

Ep #178: Fear of Being a Burden



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With Your Host

Kori Linn

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This week we're talking about fear of being a burden.

The *Satisfied AF* podcast is the place to learn how to create a life and career that's wildly delicious. Want a steamier sex life? We've got you. Want a more satisfying career? We'll cover that too. And you can be sure we'll spend lots of time talking about how to build connected, fun relationships that can handle life's ups and downs. No matter what goals you're working on, this show will help you create a one of a kind life that is just right for you. Join me, life and career coach Kori Linn and each week I'll give you lots of practical tips, tools, and proven strategies to help you create all the satisfaction your heart desires.

Hello, hello, hello. Happy Wednesday. I hope you're having a gorgeous day. I'm having a kind of low energy day. Alex and I got Covid shots yesterday because you may remember we had Covid over the winter holiday. And at the time, we reached out to our doctors and the guidance was to get the vaccine three months after being sick. So it's been about three months, so we went ahead and did that yesterday.

And I often have a bad reaction to the vaccine, just not feeling very good the next day. But this time I actually feel mostly fine. My arm is kind of sore, but mostly I feel okay. But Alex this time feels really yucky. And I feel so bad for her because I was expecting to feel not great and I feel pretty okay. And she was expecting to feel fine and she feels pretty not great.

So I've been just doing some little extra things around the house today, loading her dishes, offering to make her food or drinks, stuff like that. And I think that really relates to what we're talking about today, which is the idea of being a burden, or the fear of being a burden in your relationships, maybe in a work context.

This is something I see come up a lot when I invite people to consider making requests and asking for help, is this idea that they don't want to be a burden on someone else. And this is something I see also come up a lot on social media, particularly on Instagram, there's a couple of main trends I see.

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One of them is like asking for support from other people doesn't make you a burden. It's okay to ask for support. There's another trend of like, you shouldn't be made to feel like a burden in your relationships. So if the people that you have relationships with make you feel like a burden when you ask for something, go find people who are a better fit for you.

And as with a lot of things that are on social media, I think there's some stuff in there, like some really cool insights and a lot of stuff in there just maybe isn't that helpful or could be confusing or can make you wonder if you're doing relationships the right way or if there's something wrong with you.

So let's just answer that right away. There's nothing wrong with you. You're a human who has some relationships where some things work and some things don't. And here on the podcast, we can help you get more of what you want in those relationships, create relationships that feel more delightful and connected, get to know people more deeply, create more intimacy.

And I think a lot of that just comes down to skills. And we develop those skills on the podcast and in my coaching containers. And also practice, right? Because when we get a new skill, we're usually not great at it right away. And so we become better at it by practicing it over and over and test and learn too. We practice the skill, we see what happens. We're curious about ourselves and others. We become more skillful with the skill the more we try it and the more we practice.

So I think there are two main ideas I want to go over in this podcast. One is this idea that to ask for support in a relationship does not make you a burden. And that a lot of what relationships are about is reciprocity and is being able to be there for each other and get support and give support.

And I see a lot of people being really comfortable giving support, but being less comfortable receiving support. But there's this other thing, which I think I actually did see maybe on Instagram or TikTok or one of the other social medias that said this thing that I thought was really insightful. And this is

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where social media sometimes comes in with a zinger that you're like, oh yes, this makes sense.

And what it said was sometimes maybe you are a burden, but it didn't mean it in a bad way. So this podcast episode is going to be weird because you're going to be like, wait a minute, you're saying two opposite things. And I'm like, yes, that's correct. I'm saying two opposite things because two things can be true that seem to be at odds. And one of the marks of intellectual flexibility is actually being able to hold multiple ideas that seem to conflict with each other as kind of possible at the same time.

So on the one hand, asking for and receiving support in relationships, in your workplace, in your friendships, in your home does not make you a burden. That's part of what relationships and workplaces and friendships, I think, are meant to bring, is support for the parties involved. And sometimes we're the one giving the support and sometimes we're the one getting the support.

On the other hand, the second part of two things can be true is sometimes we're asking people for something that is inconvenient or difficult for them. And I think that can also be okay within the system, right?

