

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend. Welcome to She Said/She Said. Here on this podcast, I'm joining forces with a broad array of top notch guests to share important life and career lessons. Always with an eye toward insight, inspiration and the drivers that help us build influence. I've spent three decades studying and learning the art of influence. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, advocating for a promotion or running your own household, understanding influence will increase your chances of success, whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said/She Said Podcast may just be the smartest, most efficient investment you can make in you.

Hey, friend. Welcome to the podcast. I am really excited about today's show. When I shared on Instagram and Facebook that Dr. Samantha Boardman was joining me today, you all were as excited as I am. Dr. Boardman, for those who don't know, is a clinical psychiatrist with a master's degree in applied positive psychology. She is the founder of positiveprescription.com and the author of the terrific new book, *Everyday Vitality: Turning Stress Into Strength*. I've included a link in the show notes for this episode, Episode 167, where you can get the book if you haven't already. I highly encourage you to do so because it is terrific.

Our topic today is stress. How to think about it and how to manage it. Now, you likely already have strategies for coping with stress. But I promise you, Dr. Boardman will give you a few new things to think about as we think about stress management. In particular, I think you're going to love her approach to using vitality as a means to deal with the everyday stress that for many of us, can be more challenging because it's always present.

A couple of other interesting observations before we jump in. The first relates to our focus on influence that we've been talking about on the podcast this season and its relationship to stress. When we allow stress to drive us, we are less effective. That's likely stating the obvious, but for many of us, learning to manage stress, anxiety and worry is something that we really struggle with. And with so much to be stressed about these days, it's become a much more serious problem for many of us.

So what's the connection with influence? Well, without a strategy to manage stress, both the big stuff and the everyday annoyances can really, really add up and it can impact how we feel, how we relate to others, our ability to think clearly and ultimately, how influential we can be. Dr. Boardman's approach is based on three components to build and sustain vitality. Connection, challenging yourself and contributing to something that is beyond you. She also emphasizes the importance of a growth mindset that we've talked about many times on this podcast. But she does it in a way that's really different. She blows up this societal obsession with authenticity and just being yourself, if just being you prevents you from continuing to grow. In other words, she's suggesting that you be willing to embrace the un-you or the aspirational you in the interest of personal growth. How great is that?

Dr. Boardman's approach is based in science. But one of the things that's so interesting about her journey is her recognition that what she learned in medical school wasn't enough to effectively treat her patients. I'm going to let her tell you the story, but it's an interesting career pivot that helped her broaden and expand her perspective in a way that enables her to add more value to her patients. I think her advice will really resonate with you.

Before we jump into the conversation with Dr. Boardman, though, I want to say just a quick thank you to you for helping She Said/She Said Podcast reach our most recent milestone, 100,000 downloads last week. I am incredibly grateful to have you here. And I am so gratified that this content and these tremendous guests like Samantha Boardman are resonating with you and that you're finding this investment of your time valuable. So thank you. And now, my conversation with Dr. Samantha Boardman. Dr. Samantha Boardman, welcome to She Said/She Said.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be here.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm delighted to have you here. I am such a big fan of your book and of your work. I follow you on Instagram, you share incredible tips and wisdom. I want to jump right into this though, and talk about the theme of the book is around vitality. Let's talk about why that particular focus as it relates to stress. What's the connection?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Sure. It was a word that I never heard in medical school. I didn't really hear much of it, even when I was studying positive psychology. And somehow I think people associated vitality with aging, with maybe dancing to the oldies or something. But actually, what is vitality? And it's that positive sense of aliveness and energy that is really at the core, I think of each day. It's physical, it's psychological. And Andrew Solomon, who's a psychologist had said once, and this quote really resonated. And he said, "The opposite of depression isn't happiness, it's vitality." And I really wanted to make this book about what are those everyday ways we can build, cultivate our vitality and others'?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. So you started this book, as I understand it, well before COVID, but your timing was just extraordinary in having this book come out as we are all still trying to deal with the stress around not just COVID, but life in general. Maybe talk a little bit about when the idea for this book came about and why.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Well, the book, it was a bit of a long time in the coming. I think there's that old saying that everyone's got a book in them. And for the most part, that's where it should stay. So I hope that's not the case here.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Not in your case, no.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

But it took a while to complete it, because it was all based on this transformation in my own career, I had gone to medical school, and where you learn about everything that can go possibly wrong in the body. And then when I studied psychiatry and did my psychiatry residence, you study everything that can go wrong in the mind. And you ask about the patient's chief complaint, what's bothering them, you try to minimize symptoms, get them back to their baseline. And you assess them for risk factors, family history of mental illness, that type of thing. And I was super focused on what's wrong.

And one day, I had been seeing a patient who didn't quite qualify for a clinical diagnosis of depression, but she was far from thriving. She was overwhelmed with kids and a partner and lots of conflict. And I said, well, how we could focus on minimizing the conflict at home with her husband, dealing with the stress of the kids. All these different ways I was trying to maybe put out fires or give her these tools to do that. And one day she came into my office and said, "Dr. Boardman, I sometimes just hate coming here. All we ever do is talk about what's wrong with me. We never talk about anything

else." And she was right. I had been so fixated on symptoms, problems, what was going wrong in her life? What was the matter with her, rather than what matters.

