

Ep #110: High Standards



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With Your Host

Kori Linn

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This week we're talking about high standards.

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.

Hello, hello, hello, happy Wednesday. I just want you to know that I broke the seal today and started listening to Christmas music. I didn't even really mean to. I do this thing when I first wake up, after I brush and floss my teeth, I go out on our back deck, and I put my headphones on, and I put on music, and I sort of just like dance around a little.

And the reason that I do this is because I either saw a post or like listened to a podcast from Huberman Labs where they talked about how getting sunlight, not through windows, but getting sunlight actual exposure outside, in the first hour of waking up is really helpful for resetting your circadian rhythm or like for ensuring that you're sleepy when you go to bed.

And as you know, if you've listened to some of my podcasts, that's something that I have struggled with personally, many of my clients struggle with, and something I've worked on. So I do thought work stuff about it, but part of coaching is thinking about how we're thinking, and part of coaching is getting information and then taking action on that.

And so as part of taking action on the information I got from the Huberman Labs podcast, I basically have this little ritual where I go outside, I put the headphones on, I play like literally any music I'm feeling in the mood for. And I sort of just like dance around outside because the other thing is like movement is supposed to be good for you like first thing in the morning.

And I don't know about y'all, but I kind of have an attitude problem sometimes about movement. Like I do a lot of it, I have physical therapy exercises I do most days. But I think just putting music on and like sort of

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like, I call it like flopping around. It's kind of dancing, it's kind of just flopping around.

Anyways, I was doing that this morning and I was looking for something specific that I wanted to listen to, and I couldn't find it. But as I was digging through old playlists or whatever, I saw a Christmas song in there that I had probably favorited like last winter or something. And I was like, "Oh yeah, I'm going to do this."

And by the time this podcast comes out, it might not seem that early. Maybe y'all are already listening to Christmas music too. As of the recording of this podcast, it's only mid-November, so it's before Thanksgiving. But I really like Christmas music, so I just listen to it whenever I want. Sometimes I even listen to it like a little bit in the summer.

But this is the time of year where I like start listening to it and then it's like, it has commenced, and I will probably be listening to a lot of it for the next month and a half. And I was playing it like out of my phone for a while this morning too when I was doing something, and Alex came in. And she was like, "Oh, it's started." And I was like, "Yes." So anyways, that's what I'm up to.

So you got a little micro lesson there on things that can help you if you struggle with sleeping like I sometimes do. And also just an update that I am gleefully already listening to Christmas music and enjoying the absolute shit out of it.

Okay, enough about that. Let's talk about high standards, because if you're anything like me and most of my clients I bet you have them. And if you're anything like me, and most of my clients, you may be struggling with like how to either let them go if you're in the place where you're like, "These are not helping."

Or struggling with figuring out how to keep them while also incorporating a lot of the lessons we talk about here in the Love Your Job Before You Leave It world, where we're talking about like embracing imperfection, and

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letting things be good enough, and building a satisfying as fuck life and career without having to be perfect all the time.

So basically, what I want you to know is that there's nothing wrong with having high standards. But the way that a lot of people have high standards causes them a lot of pain and suffering. And from what I can see, a lot of times the specific way people have high standards also blocks them from doing the exact work that they have the high standards about, right?

So something I see a lot is that people won't even get started on something. Like a project, a goal, something that they really want to bring into their life. They won't even get started on it because the standards are so high it's like that's like made the stakes so high that it prevents them from taking any action.

So I see this a lot with things like creative projects. We'll have standards that are so high that they sort of like block us from even getting started because getting started usually means doing something imperfect. Like in writing there's kind of this idea of like the shitty first draft. Like the first draft's job is to be shitty, you just like write it and that's what its job is.

But so often people aren't willing to be shitty or to create something shitty because they have these high standards. So here's what I want you to know, if your high standards are making you feel like shit and keeping you from taking action, you're using them wrong. That's not what high standards are meant to do.

High standards, the whole point of high standards is that we do excellent work. If your high standards are not helping you do excellent work, then they're not functional. They're not operating properly.

So, like I said, one way that high standards can backfire is that they keep you from taking action at all. That's not the only way they can backfire though. High standards can also backfire, maybe it wouldn't be called backfire, but high standards can also function improperly when they keep us in a place of perfecting.

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So we talked recently about the difference between like perfecting and enjoying and the difference between perfecting and improving. And something I see sometimes is like when people have high standards, then it's like they just apply those across everything in their life all the time and they're trying to do like every single little thing to an incredibly high standard, when a lot of stuff in our life doesn't actually need to be done to a high standard.

