

# Denise Brodey: Neurodivergence in the workplace

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Denise Brodey, Katy Weber



Katy Weber 00:00

I guess my first question is kind of when were you diagnosed with ADHD and what led up to your own diagnosis in adulthood.



Denise Brodey 00:08

So, I think it's probably like a lot of people, they my son was diagnosed, then I was diagnosed. And again, like a lot of people knew, I probably am, my brain thinks differently than other people. And I experienced things differently. I seem to be really sensitive. You know, I'm funny, but I, I'm also, you know, very much hyperfocus. So I could see, you know, I could see all the trades in myself. And then when we took my son to be diagnosed by neuro psych at, he was seven, I think that's the earliest that you can do it. I was working in New York, and I, I had had a lot of trouble editing, like, I just could not. When, when stressful things were happening at home, and there were 400 of them. That's when my light bulb blew out. You know, that's when I was like, okay, like, I'm very good at pulling it together. But there's an I don't daily have a, you know, I didn't feel like I had a daily issue. But then as soon as stress starts ratcheting up, that's when you realize I can't handle this, I'm going to explode. And everyone around me realize it too. And so it was not a you know, it wasn't a pretty picture at work. I was on deadline all the time, I was working till midnight, I was, you know, hoping that my son was sort of get on a regular schedule of,

you know, liking his school and so forth. And, and I also have a daughter who's amazing, and somehow flew through all this. I don't know how, but she, you know, so I had my family, my husband, and then my work life. And both, honestly, were really important to me. So I never really got that sense that, oh, I could just skip work. It's sort of glide through work. Or I could glide through my family. When everything hits you in the face. That's when you're left with Oh, my gosh, I'm doing everything terribly. And I think women tend to say, Oh, I'm doing everything terribly. Right. But this was like, I'm doing something. Really, I'm doing really terribly. And it's not going away. You know, like so I think. So I was you know, My son was seven I was in my 40s was 10 years ago, probably like that. Yeah, almost exactly 1012 years ago. So. I mean, it's terrible to say, but I'm grateful that we had the resources to get him diagnosed, I'm grateful that he informed me in many ways of how to code, which I'm sure he would not be happy. Oh, thanks. Thanks for giving me ADHD so you could understand your own. That's not what I mean, I did I think we really worked through, I worked through a lot



03:15

of



Denise Brodey 03:17

understanding of how my brain works with him as he as I tried to understand him.



Katy Weber 03:22

Yeah, I actually, I've interviewed many, many women who read who came to their diagnosis after one of their children was diagnosed, I did not have that experience. I had a therapist who had ADHD, who had been gently suggesting I look into it over the years, because she saw somebody who had had a lot going on, and I was always doing projects, and I, you know, had all these things that I would get excited about. And then the pendulum would swing and I would go into like, crippling depression. And, and, you know, I've heard it described as like, piece of shit syndrome of that, just that sense of like, your sense of self, right? Like your sense of self is so vastly different from how you are presented in, in this world. And, and so that was kind of how she first started thinking I had ADHD. And I of course, was like, Well, I'm not hyperactive, I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not a hyperactive little boy, I had such a misconception of what it was at the time. I was like, I think I might be bipolar, which I've found out now, since talking to so many women that that's actually not uncommon at all feel, you know, feeling like that pendulum swing. But when you're talking about like, that sense of overwhelm, it reminded me of

when I had my first baby. And I was working in a newsroom. You know, I was working a newspaper, I loved newspaper journalism for like, you know, almost 20 years I had been doing this just like, it was the best job. You know, it's just like, I love being on deadline. I loved writing, I loved everything about it. And then all of a sudden I had a baby and like I had to, I went back to work at 12 weeks so I was lucky enough, you know, in this country, quote unquote lucky enough to get the To be able to afford to have an additional six weeks of unpaid disability leave, and going back to my job and being told, like, Okay, if you want to pump, you can use the editor in chief's office because he was the only person who had a closable door. So I was like, or you could use the wheelchair bathroom because that was the only bathroom that had was a single stall bathroom where everybody went to take a dump, basically. And I remember feeling like, these are my options, like really like this is, this is what is happening here. Like, I have to either ask the editor in chief to leave his office if I want to ever pump or I can go into this bathroom. And I remember just feeling like just do all women deal with this, like is this, you know, though, it was just one of those visceral moments of like, Is this just how it is like, this is how all women are treated, and I need to just suck it up, you know? And, and feeling like, what you what you said just reminded me of that sense of like, how much am I struggling? Like, this seems absurd. And yet, this is these are the options that are given to me.

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Denise Brodey 05:57

But also, the conflict for me at that time. And it seems like it is now for a lot of people and the pandemic is, I was always experiencing, you know, being pulled in different directions and trying to manage all kinds of things. And being my my husband at the time, worked downstairs. So he was thank God, you know, able to pick up the slack. If my babysitter said, Well, I'm leaving, or, you know, he was there, he went to the dentist, he did all this thing. So even then, you know, I did have even that support. Right? And so she had shorter hours. And you know, it was a really optimal situation, if you, you know, and yet I was still struggling. Yeah, I think there's a lot of women post pandemic who are thinking, Okay, so I handled all that, you know, you don't know what's normal anymore? What is? What is the normal level of stress? And what are you supposed to be taking on? Am I supposed to be, you know, teaching violin while I watch this, you know, this event for my company? Like, I don't think so. You know, and, and that's, I keep, I continue to say Thank goodness, my kids are grown. They're 22 and 24. And although there's a certain, you know, the the pandemic has affected young adults as well. It's, it's not like I had a house full of kids. I don't know what I honestly don't know how these women did it. And if you and if you are doing it, you may feel like you have a lot of ADHD like symptoms, you know, like, you're like that idea that one of the things that we used to really get me was, I could be on, on, on, on on. But when I was off, like I just dropped, you know, it was complete and utter exhaustion. And I would bet that people feel the same way these days, like, oh, finally my husband's home.