And it really was this inflection point for me, was that I was so good at misery, but I didn't really know how to cultivate wellbeing. And I knew I'd studied for years pathogenesis, which is the science and study of disease, but not salutogenesis, which is the creation of health, and could I help patients find wellness within illness or people in general find strength within their everyday stress. And I ended up going back to school, to study positive psychology, where you learn about resilience and optimism and post traumatic growth and all the opposite of what you study in medical school. And I think of myself more as a positive psychiatrist. So this book was born out of that change of approach.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Was it hard for you to make that shift? I've always had the impression that for the medical profession, the field of positive psychology is a little bit woo woo, maybe not enough science based. Talk about how you decided and you really embraced this concept. I personally love it, but I'm also not a doctor. Talk about the shift that you had to make mentally.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Yes. And it continues to be a shift, I will say. But it's when are you shifting from being an astronomer to an astrologer in that way, instead of, oh, that's rainbows and unicorns and smiley faces. And the credibility, was I diminishing my credibility by embracing this woo woo pseudoscience? So what I understood then, I was the most skeptical beforehand. I really did not understand the point of what positive psychology was until I had this wake up call. And it's really been around for a number of years before I came to it.

And it was this strange, fascinating science that Dr. Seligman, Martin Seligman had been researching ever since the late '90s, but there was research even before that, about what is positive mental health? We know he studied in the '60s alongside B. F. Skinner, the behaviorist, he had studied learned helplessness. But in the late '90s, in his career, he started thinking, "Wait, is there such a thing as learned optimism?" And isn't there more to health than just the absence of disease or illness? And it was questions like that I realized I hadn't asked enough. And re-imagining what positive mental health could look like, rather than just trying to minimize problems, decrease symptoms.

So there is, I think, there remains a skepticism, I actually teach psychiatry residents who are in their fourth year and I think I get some rolled eyes still, but also then, when I teach I find the medical residents or the surgical residents, there's real interest. And I think, especially for their own mental health, they're curious about what they can learn, what they can do, what are these interventions that might be helpful in their own lives. So yes, I still meet resistance, and I think there are some roles eyes, but I do think it's becoming a little bit more integrated into regular treatment of mental health. And psychiatrists are becoming more aware and they're recognizing it. For the World Psychiatric Association, we have a global group of psychiatrists, we meet every week, I'm sorry, every month and I run it, and we introduce a different speaker to talk about some other places that have positive psychiatry and intervention that they're practicing. So I'm optimistic. I can't say that we're there yet though.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Maybe talk a bit about how you were working as a psychiatrist before you went back to get this additional advanced degree. Talk about how when you came out with that additional field of study

under your belt, how did that shift your psychiatric practice? What were some of the specific things that really changed for you?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

I mean, dramatically, I would say is that instead of just... One of the first things when you meet a patient for the very first time, what one would do in a typical clinical evaluation, for anybody who's gone to the emergency room if you have stomach pain, the question is, what's wrong with you? "Oh, my stomach hurts," whatever, "I've got a headache." Whatever is the problem, "I feel depressed, I'm sad."

And those are incredibly important pieces of information to have. But then also now, I will always ask, "What makes you feel good? What are you looking forward to? Tell me something about yourself that you want me to know about yourself." Something that makes you, you. A question I will always ask is, "Tell me, what do you value most? Tell me three things that is meaningful to you. What do you care most about? What do you stand for?" And then ask them to talk about how they spend their time. And even say, "Let's get specific, as granular as we can, what did you do on Saturday? What happened?" And it's often, "Well, gosh, I was just watching TV all afternoon. I binge watched this show and then I ate a bucket of ice cream. And then I went to bed."

And what I try to do in treatment is to create more overlap between what they really care about, what their values are, and the actions that they take. Because I think when we feel like we're walking our walk, even when we're having bad days, and we're overwhelmed with hassles, and that game of whack-a-mole that can swallow us, that we are more resilient in that every day way when we have the scaffolding, I think, of values that we are adhering to and embodying.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So you've touched on a little bit about the building blocks related to daily resilience. I'd love for you to get into that a bit more deeply and share with the audience ways that we can go about building up that daily resilience. I know you also have three buckets that you break vitality down into. So maybe let's get into the meat of this a bit more and give us some tangible, constructive ways for how we can use this.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Well, first of all, I started realizing that resilience was a word that gets thrown around all the time. "My vet told me my dog had to be more resilient." And, "My hair is supposed to be more resilient with some new shampoo I'm using." So it had that semantic saturation where it's a word we say so much, it doesn't mean very much. And the APA defines resilience as the ability to bounce back, recover from something incredibly stressful, potentially life threatening harmful.

And it turns out that actually, resilience is the norm for most people from major life events. That people, even after 9/11 people recovered very quickly from it. There was an assumption in New York that there'd be post-traumatic stress disorder, people would be overwhelmed with anxiety and stress and even money earmarked for that. But actually, people didn't need it. People tend to be more resilient to those major life events. But it is the everyday resilience, we're really, really lacking. And it might have to do with our lack of social support. But nobody brings you a casserole because you had a really bad commute. And no one really wants to hear that story of how awful your flight was delayed. So maybe that might have something to do with it.

So how do you build this everyday resilience? And that's what this book is really about. And there were three main categories that you were mentioning, that I really tried to dissect. And I think that those are the wellsprings of vitality and everyday resilience. And the first one is, connecting with

others. How are you creating high quality connections in an everyday way? With your family, with your partner, with your coworkers, with strangers even? Because the people who are able to say that they have high quality connections on a daily basis, are again, more resilient to these daily hassles that can take such a toll on our mental health.

