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CHRIS DAVIS: Hi, everyone. Welcome to the podcast. I am Chris Davis, the Associate Director of the Career and Academic Resource Center here at Harvard Extension School. And on today's podcast I am very delighted to have here with me, Laura Crandall. Laura has been a veteran Clark partner for many years. She has done many webinars for us, for our students on a range of subjects. Everything from burnout to more successful communication.

Laura has over 30 years of experience. Working in industries that include manufacturing, hospitality academia. She has a master's from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Where she studied cognitive neuroscience and organizational behavior. She also has a new book out which I'm eager to talk to her about. But Laura, welcome today. Thanks so much for joining me.

LAURA CRANDALL: Thank you so much, Chris. It's a pleasure to be in conversation with you.

CHRIS DAVIS: Yeah. So I thought right off the bat, why don't we talk a little bit about your background. The work that you've done. I think in the course of our conversation, I think students will see the relevance. And I think the helpful-- the importance of the work that you've done. As you and I have talked about before, our students are working professionals. They're in mid-career. They're in various industries.

And a lot of what you write about what you work with people about is very relevant to a lot of our students. So if you could talk a little bit about your work, and slate communication, and all of that would be great.

LAURA CRANDALL: Sure. Happy to. So yes, I too did a mid-career launch back into school when I went to the GSE. And my background was in management all predominantly in hospitality. Actually, that's where I got my start. And when I wanted to increase my knowledge and be able to share things more effectively, I started studying organizational behavior and cognitive neuroscience before I came to Harvard.

But that mid-career shift to say, what more do I need? How might I be of better service to more people? As people try to connect with their work. Lead well, manage well, cooperate well. And have a good time with what they're choosing to do. It was really satisfying for me to say, how can I then take at that point 15 years of experience? Now, I've had my own business for 15 years now.

So I've got 30 years under my belt of just being able to help cultivate better workplaces. Being able to use the tools that you have and that you want to use within your own industry. Whether that's very knowledge specific. Or how can you just take your own disposition and help it-- have it help you in your work with your colleagues for whatever type of work you're trying to contribute to the world.

CHRIS DAVIS: So yeah, I wanted to explore that a little bit. And I'll just say I think, I mean the lens that you write from is very much about these communication things that happen in the workplace. I think there's also some relevance to, I think, communication in the classroom. I'm curious to hear a little bit more about what are some of the subjects that you work with? The clients that you consult for. As I mentioned you have done webinars for us on the topics of burnout.

I think that's one of the things, among many others, that our students have certainly seen and grappled with in the last few years. But what are some of the issues the communication breakdowns or the workplace challenges that you work with most frequently with clients? What do you hear from them?

**LAURA
CRANDALL:**

Right. So when I get called into an organization. It's often by leaders of an organization or a leadership team. And sometimes there is a pain point. There's something that is deeply problematic. Something's about to go very wrong or they can see a challenge coming down the pike. We need to be prepared for this. Sometimes it's fun because there's in a place of innovation. They're starting something and they want to start well.

Well, wherever people are in their insight into their work, there is a perception of something can be better, or something needs to be addressed. Whatever that is, whether it's a big picture strategy level, we need a good strategic lens on how we are communicating internally, externally to our stakeholders. In any capacity to our employees, our customers.

What always ends up being-- whether people's hair is on-- collective hair is on fire. Or if they're trying to be very, very deliberate in their planning. One of the things that I've noticed throughout my career and in any industry. I work a lot with academia. I work a lot with manufacturing. I work with hospitality. I work with philanthropy.

The thing that's very interesting is that there are so many gifted smart people that I get. Who are really thrilled about their work, that I'm so honored to be able to work with. But they tend to leapfrog over the foundational skills that help them get further faster.

And what I mean by that, is that there's a huge pile of assumptions about what their colleagues know, about what their teams know, and about what they're even assuming about their own capacity or their own clarity of thought. So that it can be an instant opportunity for miscommunication. And the-- so what I try to do is help people say, whoa, whoa whoa, wait.

Let's pause for just a moment and help us all understand what our expectations are, what our hopes are, what the definitions of some of our language, what are the terms. And then how are we going to check for understanding along the way? And those things are not sexy. They're really boring. And they take patience. They don't take a lot of time, oddly. They just take a little bit of patience.