And you know, I'm done with my four shifts, nursing, whatever the heck it is, right? And you just drop, you're so tired, and your mind will shut down. But it's, it's a serious sense of what you use that overwhelm or, and it's very difficult to draw the line. And understand, am I living a life that's causing these issues? And I think a lot of people just write it off. Yeah,



Katy Weber 08:25

well, I think as women also, especially with young kids, I mean, we're told it's going to get better, it's going to get you know, once you start sleeping again, it gets better once you start doing, you know, once your kids start talking, it gets better. Like there's all these sort of milestones that we wait for putting off our sense of, of success or comfort in the now because we think it's going to get better. And then you know, like, I used to joke about the fact that I was still on antidepressants for postpartum medication, and my son was eight. And I was like, I'm not ready to go off them. But it's clearly though I can't call it postpartum depressive anymore. And so there's a sense that it's like 111 mile, one, like chapter of difficulty, then melds into the next chapter of life. So what's been fascinating for me because I am a pandemic diagnosis. I mean, I was absolutely one of those moms who had a house of cards. Everything was kind of holding it together. And then all of a sudden, I was the teacher, the housekeeper, my kids were home. My my, my husband was home, the house was just like, always, there was never any food in the house. Like it was just like it was such so many things that piled up that Yeah, I just like had an emotional implosion. How old are you? And my kids are my daughter's 14 and my son is almost 10. And so they're old enough. Like if I if I talked to a woman who has a child who's like under the age of six, I just want to give her a hug. You know, I feel like my kids are at a really they're at a great age. I always joke how I'm like they're self sufficient, but they're not like self destructive yet. They're still Like that, they're in that perfect window where it's like, I don't have to, like lie awake at night worrying about the choices that they're making in life. But they're also old enough that like, they can make their own lunch if they need to. So I felt like I've had a lot of freedom. But my problem when with the pandemic was like I have, you know, I'm an entrepreneur, I have a coaching business, and I couldn't do anything because I felt like I was in waiting mode, because my kids were on zoom. And at some point, during the day, there was going to be a crisis, the internet was going to blip, or there was something was going to happen, somebody was going to need a printer, or like, you know, the fact that I just had to be on all the time was so exhausting, that I couldn't, I couldn't focus on myself at all. And I remember listening to this American life episode about animals and how like, animals were sort of have been traumatized by the pandemic, by having their people home all the time. And how like, they're like, especially dogs, right? Like dogs are on all the time when you're home, and how exhausting it's it was for them. In the beginning, I'm sure I feel like they probably adjusted at this point. But like, they need time away from you, so that they can relax and not feel like they're on all the

time. And I was like, Yes, that's what I feel like, I feel like the dogs are I'm like, Yeah, I just, I wasn't doing anything and yet still felt overwhelmed. And now in respect, I'm like, Oh, of course, like I could, I was paralyzed. Right.

D

Denise Brodey 11:18

But I also think we like we like dogs have an automatic shutdown button. When it's like, okay, the noise is too loud. This is too loud. I go into a zone like people are like, What are you staring at not be in a restaurant, and like, I'm not staring at anything. I'm just like, I just, I just turned the off button like I don't, I'm not functioning right now. I'm not functioning, I'm just, I just turned off everything in my brain. Because, you know, and like, you can see a dog just goes to sleep in the middle of like some sort of, you know, soccer match, or whatever it is, you don't you're like, how did they do that? And it's like, I do that, you know, like, I've had enough thanks my brain just, I think the reason I started rebel talent, which is, you know, also entrepreneurial, and is very difficult to say, like, what stage Am I at now and so forth. I write a lot I write for Forbes, I write marketing copy for pretty much anyone who asked me to do it, because it's just easy. It's a no brainer for me. And that's how I make a lot of my living but,



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but I also

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Denise Brodey 12:26

started rebel, because I felt it two years ago, I started it because I felt like people with ADHD and other neurodiverse you know, diagnosis, never really interacted with the people who were hiring them, or who were managing them. And it's this is this huge gap, like, What? How are we supposed to understand each other? And how are we supposed to find mentors, if everybody's very quiet about the fact that, you know, I'm success, but I don't tell anyone. And there's a statistic I don't I can't remember what it is. But it's not specifically about neuro diversity, but it's about disability in general, that came out of a why. And it and it was a couple years ago, and it said 2% of people in leadership positions in Tel Aviv, their fellow colleagues that they have a disability to present. Okay, so think of that probably 50% of the world right now has some sort of issue, either chronic pain, migraine headaches, you know, that pain, dyslexia, you know, depression, whatever it is, right? And so, but but nobody's talking about it, well, if you want to be a, if you want to be talented, and move ahead, and you want to be yourself in the office, then you have to be a bit of a rebel, in a good way to say, I'm gonna have to let some of this out of the bag. I'm

not saying everyone should disclose their disability, I do not think that's the right thing to do for some people. But if the timing is right, and the last situation is right, and, you know, I, or even if it's not, I think there's a way to reveal. I'm not going to I'm rebelling against this tradition that we all work on Friday nights until 10. I'm, I can't do that, you know, and I think of it sort of like, you know, religion, like, this is what I do. I practice this rebel talent religion, in which, you know, my inner being says, I'm sorry, this is the line where I rebel where I can't actually do this. I can't learn three new billing systems. I can't, you know, whatever it is, right. I can't be in an office or You know, with with people who are doing construction all around me, because they're changing the office for the pandemic, again, I just can't do it without headphones. It's that it's that kind of thing that really never gets to the boss. It never gets to leadership, it never gets to HR. So when, when you think about the hiring of neurodiverse people, and then you think about your life as a neurodiverse person, it's apples and oranges. Nobody ever asks you, well, how would you feel or and you don't tell them? Right. So there's, for me, this is a watershed moment. This is a tipping point where people are actually talking about mental health. I don't know that they feel comfortable about it. I think there's a bajillion studies showing we're all stressed, but not a bajillion studies showing what we're supposed to do about it. So I think it takes a rebel to say, Look, I don't want to lose out, I know, I'm talented. I know I'm good at what I do. But the situation you're putting me in, or I'm putting myself in is, is basically sucking up half my energy. Yeah, I