The second C, I call it the three Cs, the second C would be, are you challenging yourself? Do you feel positively challenged? Are there instances in your day where you feel like you're in flow, where you almost lose sense of time, where your skills meet the demands of whatever you're doing? It might be at work, it might be working on a hobby, but where you have that positive sense of challenge.

And then the third is, what are you contributing to? Where you feel like you are actively adding value in a meaningful way. And there are endless examples of how, probably the single best antidote for stress that we have is doing something for someone else. And maybe culturally, we're at this moment where there's so much pressure, at least to self immerse. And we have green lighted self immersion, like you've got to go off and find yourself. I think, there is a chapter or a section entitled you can stop trying to find yourself, in the book. But the idea that self immersion or that if you spend enough time thinking about your emotions, what's going on, and you isolate and you can eat, pray, love your way to it or you've got to go off and buy some wellbeing tool to make you feel better, it's not true. And if you can connect, contribute and challenge yourself in a meaningful way and be deliberate about it, I think that we can build vitality, not just for ourselves, but also for others.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. I mean, I love everything about that. I would love for you to dig in just a little deeper on how you think about a stab... When you talk about meaningful connection, what do you mean by that? It's not just the way that we engage someone on the street and we say hello, and we move on. Talk about what that meaningful connection, what you're really talking about there.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

It's this positivity resonance. When you give somebody your full attention and you are hearing them, you're either having a meaningful conversation, because not all social interactions, as we know are created equal. I mean, certainly we can talk about this too, with social media, just passively liking something or thumbs upping something isn't the same as having a conversation face to face with somebody. Even picking up the phone to have a synchronized experience with somebody rather than texting somebody, what's up. It's just, where you're forced to actually respond, in real time, in a real conversation, that's very different.

But also giving somebody your full attention, there's research to show that having a sense of belonging, which is probably a fundamental human need, to do so we need to have frequent positive interactions with people we care about and who also care about us. So what does that look like? And that is on a daily basis, it's even the experience of felt love. When you just know somebody's got your back, and that you know that maybe even your partner, they fill the car up with gas because they know you've got to go for a drive in the morning, just those little experiences of felt love and invisible support, give us the platform and that sense of it's a resource, that is a tailwind at our back. Thinking when an opportunity presents itself, to see it really as a positive challenge rather than a threat, we're much more likely to embrace that opportunity.

Even having good friends that we support. There's a lot of research out there that shows that people who are in good marriages, it's because they have good friendships. And how the role of friendships, when they're having friendships, really, a number of close ones outside of your marriage, it's

just a way to not just help you navigate the bickering of maybe what's going on with your partner, but also those sources of strength. It's not just during the bad times, it's wonderful to have friends there. But are they there for you in the good times? Are they there to help you see these opportunities?

So I'd say in terms of those meaningful social interactions, it's a meaningful exchange of information. It's when you're with a, something called active, constructive, responding, and I'm sure most of your listeners do that. But when someone comes to us with some good news or a kid comes to us and says, "Guess what? I just got the lead in the play." We have a couple of responses. We'll be like, "Really? That's great. And when are you going to have time to do your homework?" Or, "Well, guess what happened to me today?" Probably we wouldn't do that to a kid.

But we're so quick to rain on that parade. But just the three words, if you could just say, "Tell me more." You want to hear about it, and you're giving them your full attention, your phone is down. And I always say to patients too, "Just, when you're with others, don't have your phone, in a visible place. Put it in your handbag, leave it in another room." Giving that person the gift of your full attention will ensure that you have a much better conversation and probably meaningful exchange with that other person.

So I do think those, it's very important to have meaningful interactions. And especially sometimes we forget the value of that with the people we live with and how can we create an environment if it's in the car, put your phone away, give that person your full attention. If your partner's driving, don't be on your phone. And this is a great opportunity, and even more so maybe, in that way that you're both facing forward not looking at each other, that can be a little bit more stressful.

So where are those opportunities that were missing for meaningful, positive connections? And also in expressing gratitude. We often keep gratitude to ourselves. We think, "Uh, the person already knows." Or if it's my coworker, it's going to be so awkward, what can I say, I don't have the words, they'll judge me for not being able to express myself well enough. Well, we should stop fearing that because it seems not only will... We know from research people are so grateful to receive some communication of appreciation and of gratitude from another because it's, they don't know. You think they know and they don't. But to hear just somebody articulate it and to just say it out loud or to write it down, is incredibly meaningful. And not only is it meaningful to them, but it is also meaningful to the person expressing it.

And I think we sometimes just forget that or there's, again, I think culturally, there's some pressure to make gratitude all about ourselves a lot, and to, "Well, I'm grateful for my little life. And I'm grateful and I'm #blessed." But actually, when we make gratitude other oriented and outer oriented, I think it's much more effective and actually more beneficial as well.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oh, I love that so much. That's really beautiful. I know people will have questions about one of the things that you said earlier about the self care versus the other care. Maybe dig into that a little bit more and help us strike the right balance in terms of what that means. Because you're not saying self care doesn't matter, you're just saying that we're all really obsessed with this idea of self care. It's reinforced constantly. And yet the real benefit of helping other people, you're talking about that. So maybe dig into that a bit more.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Sure. Well, I had a patient that might help explain or elucidate this concept, who really, she said, it was New Years and she wanted to find herself. And she had gone to some sort of retreat where she was told that she needed to focus more on herself and to make herself a priority. And she took this very literally. And so she was changing her diet, and engaged in this exercise regimen and was regulating her sleep

much more and creating these gratitude lists at night. But what ended up happening though, was she said, "Well, I feel more well rested and maybe I have more energy." But she was withdrawing from her friends and family. Her sister came to town, but it wasn't coordinating with her plans for self care, so she didn't see her. She canceled plans to go to a friend's birthday party because they didn't have the juice diet she was on. So there was a lot of ways it created for her, avoidance and disconnection.