But when we can do that, I don't care how many PhDs you have. I don't care how many years of experience you have. If you can stop and really check for understanding and check for tacit assumptions that need to be made explicit. On a team, in a business, in a classroom, with your family wherever it may be. It's amazing how much calmer, more efficient and engaged people can be in their work.

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CHRIS DAVIS: So let's talk a little bit about your book. As I mentioned earlier, you have a book that is titled Working With Humans. And the subheading is tools you didn't know you needed for conversations you never expected to have. Following on what you just said, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about what some of that entails. I think that's a very universal message, a very universal problem that people have.

I see in the description. I mean, this sounds like something I have to ask you to elaborate on. Because the book gives you tools needed to break the cycle of annoyance in the workplace. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that.

LAURA

So everybody's got somebody. Everybody's got somebody. They just go, why do they keep doing that? Why?

CRANDALL:

Don't they know better or how? That just can't believe that someone approaches a problem or interacts with a colleague or just participates with you, talks with you in a way that is deeply annoying to you. We all have them.

But we often don't stop to say, wait, why is that person-- where is the assumption? From my part, from somebody else's part. And then how can I connect with that person? Even if your urge is to perhaps stare at them with daggers coming out of your eyes. And so how might we look at our own assumptions about why that's annoying? Where are we annoying our colleagues ourselves

And almost always. And my math is 99% of the time. Because I like to leave room for things like lightning strikes and quicksand. But it's almost always in the communications channel. And so the point of the book is that we don't talk about things like, oh what, are your expectations? Here are my expectations. Because it-- and also the term expectations can be really loaded.

Well, what do you expect? Or here are my expectations. Whatever that may be. But if you can say, OK, what do we expect to happen in the situation? Or when you were talking with me, what were you hoping for? Or when you interrupt in meetings, what are you trying to accomplish? Even just asking those questions of ourselves first, helps us just build a little more space and curiosity in how we're perceiving our colleagues.

So that we can actually not get fixated on the stuff that bugs us and move through that with humanity and generosity. Which can sound like a stretch right now. Especially, when we're all under a lot of pressure. And there's a lot going on in the world. But by being just a little curious. Why is that person annoying me? And not asking it rhetorically. Why am I-- where are my expectations not being met?

Does anyone know what my expectations are? Do I know what my expectations are? It's just a different perspective that when you can slow down. And I do this with individuals with coaching. I do this with whole leadership teams. What are your expectations? And why is this dynamic plan process? Why does it just bother you? And sometimes it's for really good reasons.

And often it's just because we haven't thought about what our expectations are of each other and then have not made them explicit.

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CHRIS DAVIS:

Thank you, Laura. So what I wanted to ask you next is, this is something that's also come up and students have asked about this. Or they've experienced this in the workplace. Or they're curious about it. But one of the things that you do or have done is leadership coaching as you mentioned.

Yeah.

CHRIS DAVIS:

And I think sometimes people don't know what that means or what the benefits of it are.

LAURA Sure.

CRANDALL:

CHRIS DAVIS: Could you talk a little bit about that?

LAURA Absolutely. It would be really nice if when people get the opportunity to lead an organization. Or be in any type of
CRANDALL: whether that's professional, whether that's in any type of community or part of. That when you get appointed to a position of leadership, with the title there is a magical download of all the skills you will need to manage your time, manage your energy, manage your emotions, manage yourself.

Then while you all are also leading in some form, a group of people. If you're lucky you get some of that through your career. As far as what those skills might be. But often people just have an aptitude for helping out well, and pointing the way and people tend to follow them. And that's often how people get into positions of leadership, which is great.

And also leadership coaching is a way to support leadership, with some external resources. Not only in business management often. Oh, let's think about your profit and loss this way. Or how are you talking about the year's projections? Or the business plan for the next five years, with the people that you're leading. What are the ways to do that well? There are a lot of different models.

But essentially, someone who is a leadership coach is like an auxiliary brain and backup for how leaders think about their role. And how they enact that role over time, consistently. So that they can feel confident. That they feel like they've had-- they're not just necessarily playing. Going completely from the gut. Which can be absolutely the right thing to do. But essentially, so that leaders don't have to feel like they're making it up as they go along. So that there's more deliberateness.

There's some external perspective. And then they just have support. There's lots of other fancy ways to describe it. But basically, it's backup. You have backup. And it feels really good. And what I really enjoy about it, is that I have such an opportunity to share my experience. But also to really discover and learn from my clients too about the challenges of connecting with humans that they have and how to meet that well with a lot of tools at our disposal.

