

# Ep #50: More Things You Need to Know About Stress Responses



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kori Linn**

## Ep #50: More Things You Need to Know About Stress Responses

This week we're discussing even more information about stress responses.

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 missed you. I know that every week you hear from me on Wednesday, but sometimes I record the podcast on different days. And this week I'm recording a few days later than I usually do. And it's interesting, this is the very first time this has happened where I was like, "Oh, I miss them."

Even though you're not here live when I talk to you, I'm thinking about y'all all the time. I'm thinking about how your careers are going, how your personal lives are going, what I can talk to you about that's going to be really useful for you and help you have more of what you want in your work and your life and less of what you don't want.

So, we have spoken before about stress responses and this week we're going to dive back into that topic. And it probably isn't going to be the last time we dive back into that topic because I read a lot of books. I really love learning, that's been true about me for approximately a million years. And I'm always learning new things.

And the more I learn new things, the more I want to share them with you. Because each new thing I learn adds insight and information about how we can navigate our careers and our lives and have a really fantastic time doing it and navigate the ups and downs along the way. Because let's be honest, there will be ups and downs probably.

So a while back, we talked about how to complete a stress response, and that is great information. I'm so glad that podcast is out there for you. This week I want to dive a little bit more deeply into the idea of a stress

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response from the framework of this new book I'm reading. And the book is called Call of the Wild, and it's by Kimberly Ann Johnson.

I'm not even done with the book yet. And listen, this is going to be the case most of the time when I have something to share with you, I'm going to read like half or a third of a book and already be so excited that I have to talk to you about it. It's just kind of who I am as a person. And you can go and check out the whole book if you want to.

So, in this book the author talks about a lot of different things. But there's one thing in particular I want to dig into. And it is the way different stress responses look. So we've talked about this before, there's fight, there's flight, there's freeze. I taught you about the one that I had learned about pretty recently called fawn.

And then in this book, Kimberly Ann Johnson taught me about another one, which she calls fit in. And I really like the way she frames it, which is that fight and flight are kind of like the body going up in energy. We need a big burst of energy to either fight something or to run away from it.

Freeze is the opposite; the body is going down in energy. Kind of like the energy contracts, we stop moving. In the wild, animals play dead. But what she taught me in the book is that they're not playing dead, they're not making a conscious choice to do that. That's what their brain is choosing to do. It's like bloop, bloop, and that's what happens.

And then they're these two, the way she frames it is fawn, which I think she calls appease, and fit in are social nervous system responses. So they maybe come from a different part of the brain, I'm not 100% sure on the science here. But the idea is that they're social, which I think makes a ton of sense, right?

People pleasing, fawning, is something we would do socially to another human. Not necessarily something we would do to a tiger. And then this fifth one that I hadn't heard of before is fitting in, so it's like trying to belong, trying to blend in as a way to stay safe.

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Okay, so first of all, I think it's just really interesting to have this additional framework of thinking about like, is my body trying to go up in energy? Is my body trying to go down in energy? Or is my body trying to respond in a social way?

And this happens in the brain, but I'm saying my body because first of all, the brain is part of the body, even though we often kind of seem to think it's not. And second of all, because while it starts in the brain, it's going to be physiological in nature as well.

When we get the kind of like up stress response we get, I think, increased heart rate and stuff like that. That's on the physiological level and we're not choosing to do that, that's our brain being like, "Okay, fire these systems."

So here's the part I want to talk about with y'all. One of the things that Kimberly Ann Johnson talks about in the book is this idea, if you notice a lower level of any of these stress responses, so fight is like big, right? But if you notice irritation, she sees irritation as like a mini version of fight or like the beginning stages of fight.

And nervousness or lower amounts of anxiety could be considered the lower level of flight. Whereas panic might be the higher level, like we're getting more into the stress response there.

And if you look at, let's say fawn and fit in, for fawn it could be like just a touch of people pleasing. And for fitting in, it could be like just a touch of agreeing with other people when you really don't or trying to blend into the group. And with freeze, it might just be like not saying anything. You're not fully shut down, fully frozen, but you're just kind of retracting a little bit from the situation.

Okay, so she talks about at that moment you can kind of look at the situation and see, "Oh, my brain has assessed that there's a threat here, which is why I'm in this stress response." It's a response to a perceived threat, which may not even be a real threat.

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And as I talk about all the time, on the podcast, a lot of the things that we perceive as threats, the way we're "perceiving" a threat is that we're having a thought. Maybe a thought like, "The work I did on that project wasn't good enough." We're perceiving that threat and the threat perception is happening in the level of thinking.

So from there, as a coach, the way I would normally look at that is I would be like, "Okay, here are the facts. And here are my thoughts. And here are my feelings. And can I see that the thought is creating this feeling? The fact is not what's creating the feeling." The fact that the project is complete is not creating a feeling of nervousness, it's the thought like my work might not be good enough is creating the feeling of nervousness.

So that's the lens that I generally use, is helping people see the difference between factual information and then the way their brain is currently thinking about it. And then we shift to the way their brain is thinking about it to create results that work better for them. But I love this new frame that I have from reading the book and I want to share it with you.