So it's like today I was doing extra labor. Now, first of all, Alex didn't ask me to do this extra labor. She didn't even know I was doing it. I took it upon myself. She doesn't feel great. There's this labor that can be done of loading her dishes in the dishwasher. I'm going to do it because I know on a day when I didn't feel well, just like kind of these minor efforts might feel overwhelming.

And so on the one hand, Alex and I have a lot of reciprocity in our relationship. We both give and we both take. And so giving a little bit extra that's outside of what I normally give didn't feel like a burden at all. On the other hand, literally it was more effort for me. So this is kind of what I'm saying when I'm saying two things can be true.

Thing one is in a relationship of give and take, to take does not make you a burden. But thing two is it's okay if sometimes loving you requires – It

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doesn't even require, but it's okay if loving you sometimes involves work for other people. It is okay for other people to work and do effort in the act of loving you. And it's okay for them to be aware of that. It's okay for you to be aware of that. And it doesn't make you unilaterally a burden.

It might be more like, oh, this is the part where I need extra help. And maybe there's another part where the other person needs extra help. And is that something we're both willing to give in this relationship or in this agreement?

I think there's really something about this too, that's about being a social mammal, being someone who derives value from being with others, both giving to others and receiving from others. Like not being a rock or an Island unto yourself where you can meet all your own needs. And this is really interesting because I read a book, I think it was the book about emotional childhood neglect that I've talked about on the podcast a few times before. It's called Running On Empty.

It's a really good book. Although you may find it to be triggering to read. I know I did. But in the book, it talks about this thing called counter-dependence and counter-dependence, from what I understand, is kind of the extreme opposite of dependence. So it's like wanting to be fully independent at all times from other people, never asking for help, never relying on other people.

And one of the things I thought was so interesting about that book is the book was saying that, if I remember correctly, the book was saying that this is something that can happen if you have gone through emotional childhood neglect, is that you may develop an aversion to depending on other people. Whereas in a lot of relationships, giving and receiving is part of the flow, with counter-dependence you may be willing to give, but it would be very uncomfortable to receive.

And I think that this is related because I think for a lot of people it feels okay to give, or sometimes it even feels really good because a lot of us were conditioned that being helpful is better or more worthy than receiving help.

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But then I think something that can happen with this is we become resentful. Because if we're in relationships where we're giving more, even if the other person wants to give to us, but we're uncomfortable receiving or uncomfortable asking for or allowing support, then it can create this imbalance where we're maybe giving support.

And I'm sure there are some times where people are unable to receive support and they're also unable to give support. And I feel like that's probably an incredibly lonely way to live.

Now, as always on the podcast, if you have a system that's working for you and working for the people in your life and you don't want to change it, don't change it. You're the boss, you're in charge. You are the ultimate authority figure in your life.

But if what you really want is to have your life feel different and to be able to not do everything and to be able to ask for support and feel okay in that asking and to be able to receive support without this internal narrative of being a burden on other people, then I think today's conversation could be really helpful for you.

And on the other hand, if you're more in the opposite space of like you've had a lot of relationships where you simply existed, like kind of felt like a burden or you internalized that other people seem to think it was a burden of some kind, you may be feeling really allergic to that kind of engagement and you may be really seeking out new relationships where you feel cherished and loved and accepted rather than merely tolerated. And I think this conversation will be useful for you too.

Basically, the key takeaway for me in this conversation is, like I said before, the two things. Thing one is you're allowed to ask for things and you're allowed to receive things, whether it's help or support or love or kindness without that making you a burden. And that there is a rightful place for that in a relationship of reciprocity, of give and take.

And also the simultaneous thing that seems to contradict the other thing that I would offer to you that they don't, it's just kind of a complex set of

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ideas, is that in a relationship with give and take, with reciprocity, it's okay if sometimes there is work involved in the loving and caring of you. And I personally just believe that it's okay if other people see it even as work sometimes, right?

And we had the example earlier where I wanted to give extra to Alex, it was work. I can see that it was labor. I don't resent it. And I think that's the key difference, right? If I'm able to give, even if I see that giving as labor, I still know I'm giving of my own volition. I'm choosing to give. So it's not something I feel any resentment about, even if today I'm giving more than I normally would.

