

Catherine Avery: Productivity, biorhythms & how to avoid bur...

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SPEAKERS

Katy Weber, Catherine Avery



Katy Weber 00:00

I want to talk to you a lot about your story because I feel like not only your diagnosis story about your cancer journey, I think is really important to kind of your own sense of self realization, kind of figuring out what was going on with your brain and your life. But why don't we start out with, you know, when were you diagnosed with ADHD and kind of what was happening in your life? What were some of those signs where you were like, I really need to, I really need to get this looked at. I need to look into this.



Catherine Avery 00:30

So that's a complicated answer. I know, right? Me, because ADHD 16 stories popped to mind. I'll start at the end. And in the spring of this past year, I decided to be tested. I had never been tested for ADHD. I'm 56 years old. And I got tested because I'm an ADHD productivity coach. And I got tired of saying to people, oh, I have undiagnosed ADHD, and they thought, whatever they thought, and I just kind of thought, it's clear I have it. So what triggered the knowledge, what triggered the knowledge was having chemo brain at age 50 Right after I'd been through cancer treatments, and it really affected my brain cancer treatments, chemo treatments for cancer, so I chemo treatments or radiation or her cept in that I got the whole Migaila. The good news is, is I had early stage one breast cancer, so they knew exactly what they needed to do to get rid of it. So that's the upside. The downside was unfortunately, I had all of it. I didn't have the mastectomy, it was very lucky I did to actually get away with having a lumpectomy and I'm delighted I also negative for the bracha gene. So for people in breast cancer world will understand all that those are being very positive things. And what happened with the brain was I couldn't remember words, I didn't know where I was going, what I was doing, how to get anything done. It was absolutely crippling and thought, This doesn't seem like it's just chemo brain. Now the other thing people have dealt with breast cancer will know is that you end up having to shut down your hormones if you are positive in the hormone department. And I was so I was triple positive I was positive for estrogen and progesterone and her two new, which meant they were doing a fat shutdown on my hormones. I was 50. So I actually was well into

perimenopause, borderline menopause. But the shutdown is pretty quick. They put you on meds and they knock it out of your system. And so there was this horrible sort of Triple Play of chemo brain Undying, undiagnosed and completely unaware of ADHD. And, you know, hormones being shut down. So it all just resulted in a nightmare. And one of the things I didn't talk about much then, but I'm certainly open about it today is that there were times in my life, I dealt with anxiety and depression. So I had been through therapy for years for anxiety and depression, and have since talked to the therapist and found out Oh, yeah, he thought I might have ADHD, but didn't think that was something we should deal with. And I have words, I won't use them. But knowing now what I know, five, six years later, I really think it's a shame because it would have been very helpful to me even as an adult to have had that diagnosis and started working with it. I'm a firm believer that trauma, anxiety and ADHD can go hand in hand. Because of course, kids who are neurodiverse diverse neuro divergent, I get them confused, but I think it's kids who are neurodiverse here 20,000 more negative messages by the age of 12 than kids who are not. And of course, I was one of those kids. I mean, you could look at my report card and just say it screams ADHD. So I then went on kind of a brain journey. What am I going to do next and I did take medication for the depression which was caused by cancer slash chemo belsay was cancer. Isay was chemo. Chemo was chemical. I think it messed with brainwaves and put me into a depression. I think walking around brain fog probably has a big chunk to do with depression too. Because it was so frustrating to be super smart. And I am to E, twice exceptional, gifted and ADHD. So I went on like a brain journey. And I started looking into how could I learn more about ADHD and executive function. All this was happening at the exact same time as my daughter was entering sixth grade math, and really being challenged and showing executive function struggles. So Ding ding ding ding like daughter like mother. She didn't get tested till the summer. So I didn't we just both kind of just said we're executive functioning issues people we just have some executive function challenges and I didn't want to believe I had ADHD. I'm not sure why I was in denial for so long, kind of get over myself. I'm not sure what I guess I wanted to be different, even more different than I already am, right?



Katy Weber 05:11

Well, sometimes our ADHD gets in the way of us even getting the diagnosis, you know, there's a lot of steps involved. And you're usually we're busy and exhausted and doing a million other things. And sometimes just even getting the official diagnosis can kind of fall down on the to do list.



Catherine Avery 05:26

Right. And that was the case. And I think, in addition to me sort of being in denial about it, but I recognize that over the years, I had put systems in place, I knew how to what I call managing me, I knew how to manage me. I didn't know me was ADHD, and I was managing ADHD. I just was managing me. And what did that look like? I'll give you a quick story. I had gotten my first home, which was a one bedroom apartment in New York City. This is many years ago, I was about 28 years old. And when I purchased it, I had ticked my first mortgage. And I knew that I struggle with paying bills. And I just thought that was a fluke about me. And so I was a nervous wreck about it. So I said, here's what I'm going to do, I get a bonus, I worked on Wall Street at the time. So I'm get a bonus. And don't get all excited. It wasn't a huge bonus, but it was a bonus. And what I would do is I went to the bank, and I said, now remember people this is way before automated bill paying and everything else. I said is there a way we can set up a savings

account, and I'll put the money in its beginning of the year to pay my mortgage, and it will just auto pay from here. And the banks that I had the mortgage at the same bank, they set the whole thing up. So I'd put all the money in before January 1, have it ready to go for the next year's mortgage. And it just paid. Because I was so stressed out about the responsibility of paying a mortgage now. I mean, we kind of laugh at that. But if you're in ADHD land, that is a serious concern. Because we forget to pay bills. We don't mean to it's not that we don't have the money in the account, we just forget to pay them.



