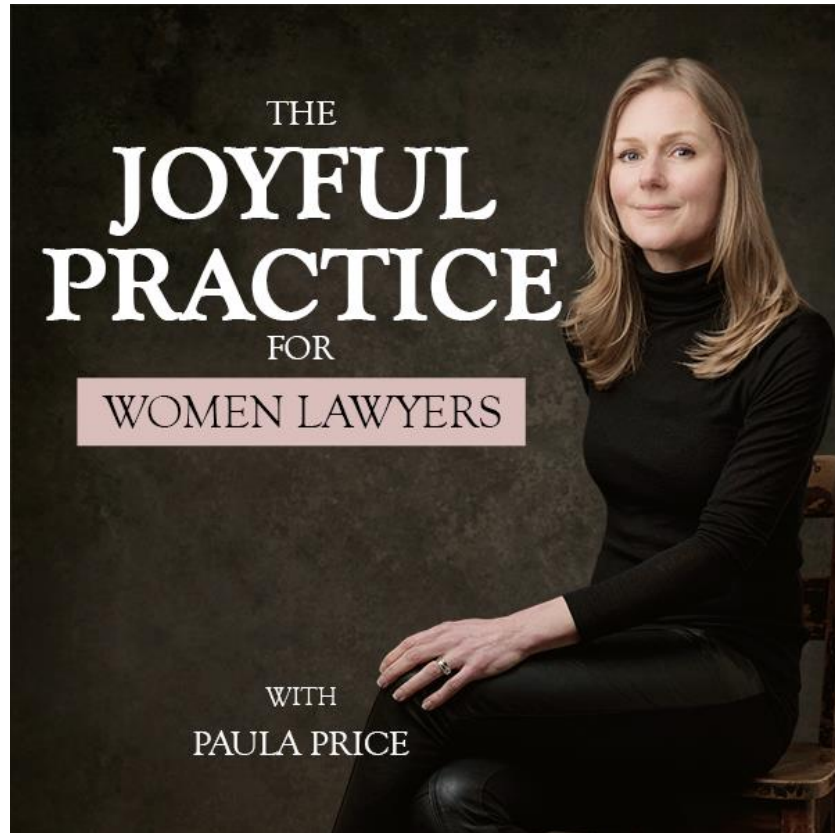


Ep #11: How to Be Your Own Best Boss



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 11.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello everybody, and welcome to today's podcast. For those of you who are returning, welcome back. I am so glad to have you back here every week. I so much appreciate your support and the feedback that you're sharing with me about the podcast.

For those of you who are tuning in for the first time, welcome. My name is Paula Price. I am a lawyer turned certified executive coach. I've created this podcast to share with you some of the lessons that I'm learning in the work that I'm doing with lawyers, the work that I'm doing coaching lawyers. And to make some of these principals more accessible to you, and to offer some strategies and tools that you can apply in your practice.

So for some of you, the concept of coaching may not be familiar. What does it mean? Well, it means that I help lawyers figure out how to create more of what they want both in their practice and in their personal life. So that can be anything from time management or career direction, career transitions. It can also show up as better integration of your professional work and your personal life.

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I share what I learn from the lawyers that I work with, obviously confidently, in these podcast episodes. My hope is for you to recognize yourself in some of what I'm talking about, and to really be able to up level your experience of your professional work and what you're experiencing in your personal life. So that's the podcast in a nutshell.

Today's topic is something that I'm really excited to talk to you all about, which is how you are showing up as a boss to yourself. This is particularly pertinent to someone like me, and maybe it's particularly pertinent to any of you who are really your own boss. It may be that you're a partner in a law firm, and you are the boss of yourself for the most part. It may be that you have founded your own law firm. It may be that you're a sole practitioner, or you have a team of lawyers who work for you.

Even if you are an employee, if you are primarily reporting to others, there is still this relationship that you have with yourself, which is that relationship of boss and employee. I'd really invite you to think about how that works in your professional work. How it also works in your personal life. We're going to get into that in more detail.

The perspective that I have in coming to this discussion is that I have experienced both. I've been an employee as a lawyer where I was reporting to other lawyers, more senior lawyers, and clients obviously. I was also in some ways reporting to myself, maybe at a more unconscious level. Now that I have my own coaching practice, I run the show. I am my own boss.

So taking vacation, for example, which is something that I did last week. I took the week off. It's something that I have to effectively mandate for myself. I have to allow myself that time off. It's not just vacation. It's how I decide to govern my business. So what I'm going to talk about today is really an invitation for all of you to think about how you treat yourself as a

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boss, how you show up as a boss, and to ask yourself whether there are any areas where you might want to make some changes.

So to get the discussion started, I would invite you to think about external bosses first. It might be easier if we start there because I think we know intuitively what we consider to be a good boss and what we consider to be a bad boss. I'll get into good boss discussion in a little bit more detail after the initial discussion of what challenges you may have, or you may see and how you show up as a boss to yourself.

The way I'm going to structure today's podcast episode is to really talk about the challenges first, and then move into a discussion of four steps you can take to shift the way that you're showing up as a boss to yourself. So that's going to come later in the podcast. What I really want to focus on first is telltale signs that you may not be showing up as the best boss for yourself.