And I mean, I think that the idea that when self care is interfering with our connections, our meaningful connections with others or if it's becoming an on-ramp for avoidance or rumination when we're stuck in our own thoughts and we're going over and over the same thing over and over again, that that's when it can become problematic. And so I do think to have that, just to keep in mind. I mean, self care is obviously very important and super important for women, but not to use that as an on-ramp to isolate and as a green light to pull away from your connections, which are probably really the lifeblood and really the wellspring of wellbeing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's really well said, that's beautiful. I was so intrigued by, there's so much of the book. But one thing in particular that jumped out at me, I both read your book and then I listened to the audio as I was out on the trail, getting exercise and I loved it. You've read it in your own voice, which I always love the authors that do that. But one of the themes that jumped out at me was this idea of authenticity and being willing to be the un-you. It's so counter to everything we hear. And so I want you to talk about that and illuminate my listeners with this concept, because it's so smart.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Well, we hear so much from I think very well meaning people and people have given me this advice too, is you've got to be yourself, and be yourself at all times and be your authentic self. And for instance, somebody had given me this well meaning piece of advice before I was about to give a talk to the American Psychiatric Association, and I was so anxious about it and nervous about public speaking at the time. And had I been myself, I would have run off the stage and out the back door. Because I think this idea of, be yourself assumes that yourself is your ideal self. And most of the time, we're not our ideal selves.

And so there's a fascinating research out there, that shows that when we are able to think of somebody that we admire and think, what would that person do? What would Michelle Obama do in this moment? What would Laura do in this moment? How would she handle this? That it can actually lift us out of those self immersed fears and feelings that might be really having us turn to more negative coping strategies, and help us see and gain some perspective. And so I mean, I used to scribble then in my notes for speeches, BW, BW, and it was, what would Barbara Walters do? Because I had once seen her give this amazing talk and be funny and be spontaneous.

So to have go-to people in your mind that you admire. Another example of this is called psychological Halloween-ism. And if people who are asked to behave like an eccentric poet, become more creative at problem solving, they have... Divergent thinking is the measure of creativity in these studies. But creativity is something that we often assume, you're born with it or you're not. I'm a creative person, I'm a left brain person, I'm not. And it turns out by asking people to channel or inhabit or imagine themselves into the mind of a creative person, they become more creative. Even asking kids to dress up and even embody, I mean, maybe sometimes dressing up can be really helpful when we dress the part. But having them put on the costume of a superhero they admire, they're more likely to persevere on a boring task than they are to turn to a fun game on an iPad. So I think sometimes when

we are channeling somebody we admire and not being our authentic selves, we can get closer to the version of ourselves that we'd actually like to be.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. I also loved, and was really struck by the fact that it feels like the way you describe this builds upon research by Carol Dweck, which came up with this concept of the growth mindset that I know you're very familiar with, and I think you talk about it in the book. But maybe expand on how those pieces fit together. Because we do talk about the concept of mindset and embracing a growth mindset on this podcast. And I see this theme of being willing to be the un-you, really directly aligning with this concept of a growth mindset. Maybe talk a little bit about that.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Right. Well, I think that the idea of being your true self or even finding this true you, has to... The presumption then is that there is some fixed kernel, this true you this fixed self that is unchanging. If only you could do enough self reflection, then you can find that true self. And I think denying your possibility and the reality that you are constantly changing, we're all works in progress, who I think mistakenly think that we are fully formed. So how can we change in the direction that we'd like to change? Be a little bit more deliberate about that change?

And so when I tell people to be un-you, I'm not telling them to deny their values, but just to think about beyond their immediate knee-jerk responses to something, to their reactive way that maybe somebody who's avoidant because maybe they grew up around parents who used to fight all the time, and they would want to get away from it and run away and hide in the bathroom, that maybe that was a very constructive and protective habit at the time, but maybe it's not the most constructive or protective habit at this point in their lives.

So where are these opportunities, though, that we can be un-ourselves and actually expand our behavioral response to something that's stressing us out? And I think, certainly we know how we want to respond to something and our knee-jerk response to something, but when you can be un-you, you're like, "Okay, maybe I could do this a little differently." And to see beyond ourselves. And I found it to be incredibly helpful for patients to just have a different way to step back from that immediate self immersion into their experience, and to think, "Well, maybe there's a different pathway." And it taps into this, what this old psychiatrist once said to me when I was in training, and he said, "Samantha, what do you think the purpose of therapy is?" And I said, "Well, obviously, it's to change your future." And he said, "No, you're wrong." And I said, "Well, then to change your present." And he said, "No, it's to change your past."

The idea being that we get so entrenched and stuck in a story that we tell about who we are. We have the five minute version, we have a 45 minute version, we have the, probably a month long version of that. But when you start to see that there's different angles, different truths and part of that story you've been telling is true, but maybe there are other ways to see it. And I think when you can be un-you, you're tapping into that growth mindset, imagining other possibilities and even also recognizing that other people also, there isn't some true self that they have either. That they have values that you respect, but allowing other people to be un-themselves, allowing other people to change. We know from high school students and studies when they realize other people change, that they themselves have less aggression towards maybe somebody who was once aggressive to them.