Katy Weber 16:11

mean, you know, you had mentioned about feeling grateful for the diagnosis and helping your child and I've often felt weird about using the term grateful for the pandemic. But in terms of, you know, like, I, I feel like a phoenix a lot of the time. I like that analogy, because it really did take the pandemic and it did take like a mental health implosion for me to get this diagnosis, which has been so life changing. And it has made me kind of reframe everything and sort of realize how incredible ADHD is not only not only in as a neuro divergence, but just sort of like how I credited for so many of those sorts of successes I had in my life. And I just wasn't willing to see that because I was always trying to hide those parts of me. And so it's interesting, like when you talk about, like, I've interviewed so many income, I don't think I've ever interviewed a woman where I went where after the interview, I was like, she wasn't very smart. I mean, there everybody is just so interesting, and so fascinating and so good at what they do. And yet we there always is that underlying sense of like the stigma involved, that you're going to get found out and you're going to get out it and like we are such overwhelming evidence to the contrary. And yet, it's like you said it's like a one person, it's very difficult for one person to advocate for themselves, especially like if your job is on the line. These times it is



Denise Brodey 17:33

Yeah, yes. Well, I mean, the The other thing that I was going to say is, I think you have to turn the tables and say, I deserve this, like I deserve to be able to do what I do and do it well. And it comes along with the women equal women and equal pay movement that whatever the meeting, there's just a groundswell of people saying, whether it's black lives matter, or, or Equal Pay Day, it's it's a groundswell of women saying, I am not going to take this anymore. And then corporate structures and organizations need to find a way to deal with it. And we're out in the streets. And we're, you know, I distinctly remember someone saying to me, a man saying, What is this million Women's March? Like? Who Who, what does that really do? And I thought I don't, I don't know what it really does. But I think we're gonna find out, it's going to do something. And I was with him a little bit on idea that enough of the protests enough of the postings, you know, like, what's really happening? And then when I saw that they were signing up women to vote and to run for office, learn how to run to office at the that March, I realized, Oh, yeah, you know, what's gonna come out of this women are going to be in let's just do you know, local legislators all over the country. Like they're taking control. And it did. I mean, more women voted more women ran for office, more women understood their local government, and started being advocates than ever before. That's what that March did. It was and I feel it's like, directly correlated. So were we being everyone, you know, the ADHD community, whoever it is, we're reaping the benefits of the women who are out there saying, I can't you know, I can't tolerate living this way anymore.



Katy Weber 19:29


Yeah. So I mean, I take my pumping example. Like, instead of just saying, like, Oh, these are the options that are available to me for pumping, and those are too stressful and ridiculous. So I guess I'm just not going to pump. And I guess I'm going to stop breastfeeding at three months. And then I guess I'm going to carry that guilt with me for the rest of my life. Every time I get an ear infection or whatever. It's interesting, you know, that, like you said, I guess just that idea of like being able to recognize that what is what is happening right now may feel like it's the norm but it's not acceptable, and like, how do we even begin to recognize those situations when we are so bogged down in daily living.





Denise Brodey 20:07


Yeah, that the idea of having, like, from like another, another way to understand how people get information and how they understand what's normal and what's not. You know, the one thing I dread writing about is celebrities, right? Like, I don't want to learn my normal from some celebrity. That doesn't make sense to me. But I recently wrote about

Ilan musk and SNL, and I don't agree with him on many, many, many friends. But there was so much discussion about what is Asperger's? What is autism? What Why is he like this? What are all entrepreneurs like this? How does he you know, manage to stay afloat? And not, you know,

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just,

 Denise Brodey 20:55  
you know, catch on fire, she has to go up in flames, you know, like his life is so not moderated. And I realize, okay, so and one of my friends who's on the advisory board for rebel talent said, so why are you doing this today's like, This man is not a role model. And I said, it's, I'm doing this exactly, because we're having this discussion on LinkedIn, and everyone can see it, and everyone can see this topic. And if they want to, they can scroll back and find out who you are as an ADHD coach and who I have. And that's opening a discussion that is really, you know, wouldn't happen unless that person saw this link. And I'm not saying Ilan Musk is a great guy, I'm saying he's a he, he's, he liked to fire. And I'm kind of, you know, there, where there's where there's heat and friction, I'm going to, hopefully get some traction and, and, and it will alert people that to the issues.

 Katy Weber 22:35  
So just to backtrack a little with rebel talent, tell me about the kind of inception of this and who you work with, do you work with employers or employees or both?

 Denise Brodey 22:43  
So right now, I work with both. The idea is, let's meet in this middle space. And so companies hire me to basically it sounds terrible, it sounds like a goldfish bowl. But it's, it's like a focus group. It's like, if you really want to know how, you know, to go to work with people who are neurodiverse, you have to talk to them. And if you ask HR people or anybody, they'll say, I'm sure I know anyone neurodiverse I'm not sure I've interviewed anyone neurodiverse. And they're like, well, now you will, you know, and it could be they, they're the people that are in the group. So it's sort of equal number of HR leadership, whoever wants to be in it. And then random people who have time to be very open and and can use it as their first name, if they want to, they're not looking for a job, they're not interviewing, they're simply there to say, I represent the average person. Or I can tell you