Katy Weber 07:03

Yeah, I had the same issue with student loans. I you know, by the time I was in my second year of university, I was getting I was old enough, because I had dropped out of school so many times that I was old enough that I was no longer considered a dependent on my parents. And so they were giving me much bigger student loans. And that, you know, I would get this huge chunk of money in September that I had to dole out for rent and food and you know, all of these lifestyle, you know, payments throughout the year. And it was terrifying. It was the same way. Yeah. Like I really wished I had had somebody take that money and do do exactly what you had done,



Catherine Avery 07:41

and work in Wall Street. So I was actually around financial stuff. And my dad is really good at finances. So I also kind of had that dad pressure of knowing that I needed to make sure I didn't mess up.



Katy Weber 07:52

Yeah, you know, it was funny, my mom was an accountant too. And so I always I think she sort of thought I would, I would come by it naturally. I was a disaster when it came to money, and budgeting and all of that stuff. But I loved accounting as like a subject. You know, like I loved math, and I loved accounting as a subject, it was just when it came to real life. It was just it was very easy to kind of put off and not think about,



Catherine Avery 08:18

Oh, that's interesting, because I'm the opposite. I am not a math person. I'm not an accounting person. I hated accounting in business school. However, when I went into classes like market research, we applied accounting, and then I totally got it and it all made sense. So I'm very much a sort of visual and doer. And I really struggle with anything. That's a process, which is ironic. So I'm a productivity coach. But that's because I've had to learn how do I set up processes to manage me, so now I can teach them to other people. But math is all like a process. And you have to remember that whole parentheses first. Multiplication, I can't even remember the formula anymore. And that's the way we saw our daughter's ADHD was seeing her struggle in like early algebra, and the processes and it was like ding, ding, ding, ding. And also, not only that kind of looks like an executive function challenge, but thought looks kind of familiar. I kind of remember being that person.



Katy Weber 09:16

Yeah, right. I remember admitting to my children that the only time I ever cheated on a test in middle school in high school was math tests when you had to remember formulas because I just never could. And so I would write the formula and pencil on the inside of my Texas Instruments calculator cover. And then as soon as I got into the test, I would write all the formulas on the back of the paper and then I would erase the Texas Instruments calculator, so I didn't get caught. But yeah, that was the only time I was the only time I cheated even though I was like a lousy student. In many ways. There were the only time I ever cheated was when it came to math formulas. Like I just couldn't remember those. I think I don't think they make you remember them anymore. I think finally somebody realized that that was a terrible thing to do, but



Catherine Avery 09:59

it will It kind of depends. Yeah, she just bumped into this with her contest and was very frustrated because he didn't give the formulas and he normally does. And of course, he's darling, he saw her and he said, I know what you're gonna say, you could just retake the test. I'm gonna help you through this. And it was great. And just in the moment, she still hasn't learned like, in the moment, she needs to say, Mr. Teacher, I need to, I can't do this test this way, you know, my 504 is gonna require me to need XYZ. Now, interestingly, the beauty of this was we found out the 504 actually doesn't require visual study methodologies. And so we are meeting while the whole team is meeting next Friday, and we're gonna put that in place. That's her original five of four was just for anxiety. And so it had a different kind of flavor to it. But now I'm realizing like, Oh, Hello, mom, right, in the world of ADHD think I would have looked at this. But I never even thought about it in language. Sure, her combinations are fine. Not a problem, right? No, they're not fine.



Katy Weber 11:05

So just to backtrack a little bit back to the your experience with chemo brain because I know a lot of us, you know, something happens in our life where when we're diagnosed in adulthood, something happens that kind of derails you where you're like, What is going on? I'm not able to cope, I'm not able to remember like I used to, you know, like, there's always something you know, where you feel like you're kind of imploding and I know chemo brain is something that happens to a lot of women because of the estrogen fluctuates, fluctuations. But then again, you know, when you are diagnosed with ADHD, a lot of us look back throughout our entire life and see, okay, the signs were there all along. And this is really just sort of peaks and troughs when it comes to my executive functioning. So like, when you think about chemo brain, do you think chemo brain only happens to women who are neurodivergent to begin with? Or do you feel like chemo brain is just one of those things that can look like ADHD? I mean, how do you even like, like, I always think of my guest, Emily Dotto talks about the fish hooks, you know, it's like when you're trying to figure out what is the source of these executive functioning issues, it just feels like you're pulling out a pile of fish hooks, like how do you even begin to, in your brain research? How do you even begin to decide like, what is what?