So basically, it's just a different way of kind of doing the same thing. So something that happened to me recently was I was going somewhere with someone, and they had forgotten something that they needed. And we had to go back and get it. And I noticed that I was irritated.

And so from my normal coaching lens, it could be like, "Well, what am I thinking, what's causing this irritation? Is there a different way to think about this situation? What way of thinking about this situation is going to help me create the outcome that I actually want to have? Maybe I'd like to choose a different perspective on it, versus the perspective I have now that it's so annoying, which is creating this irritation."

There's nothing wrong with doing it that way, that's still a super useful lens. But because I've just been reading this book, instead of thinking about it that way, my brain said, "Oh, I'm irritated. That's a low level fight response."

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My brain has perceived a threat. What does my brain think is being threatened here?"

And it was really interesting because just looking at it from that point of view, first of all, it was like, "Whoa." I felt like this kind of like fascination, like this is really interesting. I'd never thought about that kind of thing before in exactly that way. And so that already took my irritation down pretty significantly. Because I was like, "Oh, I'm in awe of my own brain and seeing what the fuck is actually happening here."

And then second of all, I had this new kind of way to look at the irritation and to engage with it. It was still being caused by a thought, it was still being caused by the perspective and minds that I was currently having in that situation where the person had forgotten the thing. But looking at it like, "What feels threatened?" Kind of just gave me another way to be curious about my own current thinking.

And this is important because curiosity is incredibly powerful. When we believe all our own thoughts, we're not being curious about them, we're just agreeing with them. They just seem true; it seems like the way we're currently thinking is the only option. And sometimes it can be really hard to shift our perspective even when we know that would be useful for us if we're not able to get to curiosity.

So asking myself like, "What feels threatening about this? What do I think is being threatened?" It got me into this state of curiosity and just it in its own right was its own mindset shift. Shifting from being the person who's irritated to being the person who's curious about my own irritation, that is the first shift.

And then probably I'm going to make another shift in how I choose to think about the other person and the thing they forgot, et cetera. But this shift in my own relation to myself and my own thinking from the person thinking the thoughts to the person being fascinated by the thoughts, that's a huge shift.

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And I'm just going to go ahead and say that's something y'all can practice in your own life, going from being the person who feels anxious about the report to being the person who is observing yourself be anxious about the report and be curious about that and be willing to be fascinated. That's going to give you more wiggle room between you and the thought that's not working for you, so that you can switch perspectives.

But then the next question is, what did feel threatened? So me and this other person, we were going to go to see a show. And what I realized was the thing that felt threatened was me having a fun time. And that might sound minor, but it's really not. I was annoyed at the other person because I perceived that my ability to go out and have fun was being threatened.

When I could see that, then I was able to be like, "Wait, is it possible that that's not actually being threatened here? Is it possible that what's more threatening to my ability to have a good time tonight is this irritation, and the way I act when I am irritated versus when I am able to shift out of it?" Even if I'm not being unkind to anyone else, like even if I'm just being with my irritation and not acting it out, it's not my favorite place to be. And it's not the most conducive to having a fun time.

So when I can see like, "Oh, I'm irritated because I think my ability to have fun tonight is being threatened. But what's actually threatening it is the thing that's in response to the perception that it's threatened." Which, listen, I know that probably sounds a little circular and confusing, but go with me. I can basically step out of the spiral of irritation and that's going to get me closer to what I actually want, which is the ability to have fun tonight.

When I look back at this example, we were trying to go somewhere. And so my brain subconsciously was like, "Oh, getting to that place and being there, that's how we have fun." But that's not actually true. I mean, I know it seems true.



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But how we have fun is actually choosing thoughts and feelings that feel fun for ourselves. And then creating them, whether we go to the show or not, whether we see the friend or not, whether whatever or not.

Because as I know from years and years of experience, if I think a bunch of thoughts that make me feel irritated and annoyed, and then I do go to the show and I make it there in time, I can still sit in that fucking show and be irritated and annoyed. I have a lot of data to prove this, y'all.

So if what I actually want, if what my brain is actually trying to protect is my capacity to have fun and have a good time, that's really fucking good information for me to know. Because I can do that much more effectively, and I can drop the irritation too.

And it doesn't mean we have to drop the irritation. And we're not dropping the irritation, so that the other person gets to have a better experience of us. It's just a question for yourself of like, do I actually want to be irritated about this?

And there are no right answers. As y'all know, I'm very into your own agency and your own authority. So if you decide, "Fuck yeah, I want to be irritated." Go ahead, you're allowed to do whatever you want.

For me and that night, what it helped me do is see the situation more clearly. And then think about how to still create what I wanted to have, no matter what anyone else was doing. And whether we got to the show at the time I wanted to get there or whatever the thing was. If what I actually care about and what I actually want to protect is my capacity to have a good time, how do I create that for myself?

And we did get to the show. And we didn't get there as early as we could have if the other person hadn't forgotten something. And we did still have a really good time. I still had a really good time, and I was able to exit my irritation and have a good time because of the curiosity and because of shifting out of the irritation.