So going back to that idea of looking at it from an external perspective, you might think of some of the bosses you've had as an employee, for example, or somebody that you report to where you thought they were a great boss. So maybe they gave you a lot of freedom. Maybe they really trusted you. They allowed you to experiment. You may also have those experiences where you had bosses who you found very challenging to work with. So those may be bosses who have unrealistic expectations of you or who are very critical. Who are micromanaging the work that you're doing.

So just start thinking about some of the relationships that you've had with your external bosses. We're going to think about how you show up in relation to yourself.

So some of the telltale signs that I see when it comes to a boss relationship with yourself where you are navigating your career or your personal life in a way that is less than optimal can show up in a number of ways. The first is

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being a boss that has a problem asserting boundaries or respecting boundaries depending on what perspective you're taking in looking at this.

So when it comes to boundaries, we may have been experiencing this at a more sensitive level. Particularly during the pandemic because a number of you may have been working from your homes as opposed to working from your office. This created a situation where there was less of a clear boundary between your home life and your work life. Maybe that meant that you were answering emails later in the day than you normally would. Maybe it meant that you had more difficulties saying no to things. It may be that it allowed you to create more boundaries in a positive way.

For many of us, the boundary setting can be a real challenge, especially when it comes to managing ourselves. So as a boss to yourself, how are you speaking to yourself in relation to your boundaries? There are a number of places where boundaries come up. So it may be time. It may be that you have told yourself that you're going to leave the office, the virtual office, the real office at a certain time. Then you allow yourself to not do that.

Maybe something comes up. Maybe it's an emergency and it truly requires your attention. Or maybe you are trying to leave at 5:00 that day or 6:00, whatever time it is. You've got something scheduled for yourself. Maybe it's a workout class. Maybe it's a phone date with a friend. If you're doing in-person dinners, maybe you're meeting a friend for dinner. Instead of actually following through on your original plan, you say, "Well, this thing came up for work. I'll just write this one last email." Next thing you know you're running late for your next appointment, or you haven't followed through with that initial boundary that you set for yourself.

So time is an area where I see a lot of slippage in terms of asserting and maintaining boundaries. This is not necessarily coming from somebody

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outside. This is you imposing that on yourself or inviting that for yourself consciously or unconsciously.

Another area where I see there being an issue with boundaries is sometimes in the way that you may talk to yourself as a boss in relation to the words that you're choosing. So one client that I was working with recently was telling me about how she was procrastinating on some tasks that she'd assigned to herself at a particular time of day. She wasn't doing them. The way she described this was, "I was just being lazy."

This word lazy is a really powerful word. If you think about telling yourself I am lazy and how that feels, it does not feel very empowering. It does not feel very supportive. If you can imagine a boss, some other individual, coming into your office and saying, "Oh, you're not doing your tasks. You are very lazy." What that would feel like.

So I am inviting you to think about the words that you're choosing to describe yourself, how you're speaking to yourself in those moments where you may not be doing exactly what you had planned, and to really be conscious of the language you're choosing. If it's not language that you would be choosing in relation to somebody else, I would ask you to question whether or not it's language that you want to be using in relation to the conversations that you're having internally.

Another area where you may have challenges with external bosses, but what we're talking about here is really that internal boss. How to be your own best boss. It's expectations. This can come up in, again, a number of ways. It might be workload. If you are like me, you probably like to have your to-do list, and then look at all those things on your to-do list and create for yourself a plan where you're very productive. Where you're getting a lot of things done on any given day.

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Now there's nothing wrong with being productive, but I would ask you to consider whether or not the workload that you're creating for yourself is realistic or if the workload that you're creating is excessive. Because you may be setting yourself up with an expectation that you get everything done. If you don't get all those things done, then what? Then how are you treating yourself?

Going back to the boundaries question, is there so much on your plate that you're not going to be able to make time for other things? Whether it's rest, self-care, time with your family. What does that look like? So I'd invite you to think about what are your expectations in terms of your output, in terms of your workload?

It may be that you have problems in terms of patience. This comes up with clients that I work with, for example, who are looking for a job. For anybody who has gone through that process, then you know that it takes time to maybe reconnect with your network, to build your network, to seek out positions, to go through the process of having interviews, having informational interviews. The process takes time.

There may be something in your practice that is taking time to build. Maybe it's your advocacy skills or your drafting skills or learning to work on more complex files. You may wish that you were already there. That you were already at that point where you'd achieved the result that you were looking for, and you're frustrated with yourself. You don't have the patience with yourself because you're not there yet.

So I would ask you to pay attention to situations where maybe you're not being patient with yourself. Again, imagine that you had an external boss. How would that external boss be speaking to you? What would they be saying to you? What would be considered to be supportive and helpful versus what is not helpful?

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As I'm recording this, I'm imagining I've had situations where maybe it's a lawyer that I've worked with or a client that I've had where they're kind of pestering me, right? Following up. "Is it done yet? Is it done yet?" It's not because I'm slow or I was slow in executing on a project. It's because they were not having the most patience for whatever reason.

It doesn't necessarily make that process go any more quickly when you have the client who wanted that thing filed not now but right now. Then following up doesn't necessarily make that process go any quicker. So you need to ask yourself if the way that you're speaking to yourself in relation to something that takes time is actually helping you move forward.