how I felt not no two people are like, but you know, I think common questions come up, and it's like, oh, so noise really bothers you, or, you know, like, really basic things. Like the two days I stay home from work, and I don't have to commute I'm so profoundly, you know, productive, any of those things. And they don't have to be about stigma, or I need mental health help, and I'm having a prices, the discussion is really about, Hi, I'm this way, you're that way, what's the big deal? Like, let's become familiar with each other, or we will be able to have any context for when we're trying to hire or help someone as a manager. And it's been really fun. Like, it's just, it's, it's just, you know, I'm working on this book called the, you know, sort of like the big book of rebel wisdom. And it all comes from people who have been in these conversations with me or who I've interviewed at Forbes. they've, they've said just everyday things that make them that makes so much sense. And I heard it on your program as well, when when someone would say, Oh, that was just me, you know, I thought I would only do that. And it's so validating to be able to both talk to people in leadership positions and not feel like you're on the, you know, like, you're on the rocks, like, it's not your job is on the rocks, right? And also to be able to talk to other people like you and just let these things out, right. And then you realize, Oh, my gosh, that's not so you know, that, like, it's not such a big deal. I just, if you can name it, you can make it manageable, you know. But I don't think anyone's really doing what I'm doing. Because it's very niche, it's very small. And, and it takes a lot of time. So it's not necessarily going to be anti bias at scale. Right? Like, it's just, that's, that's not, that's not where I'm going. But I do think it's in a company, let's say, of 400 500, or a team of 100, or 50. It's, it's really, it breaks open this, you know, new conversation. And even if nothing gets solved that day, people become human to each other. And that's, that's what's missing. Right now. If you're a label, I have ADHD, she has ADHD, should we interview her? No. I don't want to be a label to people. And I, and I know other people who would say, I don't even want my label, no. And that's okay, too. But just saying how I work or how I work best, or what I, what happens to me, when I get feedback from you, after a long day, you know, how I accept feedback, all of those things have something to do with being neurodiverse. And, frankly, other people who are not neuro diverse have them too. You know, there are people who freak out about getting feedback, and there's, there's not diagnosed with anything, they're just them. That's just Joe hates feedback. Right? So they become normalized, basically, things just become



27:31

discussable



Denise Brodey 27:33

I'd say. And that's what rep attalla does, it says I'm going to, I'm taking the time to

because I've been a success, but because I've really dug deep into this diagnosis myself and come to grips with it, I'm going to take the time to share with other people and rebel against the, the, the traditions of not talking or the traditions of my company.



Katy Weber 27:58

Well, and I feel like it makes so much sense, it's almost like the matrix, once you actually see it, you know, like, it's like, it makes so much sense to, to lean into the strengths of your individual employees to get the best out of them, as opposed to making sure that everybody is uniform. And yet, like I think in the US, especially like putting resources into the health and happiness of your employees is frowned upon. It's like, it's almost like a sign of weakness. Whereas like, really, at the end of the day, like that's the best investment you can make in your company is making sure that you've got like, optimal workspace or up, you know, you know, if your nine to five is not your jam, let how do we, you know, how do we figure out how to best lean into your strengths. And and so when you talk about it that way, it's like, feels like common sense. And yet it really just the culture in this country is the exact opposite. I think it's why so many people with ADHD end up becoming entrepreneurs, because they just couldn't take it. They had too many outbursts where they were just, like, expected to do one thing and just couldn't perform. Right or didn't ask for help. Right? Yeah.



Denise Brodey 29:07

I mean, it's like, oh, if I'm an entrepreneur, nobody will see the fact that I cannot handle QuickBooks, you know, like, that's just nobody's gonna ask me Do I have that skill? You know, I would have these massive charts, these donor charts when I was working for one nonprofit, and someone would say, so to scroll just keep scrolling and I'd be like, I can't see like, I don't know why it's like stopped stop scrolling. Like, I don't understand where you are in this file anymore. You know, and like, What is wrong with you? And you know, I just said I don't know I just can't see it. I can't visualize what you're talking about these different groups. And this that different totals at the bottom when I can't see the totals at the bottom and I don't know what how much the campaign made. And I you know, this is like it just drove people insane. The people who who were You know, working on all the analytics, just, I'm sure we're not quite excited about working with me. And, and I the same with them. But if we had talked about it, and I had said, I know this thing is a 20 page report, but if you print it out, it'd be and we had a discussion. This would go so much faster. Like really honestly, like, I, that's all I need is a printer. And, and I think that that's why some people fail, they can't manage their responsibilities, right? Because they can't they take get sucked up in one activity that they're really bad at, instead of acting, asking

for help. I mean, I used to do that with expense reports. As a journalist, I would spend all weekend being like, oh, that thing, go that take that receipt. And every single thing I did was like, they had to deal with money I did outside of work, because I was just like, Okay, then you add this to that, you know, like, it was a nightmare. And if I had taken my real work time to do that, I would have been fired immediately.



Katy Weber 31:09

I know, asking for help is so hard for us. And I think, you know, I feel like our default in so many situations is if this isn't working, I'm the failure, you know, like we immediately pile on on ourselves. Whenever our default our knee jerk reaction is never this situation is not ideal. How can we solve it? It's like, I'm terrible. I'm, you know, I'm the failure. I can't perform whatever it is, you know, and I'm like, how do you even begin to work on that impulse that that knee jerk reaction after a lifetime of feeling like you, you know, that you're the one who's wrong?



Denise Brodey 31:47

Yeah, under yours, under years of practicing life that way. That's the great thing, I think about my son's generation and their 20s. They, they're like, my son's learning. differences. In his tutoring were embedded in his school, there was no Oh, the special kid goes over there, you know. And, therefore, and then having to let that happens to a lot of kids, where it's, it's a known factor that, that the kids learn differently. And if you're in a decent school system, then you speak out, you learn to speak out. And as a kid, you learn to advocate for yourself, like, I need to sit near the window on the bus to the game, because I'll barf on you. If I don't, you know, like, it's not huge accommodations. It's just open the window or seat me away from the pencil sharpener. Or can we not, like have study hall outside the gym, because it echoes so much. Those are all, not expensive. accommodations. And once you as as, as my kid has a you, once you're used to speaking up for yourself, you don't really care. Like if a professor doesn't understand you're like, oh, how can I help you understand, because at this point, I know what I need. And maybe you just don't know, you don't get it, you know. And I love seeing that. I love seeing them talk about it.



