



## Your Stress and Burnout are Real: Extending Mindful Self-compassion to Yourself

### SPEAKERS

Stephanie Delaney, Tierney King, Kristin L. Roush, David Betancourt

#### **Tierney King** 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast, sponsored by the Teaching Professor Online Conference where you can join us from the comfort of your own home and transform how you teach and how your students learn. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your every day teaching. As an educator, you've been through some of the toughest years of teaching. Many have faced academic stressors, burnout, anxiety, and so much more. So this is your timely reminder to take care of yourself. In today's episode, we'll talk about resiliency, appreciative inquiry, growth mindset, and mindful self-compassion. The following tools, resources, and techniques can help you construct a more joyful mindset and offers a process for helping with stress and well-being. First, David Betancourt explains how he uses a resilient mindset and a growth mindset to help mold his teaching practices and create a positive outlook during difficult times in his program, How Can I Apply a Resilient Mindset to My Teaching Practice?

#### **David Betancourt** 01:13

To be honest, the idea of resilience and being able to have that is not just an outward facing where people will say that person presented but just for your own well-being, for your own care to be able to practice resilience is quite empowering in our profession. To be able to bounce back to know how to bounce back to have different ways to do it, given you some ideas to think about some things we can implement in our own teaching strategies, versus having a resilient mindset. First one is the idea of appreciative inquiry. So, we're very much used to, as teachers—I know, even myself, I've struggled with this my entire career, of feeling like I've been successful, getting a lot of feedback from the students, and from colleagues, and peers, and administrators, and everybody about the wonderful things that are going on in the classroom, and what they see happening. And then you get your student evals. And you have 1,000 student evals and one of them says something about teacher doesn't get back to me fast enough. And the funny thing about that is that one eval is the one that you'll lose sleep over. That one evaluation, that one comment, that one little bit of feedback. Not all the other 999 comments that were a testament to what you've been able to do in the classroom for your students. And so, the idea of moving away from that for me is sort of an epiphany of my own that I had, just moving to what's going right. What are the things that are going well? What am I doing well? What are the victories that we see every day? And being able to spend some time focusing on that. Doing it

consciously. Doing it with intent. And this is where appreciative inquiry comes into play. Because the appreciative inquiry isn't just about focusing on what's going right. We can all do that to some degree, I think. But it's focusing on the why. Why has it gone well? And that's where the inquiry part comes into play and where it's most effective of this mindset of appreciative inquiry. So, for instance, if I'm looking at why the students constantly feed back to me about they feel like I'm always communicating with them. And I'll take an online course, for example, because we've had to do so much online the last couple of years. I've done a lot of asynchronous teaching. And the students consistently tell me that I am really good at communicating with them, that I'm constantly in touch with them. But in fact, all my announcements, or I'd say 95 percent of my announcements are created before the class even starts. And so, what I've realized is that—I've reflected on why I'm receiving this kind of feedback, this idea of you communicate well with us. You're always in touch with us. You're always giving us the information. And it's because I've laid out all my announcements ahead of time, that go out to just sort of are fed out at increments as needed, according to when assignments are due, or when it couldn't be the needed, all these, all these other factors. And that has gone really well. And so what I want to do is I want to take that idea, that model was kind of well, and I want to be able to transfer it to something else. What else can I do? What other tools might I be able to use online to do the same thing, where I can have this sense of communication, a sense of engagement with the students the sense of relational teaching. So that's me, really enacting this idea of the appreciative inquiry. Taking something that works really well, then applying it somewhere else. The second thing was the idea of growth mindset. Now, you're probably familiar with Carol Dweck and her writings, but this has been around - the growth mindset - for a long time, and while I have embraced it to various degrees over my teaching career, I think, in the last couple of years, I've really grabbed onto it just grabbed it all the way. Just because let's face it, if we had to go completely online—some of us never taught online before. And then all of a sudden, it's like everything has to go online. That was a tough change. The learning curve was steep, like the steepest, fastest, roller coaster out there. And a lot of us just grabbed on and went for it. In doing so, I think we had to embrace the growth mindset, not just for our students, which we often do, we often advocate for them, that lifelong learning, keep learning. And then sometimes we get so busy and focused on doing that, that we forget to apply that to ourselves, that what else can we learn? Are we capable of continuing to learn our entire life continuing to grow? And of course, we are. We say so for our students, even as we get adult learners that come in. And we say, yes, of course. And we're often so much more impressed if they come in at 30, 40, 50 years old and they want to go back to school and learn something. And we embrace that. Embrace it for ourselves. This is what I've really come to terms with, continuing to learn, continuing to find ways to discover teaching practices.

**Tierney King 06:15**

As you continue to implement a growth mindset into your teaching practices, you may also want to consider how you can reduce your cognitive load, so that you're not carrying around so much stress with you. In this program, What are Three Calendar Hacks Faculty Can Use to Avoid Stress and Burnout, Stephanie Delaney explains how creating boundaries can actually create freedom, and how you can do this with your faculty calendar.