CHRIS DAVIS: Laura, I want to close by asking you about something which I brought up earlier and I think is still very relevant. The subject of burnout. We have a very global student population, as you alluded to earlier. I think it's fair to say that just from a more micro level, I think wherever students are.

They are facing uncertainty in the workforce, uncertainty in other areas of their lives. Added pressure, whether it's economic financial or in other ways. And just a sense of how to have enough time and energy to make all of this work. But for whatever the reasons, I think burnout is something that is still very prevalent.

Can you talk a little bit about how you approach that subject, either in the leadership, the management consulting or the leadership coaching you do? Or what advice that you would give to folks who are dealing with that.

LAURA

CRANDALL:

Absolutely. Happy to. So I've burned out. I've burned out myself. So I'm speaking not only as someone who talks about this with well-informed theory, but also from a personal perspective. And I know what it is to be burned out and it's horrible. And if you can find the calm and the faith in yourself to navigate your way through, you can make it through.

One of the things that I think is very detrimental in the way our world works right now, is that productivity is seen as how we test our mettle. How much can we do? How perfectly can we do it? And that is a recipe. Just go crazy till you drop very industrial model. Then add it with-- then mix it.

Add it. Mix it well with the speed of the information age. And it's a recipe that's very hard on our humanity. I prefer, so how do I deal with that. And how I coach people? First of all, we just have to see where we are. That's what we're dealing with. I think saying, oh, well, all you have to do is just buck up. And it'll get better. And just do more and figure out a better way to manage your time. Sometimes that's true. Sometimes we do need to do that.

However, I think the first thing is saying, wow, I'm feeling overwhelmed, if you are. What is within my control to address that? What is not? And I do this with leadership teams. I do this with CEOs of large organizations. I ask these same questions when they are facing overwhelm. Sometimes time management is not more often, it's their energy management.

And what I mean by that is, sometimes when you walk into a classroom. Let's say, you only and your life is going on and your family and your work and whatever. If you're going to class let's say. You only have 10% of your energy or 3% or whatever that might, to pay attention in that class. That's OK. But if you have 3%, just give that 3%. That's OK. Don't do more just give what you have.

But I think the thing that I've found to be most useful in organizations and in leadership coaching. And this is something that I've really been playing with for the last couple of years. Is if we can shift from thinking about what is productive. And productivity is a useful term. But I think it's overused. And I think it's inappropriately used for our humanity.

And the center that we have value as beings that are us. I would prefer that. And what I found of use for many people, is if we start to think about our work, our schooling, our interactions as what is fruitful. Rather than what is productive. And why I say that, is that when you think about the word fruitful, it implies something that takes time. That takes cultivation. That takes patience and persistence. That if we just think about a fruit tree.

It requires harmony with the world around it. It requires use of good resources to be-- to generate something that is useful and delicious when we're done. And if we can think about the choices that we make as being what is fruitful for me, for this interaction, for my business, for my team, for my classroom.

What I like about it is that it allows us to slow down just a skosh. To reflect and feel more embodied in how we do our work. And the thing that I like most about it, and this is Margaret Gunther. Actually, I read this from her. She was a really interesting theologian. She actually said, the thing that's differentiated between work and play is that work is productive.

But play is fruitful. And if we can have a little more fruitfulness, a little more playfulness, that allows us to be infinitely more spacious in how we are connecting with others. How we are doing our work. And given the world that we live in. It's not like we're going to flip a switch and suddenly we're not. It's not all puppies and kittens and sunshine and rainbows. That would be wildly entertaining.

But it's unlikely. But I think if we can reconsider what we think of as productive, and how we want to engage in our own contribution. It can help. There's no magic remedy. But deciding what gear we want to be in. And how fruitful we want to be is what I have found helps us slow down even a fraction. So that we can still participate, still contribute. But not feel like the hamster wheel is winning.

CHRIS DAVIS: Thank you, Laura. You went above and beyond in answering my question. And on that note, I'll say, thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate it. I want to mention as well, *Working With Humans* is the title of your book. Thanks so much for being here today.

LAURA It's been my pleasure, Chris. Thanks for having me.

CRANDALL:

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PRESENTER: You have listened to the CARC Podcast. This is the podcast for the Career and Academic Resource Center here at Harvard Extension School. And I hope you will join us again.

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