And sometimes when we're doing things to a super high standard, we're actually doing someone else's work and allowing that other person to not have to do the things they need to do. We're like picking up too much slack sometimes.

So if your high standards are keeping you from taking any action, you're using them wrong. No offense, but I think it's just easiest to say it simply like that. And if your high standards are exhausting you, that's also not what we want. And I would argue that that's us using high standards the wrong way.

In my opinion, and you get to choose for you always, but in my opinion, the whole point of high standards is for us to do excellent work, yes. But what if we also have high standards for ourselves and that the other point of high standards is for us to get to have an excellent life, right?

So oftentimes when people are doing stuff like overworking or over perfecting, like the reason they're doing that is because they want to have a yummy, delicious, satisfying as fuck life that's successful. But sometimes what they do then is they sort of like use that working, it's like the working is supposed to help their life be successful.

But they're working so much and going after success so much, it's like they sort of lose sight of the bigger thing, which is that they have this amazing life. And then they don't even have room to have the amazing life because they're so busy dedicating all of their time and energy and resources to trying to "be successful."

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It's a little bit like you don't see the forest for the trees, right? It's like you're trying so hard to be successful without slowing down to realize that if you can't enjoy your success, what's the fucking point of it?

And then for the other example, it's like, okay, if you have high standards because you want to create this goal that you want to have this amazing thing in your life. And so you're having high standards, but the high standards are blocking you from creating the goal, then the high standards are also, they're not functioning properly.

Because if the whole point of the high standards is you do a really good job at the thing, but they're blocking you from doing the thing, they're not working. And in that way, they're actually sort of like keeping you stuck and trapped, not working on the goal.

So these are the two ways that I see high standards misused most often. To review, way one is that we don't take any action, we get stuck and paralyzed in fear of not being good enough. And so then we just don't do anything.

And way two is that we get stuck in perfecting and in trying to meet the standards. And I think in our heads we're often sort of changing the standards. We're like, "I'll be happy when blah, blah, blah." But then we blah, blah, blah, and then we're not happy. And so we like kind of go back and try to keep working and we keep trying to achieve that feeling of success, or safety, or good enoughness from doing more.

And so both of those are two different ways that high standards can backfire and fuck things up for you, because like I was saying before, what's the point of high standards? Yeah, the points may be to do excellent work. What's the point of doing excellent work? Probably part of the point is like that feels like it's in integrity with who you want to be. But also part of the point is so we can reap the benefits. And that means being able to like enjoy the work and enjoy your good life, right, in my opinion.

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So basically, I think what I'm asking you to do here is pick an area of your life where you have really high standards and you know you do, and like maybe you're even suspicious that those high standards are not working for you. And then think about like why do you even have those high standards? First of all, what do the high standards even mean? Like what is the standard? How will we know if we met it? Is it even possible to meet it?

So often I see people going around and they're like, "I just have high standards." And I'm like, okay, but are they actually possible? Are they possible high standards or are they impossible high standards? Because possible high standards can be really fun, and they can be a place in which we can engage our creativity and really enjoy the effort of excelling and creating excellent work.

But impossibly high standards are not going to do that because they're impossibly high, ergo they're unmeetable, ergo if you need to meet them to feel good, you're never going to meet them, you're never going to feel good, you're always going to feel like shit.

I think it's also important to talk about like I do teach a lot about how you can have these like wildly improbable goals and things you work on that like no one's ever done before. I know I've spoken on the podcast before about Roger Bannister, who is like the first person to run the four minute mile. And before Roger Bannister ran the four minute mile, people literally thought it was impossible.

So that might be a thing where you're like, "Well, wait, Kori, you say that we can have these impossible goals that we work on." And I want to be really clear here, you can. But there's a difference between having an impossible goal that you work towards and that you can celebrate yourself while you're working towards and that you can celebrate yourself even if you're "failing" at it. Because even failing at an impossible goal can be an incredible success in your life.

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And there's a difference between that and having impossibly high standards, which means you never get to feel good about yourself unless you meet them, but you also can't necessarily meet them. Like we don't maybe know if they're even meetable.

So if you were doing something like what Roger Bannister did, I would say like what if we have a lower standard for success? Like a lower standard for when you get to be proud of yourself. And we can still keep this like impossible goal that we're working towards. But we're not going to make the impossible goal, the standard. Because the point of a standard is you're supposed to be able to meet it, right?

So another way I say this sometimes when I'm coaching people is like, what if we have a lower standard of success? And I like to get really like intense with this, like really intensely low. Like what if my standard of success for my day is like I wake up and I do some shit, right?