Another area where you may find that you have challenges with expectations, the expectations that you set on yourself, is if you make a mistake. If you've made a mistake, it could be a typo in an email or it could be something more serious. The reality is that we are human. As lawyers there is a very high expectation in terms of the level of quality, the level of output.

However, you're a human being, and human beings are not machines. They're not robots. You're not a robot. Nor are you expected to be. The flexibility and the creativity and the dynamic thinking that you can come up with with your human mind are some of the qualities that you bring. It also means that you may not be executing like a computer, and there will be mistakes. You will make mistakes in relation to your practice. You'll make mistakes in your personal life. We all do.

The question isn't whether or not you do it. It's how you treat yourself afterwards. You can think of situations maybe where you've had something go wrong on a file, and you've had a conversation with somebody else. Maybe it's a lawyer you report to, somebody at your firm. How they treated you in relation to that mistake. Did they treat you with compassion? Was it a problem solving approach? Or was it blame and shame?

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If you think about how you felt and the result that you created based on that interaction, was there a resolution met or was it some other thing. I would really encourage you to think about how you're speaking to yourself when you make a mistake. To think about how you want to show up as a boss, not just for yourself. I mean we're talking about being a boss to yourself, but also how you're showing up in relation to others. We'll talk about that a bit more as well.

Other areas where you may find a challenge in terms of being your own boss is direction. Direction and leadership. It's so easy to see in others. I know I've had the experience of working for lawyers, for example, where I get instructions from them one day to maybe draft something a certain way. Then I'll send them that draft, and they might say, "Oh, well. This, now that I see it on paper, is not exactly what I had in mind." So they might change the focus. Maybe it's something more pronounced than that. It could be a complete strategic overhaul.

I think you can probably relate to the experience of working with a lawyer or a client even who is focused, who has a direction, who has a strategy, who has clarity versus working with somebody who is a little bit more scattered. Who maybe doesn't really know what they want. It can be so much more difficult when you're working with the latter.

So I'd invite yourself to think about how you're showing up as a boss when you're the boss of your career. Whether you're independent or if you're working for somebody else, do you know what your direction is? Do you have that clarity? If you don't have that clarity, what might you do to create that for yourself? It's a lot easier to work with a boss who has that direction than to try to be guessing or switching tracks on the regular because there's that lack of cohesiveness.

Another area where you may see challenges as a boss is are you recognizing your own accomplishments? You may know what that feels like

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in relation to somebody else, right? Maybe you are working on, or you have worked on one of those due diligence projects where there's a lot of very detail oriented review. Painstaking and they take a lot of time. Maybe you're doing document review on a file. Maybe it's a drafting exercise in a very complicated area of law. There are all sorts of tasks you might do that require a great deal of mental focus and a great deal of time.

It may be that you do those things, and then the person that you're reporting to, maybe they don't say thank you. They don't recognize your work. They're busy. They're distracted. How does that feel? How does that feel to you when you don't get the recognition that you're really craving? If that's happening externally, you might also ask yourself is that happening internally? Are you not recognizing yourself for the work that you're doing?

Just a couple more areas here. One is how you see yourself. So I have had the experience of teachers and lawyers and coaches and other professionals where my relationship with them has been really expansive. In part because they see me at my highest potential. When they see me at my highest potential, then I grow to that. I've had that experience, and I'm guessing you have to. Whether it was a professor or a teacher that you had while you were in school, whether it was before university, during university, in law school.

Maybe it's somebody that you're working with right now. Somebody who when you work with that person, they hold you in this high esteem. You just feel like you could do anything with that person. Versus other individuals who maybe held a low esteem of you. For whatever reason, they just didn't see you in the expansive role that you could potentially have, and how that impacts the way that you show up in that relationship.

Are you showing up confident and willing to try new things and experimenting and pushing boundaries? Or are you showing up small and

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scared and just trying not to make mistakes. There's a really big difference in terms of that energy.

You have no real control over your external bosses, but you do have control over how you are in relation to yourself. So are you looking at yourself as somebody with an expansive and broad potential, or are you seeing yourself and painting yourself into a corner with narrow expectations? So that's another area where I see people showing up and not really giving themselves full credit for what they're capable of.

Now for you, my listeners who are in practice, you're lawyers. You're advocates at the end of the day. You are defending and explaining and helping individuals who mostly are not lawyers. You may have clients who are lawyers, but for the most part you're helping non-lawyers with their legal rights. You are helping them achieve what they're wanting. You're helping them avoid problems. You're helping them solve problems. Ultimately, you're an advocate for them.

Ironically you may be an amazing advocate when it comes to somebody else, but if you're not doing the things that we just talked about. If you're not showing up as a best boss to yourself, you may be really lacking in that self-advocacy. If that's the case, I don't want you to beat yourself up over that at all. I would encourage you and invite you to think about are there ways to show up as a better advocate to yourself?

An interesting question might be whether by showing up as a better advocate to yourself, are you then able to show up as an even better advocate in relation to others? That's a question that I will leave with you to think about as we go through today's podcast.

So I've explained some of the challenges and the telltale signs of not showing up as the best boss to yourself. There's a few reasons why this happens. Like I said, I do not want you to beat yourself up over any of this if

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it is happening to you. If you are finding that, “Wait a second, maybe I'm not the best boss myself. Maybe I haven't been treating myself the way that I could be treating myself.” This is totally normal.