**Stephanie Delaney 06:39**

So the first guiding idea is the concept of cognitive load. Cognitive Load is the amount of energy more or less that your brain is using to think about things, a lot of faculty tend to not use their calendars. You

know, when you're teaching, you know, maybe that you're in the classroom from, nine o'clock until 10:30. So why put it on your calendar? But when you then look to see, am I free for XYZ meeting? And you look at your calendar, you don't see anything on it, you think, Oh, I'm free. But then you're remembering oh, wait a minute. Now, actually, I'm in class during this time. And that's just a little tiny weight that's sitting in your brain. Remembering, oh, yeah, I'm in class during that time. Oh, yeah, I'm in office hours during that time. Oh, yeah, I have that meeting, I have to go pick up such as such during that time. All of those thoughts that are floating around in your head about where you need to be and when you need to be there is adding to your cognitive load. And by putting it in your calendar, it takes that load away. I know that some people feel constrained by putting things on their calendar, and think that by putting things on there, that makes you feel a little bit trapped. But I'd like to share my second guiding idea, which is that boundaries actually equal freedom. There was a study that was done with some children in a playground. And the children's playground initially had no fence around the outside of the playground, and the children tended to play towards the middle of the playground. And you know, that was fine, they were having a good time they were playing. But they saw that when they put a fence around the playground, the students used the entire space, they played all the way out to those boundaries of their playground. And they've seen in a lot of other situations where creating constraints actually resulted in more freedom. So if you feel like your calendar is a constraining thing, I'd urge you to shift your thinking a little bit. And realize that by identifying some boundaries, you actually have additional freedom. One way that might show up in your calendar is that faculty work can expand to take all the time given to it right. Your grading can go on and on, your research can be never ending, you've just never read quite enough books and articles to do the thing it is that you need to do. And so that work can just absorb every spare moment, which leaves you feeling burned out and exhausted. So by creating a constraint, this is my work day, for example, and saying, I'm going to start working at eight and I'm going to stop working at five. And during that time, I'll teach my classes I'll do my office hours, I'll engage in my grading, I'll do my research, but then after five, I'm done. Or maybe after five, I check in for 30 minutes in the evening, and then I'm done. So creating those boundaries, those constraints can create freedom in those other times that you're not feeling like oh my gosh, I should be doing X, Y, and Z. Well, you can do XYZ the next time you have working time, but during this non-working time, the best thing to be doing is not working. So I love that idea of creating boundaries, which creates some freedom.

### **Tierney King 10:33**

Finally, let's address the actual stress you're feeling. The feelings surrounded by burnout and anxiety. In this program, Kristin Roush explains how we can let feelings in and out on a daily basis and offers a practice for mindful self-compassion.

### **Kristin L. Roush 10:49**

Feelings are not the truth of who you are. Feelings are a temporary state. Feelings don't define who you are. Maybe you've heard this mantra, I have my feelings, but I am not my feelings. And I have said before, if you don't have your feelings, your feelings will have you for the rest of your life. Let me share this bit of free therapy with you. Whenever I had a client who presented with symptoms of panic attacks, I would always ask, have you ever gone through a particularly traumatic life event or a series of unrelenting difficult life events which, at the time, you didn't let yourself feel about them? Maybe you just buried them and tried to keep it together on the outside. It could have been months ago or even

years ago. No kidding. Literally, every client I asked, said, Yeah, I can think of something like that where I just pushed my feelings aside, and I never got back to them. And now they've had three panic attacks in six weeks. And they won't know to connect the dots between that traumatic event years ago, where they buried their feelings and their recent panic attacks. Now, I'm not saying that all panic attacks stemmed from this, I'm just saying that it might be one contributor to consider. So the goal is feelings in feelings out on a daily basis. And finally, I want to suggest that as you are recognizing your feelings, extend self compassion towards yourself. This is called mindful self-compassion. This is just about being aware in the present moment. You're simply noticing, without judging as good or bad, that you are having a feeling right now. That's it. Now, just extend an attitude of loving compassion towards yourself. As you notice, I'm feeling angry right now. I'm feeling scared right now. A simple physical gesture to symbolize this self compassion is to gently place your hand over your heart. As you notice what you are feeling. And treat yourself the way you would be kind to a friend who is going through the same thing. Be your own best friend. You can express your feelings through writing or journaling or poetry, through prayer, meditation, art therapy, or dance. Or, like a lot of people, you can talk about it with a friend or clergy or a counselor. Tell your story and feel the relief of getting some distance on it through the telling of it. And again, remember to direct an attitude of loving kindness towards yourself using that mindful self-compassion. No matter what the feeling is - anger, guilt, shame, or grief - whatever it is, treat yourself with a gentle kindness as you would recognize our common humanity with the rest of us.

**Tierney King 14:18**

In addition to being kind to ourselves, she also explains how two truths about human behavior can impact our ability to handle stress and let something go and these two truths,

**Kristin L. Roush 14:29**

Write this down. Number one, what is learned at an emotional level cannot be unlearned at a cognitive level. And number two, we prefer the familiar negative over the unfamiliar, positive. As much as we consciously want to be happy to not carry this around anymore, we want to be free from old traumatic pain. There is sometimes an unconscious part of us that prefers the familiar negative and will actually sabotage our best conscious intentions. Similarly, what is learned at an emotional level, cannot be unlearned at a cognitive level. In other words, you can't just throw flowery happy affirmations at deep pain and expect the pain to go away. Frankly, that is insulting to your pain. And it's a waste of time. So here are just a few things to keep in mind about this process. Often letting go is a process, not an event. The feelings will probably come up again. And when they do, use mindfulness to simply notice them. And then use visualization to imagine releasing them. This allow yourself the experience of reliving it or ruminating about it. Assert mental discipline, distract yourself and remind yourself that you already dealt with this and let go of it. And then you can repeat the ritual if you need to. So, in conclusion, what is the moral of the story? What can you keep in mind as you deal with difficult situations and then become more resilient and lighthearted? I guess I would say, if you want nothing to have to let go of later, don't pick it up in the first place. Deal with events along the way. Don't stockpile. And I love this quote, address the difficult while it is still easy. Filter your daily life events through a balanced belief system that emphasizes perspective and boundaries and mindful acceptance of what is a healthy and balanced belief system about life will help to inoculate you against interpreting events as more problematic than they had to be.

**Tierney King** 16:53

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.