Katy Weber 33:18

I know it's and that I am grateful for that in terms of how I am now able to recognize the importance of self advocacy and be able to turn around and help my kids with that. Because you're right, it's so important. Like, you know, My son, who is not yet diagnosed, because I'm so recently diagnosed, we haven't even gotten there yet because of the

pandemic. And so, so much of his school year was at home learning and remote learning and like, but you know, it, it's, it was crazy, but I'm also like I said, I'm very grateful, because I've been sort of by his side this whole time. So I've been able to see so many of these idiosyncrasies that I've been able to link and say, okay, like, what are the structures that we need to help with that? And, you know, I joke about the fact that like, we all swear, you know, we have no filter, we swear we have there's no there's no off limit words in my house, except for the word lazy, we call that The L Word. And they're not allowed to call yourself lazy, right? Because he will do that, you know, where I'm like, why didn't you do this thing? And he's like, I don't know, I'm lazy. And I'm like, you're not lazy. You just spent six hours in Minecraft, if you are the opposite of lazy, or like, you are not allowed to use that word, you have to figure out okay, maybe you didn't do the thing. But there's always a reason why you didn't do the thing usually is because it's boring. And it's terrible. And you need to figure out a way to motivate yourself.

D

Denise Brodey 34:32

Right? But see the thing that's so great. Just to go back to that is you seeing him doing these things, right? You're like, if you see a pattern long enough. I mean, then some of them can reflect on you or reflect on them. I mean, I can tell some really funny stories about terrible patterns I, you know, had but just talking about those patterns or being having the luck To have seen that, and understanding it because you are who you are. That's exactly what people in business do not have. And that's why time the thing together is so much of, you know, just sort of unbundling, you know, all these fraught feelings. It's not about do Do you know how to do QuickBooks? It's like, could we have someone help you teach you QuickBooks or use the new Razor's Edge system or whatever it is, you know, using printed out materials like, I would have been much better off. Instead, I, I just went bananas, like trying to understand what people in them in other departments were talking about when they talk about finance, it's



Katy Weber 35:43

right, or that it's not a reflection of your intelligence, if you can't figure out QuickBooks on your own, you know, like, I think we also have this sense of like, if we need help, it's somehow a reflection of our incompetence, or it's our lack of intellect. Whereas like, asking for help is like, what, you know, that's one thing I think we really could give to our children is just like normalizing the need for help and like that you shouldn't be you shouldn't be at your wit's end before you even ask them.



Denise Brodey 36:10

Exactly, exactly. Like they are in competences I can't do you know, a lot of Photoshop. Like, I'm sorry, I haven't learned that. It's, I'm not competent at Photoshop, but I know someone who is, so if I give it to that person, can you know I do. I mean, as a kid, always, always, I had a barter system of activities, you know, like, I'm really bad. Like, like, someone would tell me to rake the leaves. And like, I'd rake them like, and they'd all or mow the lawn or whatever. shovel actually was another one show and I Shovel Knight in a straight line, you know, and I'd be like, here's the deal. I'm going to make all the hot cocoa is and all this stuff and do all this stuff. Right? Like and put all the wet clothes in the dryer, if you do the shoveling, because I can't have my dad come out and look at this. Like Bizarro, you know, maze that I use on the driveway, right? It was always this and that you do this, I'll do that. You know, even to the point of, if you sing louder, then the teacher won't tell me to stop singing because I have such a bad boys like, you know, there's numerous ways you can think about it. And it's, it's, for me, it's a bartering skills is a way of life. You know, I'll help you organize things while I'm hyper focused, you know, and you can paint the walls. I can paint. You know, I'll give up after 20 minutes. I'm so boring. And I'll live with a half painted wall. You know, so and I know that that's not a competency of mine. Like, I literally just moved and someone said, Who's painting and I'm like, it's not me isn't too much. It's like baby, I said, I ordered this little kind of chalk paint. And I said, I actually just painting the windowsills because they're so gross. And, and a friend of mine said, that is a great job for you. Like, just these little parts of this little Canada's a little brush. And it was so satisfying. And but, you know, again, back to like, what are you not competent at what drives you mad? My son used to come home from school at three o'clock. And he would always find right home set, forget him. Right? Like, you'd be like, 14. And I'd be like, Oh, yeah. Oh, sorry. And when he called if he needed a ride, but like, why do we need a ride? And like, I'd be bananas, you know? And then if he came in the door, and had gotten a ride, I'd be like, can you please be quiet? And he's like, I just got home from school. And I'm like, but I was just starting to fuck.



39:00

And, and finally, I



Denise Brodey 39:01

was like, This is not your fault.



39:04

I am so



Denise Brodey 39:04

sorry, honey. Like, I don't I'm gonna have to figure this out. But like, I'm so sorry for yelling at you at three o'clock every day.



Katy Weber 39:14

Yeah, I definitely had that the beginning of the pandemic where it was like you need to eat again. Why I just fed you. And you're right. And I don't think I was very sensitive to the fact that for me, it was sort of I was joking about the absurdity of the fact that I even thought that but I'm not sure that nuance comes across to a nine year old who's hungry, who's like, I'm sorry, I'm taking up space. I really feel like I need to apologize for those things.



Denise Brodey 39:38

When I would work on events. I would I would come home. My office was very near our home and I would I would run to the grocery store and get like a rotisserie chickens and potatoes, some salad and some ice cream. And I'd say everything and I tell Toby everything is out for dinner and one day he called me and he goes There's a potato on the counter. And I was like, What? No, I'm sorry. Like, and I'm busy like checking in like high, high giving donors and I'm like the potato, like, and, and I was like, No, no, there's ice cream, there's salad, you just chop it up and there's dressing that you like, and then the rotisserie chicken, just take it out of the fridge and let it get to room temperature. And he was like, great, but right now there's just a potato. And I was like, that's so you can microwave it. Like, just what is the problem? You know? And yeah, I was like food, what is it? Like, I just expected him to be a gourmet chef at 14 or 15. And put all the pieces together. Now he jokes that I don't cuz I assemble food.