And I think allowing for the possibility for change in others, Ellen Langer, who's at Harvard, she's, I think, the first tenured female professor in psychology. And she'd said that, "Sometimes people come

to therapy after 40 or 50 years of marriage, and they say, "I'm just finished with this. And he always does this or she always does that." And she said, "Nobody's ever come to me and said, "I'm so sick of my plant or I'm so sick of my dog or I'm so sick of..." Something that you expect to change, you expect your child to grow and change, you expect even your plant to grow and change. But your partner, you have this assumption of, I know who they are. And that actually, her advice always for couples was, don't predict what they're going to do that it's the same. Try to look every day for three things that are different about your partner. Prime yourself to notice change. And I think it's really good advice, because not only, I think when you're seeing change in them, you can also see better change in yourself.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Oh, my gosh, I love that. That's amazing. Why do you think we have this tendency to fixate on, people can't change? I mean, I've heard that my whole life that people are who they are, they really can't change. How did we get to that point? And why are we so stuck on that concept?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

I think there's two things, I think there's almost a conceit that like, oh, I know that person. Even you think of legally, a character witness, that person would never do such a thing or that was a good person or a bad one. And not really looking at the circumstances. And I think we often, we tend not to recognize the context of people's behavior. We judge ourselves by our thoughts, we judge others by what they do. If I see someone screaming at their kid, I might assume, "Uh, that's just a bad mother." But I scream at my kid. And well, because I'm harried and the child isn't listening to me.

So the way this disconnect, and it's called this correspondence bias is that we don't judge people in the same way we judge ourselves. Someone cuts me off in traffic, they're a jerk, I cut someone off, I'm late. So how do we... I mean, I think there has to be some evolutionary explanation as to why we do this, and we can maybe assume friend or foe. When we meet anybody new, can I eat it? Can I have sex with it? Will it kill me? We have these fears, that maybe it was just for survival, and so if somebody behaved in a certain way. But the idea that we can judge people, just by their actions and behaviors, and I think we have to always pause and think what else could be going on? I think that's the core of cognitive based therapies to say, "Well, maybe that's the case. But what are some other possible explanations for why that person did that thing?"

And I think it helps, I think, for all of us to gain perspective and not to be so quickly judgmental and assume that we have this knowledge and that we can generalize from one observable act to this person's behavior in the world, and that's the kind of person that they're good or bad. And I've got to say, in my own life and in my own career, I've learned to really love being wrong, and making assumptions sometimes about people who I didn't think would change. And even in my training, I had learned that people would be a certain way if they had a certain type of mental illness. And I've loved being proven wrong. I had met a patient years ago, who he had a severe problem with alcoholism, and he was hospitalized a number of times, he was in the ICU with the DTs and it can be really life threatening withdrawal.

And a couple of years ago, I bumped into him on the street. And I honestly didn't think he would survive. And there he was with his family. He was like, "Hey, Dr. B." And was just thriving, doing really well. And I think when we can also give other people the respect and the generosity of allowing them and knowing that they'll change and hope that they will have that back for us as well, it can, I think, help us manage a lot of the conflicts we have even with one another politically or otherwise.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. Maybe let's talk a little bit about some of the uplift imposters that you talk about in the book. There are a lot of things that are served up as ways to deal with stress. And one of them that I especially liked, because I'm a bit of a junkie myself, and that is productivity porn, your terminology in the book. What is productivity porn and how do we know when we've crossed the line into it being inefficient versus actually moving us in the right direction?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Productivity porn, because I was also one of those people who always was like, more and more and more. The darker the circles under my eyes, the prouder I was. And-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

The longer the checklist.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Yes. And I didn't trust anybody. I remember when I was in residency, there was this woman in my residency class, and we would have to work all night all the time. And she just always looked really well rested. And I thought she must be really lazy. What's going on with her? I mean, clearly, she's sleeping too much. And there was something wrong with her. Meanwhile, not realizing how... I mean, I was probably, my judgment was severely somehow compromised, given my lack of sleep.

But productivity porn, I think, how can I... There are all these tools we have to make us more efficient. I study harder. If I work more, I'll get more done. But we know from research that's not the case, students who are studying for exams in college, those who take time to take a break, to hang out with friends, to even enjoy doing something fun and to punctuate that, that then their retention of material, their learning is going to be more efficient.

So I think when we're just trying to stuff more and more into our heads and also just move from task to task, that we're actually undermining our ability to do well. An interesting study was done in a workplace where just asking people at the end of each day, and they didn't know, they thought it was just a survey, just to reflect upon what they had accomplished during that day, for five minutes. It wasn't long, just to think about what they had done, versus those who just were going to the next their next task. The ones who were able to just reflect upon what they had accomplished were less stressed out, they reported just fewer physical aches and pains, and they slept much better as well. And they felt like more replenished and revitalized when they went in the next day. And it's such a minor intervention.

So I think when we're just always going from task to task and just dismissing the importance of doing something that feels meaningful, that feels even fun or joyful, that we dismiss as time wasted, like, "I don't have time to go for a walk. That's just a waste of my time." That actually I think we all have nature deficit disorder, is just going outside, taking 45 minutes, breathing, not bringing our phones with us or at least putting them away. Even not listening to something. I mean, I love listening to your podcast, but I don't listen to it when I'm walking, because it's so good to actually hear the sounds of trees or birds or whatever, that is so important.