And that might make your skin crawl. You're just like, "Ah, that could never be successful. I can't think I'm good unless I do all these things." But I'm a high achiever and I have found that it's actually very effective to have a super low standard for success and a super high standard for like what we could accomplish, what could happen, what could be fun, what could be interesting.

And that works because when I meet my low standard for success, then I feel really good about myself. I'm like, "Good job, Kori, you did the thing." And feeling really good about that gives me a lot of energy to go do the other things. And I'm also a person who has a lot of ideas, who likes to do a lot of different things. And the thing is, I think most people are like that.

We have this whole idea in our culture that like people are lazy, and I just don't agree with that. I think that a lot of people in our culture are overtired and truly need rest. I think a lot of people in our culture are trying to make themselves work on things that aren't interesting to them. And so they either need to like allow themselves to work on different things, or they

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need to find a different way to think about the things that they're choosing to work on, like getting on board with themselves about why they're doing it.

That's something I do in my business all the time because there are some parts of my business I really love. And there are other parts of my business that I do because they matter to the business running, right? Like things like tax compliance is not my most favorite exciting part of running my business.

But I am willing to do the effort, like I'm going to hire out some of it, but I'm willing to do the effort that I need to do as the business owner. And I'm willing to tell myself a magical story about that to like get myself to do it so that my business can run well and so that I can do the other parts.

But if all of my business felt really boring and taxing, I would need to make some serious changes because, yes, we can change our thoughts about things. But I talked before about like what is the project of your coaching or like your thought work. And to me the project is not to make myself like a bunch of shit that I don't like.

It's to get myself to do the things I need to do that I don't like to allow myself to do the other things I do that I do like. And if there aren't enough things in my life that I do like, then it's also like I would be using the thought work and the coaching to make changes to create that availability for myself.

Okay, so we've done the Kori Linn special, which is what I call it where we started on one topic, we're going through a bunch of different things, it's all going to come together and be a really powerful idea you can take into your own life and your own career.

To circle back to what I was saying before, think about an area of your life where you have really high standards. What are the high standards that you have? Are they actually possible? And when you think about yourself and those high standards, what are they supposed to be doing or creating for you in your life?

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Like are they supposed to create you feeling successful? What's that supposed to create? And take yourself through and like really drill in, like why are you doing this? Why does it matter? What do you think it's going to get you so that you can see not just your original goal, but the end game you think that's going to take you to, right?

So as an example, maybe you have the standard of doing really, really well at work. And I would ask you, like what does that even mean? What is the actual standard? Like in your head you're like, "I just have to do really, really well." But that's like sort of subjective, so we never actually know if we've met it. So what is the actual standard?

And when you look at that, then you're going to find out is it possible or not, right? Like, maybe you're thinking like, "Oh, I need to get exceptional on every single performance review." And then it's a question of like, oh, is that actually doable? And if I can't get exceptional in every performance review, am I actually in the right role? Like should I be able to get exceptional? Is that actually required?

And then we can dig a little further like, okay, if you got exceptional on every performance review, like we'll set aside for now if that's possible or probable, or like even an indication you're in the correct role. If you got that, what would you get?

And this might dumbfound you for a minute. You might be like, "Uh, what do you mean? Like excellence is just important." But why? Why is it important? Why do those standards matter to you? And so after you aren't sure for a minute, like just keep digging and you're like, "What if I did know? What if I did know?" Right?

And you're probably going to find that it's got something to do with like you're getting to have a good life. Like either you're getting to feel good about yourself, that you're creating good work. Or you getting to feel safe and like you're okay, and you're secure, and that your needs are going to

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be met because you're going to be able to stay in your job and keep making money.

It could be something else. Those are the two I see most often, is we want to feel good about ourselves and we want to feel safe, right? And then you can dig into like, why do those matter, right? And probably at some point you're going to get to like, I want to have a good life. And then it's like, what does a good life even mean? What are the indicators of that? Like what does it even mean?

And probably what's going to happen if you get that far and dig in, is you're going to figure out some stuff about like even if you want to have a wildly amazing, incredible career, you probably don't want to be working all the time. You probably don't want to be spending all your hours perfecting things. You probably don't want to be laying awake at night worrying about, you know, a fucking email chain.

And that's good to know because your brain is going to be tempted to do all of those things if it thinks you need to do all those things to feel safe and feel good about yourself. So when you really dig into what you think your high standards are actually going to create for you, then what you can realize is that like that's a bigger, fuller picture.

And overworking yourself at work is not going to create that for you. Like overworking yourself at work is not going to give you quality time with your significant other in the evening. Which maybe is something that is part of the good life that you ultimately want to be living.

