

Ep #35: The Pleasure Gloss: The Secret to Creating a Career You Love



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With Your Host

Kori Linn

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This week we're talking about a concept I've recently learned in a book called the pleasure gloss and how it applies to creating a career you love.

You are listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It, the podcast for ambitious, high-achieving women who are ready to stop feeling stressed about work and kiss burnout goodbye forever. Whether you're starting a business or staying in your day job, this show will give you the coaching and guidance you need to start loving your work today. Here's your host, Career Coach, Kori Linn.

Hey y'all, I have a topic today that I'm super excited to introduce to you. Maybe you already know about it, maybe you're not being introduced. But if you already know, I even think that the way I'm going to talk about it is going to help you understand how to apply it to your work and your whole life really. It's kind of fucking awesome.

So we're going to get into that in a minute. But before we do, I just want to let you know I'm in Sacramento now. I think actually by the time you get this podcast, I'll have been in Sacramento for a few weeks. But I recorded some podcasts ahead of time so that I could take some time off to move because as y'all know, taking time off is really important.

Not exactly a vacation, but just having time to be a human being who is moving her whole life from Seattle, Washington to Sacramento, California. There were a lot of little moving parts to deal with and a lot of big moving parts, honestly also. Like driving 750 miles with our elderly, beloved diabetic cat.

That was an adventure. We actually got a little harness and leash, so I was able to walk him when we stopped the car to walk the dog. And I was super nervous because I was like, you know, cats are kind of magical creatures. Like they can escape from things and bend their shoulders and interesting, weird ways.

And I was like, "What if he escapes? What if it's terrible? Like what if something really bad happens?" Because I chose to travel with him

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basically in my lap, and then on the leash and harness when we stopped rather than like making him being a cat carrier.

But y'all, he really hates the cat carrier. He gets very distressed in there. So I chose to do this new thing, which of course my brain was excited but also freaking out about because, hello, what if something went wrong? Which I know is a thought that many of y'all have too.

Anyways, it was great. But I had a lot of stress based just on the thoughts I had about what if something went wrong. And of course I did what I teach y'all to do, which I was like, "What's the useful content in here?" And the useful content was he could escape, and he could run away, right? When I take the worry out of that I was like, "Okay, what do I want to put in place to make it less likely he can escape?"

So I traveled with a friend and at the first place we stopped we didn't bring the dog out of the car at first. We put the cat down on his little harness and leash and we're like, "Okay, what's he going to do?" And we waited to see if he was going to try to escape before my friend went and then got the dog out of the car.

And he was fine, he didn't even try to escape. So all of that worrying, nothing actually happened, but I had so much stress ahead of time. Which is fine because I know how to deal with it. I know how to complete stress responses like I taught y'all two weeks ago. But just such a good example of what I talk about with y'all, what we together, you and I, talk about every week.

Anyways, so there was like a lot of stuff. And it's actually really funny because I was totally going to try to work the first week we were here. And my girlfriend took the whole week off and she was like, "You could take some time off."

And I'm so glad she said that because there was so much stuff. In addition to all the things my brain decided to worry about ahead of time there was a

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bunch of other shit that needed to happen that my brain didn't decide to worry about ahead of time.

But taking that time and giving myself time to be a human person who has moved several states and has a lot of stuff up in the air, and also a lot of stuff in boxes was really, really wonderful. And I think it's such a good proof of concept too that I'm the only person working in my business right now. I haven't gotten to the point yet where I've hired any employees or contractors.

I mean, I have people who help me out, like I have my wonderful podcast producers, thanks y'all. And I have like my tax and finance people. But I'm the only one who does a lot of the stuff in my business. So really realizing that can be true and I can still take a week off completely from work and set things up for myself ahead of time to make that possible. I love that I did that because that's what I would want y'all to feel like you could do.

And I feel like one of the things that I do in my business is I think about what do I want to teach you not just in what I'm directly teaching you by what I talk about on the podcast and by how I show up on social media and what I talk about there, but also by how I'm being.