And so taking that time is so revitalizing. And I think, I was always one of those people who just completely dismissed it. Even taking time to take a break, to sleep, to socialize, to take care of ourselves, is really time well spent.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. I absolutely love that. Let's talk a bit about this notion of the comparison trap that we sometimes fall into, social media gets an especially bad rap, because it's the thing that we're focused on right now. But the reality is, we've always done this to one degree or another. It's not a new concept. But maybe talk a little bit about how we can avoid falling into that trap, and also how we can help keep our kids, our teenage children in particular from falling into that trap.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Yeah. I mean, I think it was Eleanor Roosevelt who had said social comparison is the thief of joy. That said, social comparison can, being competitive, comparing ourselves sometimes can actually be a motivator, a fuel for us to want to do better. If somebody is running that mile a little bit faster than you are, it might fuel you and give you the motivation to practice a little bit more, train a little bit more.

But I think with social media, it's a completely different level of perfection that we're seeing. And we know especially this does affect young women. And now even girls as young as 10, 11, 12 we're seeing upticks. I mean, it's severe, it's almost like a hockey stick from when they started having phones and access to social media, seeing this increase in anxiety and depression and this is very real. Some people dismiss these findings saying, "Uh, well, they're just more comfortable talking about depression and anxiety. It's not really real. This generation, Gen Z, they're having an easier time discussing it, they're asked about it much more. And the stigma is not there as much." Well, that's not true. And we know from just emergency room visits, from suicide attempts, from documentation of self injury, this is very, very real.

And it seems that girls are more affected by social comparison. And on social media, also, they're more affected by FOMO, that fear of not belonging, of being left out that they've missed out in some way, that's so crystal clear. I experience this with my patients, sometimes just even seeing after a breakup. In my generation, you maybe knew somebody was dating somebody else, but you weren't seeing them on vacation now in Cancun with their new Victoria's Secret model or whatever. Those types of experiences when you're... The visual is incredibly, I think it's undermining of confidence for young girls that boys don't seem to be as deeply affected by. Their aggression is much more physical, and with girls it can be much more relational. And so even, that's why that bullying experience of young girls, maybe somebody feeling left out or in those relationships, keeping somebody in and keeping somebody else out.

So apparently, it takes about, I think it's 14 seconds or so to feel badly about yourself, leafing through Instagram. But one thing to keep in mind is that, knowing that what you're looking at, and I think to remind our daughters of this is, what you're looking at is a... Just reminding this is a curated version of somebody else's life. Reminding yourself that it's not real, telling your daughters, to reminding them that it's not real in any way, not for reading or posting anything that could make somebody else feel bad in some way. Just having those at least rules that you're living by.

I think the experts in the field, Jonathan Haidt at NYU would tell you that young girls shouldn't have social media until high school. That it's just bad for their mental health. And I think if anybody told us, "Wait, your child spends 30 hours a week doing this one activity, would hope they'd be masters in whatever that activity would be." But it's social media, that's all that they're doing. And all of their free time, they're either doing school or they're there. And so what other activities could they have been doing or working on? What social relationships, those real time interactions they could have been having with others. Because instead of actually having those face to face conversations, everything is occurring through their device.

And even just learning those social skills, how to navigate a difficult time, even an argument with a friend, that when you have to actually respond in real time to that person. It's very different than

when you're texting somebody back and you're given the space and time to think about it. And it's Sherry Turkle who's written about how people's self concept, young women's self concept is defined by the amount of likes they're receiving, and it's, I share, therefore I am. And it's that sense of, my identity rides and falls and rises and falls on people's response to what I've posted. And just the emotional roller coaster of that experience takes a toll, I think, especially on young women.

And what any of us can do, I think, as parents to minimize their exposure or just not let them be on there, and I'm not optimistic we're going to see any changes coming from these big companies, but I think it's something that almost parents have to get together and do because you can't have your child be the only one who's not on it, because that's not fair. But parents will have to get together and maybe with schools say, "Okay, wait until the eighth grade," or I think establishing some norms around how young women are using social media.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I had my friend, Miriam Gonzalez Durantez on the podcast in Episode 162, just a few weeks ago, she is the founder of an organization called Inspiring Girls International. And they have launched a campaign on social media called #ThisLittleGirlsMe. And it's all about getting women to post their stories and their advice to share with, not only girls, but really all people on social media in a really positive way. But what she's doing really is creating positive momentum by using these platforms in a way that we don't always think about. What about this idea of taking your advice about giving back and not being so self oriented, but instead thinking about what you're posting as a way to help other people, what do you think about that as a concept?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

I love that. And I mean, I do think what she's doing, like This Little Girl Is Me, having these positive exemplars, because I also often think we look at people we see as successful or accomplished and assume that they're so smart, they just got it together. And everything's been this just beautiful uphill stroll for them.

And when we have exemplars and role models tell us, "This was really hard here. And there was this huge bump in the road over there." And I think being able to hear the ups and downs of their stories and the triumphs and the challenges and seeing our role models as very real people, there's research that shows that children who know their family's life stories, they know where their grandparents met, they know parts that were hard, they know parts that were less hard, not only are those kids less self immersed, and it's not all about them, but they also just have this sense of perspective, and they're more resilient as a result of it.

I mean, on social media, yes, if you're sharing it that way, there's a fascinating study from a guy from MIT, who was looking at people who performed cognitive reappraisal for others. And reappraisal is when you've learned this in CBT, where you think, "Ah, this is the worst thing that happened to me. I'm going to have a horrible day. I just spilled my coffee on me. Everything sucks. My life does, everything's going to always. I'm such a klutz. How did I do this?" And somebody, when they reappraise that situation will say, "Let's take some perspective here, bummer. You can change, get a different t-shirt, change. And what are you looking forward to next?" And so they reframe something for you. Or even people who were able to perform cognitive reappraisal during COVID, a study of over 27,000 people, those who were able to see some positive in it or could I learn from this? They reported that they were less stressed out and more resilient.