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Catherine Avery 12:20

You know, I wish I really had a scientific answer to that question. And I don't, and I want to make that really super clear. Because I'm fascinated by this. This is like my thing that I am going after, and trying to understand. And so I'm gonna say in a, I've witnessed kind of way. Brain fog, I think is what you're talking about, which is similar to chemo brain, but brain fog can show up for ADHD women as we're losing our estrogen because our estrogen has been The Little Engine That Could that helped to skate along the kind of replaced the things we're missing like dopamine, etc. And I'm not, I'm not a scientist, so I'm not going to save as well. So, as I'm looking at this, I'm seeing these interplays of all these different things, at least in my life, what I've been through, and when I'm seeing through some of my clients, you know, there's going to be a link, we're going to find out, people are scientifically researched researching this now, there's even going to be a link between trauma, childhood trauma and ADHD. And, you know, what is that link? We don't really know. But ADHD kids, if they're getting 20,000, or negative messages, they are, in some ways been have been dealing with little T traumas all their life. So okay, I feel like this is a two part question. So part one is, I would say brain fog can come up whether it's chemo brain, and so for me chemo brain was the trigger, right? That's what drilled me enough that I said, I have no idea what to do next, there must be something more here. And then you can have that brain fog from from hormones. And that can show up. When you're pregnant, it can show up at anytime, where your hormones are fluctuating in a different kind of way. But as you lose that estrogen, your brain is just not going to work the same. Not I'm not saying that as an absolute, I'm saying that can be the case, if you've got ADHD, that your brain is not working the same as it did before when you had the estrogen to sort of help you mask those symptoms. Have a sort of like that little icing on the cake that you know if there was something wrong with a cake, you kind of hide it with a little extra icing, right? That's kind of like, what estrogen is for women.

**Katy Weber 14:39**

Yeah. And I think that's what makes it so confusing for all of us when we do go to our medical professionals and they're like, No, it's probably more likely just this. But then when you're told it's just this over and over and over again, through the course of your life. Oh, it's just you a new baby. Oh, it's just pregnancy. It's just, you know, perimenopause, it's just like, Oh, you're just depressed. You know, like, it just feels like the at some point, you start connecting the dots and realizing that this has been a lifelong experience of being told, Oh, you just have to do this and, and feeling like you're throwing darts at the wall, and nothing seems to be helping. And then suddenly, this magical diagnosis of ADHD comes along, where it really starts to like, it feels like this foundational diagnosis of everything else that was seemingly random in your life. And I think that's why it's such a profound experience for so many of us were diagnosed, especially well into adulthood.

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Catherine Avery 15:39

I agree. And it really put a lot of the pieces in place. I already knew, I knew I had ADHD, when I filled that form out and got ready for my ADHD diagnosis. I mean, just reading cards, the credit cards through report cards still stuck on that mortgage on their report cards. And reading the comments that teachers had made, and I really only looked from sixth grade to 12th grade to see what they said in the comments were things like easily distracted, gets in own way could be a capable student who could be exceptional if she just applied herself, loses her notes and


notebooks turns in assignments late does this all sound kind of familiar, because this is what it all said. And there was a part of me that really had to grieve because little known story. I wanted to be a national honors student, I wanted to be a national honor society. And my grades just weren't there. Because I hadn't had the kind of tutoring etc, that I needed. And before anyone throws my parents under the bus, nobody knew about ADHD, they did not know they we just didn't have that knowledge. And I don't, in any way ever blame my folks for not knowing they just didn't know, they just you know, you're being lazy or whatever, it was just different times. Now we're so much more clued in. Just to go back to my daughter for a second, she is a national honor society, because we do know and I was able to advocate for her and get her in the people she needed to be able to do very well academically. And it's very interesting to me that I'm you know how much I'm involved, I would think like 10 years ago would have been so jealous. And now I'm just like, how great is that? That's the most awesome thing ever to watch her go up and get that and fulfill a dream that I had as a kid that I didn't get. So before you all say, Oh, wow, you're so together. When I read that report card, and got all those things ready and put them in to that ADHD diagnosis sheet. I was a wreck. I really had to mourn, losing that kid who didn't get what she needed. But once I did that, then it was like, Oh, well, this makes sense. And it answered all the questions all the why was stuff so challenging for me? Why was it such a struggle? And that's a gift, right?