Who am I being in my own business? Like am I walking my talk? What would I tell myself if I were a client and telling myself that and then doing what I would tell myself. And then discovering does this coaching work Because sometimes when I test out my coaching, I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to tweak that a little, it's not exactly where it needs to be to actually be actionable."

Which is great, because as I'm always saying, it doesn't have to be perfect to be good. And we all have to start somewhere. And if we do have to tweak something we've built or made, that doesn't mean that thing was terrible. It just means that we can evolve and grow. And we're allowed to do that.

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Anyways, that was all a very long winded way of saying I've been in Sacramento for a while now. But this is the first podcast you'll be getting from here. And also, we're in a heat wave and it's super fucking hot y'all. It's supposed to get up to like 109 today, which I'm like, "Okay, just moved here from Seattle, but I'll do my best."

Luckily, this house we live in, even though it's super old and does not have central heat and air, is set up in a way, like the way it was built, it actually stays really cool. And it does have some air conditioning. Don't freak out y'all, like I have a little air conditioner in my office, and the downstairs has central heat and air. But anyways, it's in process here, as always.

Okay, enough about that. Enough about my big adventure in moving. Let's talk about the pleasure gloss. What is it? What does it do? How does it apply to you and your career?

Okay, so I was reading this book, I'm actually not done with it yet. I'm kind of a slow reader and also mostly I read books from the library using their digital app where I can get audiobooks, and eBooks. Because that's how I primarily like to read these days, even though I love like a real classic paper book.

It's so convenient to me to be able to listen to audiobooks while I walk or do dishes, or whatever. And I honestly really love my Kindle and just being able to have 7,000 books with like one itty bitty thing to carry around.

So anyways, I've been reading this book called The Joy of Movement, by Kelly McGonigal. And you may have heard me talk about Kelly McGonigal before because I fangirl for her real hard. She has this amazing TED Talk called How To Make Stress Your Friend that has really informed some of the work that I do and the coaching that I do around the experience of stress.

And the TLDR of the TED Talk is basically that the way your body physically experiences stress is highly influenced by how you think about stress. If you think stress is harmful and bad for you, that will show up more

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in your actual physical health. Whereas if you think stress is an okay part of life, then the way your body handles the stress is different and it's either less harmful or not harmful at all.

And I don't have all the science on the top of my head about that. So I would just actually recommend you go watch the TED Talk. We can link it in the show notes. And Kelly McGonigal is like a, I think she's a health psychologist. If I were a little bit more prepared, I would have looked up what her actual title is. She is a PhD.

But I am doing my A- work like I teach all of y'all to do the easy a work. And so I don't know exactly what her title is. But she's really smart, and important, and brilliant. And totally informs the way I think about things.

Anyways, in *The Joy Of Movement*, which is about exercise and it's about all the positive impacts that exercise has on us, she talks about this concept called the pleasure gloss. And here's what it is.

The brain creates associative connections. So the pleasure gloss is when you're doing something that you have pleasure about, like you have joy about, whatever. And in her book the examples are all about exercise. And there's something else that's like correlated or associated with that activity, then your brain will begin to associate the pleasure with that other thing also.

So one of the examples is if you run and you get the runner's high, and you love the runner's high and you love running, then even just looking at your sneakers can create a sensation of pleasure in your brain and your body. Because your brain associates the sight of the shoes with the pleasure you experience when you're actually running. So even if you're not running, your brain will give you all these like nice happy neurochemicals just looking at the shoes.

And even before I learned about this concept from Kelly McGonigal it was something I already knew about just from my own experience. And here's an example from my own life.

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So as some of y'all may know, I love country dancing. Two step, line dancing, love it. It's like one of my very most favorite activities. But 7,000 years ago when I first started country dancing, I did not want to go. I told my roommate at the time that I would go with her.

And then when it was time to go, I was like, "Oh, I don't want to." Because I didn't like country music except for like Shania Twain, whom I still adore, and a few others. But mostly I didn't like country music, I wasn't excited about the whole thing. I kind of saw myself as this like clumsy, not good at dancing, person. And I was just like, "I really don't want to do this."

But for some reason I agreed to do it during a moment of weakness or whatever. And then when it was time to go, I was like, "Uh!" And I totally expected to hate it. And I got there, and the opposite was true. I loved it immediately, which was actually really fascinating. I still love being surprised in this way.

