar to you, and that's what you were trained to do as a kid with your primary caregivers.

I would say sometimes not even going to a co-worker, but going to a friend outside of work and saying, I'm having this high anxiety around performance. Someone who doesn't trigger your attachment system. You want to find someone who doesn't trigger your attachment system, and then not exhaust them with it.

Really learning how to regulate our own nervous system a little better than we're used to. That takes a lot of time with working with a therapist, and working on different strategies for doing that, breathing techniques, but also self-talk, sleep hygiene things like that. All these little ways that we can really buffer our resiliency. Those are going to be some of the key takeaways for healing an anxious attachment style at work.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I love the little baby steps of that, because that's something you can work on incrementally over time, and then over the course of a year makes a huge difference.

### **Heather Monroe**

I would also say that one of the first things I do when working with anxious attachment in the workplace, is going over with my clients where does it show up? Show me where it shows up, let's write a list, write it down when your attachment system gets triggered. What are your protest behaviors? Meaning what are the things you do to get back to connection with people?

### **[00:46:39] Heather Monroe**

Let's look at that list, and start trying to abstain a little bit more around the protest behaviors. If it's asking 1000 questions all the time, if it's needing constant reassurance, we're going to try and draw that back just a tiny bit each week, and see what comes up for you, that's with anxious attachment.

Avoidant attachment, it's going to be the opposite, with avoidantly attached people I do a lot of internal interoception work. Meaning what's going on inside of you? Because anxiously attached people, we know what's going on inside of us, we're very attuned with our overly frazzled nervous systems.

Avoidantly attached people, it's like the wind is blowing, I'm not sure what is happening, there's a little bit of a void of I don't know what the feeling is, I'm not great at nuanced feelings.

Something that I ask all my clients to do when dealing with attachment is get an app on their phone called, How We Feel. It was done, created by Yale researchers. It's all about tracking our emotions, and it gives us emotional literacy.

I use this a lot with avoidantly attached people, where the app asks you to check in, it'll just beep on your phone, check in, how are you feeling? It gives you all the different words of how you might be feeling categorized in four different sectors, like high energy uncomfortable, high energy comfortable, low energy uncomfortable, low energy comfortable. And in those sectors, it shows you the word, and it describes each feeling. Let's say there's 25 in each sector.

Avoidantly attached people, when using this app, and then also just checking in with themselves, are able to expand their emotional literacy. Then with the expansion of emotional literacy and emotions, they're able to ask for support when needed a little bit more. Expanding emotional literacy is going to be huge for avoidantly attached.

Then asking for support, understanding the difference between inter-dependence and co-dependence. Inter-dependency is a really good thing. Co-dependency, which is asking all the time, needing a constant reassurance, that's not a great thing.

Teaching them about interdependency and having them bring questions. A lot of avoidants, they have questions like, is this interdependence? Or is this is codependence? It's like, no, that's interdependence. Understanding the difference between inter-dependency and what's appropriate, and what's not as appropriate, is really helpful in them then learning where support is needed, and how to ask for it.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I can see that playing out in both anxious and avoidant, when you start doing the work, needing a little bit of reassurance that you're doing it right. It's inter-dependence versus dependence.

And then for the anxious, was I checking in too much? And you're like, no, you're supposed to check in with people, it's just how much and the trigger, or the reason behind the initiation. If you need to go check in with a co-worker about their stage of development of the project that's a legitimate check in. If you just need to ask a question for reassurance that you could have



answered yourself. When you start to do the work, it almost creates a little bit more insecurity because it's so unfamiliar, and can be uncomfortable.

**[00:48:42] Heather Monroe**

Avoidantly attached people when they come to me, it's more about, I'm having all these negative experiences at work. I'm in a terrible work environment because of everybody else, and so the work can tend to be about, tends to be more like veering them towards self-reflection. How are they contributing to that messiness, or that hostility, or that lack of connection at work? It's a very gentle guide towards that.

Avoidantly attached people, they are harder to change the attachment style with because they tend to be more avoidant in changing it. Because it was the only way they survived.

Anxiously attached people, they're much more willing to change because they are very self-aware that this is not maintainable. I can't live like this, I am on high drive all the time, this is unsustainable.

It feels more sustainable with an avoidantly attached person, it's like everyone else is the issue, I'm just being me, why is everyone so annoyed when I show up an hour late for work every single day? Come on, just get your stuff done and you'll be fine, you can be like me too.

It's not the point. You have to guide them back to what it means to be part of a group, what it means to be inter-dependent, what connection means. It's a little trickier, but if they are willing, it's doable. It's always doable if you're willing.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, absolutely, it's like all those little steps of, I don't need to introspect, I don't need to be self-aware about my actions because my actions don't impact the desired outcome of the company, in their assessment. And you're like, but it actually does, it affects group morale. If we look at empathy, if we try to develop some perspective on other people's experiences, but we have to teach people how to do that.

**Heather Monroe**

Exactly. It's so hard to be empathetic as an avoidantly attached person because you don't know what it is a lot of the time, because you've had to shut that down at such a young age.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah, because it wasn't modeled or shown to you, if somebody's constantly arguing with you about how you feel, or what you think.

**Heather Monroe**

Or you're constantly looking for to be right, you need to prove yourself right, you need to prove your reality. So, yeah, it's a constant struggle, but doable, for sure doable.

**[00:53:19] Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. That's what I definitely want to leave people with, it's this work is not... It's hard, but it's not hard, it will be uncomfortable, and it requires focus, and it requires practice, and it's a really great idea to get support from somebody like you, Heather. But it's not impossible, and it's not complicated.

**Heather Monroe**

It's not complicated. Exactly. It is not complicated, and you are going to consistently have more opportunities every single day to practice and flex this secure muscle. The more we flex the muscle, the stronger the muscle gets.

It's not going to be, for anxiously attached people, it's not going to be this is the only opportunity I have. No, you have thousands of opportunities believe me, it's going to be fine.

And for the avoidantly attached person, I don't have any opportunities. Yes, you do, you have hundreds of opportunities every day to do this. You need to see what the opportunities are. It's like the opposite issue.

**Meagen Gibson**

Putting on a new lens on our lives. Absolutely.

Heather, if somebody's ready to start this work, how do they find out more about you and your work?

**Heather Monroe**

The best way to find out about my work is to sign up for my newsletter, it's <https://www.monroewellness.com/>, and you subscribe. I'm also on Instagram [monroewellness](#).

I work out of Nashville, so anyone who is local in Nashville, I am able to talk about possible openings or waitlists, but no one outside of the Nashville or Tennessee area.

**Meagen Gibson**

For in person?

**Heather Monroe**

Yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

Awesome. Thank you so much, Heather.

**[00:55:08] Heather Monroe**

Yeah. Absolutely happy to be here.