I see it so often in my coaching practice with clients who come to me. I have experienced this myself as a professional, as a student. Even in my current practice now even though I'm onto myself. As a coach, I've learned a number of tools. I'm seeing what to look for. Sometimes it can happen because we have achieved success by being tough on ourselves. By being really demanding bosses, by having those high expectations, by maybe not setting the boundaries, we've managed to really achieve success.

So the idea of doing something differently is a little bit scary. It may be when you were growing up, your parents had really high expectations in terms of the grades that you got at school, the way that you were as a daughter. Are you the daughter that does what she's supposed to, or are you more rebellious? There are a number of external influences that shape who we are, and who create our view of how to be productive, how to be effective at work and in our relationships.

It really isn't a problem. I mean if you use tactics like that sort of no pain no gain approach, it's really fine until something goes wrong. It's when things go wrong, and maybe you're beating yourself up over it. You're trying to work harder without getting the results that you want. That's really when it becomes more of a problem.

Another reason why you might find yourself falling into this way of being is cultural. I mentioned families. So maybe it starts with your family of origin, but maybe it's also the culture of your firm. It may have been the culture of your law school. Maybe there was a lot of competition. Maybe it's very cutthroat where you are. Maybe somebody that you work with closely is a boss who to themselves is very critical or creating unreal expectations.

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You are having your own experience. So you will know what that looks like for you. You might ask yourself where that culture is part of your surroundings? What are you surrounding yourself with? Which elements of that do you want to take on? Because you do not have to take on all of it.

So I go back to this conversation that I had with a friend of mine who is not a lawyer. I mean she's very successful at what she does. She was talking about stressful situations that she would really create. She was talking about performing in her role, and that she would kind of beat herself up beforehand, right? She would get really stressed out beforehand. She would do all of this preparation beforehand. It was this very stressful sweaty process. She said, "The reason that I continue to do this is that I continue to have success by using this model. So I've equated this process with success."

What I'm inviting you to consider here is can you have the success without all the stress that comes in the leadup? I think you can. I think, in fact, more success comes out of being a supportive boss to yourself than a critical one. We'll talk again, as I mentioned, about how you might make that shift.

So another reason why I don't want you to beat yourself up over this, and why I think this is a problem that occurs is when we start having these views of the world, right? Maybe we have this no pain no gain mentality. Maybe have this perspective that we just need to keep working harder. Going back to when you were in school, that just meant you had to work harder. Maybe as a lawyer, it's the pressure that you put on yourself to have more billable hours. Maybe it's the pressure that you put on yourself to do everything perfectly. You know what that looks like in your practice.

One of the ways that I see this almost compounding is that when you have this mindset that the way that you are in relation to yourself, you start to find situations where you are comfortable in that environment. You invite others to treat you in a way that enforces that belief. So I would ask you to

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consider that element of it. How are you showing up in your professional life? How are you showing up in your relationships?

I mean this isn't just how you do anything. It's how you do everything. There's that wonderful expression. So I'd invite you to think about that. How are you showing up in relation to your work projects, but also in your relationships maybe as a parent for example.

I mean I know this sometimes in my role as a parent. Am I being the parent that I want to be? Am I being too unforgiving of things that go sideways? Not just things that I do, but maybe things that other people are doing. Maybe my children aren't doing things that I want them to do.

So there's a pattern that will reinforce itself. So what we're doing here is really just trying to identify where those patterns are, where we are saying the same things to ourselves, and how we might be showing up in relation to others. How we might be attracting more of that into our lives and giving ourselves the option or the possibility of doing things differently.

Here I think that's a really important point to note. That you may think that there is only one way to success, and it's through this sort of, I'll call it, the unforgiving or the bad boss approach because you've had success in that fashion. I'm here to say that there are other options, and we're going to talk about what that could look like for you today.

So ways that you may have been trying to cope with this. Like I said earlier, maybe you're trying to work harder. You just think, "Maybe I just need to work harder. Maybe I need to spend more time. Maybe I just need to have fewer boundaries. Maybe that will bring me the success that I'm looking for." Ultimately, I don't see that as being a solution in the long term because the goal posts are always shifting.

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Once you achieve one level of success, then you're going to be looking to the next level. If you continue to use the same strategies, you may find that you just continue to perpetuate this conversation that you're having, this relationship that you have with yourself where you're not really showing up as a boss that you want to be and you're not really creating the results that you want. It may be that you get results, but you're feeling increasingly tired. You may have a really hard time.

As you know from the title of the podcast that finding joy in your work is something that I think is really valuable. I think that really is a source of sustenance and longevity in anything that you choose to do. Whether it's in your law practice, whether it's in your relationships. It's being able to find joy in the process and not just looking at the results. If there's no joy in the process because you're being a bad boss to yourself, then what?

So another way that this may show up is that you might find that you're becoming increasingly disconnected from yourself, right? As you are trying to meet these unrealistic expectations, you might just feel yourself wanting to give up. Maybe you want to retreat. Maybe pull back a little bit. It may be that you're unmotivated. You don't see this.

Going back to how much are you enjoying the work. If you're not enjoying your work, how much more effort is it to really truly get yourself motivated to do your work. You may also be really scared of making mistakes. That might hold you back from taking risks or taking on new challenges or growing in your position. It may also be that you are attracting people into your work life, your personal life who validate that opinion of yourself, right. That expectation or that negative way of thinking.