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And that was so much easier when I realized that what I was actually trying to protect was always available to me, which was to have a good time. And for me shifting out of the irritation made that much easier.

Okay, so this is something you can do to. When you find yourself feeling mildly irritated, or even medium irritated, I think the more we get into the emotion the harder it can be. The more challenging it can be to shift into the curiosity. Not that it's impossible but just that the more heightened we are sometimes it can be more difficult to switch to that part of ourselves that's observing ourselves and being curious about ourselves.

Sometimes when we're deep in emotion we have to kind of like feel the feeling and then come to the curiosity later. So, for now, try it whenever you want. Try it if you're deep in emotion if you want to, you might still be able to do it and 10,000 points for you if you can.

But I would invite you to try it when you're feeling moderate or mild versions of these. So mild irritation, mild nervousness, mild apathy. So apathy might be the mild version of the freeze state. In a lot of ways I think of the freeze state as being about like disconnecting. So a mild disconnect, mild people pleasing, mild fitting in behaviors, like mild agreeing with others when you don't actually agree et cetera.

So when you notice that ask yourself, "What is my brain perceiving as being threatened? And why?" And get really curious with yourself about that. And about if you want to keep thinking of it the way you're currently thinking of it, or if the way you're currently thinking of it isn't working for you and isn't actually helping you protect what it's trying to protect and isn't actually helping you get what you want to get.

The brain and the body have stress responses to serve you. And they're not bad, but they're not always doing what they think they're doing. And when we kind of gain more curiosity and more mastery over them, we can decide if they're useful or not. We can appreciate our brain and body for helping us solve threats.

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And then we can purposefully choose how we want to show up and engage with the situation, whatever is happening, and whether we want to be in a stress response. Because it's not like they're never useful, sometimes they are. Or if we want to do something else, because that's just what we want to create for ourselves.

One more thing I want to mention, this is something that my coach, Maggie Reyes, taught me recently, and it made total sense. And I was immediately like, "Of course." But it also sort of blew my mind. And this is how coaching insights often are once you get them, you're like, "Oh, I'd never thought of it that way before. But actually, that makes total sense to me now immediately, and I don't know why I didn't see it."

And the thing she was talking about was, how are we going to handle stress responses in the coaching container? And what she was saying is sometimes the coaching she gives me; my brain is going to have a stress response to.

I may get mad, I may try to fight her, not literally y'all. I may get afraid and try to run away from the coaching. I might freeze and feel apathy towards the coaching. I might try to people please her as my coach. I might try to fit in with whatever I think the pattern is as a way to try to like stay safe.

And I love that she called this out explicitly. And I wanted to call it out for all of y'all because this may be happening to you. You may listen to an episode of the podcast and get really mad at me. And it's okay if you do.

You may listen to an episode of the podcast and get really scared and be like, "Fuck this podcast," and want to run away from it. You may listen to an episode of the podcast and just feel totally disconnected from what I'm saying and like, "I don't understand you," or it would never work in your life, or like, "She just doesn't get it."

And you may listen to an episode of the podcast and have this desire to prove to me that you're using the tools right. Or you might listen to an

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episode of the podcast and then hear what other people say about it and then want to fit in and just say the same thing as them.

And so I wanted to point that out for you to notice it so you could see it for what it is, which is a stress response. So if I'm sharing information on the podcast, your brain might perceive some of the stuff I'm saying sometimes as a threat.

And that's really good information for you to know, because then you can slow down and be curious and be like, "Wait, what do I think is being threatened right now? What do I think is at risk here? What am I trying to protect by having this feeling?"

Maybe if you're mad, what you perceive as being threatened is your current way of living. Because coaching invites people to make choices they're not making, and make changes, and have a more meaningful satisfying career. And that may feel threatening to your brain, your brain may perceive that as being threatening somehow.

But if you want to take what's useful out of the podcast, you may want to be curious about that and be able to see like, "Oh look, I'm really angry at what Kori said this week. Can I use that as a way to get to know myself better? Can I use that as a way to be curious about my own mind? Can I use that as a way to be curious about what my brain is trying to protect here?"

And then let me think about what I actually want and what I actually want to create. And then let me decide on purpose what's going to help me do that. Whether it's taking Kori's coaching, and maybe suggested changes in my life. Or whether it's saying, "Thanks, Kori, but this one's not for me because I have total and complete agency and I don't want to do that thing."

As I always say, there are no right answers, I want you to have a career and a life of your design. I'm just here to offer the things I know and have found to be useful for creating a life of my own design and a career of my own design. Your life and career doesn't need to look like mine. And if it's

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of your design, it probably won't. I just want to give you the tools to be able to do that.

And you get to choose which tools work for you and feel good for you. And you get to choose to adopt tools, even if your brain initially had a stress response to them, if you want to. And you don't have to do any of it.

All right, y'all, that's what I have for you today. I love getting to talk to y'all about stress responses even though it's not the most fun and sexy topic. I think it's so important for everything we're all trying to do in our work and in our lives.

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 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](http://korilinn.com) for more guidance and resources.