So the study was looking at doing cognitive reappraisal for others, there's someone texting a problem and then somebody reappraising it for them. And those who were reappraising for others, they were the ones providing reappraisal, they also learned better social emotional regulation themselves. So I think again, it gets that concept of when you are doing something for somebody else, and you're even sharing maybe your difficult story, not your picture perfect one or that Christmas card, like isn't our family just perfect, #blessed, great life, #amazing family, but actually, you pull back the curtain, and I think it creates this social vaccine, when you're able to inoculate others and just say, "Wait a minute, things were really tough sometimes." And to share the struggles and what helped you and maybe the perspective you've gained from it and what you've learned with it. Is it a wonderful act of generosity? And maybe it is a great way to use social media for good.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. You talk about in the book, this concept of Velcro versus Teflon people. I'd love for you to dig into that concept a little bit. What do you mean by that?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Well, so a Velcro person would be... I don't think this is a fixed thing, either, I think you can become much more Teflon than Velcro. But when something negative happens, it sticks to you. It's like lint, it's not going anywhere. And so that's when there is some hassle. And so many of the hassles in our lives are unavoidable, they're beyond our control in any way. So that one thing happens, and then something else does. And it all just sticks to you. And it accumulates and it adds up, and it reverberates. And that's where you have that dark cloud following you all day. And you know you're in a really bad mood, sometimes you can't even remember why.

Teflon, I think when you're a little more Teflon, you're, just things happen, but you're less affected by it. And stress as we know isn't necessarily stressful. It's our perception of stress. So the same thing could happen to both you and me, but we would perceive it to be it's totally stressful or not. So I think that perception part is super key. So Teflon people, I think have more scaffolding around them. They have those three Cs that they're building upon every day in their lives. They're contributing, they're connecting, they're feeling positively challenged. And they can, I think people who maybe have an inclination to be more Velcro, which I certainly do, I'm certainly working on being more Teflon every day and working towards that, "Okay, this happened, but I'm not going to let it follow me or define me or define my day or define my interaction with the next person I have." And I think we can be a little bit more deliberate about our Teflon qualities.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love that. Let's talk a bit about mental contrasting that you talk about in the book, what is it and talk about how this helps.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

So I might be a positive psychiatrist, but as I said, there's a lot of research to show that just positive thinking is really not helpful for any of us. We can think positively about losing weight or we can think positively that we're going to go to the gym or meet the person of our dreams. But it might feel good even in the moment, but over time, it's pretty demoralizing when those dreams don't become a reality.

So there's a wonderful psychologist at NYU called Gabriele Oettingen, and she has looked at what this intention action gap is for many of us and how demoralizing it is when our intentions don't

match our actions. So how can you close that intention action gap? And she has found it's through mental contrasting, and that's by identifying what you're wishing for and hoping for, but then also recognizing the obstacles and then finally, having a plan to tackle those obstacles.

So she created something called WOOP goals, and that's W-O-O-P, is the acronym and the W stands for okay, what's my wish? I hope I use my phone less around my kids, whatever that is. And the first O is, what would be the outcome of that? Well, it would be that I'd feel more connected to them, would have better conversations. Then the second O is, okay, what's the obstacle? It's my phone's always in my hand, it's on the table, whatever that is. So then the P is, what is your plan?

So when you can really deploy mental contrasting or create these WOOP goals for yourself and be as specific as you can about what you wish for, what the outcome would be, what the obstacle would be and what your plan would be, you're much more likely to achieve them. And I think that's what her goal is, is with mental contrasting is you're not left feeling like a tumbleweed anymore, being blown about by all these other factors that are really intercepting what you hope for and what you're hoping to do. And again, going back to that idea of when you're walking your walk, you are more resilient and more Teflon.

And Robert Brooks has brought these questions up, and I think they're very valuable to ask is, think about what words would you hope that your child, colleague, partner would use to describe you? And then ask yourself, what do you do on a regular basis to invite that person to describe you with those words? And then three, ask yourself, well, what words would they actually use to describe you? And four, ask yourself, what steps or actions could you take to close that gap? So they would describe you in the words you would hope they would?

And I think that, again, speaks to that idea of, what do you value? What is valuable to you? Recognizing your opportunity and ability to change, knowing that any change often is accompanied by setbacks, and that's normal. But that's what part of growth is. And I think having that growth mindset and knowing that you can be un-you, and bend in the direction that you hope you can bend in and making more overlap between the way you act and how you hope to be described, I think, is just a different way to think about aligning your values and your actions.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. That's amazing. I wonder how, if there's an additional benefit to actually physically writing those things down, because there's some evidence to show that when we actually write down the goals that we want to achieve, we're much more likely to achieve them. Do you think the same is true as it relates to these mental contrasting components as well?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Absolutely. And actually, she's shown with weight loss, with saving money, that it really helps to write them down. And I think because you're articulating them. And for some people, even going public with your goal, having a friend, making yourself accountable for that too. Or even having a weekly check in with yourself on Sundays, a state of the union, like, did I or didn't I, here? So you're not just plotting forward and thinking, "Where did the time go? It's already the next month or the next week, why am I not doing those things?"