It may also be that you start to depend on others for external validation. So it may be that you're not able to give yourself the recognition that you need. So you look to others. I've talked about this in other podcast episodes.

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When you start placing your self-esteem in the hands of others, when you start depending on them to give you that validation instead of being able to find some ways of bolstering that for yourself, you become very vulnerable. Because we all know that we can't please everybody all the time. What pleases one person won't please another person. So you can find yourself really caught up in an unsolvable challenge if that's where you're looking for feeling good about yourself. If you're looking to others to validate you in order to feel good.

Finally when you are in this situation where you're not being a good boss to yourself, you may also be, unfortunately, having those same traits in relationships to others. So if you are a boss to others, if others are reporting to you in your workplace, are you treating them that way? Are you showing up with unrealistic expectations? Are you upset if they assert a boundary? Are you asking them more than is reasonable?

When they make mistakes, how are you in relation to the mistakes that they are making? Are you forgiving of those mistakes? Are you solution focused? Are you blame focused? Really invite yourself to think about what that might look like if you are in a relationship, for example. Maybe it's with your partner. Are you putting unrealistic expectations on them?

Or if you're a parent, if you're looking at your children and thinking, "Am I putting unrealistic expectations on them because those are the unrealistic expectations that I've placed on myself." So I really would invite you to think about not just how showing up as a boss for yourself impacts you, but also how it impacts others.

Now I promised that I would offer some solutions. That's what we're going to talk about now. Four steps that you can think about in order to start shifting that relationship that you have with yourself in order to become the kind of boss that you want to be.

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The first step is to define what it means to be an excellent boss. This is an exercise that is so fun. It is creative. It is expansive. What I'm doing here is inviting you to think about all the bosses that you've ever had or even bosses that you've seen on TV. I can think of a few that I've seen in TV shows or movies where I've thought, "Oh that was such a great boss moment." Think about what that looks like.

When I think about what is an excellent boss, what makes for an excellent boss, I have a number of examples. So I'm going to go through some of those. You can think about whether these are examples that would apply to you if you think these are good boss examples. If not, what is a good boss to you? What is the ideal boss in your view?

So some qualities that I have admired. I love somebody who is supportive but firm. I tend to err on the side of tough love in the sense that I really like teachers who challenge me. I like bosses who challenge me. I like it when I get put into situations where I'm outside of my comfort zone, but I also like to know that there's support there. That I'm not being tossed into the shark tank without a lifeline. I'm getting support but I'm also getting challenged. So that's that supportive but firm situation.

I appreciate bosses who value innovation over perfection. So there are bosses, for example, who are really interested in just getting out there and experimenting and trying and pushing forward knowing that it may not be perfect. So that's something that I really value in a boss. Bosses who value growth over being right.

When I was making my notes for today's podcast, I was thinking of one of the lawyers that I used to work with, a very senior lawyer. I remember once we had it was definitely not an argument, but I guess it was differing views on the court of appeal in British Columbia. So I had seen something somewhere that it was one thing. He said, "No, no. I think it's something else." So I went out and I found the reference. There we were with that rule.

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When I presented it, the reaction that I got was, “This is great. Thank you for sharing this with me. This is wonderful.” It was a very positive engagement because that lawyer was more interested in the growth and the learning than in being right. You may have experiences with other lawyers where sometimes they would rather be right than to learn and grow. Obviously, it poses some challenges. So think about that in terms of how you are in creating that ideal boss image. How does that boss feel about being right versus expanding their learning?

Another characteristic that I admire is a boss that holds others in high esteem. So that person who sees you as being more advanced or further along in your road to fulfilling your potential or reaching out to your potential than you are right now. That person who sees growth in you maybe before you see it in yourself. That, to me, is one of the most admirable qualities a leader can have because it really encourages others to rise up to the occasion.

Again, I mentioned this a little bit earlier. Think of that opposite person. The person who wants to keep other people small. Some people do. Maybe they want to feel good in relation to you, but it’s so limiting. It’s so constraining. So, to me, that is such a great quality to aspire to is what is the expansive way of thinking here? How does a boss hold that other person in their highest esteem?

Other examples are praising effort over results. So this is very much that growth mindset approach where a situation, for example, maybe the boss asked for something to happen, and that person or maybe it’s you. Maybe you tried your best, but you didn’t quite get the outcome you wanted. They might look to elements of the process that you did well and praise you on those things as opposed to simply saying, “Well you didn’t get the result we wanted. So let’s just write that whole thing off.” So that growth mindset. That praising the effort of just focusing on the results is something that I admire in a leader.

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Being quick to forgive and hold grudges. This kind of goes hand in hand, I think, with this idea of holding others in the highest esteem. When you allow people to be human, when you allow them to make mistakes and to still come back and trust them with assignments or whatever it happens to be. So not letting one moment define you one way or the other.

So another example of a quality I admire is bosses who set boundaries. I had the honor of seeing somebody set a boundary not that long ago. It was in an email thread. It was somebody who I really admire who declined to take on a mandate. The way that she worded her decision was so elegant and so simple. This just stood out to me as such a beautiful example of setting boundaries. It doesn't have to be a negative thing. In this case, it came from a place of just really knowing what she wanted to focus on, what her priorities were. This particular opportunity just was not aligned with what she wanted to do.