And I think that's a really important angle here, right? So even if there's effort involved in loving and supporting you, effort given freely, effort given without resentment is not the same as effort given when people don't really want to give it or effort given that they then feel resentful about.

And I think the key when you're looking to be supported by other people, but not be resented is communication and being able to talk to people and say, hey, here's the support I'm looking for. And also it's totally okay if this is a no for you, because I only want you to give this support if it feels like a big yes. And it can be okay if they're giving the support and it feels like a yes and it's still labor, because we can have a yes to labor and to effort when it is aligned.

Let me give you another example, because I feel like this can be kind of a confusing topic. So an example that I remember from reading one of Dr. John and Julie Gottman's books, but I don't remember which book, was this idea of you're sitting down and you're reading a book and it's a really delicious, maybe thriller. And you think you know who the killer is. And you're trying to finish the book so you can find out if you're right.

And then you see your partner, kind of out of the corner of your eye, and they don't see you but you can see that they look sad or upset in some way. So they don't know that you're seeing them, but you are seeing them. And the Gottman's call this a sliding door moment, when you have the

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opportunity where you can either stay and do your thing you were doing, which is reading your book and finding out how the book ends and being excited about that. Or you can set the book aside and then you can go and check in on your partner.

Now, the Gottman's are proposing to center the relationship. And so you choose to go and check in on the partner. Now, I center you designing a life that feels really yummy and delicious to you, whatever that means for you. So you would get to choose what sounds more aligned to your values and aligned to the kind of life you want to live.

But what I want you to take from the example in the purposes of this podcast about the idea of being a burden or the fear of being a burden is if I am reading a book and I see that my partner is having a hard time and they haven't asked me for support, I could still choose to set aside the thing I'm really enjoying doing in the and turn towards them and offer them the option of talking about it with me or being supported if there's some support they want.

And there may be an in the moment part of me that kind of would rather read the book, right? That's kind of part of the example from the Gottman's too. But this is where tuning into your ultimate values comes in like, yeah, in the moment when we're reading the book, it's really fun and interesting. But what ultimately matters to you more and what kind of life do you want to live? What kind of relationships do you want to have? What kind of person do you want to be? Do you want to turn towards your partner or would you rather not in that moment?

Now, that's being the partner who's doing the giving, right? So that's the one where you get to choose if you want to turn towards. But this podcast is, in a lot of ways, actually about being the other partner, right? Being the partner who needs the support, being the partner who is feeling upset.

So in that case, it has nothing to do with us if our partner's reading a book they really like and if they have noticed us without us noticing them, we don't know about that because we didn't notice them noticing us, right?

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Like that's kind of the whole point of that part. But this is the part where we get to say like, okay, I'm having some feelings come up. What do I want in this moment?

And if what I want is support from another person, one, am I willing to ask for it even though I am asking them to do labor? And two, how do I want to have that conversation? So if you're a person who has the fear of being a burden, step one is like, or maybe this is almost like a prerequisite step, is knowing that thought is going to come up and be like, I don't want to be a burden though.

And so then taking our initial idea of like, well, this is what relationships are for, is to give and receive support. And so I'm willing to set the idea of being a burden aside and pursue support anyways. Or there's another option, I'm willing to use that idea of not wanting to be a burden to inform how I request support.

And so here's what that could look like. It could look like saying to your significant other, hey, I see you're reading a book and maybe you're really enjoying it. And I really don't want to interrupt you. And also, I really need some support right now. Do you think that's something you'd be willing to pause reading the book and give me now? Or if now is not a good time, is there a time later when we could talk?

And so what this does is it kind of brings this awareness into the conversation of I want support, and yet I also realize this is a separate person from me who has their own needs, wants, and preferences. And this might not be a time when they're available to give me the support I'm looking for. And so I'm clearly, in my request, making space for them to say no.

And if they are not able to give me the support I need, being resourceful enough also to have other places where you can potentially go and get support, whether that's another person you could talk to or something like journaling or some other activity you could do that could help you feel supported, right?