Katy Weber 18:04

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I had a very similar experience, I cried when I went back to look at my report cards because what was very sad for me too, was I was I was entered the gifted program in the third grade. And my kindergarten and first and second grade report cards were very positive. She's a natural leader, she's, you know, like all of these are very talkative, very, like enthusiastic, always, you know, you know, and then there would be the odd like her handwriting needs to be we need to work on our neatness and her handwriting. But for the most part, it was like all of these positive comments about how enthusiastic and motivated I was. And then I sort of saw this slow decline over the years as teachers just picked and picked and picked at all the things I wasn't good at, you know, like she's so you know, she's easily distracted, all the things you said easily distracted, you know, can't be in groups, they always had to remove me from groups, because I would be too chatty. And so like, slowly, I was like, my desk would end up getting moved all the way to the teachers, you know, to sit next to the teacher and like, I just saw this poor girl over the years really giving up on herself. And so by the time I was in high school, I didn't I knew something was odd. Like I knew I was bright, but I just couldn't, you know, I just couldn't do it and, and so I stopped going and then you would see the absences, right. And then it was like these, you know, then it would be like needs to hand in reports, then I just wasn't even trying at that point. And it just that's what made me cry was how much I had given up on myself and how nobody really knew how to help me back then. So yeah, like when I think about being a parent and the ways in which I am able to kind of shift my perspective and really help and advocate for my children who suffer from the same issues with executive function and memory and all of the things that I had. Yeah, it is. It's, it's lovely, like it really feels very empowering to be to be able to take that knowledge and that self knowledge and everything that your whole life has kind of led up to this point where you're like, now I can help these children in a way. I mean, there's still that part of me that has that anxiety where I'm like, What am I not seeing? Because there was so much that was not seen in my childhood. But still, I think, yeah, I totally agree with you. It is there's it's a really lovely feeling to be able to help your kids in the way that you weren't helped for sure. I'm getting very emotional. It's very it was. I mean, we do. Yeah, there is that grief is I think there's it I think you can take it and make some really positive changes in your own life. And it's, I mean, I've talked a lot on


this podcast just about like how incredible it's been to be able to kind of recognize my strengths as opposed to who I used to be which was somebody who just always felt thought I was the problem. And so yeah, I you know, but I think it is important to acknowledge a lot of that you know, that initial sadness of like how what your life could have been Yeah, for sure. I really want to hear about how you ended up becoming a productivity coach. So you were in New York and your 20s working near or on Wall Street. So were you in finance at one point?

 Catherine Avery 22:55

Yeah, I was in I worked for AIG. And then I worked for various firms, the New York Stock Exchange, and did a whole career in the financial world. It was fascinating. I loved it was great until I didn't. And yeah, multi courier ad deer, right, here we go. So then I went off and started my own trading firm and traded for myself, which was a disaster and not my superpower at all. And I got out fairly quickly after three years, I said, I just gotta get out of this. It doesn't work. And had met my husband at that point. I guess we were newlyweds, or just about to get married, I'm not sure which. And I said, I really have always wanted to go to design school. So I went to design school and I went into commercial office design, which I absolutely loved. And I found that I loved working with clients in office business, I didn't ever really want to decorate Mrs. Jones's house with fluffy pillows and draperies I was much more into, you know, desks and where we can lay them out and which department should be seated where and all that kind of stuff. And so productivity became a natural evolution out of this. And I went study under Barbara Hempel to become a certified productive environment specialist, which is basically someone who helps clients set up a productive environment, whether that's a larger corporation, and we go in and do a day or whether that is an individual, and we do organizing. And of course, what happened was, the pandemic happened. And I was already like morphing towards productivity consulting, and I was on what I call the three year plan to become a laptop business. And it was my plan to be an online consultant. Well, that plan went from three years to three months because of course, I had no choice. I couldn't go out and help offices organize their space anymore because no one was going to their offices one and two. They sure didn't want me there. You know, this is even before masks. So and by masks I mean like literally the ones we endemic, not asking, which is a whole other topic. So I looked into a couple of coaching programs. And really, I had been told about a program called coach approach for organizers, which is really now more coach approach for people who are into organizing productivity and neurodiversity. They just haven't changed their name yet. And I don't know if they will or won't. And I started that in June of 2020. And I have pretty much been in school while working. While everything a mom does in family life, and I am sandwich generation. So I'm not only dealing with a teenager who's looking at colleges, I'm also dealing with seniors who are starting to need more doctor appointments and things like this, God bless them. And so it's been a little nutty, to say the least. But it's been great. It's been an incredible ride. I've learned a ton. While I was in it, they were morphing over to include a neuro diversity service certification. So that's what I will graduate with is a certificate in neuro diversity coaching.

 Katy Weber 26:10

Oh, incredible. Okay. Yeah. The Productivity

 Catherine Avery 26:12

background already. Right, you know, partly from having study with productive environment, partly managing me. So I didn't feel I needed to get the productivity designation, I thought it was better to get the neurodiversity designation. And that's my clientele.



Katy Weber 26:30

What have you noticed is different when you talk about productivity with somebody who is neurotypical versus somebody who is neurodivergent? Because I feel like that word is very different to two different people in terms of like, what even as productivity what, what are some of the differences you've noticed?