I've had that experience working as a lawyer, for example, where I was on a file where we had a difficult client. I remember speaking with the senior lawyer on that file and having a conversation about what was acceptable from the perspective of what clients could say versus what was not acceptable for what clients could say.

So when you say leaders assert boundaries in a respectful way, that to me is such a signal of confidence and leadership. So that might be something that you also think about in terms of the ideal boss that you would want to have or the ideal boss that you would want to be.

A few more examples. So I think that a good boss will distinguish between encouraging excellence and imposing unrealistic expectations. Another example might be clarity of vision. We've talked about this before. A boss that shows up and has a very clear direction. It may not be that they know exactly how something is going to unfold, but they have a clear vision. They

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have a clear idea of who is responsible for what. They give you clarity over what it is that they want from you.

That, I think, just creates so much security and comfort in that role in the sense that you now know what's expected. You now know what the path ahead looks like. So what kind of clarity are you creating?

I think great leaders are secure and confident in themselves. This, I think, really plays out when you are speaking with other lawyers, when you're speaking with your clients even. When you notice that somebody has a lot of confidence, they are much easier to take leadership from because they are not going to be beating themselves up. They're not going to be beating you up when things go sideways. They're much more nimble when it comes to navigating challenges. So that's something that I really admire in leaders.

I think that having a solution focus rather than a blame focus when things go awry is another quality of a strong leader. So you can imagine you're working on a file and there is a hiccup. Maybe you're working on a team of other lawyers. You know what it feels like when you have leadership that is solutions focused where it's really, "Okay, this thing has gone wrong. We've hit a pothole here. What are we going to do next?" Versus focusing on blaming somebody. That doesn't really create any results, any resolution.

So you can ask yourself what kind of leader you appreciate. What kind of leadership resonates with you, and then you get to step into that. So these are a lot of ideas here. I hope I'm not overwhelming you with ideas, but I just want to offer a lot of different suggestions that might make up this ideal leader that you're thinking about.

So approaching difficult conversations with a long view in mind. I share this example. It actually came from a conversation that I had with a lawyer who was telling me about how she was nominated at her organization for a

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mentorship award because she was so effective at mentoring younger lawyers that she was working with. I asked her some questions about this and how she approached mentorship. One thing she shared with me was really impactful.

She said, “When I go into conversations about junior lawyers about things that have happened in relation to their work, on files. Maybe it’s a mistake they’ve made.” She said, “I go into that conversation with a long term view in mind. My long term view in mind is on maintaining that relationship. On helping them develop and grow as a lawyer.” That was the basis of the conversation.

You can contrast that, for example, where there’s a blame/shame ‘you made a mistake’ type of conversation and what kind of outcome that’s going to create for somebody. Versus a much more compassionate, “How are we going to resolve this going forward? What was missing here? What do you need to do next time?” So going into conversations that you have where there’s been a mistake or where there’s a mentorship opportunity with that long view in mind. What are you looking for not just in the moment, but what are you looking for in the long run?

Finally, the last quality that I have written here is a really excellent boss to me is one who isn’t constantly micromanaging all the small decisions. I think that micromanaging often comes out of fear that if it’s not done exactly one way that it’s not going to work out at all. The opposite of that is really in having faith. So having faith in others that it doesn’t have to be a certain way. That you can take different roads to arrive at the same destination.

So that was step one is to really define what an excellent boss looks like to you. So if you are doing this exercise, if you’d like to do this exercise, I would encourage you to create your own list, your own bullet points. The highlights of what you consider to be excellent leadership.

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Now the next step is to practice being that boss to yourself. You may find that you can also practice doing this with others. So what does that look like? I mean if you choose to be supportive but firm, what would that look like to you?

Are there areas in your work, for example, where maybe you've been maybe a little bit more on the hard side. Maybe you have been beating yourself up or you've been creating unrealistic expectations. Maybe there's areas where you've been the opposite of firm where you've been letting things slide. Where you haven't been putting in your full effort, where you've been procrastinating.

So I would really invite yourself to look at that supportive but firm if that's something that you choose for yourself. And to be honest with yourself about how you're showing up. Are you at the level of commitment that you want? Are you at the level of focus that you want? Or is there work to be done there?

Are there areas in your personal life where you're not showing up for yourself or you're not applying the same supportive but firm element? This comes up for clients that I work with in relation to their health often. Where they'll say, "I've been neglecting my usual routines. I haven't been eating the way that I want to. I haven't been exercising as regularly as I want to. I haven't been scheduling my appointment with my physio."

It looks different for different lawyers, but I would invite you to ask yourself, are you really showing up for yourself in not just your work environment but also the areas where you need to do that self-care. Where you need to take care of yourself so that you're able to show up not just in your work relationships but also in your personal life. Whether that's the relationships you have with others, whether it's as a parent, whether it's even just showing up for yourself.

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If you choose innovation over perfection, for example, what would that look like for you? So it may be in your practice right now there are areas where you could be pushing your boundaries, but you've chosen not to do that because you know that that first time that you try it it's just not going to be perfect. So what might you take on? What might you think about doing that you're not doing right now that could bring you to that next level?

If you're going to do that, you might anticipate that things are not going to run all that smoothly. That you're going to have some hiccups. How are you going to treat yourself in those moments? What kind of conversation are you going to have with yourself when things go sideways?