So understanding both what your high standards actually are, if they're actually meetable, and what you think they're going to do for you will really help you when it comes to knowing when you want to continue working on something and improving it and making it better, and when actually you just want to be able to believe you're good enough and safe and okay and let that work just be done for a while. Be done for the weekend, be done for the next day, et cetera.

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And again, this is where I think it's really useful to have a much lower standard for what success looks like. Because if your success standard is really low, like mine now is, and you've done some of your work for the day, but you haven't finished everything. You haven't dotted all the I's, you haven't crossed all the T's, but your standard for success is so low it's already been met even if all the work hasn't been done. And even if like all of the quality hasn't been created yet.

Then that's going to be part of what's going to allow you to stop working and allow you to say like, okay, my low end standard for success has been met. There is still some excellent work I'd like to do, but part of those high standards are having this wonderful life. And so I'm going to privilege some other areas and work on those, instead of trying to like over perfect in this work thing before I get to even spend any time in my life.”

Now, I'm talking about this as work being the place where a lot of people's impossible high standards show up. And that work then becomes an obstacle to showing up in the rest of their lives because that's a pattern I see. But that's not the only way that this plays out.

For some people, they have impossibly high standards for themselves in multiple areas. And then I think what often happens there is that they just feel fucking exhausted because they're trying to hit all of those high standards all the time and it feels like playing a game of whack-a-mole that they're always losing and can never get ahead of.

And for that I want to circle you back to some of the ideas we've been talking about recently, which is probably you do have too much work to do. Probably you do have too many demands on your time. Probably there is always more you could be doing. And if that's the case, if not everything's going to get done anyways, what do you want to prioritize? What do you want to privilege? Like what do you want to put first, knowing that something probably will be left undone?

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And again, when we think about like our original high standards and what we thought they were going to do for us and what our vision of our life is and what we think all that excellent good work is going to get us, right, and we imagine, we zoom all the way out.

And usually when people zoom all the way out, they want to have work that they like doing and enjoy, and are good at. And they want to have relationships that they can enjoy. And they want to have some quality time with people, and they want to have some rest.

When we think about that, then that can also inform how we make those decisions and make those prioritizations and what we choose to do, and what we choose to not do. Because yeah, maybe it matched a high standard that we were taught by culture, but maybe it doesn't match the vision that we actually have that we actually want to live our lives as.

So to review, a high standard that keeps you from taking action is not a high standard. That's not what a high standard is supposed to do. And a high standard that keeps you over performing in only one area of your life, while ignoring other areas, or over performing in like lots of areas, but not ever getting to feel good about yourself is not a high standard that's working properly.

Generally, the whole point of a high standard or a set of high standards is that we get to have a good life that's meaningful to us. And if your high standards aren't creating that for you, they're not working properly. And that means you're going to need to redefine them.

One of the most powerful ways I've found to redefine them is to set much lower standards for like baseline success and keep the standards for what's possible, and what could be interesting, and what I could dream of doing really high to keep a lot of space for possibility so that I can do really incredible things. Maybe things no one's ever done before.

But the whole while before I achieve those things, I can also still feel really good about myself and feel really like I'm successful and like I'm doing a

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good enough job. And that trying to reach the possibility is something I'm doing for fun, not something I have to do to be okay.

And listen, a lot of us learned our high standards from our culture, from our socialization, and changing those and interacting with them in a different way can feel really difficult and complex. And if that's how it feels to you, you're not alone. And the good news is you don't have to be alone as you work on changing these.

SAF cohort two is starting in February. And it's going to be an incredible place to do this work because in addition to getting to work on your own high standards, you get to watch a roomful of wonderful women and non-binary people work on their high standards as well.

And when we do this work with other people, our growth is exponential, and it just changes us in so many different ways because we'll get coached on the things we're working on. But then we'll watch someone else get coached on something it didn't even occur to us to get coached on, and will get value from their coaching too.

And another reason that this work is really powerful is because humans are social animals, right? We like to belong, and we like to do things that other people are doing. It makes us feel safe, it makes us feel good. And one of the reasons it can be so hard to let go of socialization is because socialization was a way that we belonged.

So when you do group coaching, it's a way to redo your socialization, while keeping that deeply important sense of belonging, and keeping that deeply important sense of community. And I think that's one of the reasons why group coaching is so impactful and so powerful. And I would love to have you be part of that next SAF cohort.

So scoot on over to my website, sign up for a consult call, or just DM me and say, "Let's fucking go." And we'll get you in that next cohort if it seems like a good fit. And if it doesn't seem like a good fit, I'm going to give you some other great information that's going to help you create the changes

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you want to create in your life and build a more satisfying as fuck life and career, whatever that means for you.

All right, that's what I got for y'all this week. 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.