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And the more you ask for support and the more you receive support, this is also a skill, right? So the better you're going to get at understanding what feels good to you and then being able to stack up options, starting with the one you want most and then working through. And then we take whichever one we get, right? It's like everything else in life. It's like, okay, I want this most, but if that's not on the menu for some reason, I'm going to go to my second choice. I'm going to go to my third choice. I'm going to go to my fourth choice.

And I think this is interesting, right? Because if we're at a restaurant and our first choice isn't there, we go to our second choice. I mean, maybe you storm out of a restaurant if your first choice isn't there, but I think generally we don't do that, even if we feel some disappointment. We're like, oh, I feel disappointed. I really wanted the short ribs, but I guess I can get the salmon instead, right?

So if you really want to be supported by your significant other and for some reason they're not available for that, like either they're not in the headspace or maybe they're at work or they're traveling or something, knowing like, okay, I have this second, third and fourth tier of support I can reach out for. Like it could be significant other. It could be a really good friend. It could be someone like me, like a coach, a professional. It could be a therapist. It could be something that doesn't require another person, like journaling.

Like there have been times when I've been upset where Alex, like I wasn't ready to talk to her about it. I think in the example in my head, it wasn't even about her, but I just also didn't want to talk to her about it. So she went to bed and I poured a glass of wine and got my journal out. And I was almost talking to myself, like myself was like, hey, why does this bother you so much? And I was freewriting about why it bothered me so much.

So that's an example of the, these are the different varying supports you can put in place for yourself. Also, when you have multiple supports, I think it's a lot easier to ask for support without that "feeling like a burden" because you're like, oh, this is just an invitation to be supported by this person. And they don't need to be a yes because I have these other

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options available. So it's totally actually okay if they're a no. I can handle that.

And we can even communicate that to them. So I think that's also another thing you can do if you're worried about being a burden, is to say to them like, listen, it's absolutely fine if this is not the right time, if you don't have the bandwidth. I have other people I can ask. I have other tools in my toolkit, but I would like to be supported by you if you're available for that.

So I think that's one of the ways that we can ask for and receive support that's going to feel so much more delicious, so much less like a burden and so much more pleasant, is just making it something that's optional. And you're checking in to see if they are willing to have that experience with you the same way you'd be like, hey, do you want to go to lunch, right?

Like, it's not a burden to invite someone to lunch, even if it might be a drive or it might be effort. I mean, it is going to be effort for them to get there. None of us can teleport yet. And even once teleporting is invented, probably that will also be effort, right? So just because we're asking someone to do effort doesn't mean anything has gone wrong.

Okay, but let's also talk to the other side, which is like, if you have had relationships where it has been expressed to you or you have intuited that you're a burden in some way, and so now you want to step away from those relationships and build new relationships. I think there's also something here like, can you create space that other people are sometimes available to engage with you and sometimes they're not?

And even in relationships where we are cherished, loved, and accepted, the people in those relationships may have other things that they want to be doing at any given time. And so it is still about the give and take and the invitation and the request of like, are you available at this time?

Something else that's really helpful, which I preach about all the time is also like, can you be specific? Like if you know there's a specific kind of support you want, it can be really helpful to tell people what that is because something that I've noticed again and again with myself and others is when

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support is requested, but what kind of support isn't clear, people will often try to offer solutions.

And then sometimes the other person gets really frustrated because what they really want is just someone to listen to them vent or someone to validate their feelings, et cetera. So on both sides of this equation, if you can get clear on what the support is you're looking for or what the support is you're offering, I think that can eliminate a lot of conflict as well.

One more thing is let's talk briefly about reciprocity. So reciprocity is the idea that we're exchanging things with mutual benefit between people, between organizations, et cetera. And so if you give in your friendships and your relationships at work and in your family, but you never allow others to support you, you're actually not doing reciprocity, right? You're just giving.

And if you're taking in friendships and at work and in other situations, that's also not reciprocity. And when people are afraid of being a burden, I think they're afraid of taking, right? They're afraid of receiving, they're afraid of asking, but a lot of times those same people are giving. So kind of an easy cheat sheet way to begin to be able to ask and allow support is to write down the ways you are giving, and then ask yourself if you're asking and allowing equal and opposite support.