And it's really powerful, because even though my confirmation bias was all in on me not liking it, somehow the experience went past that confirmation bias all the way over to I loved it so much. I was immediately like, "I'm all in." They did this dancing thing that I went to once a week and I was like, "I'm coming every week." I was like, "Basically, I'm married to this now."

And what happened over time is that I got a pleasure gloss, although I didn't know that's what it was, with country music. So I love country music now. I love all kinds of country music now that I didn't like when I was younger, like older country music or like I would have probably made fun of, whatever. And I think that the reason I like it is because of the pleasure gloss.

I get so much joy when I dance, when I two step or line dance, that even hearing those songs, or songs with similar cadences or similar sounds when I'm not dancing. Like if I'm driving in the car, I've had this before where I was driving, this was years ago, way before coaching. I was driving and I was stressed about something like traffic.

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I was on these crazy Seattle hills, and my old car was a five speed so of course I was like, "I'm going to stall and roll backwards and everything's going to be terrible. I'm going to crash this car, whatever." My brain was and is melodramatic and probably always will be, I just have a more fun relationship with that now.

Anyways, and then I turned the radio station or something or a country song came on and I could literally feel my entire body relax. And I felt like comforted. And I felt some like joy almost bubble up. And that's what the pleasure gloss can do.

We come to associate something so strongly with joy or pleasure, that when we experience it, even outside of its context, we can get that emotional component.

So another example is like if you are a swimmer, and you love swimming. Even just the smell of the chlorine from the pool can create a pleasure gloss for you. It's really powerful. And that's something you can definitely think about and use in your work life.

But the one I actually want to talk about, and I don't even know if there's a science term for this, probably there is. But is the opposite of this which I'm going to call like a pain gloss. Or a suffering gloss, or displeasure gloss, dissatisfaction gloss.

And this I see happen all the time, where people do something, and they have an unpleasant experience of it. And then anything even related to that, even something that was like just only there by association that doesn't have anything to do with that thing at all really, then they feel displeasure when they encounter that other thing, too.

And this is something I see happen all over people's work lives. And it can happen in like really interesting ways. Maybe you have a coworker who just rubs you the wrong way and you kind of can't figure out why. And then maybe one day, like after this podcast, after you've learned about this concept, you're like, "Oh, it's because the cadence of their speech, or the

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timbre of their voice actually reminds me of this person who bullied me. Or like this character from this movie that I watched that was like the villain.”

And so it can help you understand that sometimes when we don't like something, it actually has nothing to do with that something at all. It's that our brain has made an associative connection because that's part of what brains do. But we can be like, “Oh, I don't want this associative connection.” And sometimes, like with pleasure gloss, this can happen too, that we might want to unhook the associative connection because maybe we did something, and it felt pleasurable and something's associated with it. But we don't want to keep doing something associated with it.

So understanding the pleasure gloss and unpacking what it is, like first of all, we can harness it, right? Like this is part of what happens when people pair an activity that they want to become a habit with something that they find pleasurable or rewarding.

Like if you are trying to build, let's just say, a habit of – My brain is like, “What even are examples?” Let's just say you're trying to learn a new coding language. And part of your brain doesn't want to do it because it feels hard and your brain is like, “Then I have to think I'm dumb and I'm not getting it fast enough.” You have that perfectionistic critical voice up there.

But if you're like, “Okay, I'm just going to do it and I'm going to adjust myself, talk about it, and then I'm also going to add this activity I like at the other end.” Which could be anything. It's like maybe you code for 20 minutes and then you listen to a song you really love for five minutes and kind of like dance it out, right? That's a way you can build a pleasure gloss on purpose to create an associative connection to something you want to be pleasurable that's currently not pleasurable.

Now listen, with the coaching methodology I use I'm going to tell you right now, if it's not pleasurable, it's not pleasurable because of your thoughts about it. If it is pleasurable, it is pleasurable because of your thoughts about

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it. But this is something that you can layer like around or play with in addition to the thoughts.