If you choose clarity of vision, what does that look like to you? In last week's episode, I talked about decluttering and letting go of the things that are distracting you. Maybe thoughts or beliefs that are no longer serving you in order to free up what you really want.

So think about how you might be able to give yourself more clarity and direction over what it is. I mean starting with this exercise of defining what kind of boss you want to be, already you're starting to get more clarity about how you want to show up. What else in your practice? What else in your personal life? What else do you want to be doing in terms of your self-care? Do you want to have more clarity over? How are you going to set that up for yourself?

So this shows up quite often when I work with clients. I just love it when they may come to me, and they have an idea of something that they would like to do. They don't realize quite how far along that path they actually are. They might say, "You know, I know I want to do this thing, but I have no idea how I'm going to do it."

After a few questions, and sometimes it doesn't even take very long. Sometimes it's like an hour or two, but maybe sometimes it's even just in

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the course of 15 minutes being able to write out a bullet point list of things that they actually are really interested in pursuing. They can come up with this plan that shows that all this thinking that they've been doing was ready. It was ready to be birthed in the form of a checklist. So what is it that you need? What is it that's in the back of your mind where you can create some clarity in your practice?

Finally, maybe choosing better boundaries is something that you are upholding or enforcing. Clear boundaries is something that you admire in leaders, how would that translate into your practice? So I've had lots of clients who struggle with boundaries in terms of setting up how they structure their day and saying yes or saying no to things. What would that look like to you if you were to be really intentional about your boundaries?

It may be that you are in a situation where you do need to put your boundaries to the side for the moment. There are legitimate emergencies that come up where you do need to stay later at the office, where you might need to work later. If you're working later as a matter of course and this is just a habit that you've fallen into unconsciously and there's no real reason for it, what might you start doing to start creating tighter boundaries around the work that you're doing.

Ironically when you start asserting those boundaries, when you are more disciplined about when you're working and when you're not working, you may find that you're more productive in your working time because you now have that free time to look forward to. So just something to think about there.

So step three is to let go. I mentioned last week's podcast about decluttering. This is really where it can be challenging when you're shifting, especially if you've been really living by this no pain no gain philosophy where your strategy has really been to work harder. Now you're thinking about doing things differently where maybe working harder is not the

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answer. Maybe there's other tools, other ways of enhancing your performance that doesn't necessarily come from you being harder on yourself. So that can feel really uncomfortable if you start to take a new approach.

I think here when you are going to start letting go of old practices, it comes with that initial recognition and acceptance that what you've been doing far has not created the result that you want. So you're going to need to let go of certain things because they aren't working, and because you need to make room for a new conversation. A new way of being a boss to yourself.

I would imagine this is going to be hard. This is going to be uncomfortable. Because like my friend who really thought that getting stressed and getting nervous and creating this really difficult leadup time would create that result. There's that connection. There's that link in her mind between those two things. It can feel really weird if maybe every time you go to court, you have a very stressful process before you go to court cause that's what you're used to. It may feel uncomfortable for you if you change that. If you change your systems and that process becomes smoother.

You may feel like there's something missing. It isn't necessarily that something has gone wrong. It's just that you're now creating a new way of doing things. Over time if you keep that up then you may start to associate that smooth transition with the lead up to a successful trip to chamber. So I'd really invite you to anticipate that as you shift and start practicing these new ways of being that it will feel uncomfortable as you let go of old habits.

Again just going back to what you might say to yourself in that moment is you might say, "The boss that I've been to myself has helped me get here." If you're listening to this podcast, I know that you are highly accomplished. That you're smart. That you're hard working. That you've done so much to get to where you are right now. So you've achieved a ton of success already by the approach that you've been using. So you can say to

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yourself, “Well that person, that boss that I was to myself, she got me here.”

What I'm inviting you to think about is whether that same boss is going to get you to that next level of where you want to be going. If you want to shift where you're going then you may need to be letting go of parts of yourself. Who you are in relation to yourself, who you are showing up as a boss in order to reach that next iteration, that next level of evolution that you're trying to achieve.

If you find yourself in that situation where you are feeling really uncomfortable, I would really invite you not to judge yourself, but to just get curious about it. If you're finding that there's a lot of resistance there, ask yourself what you're thinking? What thoughts are coming up for you? You can really question those thoughts. We have something like 60,000 thoughts that just arrive. They just arrive every day. Not all of them are true.

So really pay attention. If you're having a struggle here, think about what your thoughts are in relation to that. Think about how you're feeling in that moment. Are you feeling anxious? Are you feeling nervous about it? Why is that? And really explore that. Approach it with curiosity instead of judgement.

Then ask yourself what is it that you want to be feeling? You want to be feeling maybe excited or courageous or confident. What would you need to believe about yourself? Who would you need to become as a leader, as a boss? Who do you need to be in order to feel like that? In order to have thoughts like that. In order to create the results that you want. So really put that forward focused cap on when you're thinking about these types of questions. Imagine yourself in that role already, and what kind of decisions you'd be making. What kind of thoughts you would be having.

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As you go through this exercise as well, notice when you're showing up as a bad boss to yourself. Notice when it's maybe a self-critical perspective. Maybe it's unrealistic expectations you're imposing on yourself. Maybe you're not adhering to the boundaries you wanted to set for yourself. If that happens, you really get to decide whether or not you're going to continue to do those things or if you're going to change it.