Katy Weber 40:43

I remember getting angry with my mom, because I thought that she had taught both of my brothers to cook and not taught me and I was like, why did you go out of your way to not teach me how to cook. I'm like, I'm totally incompetent adult now. And like, I feel like and she was like, I didn't teach anyone to cook. They just sort of learned through helping me and putting things together and I but like, I felt like I needed to be explicitly told how to do sort of adulting things. And I was very, I felt very betrayed that she hadn't like sat me down and told me how to do all of these things.



Denise Brodey 41:14

Yeah, and there's, I remember, as a kid feeling, I I never understood when people said I had no words for it, or I didn't, couldn't say it. And I'm like, talking about like, I've so many words like, it's just bear just take these friggin words, right. Like, I was like, That never happened to me. But when I looked back, I realized whatever I was saying, I didn't have the right words to explain to my parents, who are both therapists and very kind people. What was going on with me, like how really upsetting certain things were. And they, you know, like, the car sickness was just a classic one where we would take these trips and go on these crazy windy roads. And we, my mom would say we're at the top of the mountain at the road to Hana or whatever, like and Hawaii and I'd be like, and then she's like, we're gonna do this, and this and this. And I'd be like, I'll just be sitting here and she shouldn't be so disappointed. You know, she loves traveling. And I was I said, I don't even know how to explain how crappy I feel. And then I was all like, I think I was we have to go back down. Like, we got up here. I'm so focused on how to get down. And, and she, you know, didn't say like, get some food or she didn't think about any of the things that might have helped me. Because I couldn't really say we would stumble upon them. Like one day she gave me a Diet Coke, or tab as was back then. And, and I sucked it down with some Benadryl and I was like, I think I feel okay now. Like, I mean, not not Benadryl, Dramamine. And I was like, I took a half a Dramamine and like two cans of soda, and I was like, I can walk now, like, in a straight line. And, and I would feel crappy The next day, and the next night, even if it was bad enough, if my inner ear balance had gotten bad enough. And that they just, I could not explain why. You know, like out you're not I wasn't in the car, we were like, I would stop swimming. Because it would be like, I don't want to do that, you know, like, certain, like, looking for the swimming pool would seem like the rocky waters.



43:40

Like how do you say that to your friends? It's like,



43:43

wow, it's like a big boat came through. And it was just your dad diving in, you know?



43:50

So, yeah, it,



43:52

it's it.



Denise Brodey 43:55

I think for women of our age, who, who get diagnosed, all of a sudden, the pieces start to come together and you say, Oh, this is why this and this is this. And this is why I always fought with this person. That's why I always got along with this person. And it's really gratifying to know who you like, why you are how you are. It doesn't change who you are. It's just what why was I like that?



Katy Weber 44:22

Yes. And there's nothing wrong with me. I think that's Yeah, I'd say that. I feel like I say this all the time, which is like, the diagnosis is half the treatment, you know, just having that answer. And like you said, putting all of these seemingly random struggles in our life sort of all come back to this one very neat package.



Denise Brodey 44:41

I don't think you can say, Oh, I got a diagnosis tonight feel so much better because it goes in phases. I mean, I think you get really excited about being on medication, telling everybody about this, who needs to know. And then you can get really depressed when I've gotten really depressed when things don't come together. Right? And I thought, Oh, that was supposed to be the answer.



Katy Weber 45:03

Yeah, that's why I say half the treatment because I do feel like you still have to deal with the executive dysfunction elements and a lot of that stuff that's not magically going away. But you know, you still sort of have to work with who you are. And but at least like, I feel like you have a choice, you have a fighting chance to lean into those strengths. And to come from a place of there's nothing wrong with me, how can I advocate? or How can I ask for help or all of these things that we had such a difficult time dealing with for so long? Because we like you said, we had no words, we didn't know what was happening, you know, it's so difficult to really put your finger on what is going on, we're just kind of floating through holding it all together.



D

Denise Brodey 45:43

Yeah. And if you're like me, and anyone that is listening to this, whether you have ADHD or not, if you listen to enough, these discussions, or if you have had a diagnosis for long enough, you can spot someone anywhere, who's having the same issue. You're like, in Starbucks, like that guy, oh, man, he's freaking out, you know, or in the library, whatever it is. or audit airplane, like any space where you're with someone for a decent amount of time, right? You become very attuned to what other people who else in the room has these issues also, and or struggling, I always feel responsible for people like, you know, what you should just do is like, take my seat and sit over here, and then your baby will be fine. And we'll watch her while you get your diet, whatever and, and your Starbucks and eat that muffin and maybe you should have some protein with it. I feel so responsible for other people. But that, that that awareness is it can be very helpful to other people. And I I find it very rewarding when I can't help myself to at least help other people.



Katy Weber 47:01

Right. Yeah. And yeah, and I and that's why I think so many of us turn to advocacy for other people, which is just like if I if one person if I can help one person to not struggle the way that I felt like I was struggling, it will have all been worth it. You know. Now, when you wrote elephant in the playroom, playroom that was in 2007, right, so that were you diagnosed then yeah, okay, interesting.