Catherine Avery 26:47

Well, and it's been a long time since I've worked with the typical people in productivity, because my whole world that was neurodiversity. I would really say no matter what an individual is an individual, and we are unique, we need different ways of setting up our time, schedule, productivity, you name it, space, environment, all of it. And it you know, I think that can even vary amongst neurotypical people. With neuro divergent folks, we need to recognize if it's already working, don't try to fix it. I can't tell you how often I'll have someone say, Oh, I'm using this planner. But I really want to move over and use Asana. And I'm like, do you really? Is that what you really want? And then, you know, six weeks later, Oh, I hate Asana. And I'm never using it again, I'm going back to my planner, because it wasn't broken. So don't fix it. So if you've got something that's really working for you already, I don't want to come in and say you must use this program, you must go this direction, because people are so different. I mean, we wouldn't have what 100 different types of project management software if we were all the same. Whether we're neurodivergent or neurotypical. Right.



Katy Weber 28:00

Yeah, that's a good point. I mean, I think I think we are more I think if you're a nerd or Virgin, you have sort of grown up with this sense that everybody else got the manual, but you right, so it makes sense, that by the time you're an adult, when everybody says, this is the thing that works, you will want to try it, right? Because there's some part of you that never trusts what works for you, because you've sort of, you know, like you said, like, you've been told myriad times throughout your life, that what works for you, even though it's working for you is still wrong. And I think that's where we get to that questioning part where we're like, we don't even understand. You know, I think it's almost like this, this knee jerk reaction for us to go with what everybody else says is working. And also, I think there's the sort of impulsive part of us that like, chases the excitement of something new. And like, he's like, you know, even if something is working for us, we have a tendency to be like, Oh, but I want to see if this thing is gonna work better, right?



Catherine Avery 28:56

I mean, we're trying me, right, I



Katy Weber 28:58

saw, there's that part of the follow the dopamine part where we're like, oh, it's so new and exciting. And I think we get really fixated on like perfection, because we're such puzzle solvers. So it's always fascinating to me to think about, like all of the different elements to an ADHD brain that lead to you know, why we are the way we are when it comes to organization and productivity.



Catherine Avery 29:23

I can give you a perfect example. Oh, good. I was six years with Asana, I loved Asana, great project management software worked for my brain, like a color coded. I could do all these great things with it. It was wonderful, until I just stopped using it. And that was a disaster because I need something to help keep me on track on projects and tasks and everything else. And so I then went on a journey to figure out what it was that I wanted to use. Now. The plus is I've seen a lot of project management software's because I went on this little six month. Oh my gosh, what am I going to use journey and so That's great for my clients. But it wasn't so great for me. And I landed on to do is, which ironically, is so much like Asana you wouldn't even believe. And I've been with to do us very happily for several years. And it's great, but it's just a funny thing to see how we can go off in that direction and check out so many things. And it's a plus, in some ways, right? Because we have a lot of knowledge about a lot of things. But it's a minus, because then it takes us off track from using what's already really working for us.



Katy Weber 30:31

And I also feel like with productivity, I think that's something that we could I mean, we have a tendency to burn ourselves out, right? Because we are so hyper productive in a lot of ways, even though we tend not to look at ourselves in that way. We tend to actually view ourselves as being lazy and procrastinate, like when you really like sorted out and look at the timeline. I feel like we get so much more done. You know, it might be in these small bursts at midnight, but at the same time, like how do you even sort of know, I guess what my question is, like, how much is too much when it comes to productivity? Like I almost feel like you have to learn how to balance right? I



Catherine Avery 31:13

have like, six directions I can go Oh, squirrel. Okay, so I'll start with direction one, which is, and I'll hold it to is we need to have a sense of our best times of the day. When are we really good at focusing and when are we not I am a morning person, I am great first thing in the morning. This is when we're recording this and I am like on fire ready to go. The afternoon nice slump very badly, it is not my strongest point in the day. And so what I do is that the end of my workday, like 3:34 o'clock, and this, by the way, is also related to transitions. As I go and take my walk my power walk, walk about one and a half to two miles, I'm trying to get back up to two miles and very excited about that. And that because my transition to the evening to family time. And it also gives me a second burst of energy because exercise helps us with that, which is great. If you're if you're the hyperactive type and I'm or at the Combine type I'm combined

type, then exercise is really key because it helps us focus. Some folks focus best if they exercise first thing in the morning, but because that's just my time of day, or I'm super focused anyway, I know that I can put exercise a little later and get that second boost. I should also say about this that I actually am not medicated I opted not to be I am totally pro medication. I think it's great. I have no issue with it. I just felt like I'm 56 years old, I take a lot of other medications in the post cancer world. So my medication is eating healthy, getting a good night's sleep, exercising and recognizing 100% all my clients are on medication, I have no issue with it whatsoever. Just have opted not to take it myself. So that was part one was this idea of knowing your bio rhythms, what time of the day are you most on fire and then put stuff that's most important that your brain work into that time of day. The stuff that's not your brain work like maybe paying bills or you know making a few calls or whatever I put into the afternoon where I don't need to be on fire. Second piece of this, and it's really my mantra, it's what I leave Live By. In order for us to be truly productive. We need to learn how to be intentionally unproductive is very weird for a productivity coach. So stay with me, because it's where there's intentional. You are gonna burn out, you whoever you are, all of us will burn out, we get exhausted, we get tired. And then when we do we pull out our phones and we play Candy Crush, or we mindlessly sit in front of the TV or we do scroll Facebook. And that is not being intentionally unproductive. So it's far better to recognize during that downtime, right? What am I doing? I'm being intentionally unproductive. I'm going for a power walk outside fresh air, seeing a friend walking her dog. We do that together. It's so much fun, a Great Dane and now I'm using that time to reset and enjoy myself and honor that I have needs that I need self care. So whatever that self care looks like for you that can be a yoga class. I have a friend who is taking Qigong actually, it's one of my clients who's taking Qigong be intentional and productive. If you're taking a day off, take a day off, shut off the phone, turn it off. Don't look at it. Don't take your emails. I know this is really hard but you can do it for a few hours and go off and do something really fun for the day. You will come back to work with 1000 times more energy because you completely shut down. And no eventually want to try to work up to doing that for an entire week. Which is even harder if you're running your own business. But it is doable. And I have done it.