So be really intentional about what's acceptable to you and what is no longer acceptable to yourself. Above all, be compassionate with yourself as you go through this transition, right? Allow yourself to struggle in the change and to be compassionate.

Finally the fourth step is to adapt as you go. As you try to transition as a boss, as you become a leader to yourself, a better boss to yourself. Like I said, there's going to be discomfort. There's going to be challenges. It's not a walk in the park necessarily. You get to iterate and adapt as you go. So please don't put the pressure on yourself to do this overnight. Give yourself that grace.

Speaking of the patience and the expectations and learning from mistakes instead of beating yourself up over it. What is the most compassionate way that you can make this transition for yourself? What are the changes that you'll want to be making as you go through this process? What are the rewards that you're going to give yourself as you transition? What kind of feedback will you be giving yourself? How will you keep yourself motivated to continue down this path of becoming a better leader?

As you do that, ask yourself how things are going, right? Maybe you try setting a new boundary for yourself. What happens, right? I mean do you still create the results that you were trying to create? Did you not create those results? If not, what happened? If the results did get created, what did you do to support that happening? Did you miss anything? Is there

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something that you would do differently next time? What felt good about that process? What didn't feel good about that process?

Allow yourself to really ask questions as you go through each stage of your transition because that way next time you go to assert a boundary, you can build on that. You can build on what was successful, and you can learn on the things that maybe didn't go quite as smoothly as you would have liked.

Finally, if you do find yourself slipping back. If you have a negative experience and you're back to beating yourself up or not being the best boss to yourself, recognize that we all have off days. Forgive yourself and move forward. Allow yourself to make mistakes and recover from those mistakes and move forward.

Again, this might be in a conversation that you're having with yourself, but it might be in relation to something that's happening with somebody else. You may be a boss, like we talked about, in relation to somebody else. Maybe they make a mistake, and you don't forgive them in the way that you would like, or you don't show up in the best light, the way that you wanted to show up. When that happens, again think about how you would prefer to show up. Think about what steps you might take that are solutions focused going forward.

The reason that I think this strategy, why this approach will work is that you'll decouple the results that you get from the process. So if you've been using pressure and that no pain no gain idea to get to where you are now to get the success that you've already achieved, and you're able to shift that into a different energy. One where you're being more creative. One where you're being kinder to yourself, and you're being that supportive but firm boss. You'll start to decouple that idea that it has to be really stressful in order for there to be a good outcome.

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As you do that, you'll enjoy your work more. You'll feel better about yourself. You will allow yourself to take more risks and grow more because you know at the end of the day, you'll be answering to a boss who's going to forgive you if things don't go 100% perfectly the first time. So you take the fear out of it.

When you are a boss to yourself that is encouraging and applauding the efforts that you're making, regardless of whether or not you get the perfect outcome, you'll be more likely to try to do new things. You will be less likely to shy away from growth opportunities because you won't be so fearful of the negative consequences that might slow from that.

As you do this, as you continue this practice, you'll grow. You'll start attracting new opportunities into your life, and you'll also start attracting new people into your life. So these are all really positive benefits that will come. As these positive benefits start to build on themselves, this will become a much more natural way of being for you.

The skills that you'll need to learn, you'll need to learn that leadership and advocacy really do start from within. You'll need to learn how to approach your growth from a place of creativity as opposed to a more fear based approach where you're pressuring yourself into performing. You will need to learn to let go of old habits, and ultimately you'll need to learn to trust yourself.

You'll need to learn to trust yourself that when you are the boss that you want to be, when you show up in the way that is in alignment with your values, what you think is great for leadership, that you are going to perform in a way that is more true to you. That is more reflective of your potential and what you have to offer. The results that you'll create, again, greater ease, more joy, and ultimately you'll be creating more of what you want in your practice.

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So just to recap. The strategies that I'm offering today is to number one, define what excellent leadership is, what a great boss looks like to you. Get clear about that definition. Number two is to start practicing being that boss to yourself. You might start doing this, maybe all of the traits all at once. Maybe you pick one or two and get you started on that, and you slowly build that up over time.

Number three is to let go of the old habits that don't serve you. Recognizing that the boss that you were to get to where you are now. I mean you've managed to get really far, but if you want to go that next step further that's going to require a shift in you, a shift in the way that you lead yourself. Finally the fourth step is to adapt as you go. So recognize that this is not a linear process. This is really through trial and error that you'll be developing this, and that's how you're going to get to where you want to be.

So thank you everybody. That is what I have for you today. I just wanted to say thank you again for tuning in and for sharing these podcasts with me, and for sharing your feedback. I really do love hearing from you. For anybody who is interested in taking this work to the next level to working with me one to one, I would encourage you to reach out and contact me. You can do that through the website. I love hearing from you. So I wish all of you, it's still summer here. So if you're listening to this and it's the summer, I wish you a wonderful summer.

I really encourage all of you to go out and try this. To really think about leadership, think about what it means to lead yourself, and to create a practice that's really based on a relationship with yourself where you have that trust, where you have that compassion, where you set those big goals for yourself. Really create what you want in your practice and also in your personal life. So thank you again. I will look forward to seeing you again next week. Bye for now.

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