D

Denise Brodey 48:29

So I was spending most of my time trying to figure out my kids schooling. And I often, just, this isn't terrible. But I often felt like I was more of an expert than the expert, who was helping my son, and I think to myself, you're doing a great job, but he only gets 10 minutes with you. What do you think this is gonna do? You know, like, Can we try this at home and not have it at school? Like, you know, things like that, where the person was perfectly competent, but they weren't seeing the larger picture. And I began to ask other parents, well, what do you do when the OT removed and they only basically get 10 minutes of OT instead of their 25? And and what do you do when you go to your mother in law's when like, like, your kid is just like in a I'm only going to eat age food moment, you know, but doesn't want to hug anyone? And how does that affect your marriage? Like I just I was relentless. I would just ask people quietly questions and if they didn't answer they didn't answer. But what I found was that other parents also felt like experts. They also wanted to tell their stories and and they really had a viewpoint that's, it's so different than a medical diagnosis. it's it's a it's a lifestyle. Like the people, and then some people said to me, Well, you got 41 people to write, and you know, they spilled out their stories, you took

advantage of them. And I said, Would you like me to show you the letters that every single person wrote saying, this was so therapeutic. And, to this day, if I have someone I know who's wants to tell me part of their story, but they don't want to tell me the rest, I say, just write a letter to yourself, like, write it to yourself, it's so therapeutic, you know, what you want other people to know. Because getting it out on paper. And even, even if you're sitting alone in bed at night, you share the story, you know, the next day with your husband or whoever, the neighbor who has the same issues, all of a sudden, it creates this, this was before the web, you know, this was like, before I send that paper letters out to people, you know, and I remember sitting at the dining room table, like, you know, mailing that with my babysitter, and the there's now so many outlets for community. But there's something different about at that time, there was a lot about seeing 41 different types of situations. In one book, it wasn't a memoir, it was all these little bits and pieces of information. And, and that's that's how I ended up writing the book. Because I, I, I just realized I was having all these really awful issues. That didn't seem like I would talk to the medication manager, or the pharmacology guy about them. For my son, you know, I was really like getting hugs from his grandmother. And, you know, like, who do you ask that question? What do you do?



Katy Weber 51:55

Yeah, you know, and it's interesting to like, I feel like there is so much therapy in, like you've said earlier, like, just knowing that you're not alone. You know, like, that is also such a huge step toward healing, you know, that. And that's been a realization for me through this podcast as well. Like, just, you know, the answer is not in the next self help book that's going to tell you how to do XYZ in order to live a better life, like the answer is finding your community and find a feeling understood and feeling less isolated and feeling late, you know, I think maybe we're right. Like I think maybe worse, we might have more access to communicate with each other through the internet than we then we did a generation ago. But we're not accessing the full people. We're accessing, like, very limited ideas of who people are, which is probably contributing to an overwhelming sense of isolation, especially when you think of mental health isolation. And so, yeah, I think being able to kind of parse out this experience in conversation has been so profoundly life changing for me. And now I'm like, and then other people get to listen to it. And it's profoundly life changing for them to just to hear themselves in these stories. I'm like, that is where the healing is, right? When you contact me,



Denise Brodey 53:08

I'm so grateful. I was like, wow. And then I went on this walk sometimes, for some reason, when I walk, I like to listen to podcasts, remember them much more than I do. So I can

remember these moments, like where, you know, an entrepreneur said, you know, her revenue streams and this whole thing and like, and I'm like, she's anyone else would think you were nuts. But I totally get this, you know? And, like, there were just certain ones that really stuck with me. And I kept thinking, this is great. Because even if you only listen to one a week, or whatever it was that I mean, I'm just thankful that you're bringing this into the world. Like, it's just, it's just like my book, but it's, you know, it's now. And it's a little more flexible than a big hardcover book. Right? And I think women, there's more women to talk to. So who needs this outlet? So anyway, I just want to say thank you for doing that. No, well, thank



Katy Weber 54:05

you. I'm love what you are putting out into the world, and especially the work with changing the workplace and how and how we can view neuro divergence in in the workplace. I think it's so important. Yeah, this is



Denise Brodey 54:20

this, like, the way I write for Forbes, people will read the story. And they, they're like, what's different about this? And I say, it's because I'm one of you. Like, I don't, I don't write about I don't write like it as if I'm a press release, or I'm a corporate wonk, or I run the numbers, and I worried about ROI. I talk about all those things, but I talk about them on a very human level. And I think a lot of people are doing that now. But in for Forbes reader, when you think about it, nobody in business was talking about neurodiversity in 2018. Really, regularly. Maybe men So health, maybe substance use maybe opioids, all of those things. But those were also sort of put to the back, like, you know, you deal with those.



55:11

You know,



Denise Brodey 55:13

we want you to know that we want things to be confidential. So it was never in our side, you know, out in the open discussion, because a lot of them have those conversations have to be confidential. Right. But, but, you know, knowing where, you know, where to where to easily park your car is not a confidential conversation, you know, like, I'm really bad at driving really better parking. Could someone you know, tell me like, what are the spots that are the best? Like, how do you how have you been doing this? And, you know,

that's not a confidential conversation. And, and I'll use an anecdote like that in a piece. And people will totally get it. Because they, they see how every day it is, you know,



Katy Weber 55:57

oh, yeah, isn't as bad as every day. I think one of the biggest single reliefs I've ever felt since my diagnosis was when I read that, to brushing your teeth was like an issue. I just was like, Oh, you're kidding. Because it's so private. And it's such like, you know, a personal shame and fault and the fact that like, even if we can openly discuss it about ourselves, if we can discuss it in the generic that it's an issue for some of us, like, I just was like, Oh, my god, yes. Like that feeling. Lucky thing. It's like, yeah, like, I know, it makes perfect sense. If you think about it, it's really boring. There's no immediate reward, there's no immediate, you know, it's, it's you understand, and very up to, you know, abstract ways and why you should do it. But it's really like a terrible thing to have to do on a regular base it like, it makes sense to me when you really like break it down why it's so difficult for us. But it's also like, when



Denise Brodey 56:55

somebody asked, that was one of those things that were would that ever come up? You know, right? Yeah. Like here. It was like, Yes, I totally get it. I had things like, I guess, my kids or my friends notice the most, but they'll say like, Oh, God, I'd be like, Why do I always get stuck in a line next to someone who stands so close to you? And then like, you don't need you just don't like people standing in line, like that way. Like, you know, I'd be like, it always happens three minutes, because I'm sure maybe like in the know, you know, that's one of those things where I literally just get so agitated when people are so close to me, like nipping at my heels with their card back in the days pre pandemic, right, like standing six feet apart. It's just a brilliant thing for me.