Now, we don't want this to be transactional, like I helped her move in 2017 and now she needs to help me move. It's not about that. It's not about it being like a tit for tat. What it is about is about allowing yourself to see the evidence that you give and that it's also okay to receive.

So seeing that those are kind of two sides of the same coin and that it can feel really good to be on both sides in a relationship where we can develop both on purpose, like that can feel really satisfying and wonderful for both people.

And if you're in a relationship where you're only giving, I would just invite you to ask yourself why that is. And if you're in a relationship where you're only receiving, I would also invite you to ask yourself why that is.

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Now, a little asterisk side note, consenting adults can do whatever they want in relationships. So if you have a relationship like that, where the two or more parties agree that they really like that and think it's a fun, good time, go on, do that. But if you want that support and you feel resentful of not getting it and you're also not allowing yourself to ask for it, not allowing yourself to receive it, I think that is a moment to really be like, why am I doing this? And what if I stop it?

And looking at the literal reciprocity is one way to get out from under the burden narrative, because if you are receiving a very similar amount of things or support or whatever as the other person, then either you're both burdens and your burdens together and that can be a beautiful thing, like we are doing labor for people we love. Or neither of you are. And you can just kind of set the burden question aside because you have the data that backs up that you are giving and receiving similar amounts.

And the final thing I want to mention is that I think when you're willing to ask for and receive what you want, it's actually less burdensome to the other person. And when you're able to be clear about the kind of support you're looking for and you're able to make bids for that support with space for the other person to say no, it's actually so much less burdensome.

When you give and don't allow other people to give back to you, that can feel uncomfortable and it can set up kind of like this one way thing. So it's interesting that sometimes by trying not to be a burden, it can be burdensome in different ways. And by allowing yourself to be someone that people do effort and labor for, that can actually feel really good and delicious, even though they're doing effort, even though it might be inconvenient.

I think what it's also really about is seeing yourself as an equal party in the relationship, right? Like we're equal parties in the relationship. We both are willing to be inconvenienced sometimes for the other one. We're both willing to receive support from the other one. We're both willing to have conversations when something doesn't feel good to one of us. Like we both matter and are valuable here. And the relationship is about both of us. The

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relationship is not just about one of the parties getting what they want or feeling supported or having a nice time.

And I think it's worth saying that as you go about this, if you're someone who traditionally hasn't asked for support or hasn't allowed others to support you or hasn't been honest with other people about what's actually going on for you internally, this may feel really uncomfortable. That's okay, you can do uncomfortable things. Start small, test and learn, practice, keep going. You'll get better at it. It'll get easier. It's okay if in the beginning it feels awkward and uncomfortable and like you're not doing a very good job. That's how we normally feel in the beginning of learning a new skill.

And also some of your relationships may change. If there are people in your life who are used to you giving and not asking and you ask, it is possible those relationships will change and that's not necessarily a bad thing. And it's also possible that people are going to be really excited to return the effort and labor that you've been giving them. And some people may also feel less close to you. And that can be okay too, especially if it was a relationship that didn't have reciprocity.

And as ever, this is all about you creating a more satisfying and delicious life for yourself. So if there are relationships where you don't want to make changes, that's totally your prerogative. I just want you to know what you're doing and do it on purpose and be kind and loving to yourself as you do it and be moving closer to a life that feels really incredible for you.

And you don't have to do this alone. This is exactly the kind of thing I work with people on in one-on-one coaching. And the customized support of the Zoom calls and the text message coaching really helps people to become aware of their patterns and make changes in their life so that things can be more fun and easy and delicious so that they can have conflict with their loved ones without it creating a big problem in the relationship and so that they can make requests and allow support.

And if that's something you're interested in, let's have a free consult call and you can tell me about what's going on. I can tell you how coaching can

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help. And then if it seems like a good fit, we can talk about how to work together.

All right, that's what I have for y'all today. Thank you so much. Have a great week. I'll talk to you next time.

Thank you for joining me for this week's episode of *Satisfied AF*. If you are ready to create a wildly delicious life and have way more fun than you ever thought possible, visit www.korilinn.com to see how I can help. See you next week.