So if you don't want to do the coding because your brain says a bunch of mean shit about you when you do, we can work on your thoughts about that. But the pleasure gloss is just another tool you can have in your toolkit so you can work on your thoughts about it and throw in a pleasure gloss for fun too.

And if you have something where you're like struggling to be able to change your thoughts about it, you might want to look at like is there a pain gloss here? Is this associatively connected to something else? Maybe it's not just about changing my thoughts about this thing I'm doing, maybe it's about changing my thoughts about whatever the other thing is that my brain thought was painful.

So in a workplace example, if you had a job that you really didn't enjoy and you didn't ever hire a coach and get coached on it, but you switched and got a new job. You probably have painful thoughts still about that old work. So if something happens in your new work that reminds you of that old work, you might be having that suffering gloss, that displeasure gloss, that dissatisfaction gloss. I've got to figure out what I'm going to call it, but we'll just call it all the above for now.

And so it's like, "Oh, this reminds me of this old job. That old job was painful, so this is painful, I hate all of it." Versus like if you know about coaching, you're like, "Oh, the old job was painful because of my thoughts about it. I can change those thoughts. I might need to change those thoughts in addition to changing my thoughts about my current job because of the way that the brain has made this associative connection."

So sometimes it's about changing the thoughts about the old thing. Sometimes it might just be more like telling your brain like these actually aren't related, like I see that you've assessed similarities and so I'm going

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to show you all the dissimilarities. Like we can differentiate for our brain how this is not the same as the other thing.

Really, there's like a bajillion permutations of how you could use this. But the main point of this podcast is just for you to understand that this exists and it's part of brains functioning normally. Brains build associative connections because brains love shortcuts. And shortcuts are a way that they can help us move through the world without having to constantly analyze every new piece of content.

Now, the thing about shortcuts is that sometimes our shortcuts get it wrong. Sometimes there's a pain gloss or a pleasure gloss where we don't want it. And our shortcuts are also informed by whatever we learn in our social conditioning. So if we've learned social conditioning that has white supremacy in it, then the brain shortcuts are going to also have that white supremacy in it.

So that's something to be aware of. Whatever these glosses are, whatever the shortcuts are, whatever the associative connections are that my brain is making, they're not happening in a vacuum. They're informed both by your entire life experience, yes, but also by all of the thoughts you have, all of the social conditioning you have, all of the lessons you've ever learned explicitly and implicitly from your parents, from your teachers, from your peers.

Like if you're me it's like from all those like Stephen King books I've read. Which maybe not where I want to be getting my social conditioning. And especially remembering that all of our past experiences go through that lens too.

So it's like what I was saying before, if you had a negative experience at a past workplace, realizing that there are facts about what happened there. But what's happening with like a pleasure or displeasure gloss might not have as much to do with the fact, it has more to do with the emotional experience.

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There's a car alarm going off, and the car alarm agrees that it's very important that we look at this because if we don't it seems like everything our brain says about the world is like just our brain narrating. But just like a narrator in a book, the narrator has a point of view. The narrator has built in premises. The narrator maybe has an agenda, either a chosen purposeful agenda, right? If you're writing a book, you might be choosing to have your narrator have an agenda.

But when we have all this stuff that our brain has absorbed over our entire life, a lot of that's not purposeful, right? Your brain just absorbed everything it was around. Your brain probably wasn't picking and choosing. And when we are picking and choosing, we're picking and choosing through the lens of what we've already absorbed. That's a little bit of a mind bender, but let it hurt your brain.

I was actually coaching someone today, and this is a metaphor I was using earlier today when I was coaching someone. And I use it a lot in my coaching. The brain is like a sponge. It just absorbs whatever liquid you put it on or around. If you have a sink full of liquid and you put the sponge in it, the sponge just absorbs it all indiscriminately. That's what a sponge does.

When we're little kids that's how our brains are too. Our brains just absorb whatever is around. And then at a certain point, whatever they've absorbed is kind of dictating what else they can absorb. Like if they're fully absorbed as a sponge, they can't absorb anything else maybe. I don't know, the metaphor maybe breaks down a little bit here.