Katy Weber 35:15

No, I completely agree. And just to go back to the time, like blocks, you know, I think that's been incredibly helpful for me that when I really stopped and thought about like, When am I most likely to do this type of work? Right. So I'm like, it's the same like, early in the morning, I am just abuzz. And that is when I get all of my like to do lists, like the easy stuff. I'm just like, boom, boom, boom, boom, get it all off. And, and then I walk my dog at like three o'clock when I'm when I'm feeling that's slump, I do the exact same thing. And not because you know, it is your right, it's a nice transition from that into the evening. And then I know that in the evening, my brain has quieted down. And so that's when there's certain types of things I do better in the evening. So I like wait, I don't try to do those earlier in the day like so. So again, it's like really trying to stop and think like, what am I most, you know, when is when is this task best, you know, serving me throughout the day and kind of trying to place it into these time blocks. But again, that comes with an enormous amount of privilege, being an entrepreneur and not having a nine to five job where you have to sit at a debt. Like I realized that there's a lot of freedom that, you know, my life allows that kind of freedom. But I



Catherine Avery 36:34

will say even in corporate, you can make this work, you can say because I have a corporate client. And one of the things I've encouraged her to do is to not check email first thing in the morning. And she was very nervous about this. So what she did was she created a separate like little ding noise on her computer for when her CEO contacts her. So no matter what she has to be available for the CEO, but she doesn't check email before 10 o'clock in the morning. So she can get some focus time in and some work done because she works in HR. And it's all day long with the emails and the phone calls. And she's never out of meetings. So that is one way you can manage that and corporate is to say, I'm not going to be available. And listen, you put it on a responder on your email that says I'll be checking my email at 10am. It's, it's, you know what, here's the thing, we have all allowed everybody to run all over our boundaries. It is an age in which people can reach us 24/7 And they expect it, my clients don't expect it because I just set that boundary right up front. They are not chit chatting with them on the weekend. I mean, if really something urgent came up, I would be available but that's pretty high. That has yet to happen. Since I've gone into coaching, you know, we we draw the parameters and the boundaries around what we need. And if we have a brain based challenge, it's even more mission critical that we do it that we set these boundaries. So that's one way to do it. The other way to do it is especially if you're an entrepreneur, and it's a little trickier to do a corporate but you can definitely do this as an entrepreneur. I only see clients Monday, Tuesday, Thursday. Wednesday's are crazy for me, there's always a whole bunch of trainings and meetings etc. And then on Fridays, it's my strategy day, it's the day that I do all the intensive work that I may or may not have been able to get to during the week because I've been in constant meetings I mean, I can be in five or six zoom meetings a day. That's definitely something that happens in my world. So that's why I try to chunk them into Monday Tuesday Thursday, so that I have some Wednesday afternoon time for a few hours where I can really focus in and then also on Fridays.



Katy Weber 39:29

So now looking back at your own ADHD what what are some of the things that you feel like it's helped you with in your own life? What are some of the things you love most about it?



Catherine Avery 39:44

The creativity and that whole research aspect? It's easy to go down the rabbit hole right on the research thing and yet it's one of my favorite things to do. I love to learn. I am finding at my age that I have to learn differently. I flip back and wonder how I was an English literature major and how I did 1000 pages of reading a week, because now I find that agonizing. So a lot of my learning I do from listening to podcasts, and actually listen to I'll tell you about a story around one of the podcasts I listened to of yours. So it's, you know, it's learning those techniques and figuring them out and then just running with them. But I love that part of ADHD, I love being different, I enjoy the creativity of it, I enjoy the highs when you just have a ton of energy, and you can just go go go, I always have to remember that we're gonna have to schedule a little time to drop over at the end of that, because we burn out. That's the bottom line. It's really easy for an ADHD or to burnout because we forget, and we're in that hyper focus, and we're going and we're so excited. Cuz sometimes means that we can be late for things, which I've really tried to work on. But I think I think my ADHD has allowed me to become an interesting person.