And I think, to be a little bit more generous and forgiving with ourselves. As women, we're such perfectionists. And we know with young women too, we're seeing perfectionism on the rise and just we are maybe a little bit more forgiving and generous and more empathetic towards others who have challenges. And I think it's been wonderful having these celebrity exemplars showing and sharing their

struggles. But we're really still perfectionists when it comes to ourselves and we don't really give ourselves any leeway or we're not generous with allowing for those setbacks and just also expecting in a growth mindset way, that that's part of the process.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Do you see other differences related to gender, both in your practice and as you think about this big concept of stress?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Yeah. I mean, I think men and women do respond differently. It's certainly changing. But men tend to respond to stress with fight or flight and women more with tend and befriend. Women report more stress, more physical and emotional symptoms, because of stress. Men often turn to unhealthy coping strategies, it might be alcohol, but are sometimes more active as a result. They instead will hit the gym, whereas women tend to talk more. But we do have the benefit of those. We tend to tend and befriend meaning, I think when we have those connections with others, we'll talk to others. And that does release oxytocin, it helps with stress, is the theory behind it.

But one thing to be really careful about, and women do this more, and it actually is counterproductive, is rumination. When we ruminate with others, it's like co-ruminating with our good friends or with our children. It's asking somebody to, if your child comes home or your partner comes home, and you say, "Tell me, what was that bad thing that happened?" And then you rehash it over and over and over again, but you're reliving it, but you're not helping that person or yourself come to some understanding or even action that they could take as a result of it.

And so rumination is really, I think, an on-ramp to feeling more depressed and anxious. And you know you're co-ruminating if you feel like, "Wait, didn't we have this conversation last week about your mother in law?" That's like okay, I'm not helping you in this way. And so when you can ask them to instead re-construe it, and that is often done through what's called self distancing. So it's not self immersing, it's thinking, "What would a fly on the wall say about this?" Or, "What would you tell a friend who was in this exact same situation? What advice would you give them?" Because anything to have them see this situation or whatever was stressful, with some perspective, because what this does is it gives them also, clarity around it. It gives them closure, but it also gives them perspective about what actions they could take. So maybe next time, they don't have to do it that way. So moving forward what advice would you give to somebody in the situation?

And so we don't have the French word like, [French 00:59:45], that constant, "Why didn't I say that when that person said that to me?" And you think about it as you get to the bottom of the stairs or you think about it the day after, and you can't get that thought out of your head. Another really good cure for rumination is green spaces. We know that it really disrupts that tendency to have that ticker tape just going on and on and not be able to get out of our own heads.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Such great advice. Such great advice. Okay, because influence is our topic this season on She Said/She Said Podcast, and probably for longer than just this season, I have to say, because it's been extremely popular, how do you think about maybe the connection between our ability to regulate our emotions and understand our emotions and this concept of being influential? Influencing in terms of getting what we want and achieving our goals and connecting with others? How do you see this connection between our ability to control our stress and this idea of influence?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

I think when we're able to use our emotions as data, and almost as fuel rather than swimming in them, and just being so overwhelmed and just hardly being able to come up for air, when we're able, even negative emotions, I'm a big fan of, and not just trying to sweep them under the rug or move past them very quickly, really asking ourselves, "What can I learn from this? What is this telling me? This is data, this is information that I can learn from." And I think when we use our emotions effectively like that, that we're able to exert influence and feel like we have a sense of agency over the choices that we're making, and we're not feeling windblown and that we're tumbleweeds going this way and that and we're part of somebody else's agenda.

If you look at the three main wellsprings of wellbeing, I think is having a sense of autonomy, that you have some choice, some control, some say in what you're doing and you're being deliberate about it. It's also having a sense of competence that you have skills that you can rise to the challenge that somebody puts ahead of you. And then thirdly, it's a sense of relatedness, do you experience love and are you loved? And I think that's really key to having influence. Because you have then, I think that vitality and that fuel and that force behind you to be able to then be that agent and shape the life that you're living and also maybe make some other people's lives better.

Influence has a lot to do with what you're paying attention to. And I think when you have clarity of what you're looking at, and we know, moral outrage is something that always hijacks our attention. And attention is something we throw around a lot. But if we really want influence, I think we have to be super deliberate about our attention and where we're generously deciding to shine it. And if we think of it as a flashlight, let's make sure our attention is going in the right place. Because I think that will shape the way we can influence our own lives and others'.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, it's amazing. An amazing way to think about it. I really love that. Okay. Final question, regrettably, because I have lots more we could talk all day. But one final question for you. I ask each person who comes on this podcast for a single piece of advice, a life hack, a mantra. Maybe it could be something that you wish you could tell 24 year old Samantha as she was just launching her career, what would yours be?

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

That would be, I think that there's going to be lots of zigzags. That plan that you have, it's going to change a lot and to embrace the off-roading.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. The book is Everyday Vitality. Dr. Samantha Boardman, thank you so much for being here today. I really appreciate it.

Dr. Samantha Boardman,:

Thank you so much, Laura. I loved it. I loved the conversation.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Friends, to learn a bit more about this week's guest, Dr. Samantha Boardman, check out the show notes for this episode, Episode 167. You'll also find a link to Dr. Boardman's terrific book, Everyday Vitality: Turning Stress Into Strength, as well as a link to her website, positiveprescription.com. I hope her advice

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for creating a strategy to counter stress resonated as deeply with you as it did with me and that you found our conversation a helpful and good investment of your time today.

Friend, I am delighted that you joined us today and I'd love to hear what you thought of this or any of our She Said/She Said Podcast episodes. You can send me an email via the contact link on our website at shesaidshesaidpodcast.com or message me on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. I would love to hear from you. Until next week, take care.