But what I want to point out, and the important part of the metaphor is, we would never get mad at a sponge for absorbing liquid. We would never shame the sponge for that. It doesn't make any fucking sense. The sponge absorbs whatever you wipe up with it, right? This is how I will invite you to think about your brain too.

If you grew up in a culture that had all of these kind of social values that it was instructing you on and your brain absorbed them, that doesn't mean

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anything's wrong with you. Like to go back to the example earlier, if you discover in your brain some ideas you don't agree with, whether they're like white supremacist ideas or patriarchal ideas. Or any other kind of ideas that you are like, "Oh, that's not who I want to be as a person."

A lot of people when this happens, they feel ashamed. They feel ashamed about those ideas. Versus realizing, "Yeah, my little spongy brain picked up these ideas and now I just can wring the sponge out and run it under hot water or put it through the dishwasher. Or however I want, I can get this stuff back out of this sponge."

But deciding it means the sponge is bad isn't useful, because it doesn't help us clean the sponge. It just gets stuck in like, "Oh, why did this happen? And why is it like this? And the sponge is so bad."

If you've absorbed ideas that don't align with your values, that doesn't make you bad, it makes you human. The ideas you absorbed as a kid aren't your fault. But now they are your responsibility, because you are now an adult sponge and whatever is in your sponge is your business to rinse out or keep. You get to do whatever you want because as we talked about in the when is it time to quit my job episode, I am not here to tell you what to do or how to think.

Or rather, I'm not here to tell you what to do and what to think. I am here to teach you how to think so that you can decide what you want to think and how you want to show up. But it's a lot easier to do that when we're not judging and shaming ourselves and our brains for the way we currently are and what's currently in there.

So, to review, your brain likes to build shortcuts and associative connections. And it will apply those to your life all the time without you asking it to. And it's doing this because it's trying to help you stay alive and not spend a lot of extra brain energy on things that it's decided don't need to be reassessed, but which you might like to reassess.

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And the pain gloss/the pleasure gloss is one way it will do this thing. But once you understand how your brain works you can use it to your advantage. You can use the pleasure gloss to your advantage. You can notice the displeasure gloss in your life and in your career and use that knowledge to help you pick apart that associative connection and to rewire it into a different connection if that's what you want.

And when you do all of this, again, I'm just inviting you to look at your brain as a neutral sponge that just absorbed whatever was around it. And yeah, some of what was around it is like stuff that we, as children, did on purpose.

Like all those Stephen King books I read, I chose to do that. In a way that is my responsibility. But the person who chose to do that was like 13. And as we know from the mistakes episode, I can be mad at her for doing that or I can be like, "Yeah, she was young and trying to entertain herself."

And like weirdly, even though it was horror, I think there was a part of me that was trying to comfort myself by finding something bigger and scarier than my own life to think about. So I can also like love her and be like, "But maybe I don't want my brain's inferred lessons from Stephen King books running my life now as a 37 year old woman, right?"

So here's what I want you to think about, where is the pleasure gloss showing up in my life? Where do I want to invite or create the pleasure gloss to show up in my life? And where is the displeasure gloss showing up? And do I want to keep it? Do I want to revise it? Do I want to dismantle it? Like what do I want to do with that?

All right y'all, and then come report back. Come find me on Instagram and let me know if you have questions about these concepts or if you want to talk about them some more.

And if you love what I teach, and you want some help taking things a little bit deeper and figuring out how this all applies to your own life, I've got good news for you. I've got space for a few new one on one coaching

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clients starting this month. So let's hop on a call. I'll give you some coaching right away to help you get going. And if it seems like a good fit, I will share with you how we can work together. Just head on over to my website and click on the work with me button and get started there.

Also, bonus, my coaching offering is totally virtual so as to better serve my global audience. And yes, I do work with people who are not native English speakers and we've had great success doing that. There's even a testimonial on my website with someone in that category so you can check that out on the testimonials page. All right y'all, have a lovely week and I will talk to you next time. Bye.

Thank you for listening to Love Your Job Before You Leave It. We'll have another episode for you next week. And in the meantime, if you're feeling super fired up, head on over to korilinn.com for more guidance and resources.