Katy Weber 41:01

You just like, I try not to be late to things I'm actually pretty prompt. Or usually I'm terribly early because I have such a bad eye the sense of time. But like, there are so many times where I will do something just before I leave the house where I'm like, Oh, I have plenty of time to mop the kitchen floor before I leave. And then that's what ends up being late. So it just made me laugh.



Catherine Avery 41:24

That makes me laugh. And it's true. So I have to tell you this thing that I learned on your podcast, because I never knew this. And I'm fascinated again, I'm fascinated by this. I have TMJ. So one of your people you were interviewing and I apologize, I've forgotten her name, but she was a lovely young lady from Scotland. She was talking with you about TMJ. And I guess that's something that can come up with ADHD. I would love to know more about that. Do you remember?



Katy Weber 41:52

Oh, well, I think it was my own experience with teeth grinding. So you know, teeth grinding is something that is very common with people who have ADHD and carry a lot of anxiety and tension. And so I think we teeth grind. And we and we clench our jaws during the day, but I always had been a really bad teeth grinder at night. And so my dentists over the years would say you really should, you know, your molars are, are seeing a lot of wear and tear, you should wear mouth guards. And I would go to the drugstore, I would get a mouth guard, you know, one of the over the counter mouth guards. And I would you know, you'd shoot chomped down on these mouth guards on your molars and I could never keep them in my mouth. I'd always spit them out. They're very uncomfortable. And it was just sort of, I would go through life like this. And then several years ago, I started out of nowhere I started getting vertigo. And it got really bad I would have these like attacks seemingly out of nowhere, that I just like would I couldn't open my eyes. If I would open my eyes I would immediately just vomit like it was just awful. I couldn't drive my kids anywhere. I it was really debilitating. And I kept going to the EMT because I've always sort of had allergies and sinus issues and so I still thought it was sinus related and so the EMTs are like yeah, you know, you should take a diuretic you need to give up caffeine you need to give up chocolate you need to give up alcohol you have to have be under 1000 milligrams of sodium a day and I was like just kill me I couldn't like that. Well exactly. I was like 1000 milligrams of sodium sounds like a lot but it's nothing like I couldn't eat in a restaurant anymore. Giving a coffee was awful. And, and I also it seems like I got rid of the vertigo but I was getting really really bad tinnitus or tinnitis, however you want to pronounce it and it was getting to the point where I was couldn't hear anymore. I was getting fitted for hearing aids. I was so depressed because you know, tinnitus is just it's really isolating and depressing. I couldn't think I couldn't have conversations with people I couldn't have any ambient noise. It was a really dark time. And I just felt like I don't know what you know. And even the audio all the audiologist was saying like you know a hearing aid is really not going to help with what you need help with like they were basically like there's nothing we can do for you. And then I went to a routine visit with my dentist or hygienist and was telling her about all these issues I had and she said it sounds to me like you might have TMJ. She's so she's and that was and I was like I don't know what you're talking about. And it was just this lightbulb moment where the dentist came in and he was like, I have a feeling what's happening is you're you're

chomping down on these mouthguards the jaw that mandibular joint is jamming up into your ear canal and that is what is creating all of these issues. So they did this X ray the 360 X ray of my jaw sure enough, my jaw had been just you know that joint was jammed right in there because of all my teeth grinding So he said, you know, all you need is this like I'm gonna give you this like special kind of bite plate that you're going to wear for six months. And he said all of you know, he was like, you're going to be able to eat pizza again. You can drink coffee, you can every your life will go back to normal. And I was like, Who do I will? Yeah. But in that moment, I was like, Who do I believe these EMTs and audiologists who are assuring me that this is a chronic, I was diagnosed with chronic manures disease. They were like, This is it. This is your life. And then the dentist who is like, oh, no, no, no, it's fine. We'll just fix it really quickly. And I was like, All right, I think I'm gonna go I'm gonna I'm gonna bank on the dentist and I'm so grateful I did. Because he fitted me with this biplane. He gave me a proper mouthguard, which is goes on the front of the tee. You don't bite down on it, which now thinking back I'm like those over the counter mouthguard should be illegal because I think they probably are causing a lot more issues than they are healing. And yeah, so anyway, I love this story, because it was so incredible. within 48 hours of wearing this mount, this bike plate, all the tinnitus went away, all of my hearing was restored. And I've never had any issues. So I still to this day, I don't wear the the bike, the bike plan, I only work for six months, but I still wear the end, it's called an NTI it's a front of Mount nightguard I still wear that because I still grind my teeth, obviously. But all of those incredible like I was so sad like it was really, really dark and and I tried to tell people the story as much as possible, because I think there Yeah, there's definitely a lot of people who are grinding their teeth out there. And their dentists are telling them to go get those molar mouth guards. And I'm like, That is the worst thing you can do for your jaw and your ear canal. So if anyone is having strange issues with tinnitus, or vertigo or any kind of hearing loss, and you're you're feel like this might be, you know, you it feels like, you know, this might be an issue and you've been told you grind your teeth at night, like please look into this because yeah, it's it was