Katy Weber 57:42

Yes, I agree. I really hope we keep that. Yeah. And I think you know, one thing that's so wonderful about the neuro diversion community is how open and accepting most people are and like, the weirder the better, in my opinion, right? Like all of these things that you've had secret shame about for so long. It's like Bring it on, we're all weird.



Denise Brodey 58:01

packs to like, you think, oh, that is such a good idea. Whatever it was, I mean, I grew up

with the what I call like the ultimate ADHD hacker, my dad. And we had a name for it, it was called the Brody method. And my dad would do has ADHD is learning disabilities. And he was diagnosed with learning disabilities at a young age, but he's at but he, he spent a lot of time in therapy, not really with a tutor. And I don't know really how he did it. He's a wonder. But he's, you know, he became a psychiatrist, because of all the therapy he had and all the struggles he had. But, but he also became shameless about making things the way he needs them. The Brody method. So at the were the telco was, there would be these white pads, and then there'd be on the back would be a big pen that was with a string attached to it. So you never had to look for a pen. When someone called to write down their name. Like, that's just a classic. Right? And I've tried to think of, like, you know, if somebody if, if you're, oh, this is a great one, when there's too many people in the house have too many glasses, and all the glasses are getting mixed up in and like, why run the dishwasher? 75 times? My dad was different colored rubber bands on the glasses so that your coffee cup is yours, like that's yours for the day. You have read? I mean, there's endless uses for rubber bands, right? And if you would, like, you know, he's one who taught me that when you go to a hotel, and like, there's some weird squeaky noises, like just bring wd 40 you have this little thing WD like, they really like who else does that? You know?



Katy Weber 59:54

Oh my god, I love it.



Denise Brodey 59:55

So I mean, you know, those Those hacks that you get along with the tooth brushing with it, the confessions, I've learned how to live my life a lot better.



Katy Weber 1:00:11

Well, and it really flips the script when you realize like, we're not lazy. We're actually really hard workers look at all of these ways in which we have like, gone the extra mile to make our life less terrible. Or like to manage with some of these issues. Yeah.



Denise Brodey 1:00:25

Well, someone said to me, like, What are you? I was, I was dating someone, and I would make the bed while I was in it. And then what are you doing? And I'm like, it's just so easy this way. And then that is really weird. And I'm like, No, but like, I don't spatially know how much is on the other side of the sheets on the side of the Comforter, and this, and like,

that's one of those things. Someone else saw me I was like this. I love this.



Katy Weber 1:00:51

This is great. I love it, too. Yeah, I have to bring my pillow with me everywhere I go. Because I can't sleep on any other pillow, but my own and like, it's forever a source of conflict with my sister in law, because she takes personal offense that I don't use her pillows. And I'm just like, I'm sorry, have a good night's sleep is more important to me. Your affection?



Denise Brodey 1:01:13

Well, it took 10 years for I think all of us in our family to say to my mother, your sheets are crunchy. They're like, so



1:01:19

I don't know what it is. I'm crunchy.



Katy Weber 1:01:21

I know exactly what you're talking about. Yeah.



Denise Brodey 1:01:23

You know, so we would take, I always if I don't have a pillow, or I'd take a T shirt, like a cotton t shirt, and I put it over the pillow. And like just a T shirt from the gap, you know, short sleeve t shirt, and then it fits perfectly over the pillow. And then it's mine. I don't have to print around like that. What I know No. Yeah, it's it. The other thing that I wanted to mention was that a lot of the A lot of my points of difference, which I think other people I would love to see, and I know they will and do privately is that you have to have a sense of humor, you know, you really have to laugh. And you have to be able to laugh not only with each other about ADHD jokes, but be able to laugh when someone doesn't understand you. And that's become a big thing for me just looking at the other person like, wow, you're a nose picker? You know, I find that to be a really strange habit. And it's very upsetting. Are you neurodiverse? You know, you have neuro diverse nose picking issues, like well, you know, everybody has their quirks, like, I don't want to pick his nose for the entire meeting. Maybe that's maybe that's a normal tree. That's just terrible. Get rid of that normal trade.



Katy Weber 1:02:46

Right? Yeah, I feel like it's the difference between somebody telling you something really, like vulnerable and personal and, and the rest of you. Somebody who's neurotypical might respond like I'm sorry. And a neuro diverse person would be like, That's fascinating.



1:02:59

How did that happen? Why



1:03:00

What's going



Denise Brodey 1:03:02

on? See how that came about? Right? Yeah. But I literally would also put my hand over the side of my face. If someone was doing something so annoying in a meeting. It was like, I became like a horse. Like I saw a horse in Central Park once you know what those things is blind. Now, it's like, that's it. That's what I need. I need to box like this. So I would just and people are like, are you okay? And I'm like, Yeah, yeah, I'm just like, this is how I think.



Katy Weber 1:03:33

I feel like I could talk your face off for hours. So thank you so much for joining me. And it's been such a lovely conversation. How can people find you online?



Denise Brodey 1:03:43

So the Reverend talent site, the best thing to do there is to sign up. There's a couple places where it says sign up, get news advice, insider stuff, and I don't send out a lot of stuff because I have ADHD, like I don't get a lot of times, you know, like, I'm not gonna overflow your inbox. And the site for rebel talent is elephants with an S dash everywhere.com. If you don't do it correctly, you put a period you'll come up with some really cool group singing some rock band that I don't know. And I think they're very lovely. But you can also find me at talent Rebel on Instagram, and on Twitter. I'm at D. Brody. So you can find all of my Forbes pieces if you just literally put in my name, Dr. o, d, y, comma

Forbes. But I think you have the link to like the, the, the, the author page.



Katy Weber 1:04:43

Yeah, I'll put all of these links in the show notes so people don't end up at a accidentally end up at a bad website. So you can go to the show notes.