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Catherine Avery 47:07

an ad my story. Yes, please, I think is hugely important. And it was fascinating to me. I. So in March of 2020, prior to March 2020, I was having all this ear pain, and then the pandemic hit, and you couldn't go to a doctor. So I was doing online, doctoring medical appointments. And they were putting me on higher and higher doses of valacyclovir because they thought I had shingles in my hair. And your pain was outrageous. And, and I kept taking this and taking this and taking this and what I had been doing was putting my dentist off because I didn't want to go anywhere where I had to open my mouth wide in a pandemic. So I was just a wreck, I was terrified to go to the dentist. And finally, I guess over the summer, the Auntie said, you know, we're gonna bring you in the fall, and we're gonna have to go in and do an endoscopy and do all these things. And I was like, no. So I said, You know what, let me just go see the dentist and ask some questions and see, you know, because he'd said, maybe you need to dentists. All right, I'm gonna suck it up. And I'm gonna go and you know, fully mass did the whole nine yards got in there. And I said, here's what's going on. I have this tremendous ear pain, like piercing brutal ear pain. And if you don't like you said it debilitating. It's to be like that as a horrible, horrible thing. And so he came in, and they took his two fingers and stuck them in my mouth, and he said, chomped down on my fingers. And the pain was such that I was almost on the ceiling, because it was so bad. And he said, TMJ we're getting you a mouthguard, the whole nine yards, mine actually goes the whole way back, I wear it every single night. I really jumped back and molar. So I'm going to ask about that front one. Because I have really done a job on the back molars of this thing. But as I've gotten used to it and used it, I have no pain. My life is

perfectly normal. I have to wear an ugly mouthguard to bed and it's not terribly comfortable. And it did take some getting used to I mean, he told me it's like wear it for 15 minutes, an hour, two hours, three hours until you get used to it and then you will just end up sleeping with it and it'd be perfectly normal and that is the case. But it's truly if you got weird symptoms, just keep asking see different doctors and you know, it's same with ADHD, right? Let's just bring this right back on to ADHD. Don't let someone tell you. No, it's not ADHD, you just anxiety and depression or whatever that was my story. keep pursuing it. Because the fact is, you may just not have found the right doctor yet. Or it may really truly be anxiety and depression like I don't want to diss doctors but at the same time, you are your own best advocate and we have to take care of ourselves absolutely knows us better than us.



Katy Weber 49:58

Well and this was such a isn't an advocating for me to because my EMT and audiologist had sort of diagnosed me with this chronic condition that they were like, no, sorry. Like, this is just what your life is going to be like from now on. And I, you know, I really was I had gotten to that point where I was like, There's got to be a source for this. And the doctors were just interested in, in treating the pain, they were just the pain management. And they had gotten into this, like, let's just make this as easy as possible, where I was like, No, something has to be causing this. And so yeah, there's so many parallels to that. And the way in which so many of us are diagnosed with depression and anxiety without looking into what is the root cause of the depression and anxiety. We're just going to give you a pill and treat that. And so this was really Yeah, I mean, it was, it was a frustrating, very lonely journey. And, you know, it was funny, because I actually went back to my en ti after I had this amazing experience with my dentist, and the and the treatment. And I went back to him, and I said, this is, you know, this isn't this amazing. It was actually TMJ D and it was like, blah. And he just looked at me, I was like, I've never heard of that. I don't think, you know, he was like, I don't think that's the case. That makes no sense to me. And I just was like, I left, they're so deflated, because he was not interested in like, opening his mind up to like, what alternatives it could have been, and I obviously don't see him anymore. But but it was, yeah, it was just, it was just, yeah, there's been so many parallels in terms of like, how important it is to just keep trying, as exhausting. And as depressing as that can be like, if you feel in your gut, that it's got to be something else, you know, they have to you know, it's really is it so important to advocate for yourself and, and keep going even when your doctor is very confidently telling you no, it's the it's just whatever he's telling you. I say he I know it's possible that there are women doctors out there who who gatekeeper as much as mad but



Catherine Avery 51:59

Oh, absolutely. I could, we could spend just another hour talking about Rice I've got about women doctors as well. So, you know,



Katy Weber 52:07

I want to make sure we spend the next I want to make sure we have everybody know how they can find you and how they can work with you. And you know, where are you? What are you doing on the internet these days?



Catherine Avery 52:19

Okay, well, I am found at my website productivity by design.com. If you want to reach out to me to chat about anything, you can do call with catherine.com Catherine will see and set up a time on my schedule. I'm on all the social media channels, trying to build my YouTube presence. And I am also host of the uncluttered office podcasts and Katy is going to be on my podcast as well. So stay tuned for that. I guess it's really it. Happy to connect with people. This has been an amazing time. Thank you so much for having me on.



Katy Weber 52:53

Awesome. Yeah, thank you so much. It was really fascinating to hear your story and and yeah, we got to talk about some issues I wasn't expecting, which which often happens with this podcast. So yeah, it was lovely. Getting to Know Your work Catherine's thank you so much.