

106: What do you need to quit

[00:00:00] **Elena:** Welcome, Leslie. Hello. Thanks for jumping into this conversation. So I'm going to start off with a little story when I think. The pivotal moments of my life and perhaps specifically my professional life. I remember this moment in August of 2009, when I was in a leadership development course. And I don't remember the exact question, but I was asked something along the lines of what is the story you are telling about a situation you're in that you're complaining.

[00:00:45] And at that point in 2009, I was starting another year in the Oakland public schools where I had already worked for 15 years, something like that. And. I was complaining all the time about the school district and my supervisors and the school leader. And I remember this moment when that question was asked, and then I was asked to turn to a partner and talk about my response.

[00:01:17] And I remember just saying, oh my God, I am walking around. Relentlessly telling this story that this district is so fucked up. This district is hopeless. And by this district, now I kind of hate that term. It's like, who are you talking about? Right. But what I was telling was a story of powerlessness, of being.

[00:01:42] Sort of a victim at the whim and mercy of, and for us ambiguous anonymous structures and power. And it was a story of like, no matter what I do, it's not going to matter. It's just so fucked up. And I had this moment in that August of 2009, when I turned to my partner in this course. And when I said that and I realized like, wow, What is possible, what is possible for me, what's possible in the work I'm doing.

[00:02:11] If this is the story I'm telling, and in this course, we were given these prompts to respond to each other. It was kind of structured protocol. And her question to me was something along those lines of, what is possible, or is this a story you really want to tell? What are you getting from this story?

[00:02:28] But in that 10 or 15 minute dialogue with her in that moment, I realized. This is the story I've been telling him and telling it for years. And it's a story I want to live in anymore because it's demoralizing. It drains me. It's making me feel like, like, why am I in this job?

[00:02:46] If that's the story I'm going around telling. And that was a pivotal moment. And when I think back to that moment, it really. Was what transformed

my experience in that school district. And I can trace everything that's happened since then, including writing the book on the art of coaching and leading a team of transformational coaches and actually having some tremendous impact in that school district to my decision to begin releasing that mindset.

[00:03:21] And it was a mindset that I had been in for years. It was one that I can see how it was cultivated and supported by the context I was in. And some of the people I was around, but I was like, I ain't got to let this go for my own health and wellbeing as well as for me to be able to live my legacy.

[00:03:37] So that's the story I wanted to start with because this episode is about what you might be able to quit. Or release or let go of in order to stay in order to perhaps thrive. And maybe in order to just at least be here right now, be in this moment and make clear and informed and thoughtful decisions.

[00:04:07] So, Leslie, I want to stop there. And before you tell your story, just pause to invite you to share anything you've heard or any reflection you have on my story.

[00:04:19] **LesLee:** I have a parallel story. Mine was at an education nonprofit when I was running a region of seeing and thinking the same thing.

[00:04:27] And I remember using slightly different language about it and somebody who was in there said as long as that's the lens at which you're seeing this region, nothing as possible.

[00:04:39] And, that chance, to mirror, to stop, to interrupt. Would it help it is to be able to interrupt ourselves. I'm imagining you in that moment and to seeing you have that aha, and watching that through line through what you have brought forward and the coaching stems that I see you put out into the world of seeing their root in that experience.

[00:05:00] And that's really powerful. And I'm guessing something that's really resonating with a lot of people that are out there.

[00:05:05] **Elena:** One of the things that I've been thinking about is how do we become aware of and release whatever it is we want to release. A thought process, like I'm talking about really a mindset or a rat story, or is it a relationship or is it a habit? There are things. We do that are self-sabotaging that we get something out of by doing them.

[00:05:28] So we have to acknowledge, what am I getting by telling this story or engaging in this habit or in this relationship that we know at some level is unhealthy. What are we getting? What are the fears about and what might be possible if we were to let it go to release it.

[00:05:44] The first step really is cultivating awareness of what you're doing. And as I thought back to that moment in August of 2009, there were a few things that I was like, yeah, that wouldn't have happened. If I hadn't been in a structure like this leadership course, which challenged me, which pushed me and I chose to be in that I wanted it, but it was that structure.

[00:06:08] It was having. A partner, the partner I was with became my accountability partner for the three months of the course. And that was really critical. And the other thing that I was remembering is that there were all of these writing prompts. And because I am a writer and I journal, I still have that notebook and I love being able to look back at that and seeing how I thought about that moment and what I wrote and just how.

[00:06:33] I think there's a lot of desire to change, to transform, to release the rut story or the relationship or whatever it is, but you need to have the structures and processes and routines, or it may not happen. So I'm curious, I would love to hear from you a story that reflects this question we're talking about, and I'm curious as you tell the story and you might add this afterwards, what allowed you to do.

[00:07:01] **LesLee:** Yeah, before we do that, I have two questions for you, but I'll ask on behalf of listeners that I think they might be asking. So one, I have heard this terminology so much, I'm familiar with it, but for people who aren't familiar with it, can you say one more sentence about what a rut story is?

[00:07:16] **Elena:** Yes.

[00:07:16] A rut story and that's not my phrasing. You can find the reference to it in the art of coaching we'll link in the show notes, but a rut story is basically something you tell yourself. It's a mindset. It's a series of thoughts that you have that keep you stuck. There ourselves.

[00:07:38] Different kinds of ruts stories. We tell, like the victim story, that's a really common rut story. It's a story of powerlessness. And so it's these thoughts that we have that we go over and over that we reinforce that keep us limited. Usually keep us in an emotional place of fear.

[00:08:01] Would you add anything based on how you think about the definition?

[00:08:05] **LesLee:** I remember years back being in a program with you and when you introduced it, there was a re or reverse. So the rat story, I'm such a visual person. I think of like, what is that thing that you say, or you think over and over again, so you can actually see the ground getting deeper and deeper every time you do it.

[00:08:21] I think about it, like digging a hole where it's like these things you repeat in your mind or out loud versus the river story where it's still the same. Information, so the same experience, but you can see yourself being able to move through it that you're telling a story and you're moving forward and that you're flowing with it.

[00:08:40] I think about that in relationship to our emotions. When you talk about emotions where it's either the emotions can get ahold of you. And I feel like that's when you're in that rut story. Or they can flow through you and you can see them and you can name them and you can move forward. And a lot of times when I'm trying to figure out, if I'm in a rut story, it's like, are my emotions holding me or am I able to release them?

[00:09:01] Because as soon as I released them, that's normally what I can move out of the rut and move more into the river.

[00:09:06] **Elena:** Yeah. Thanks for adding that. One of the things I've been realizing is when we talk about what you need to quit or let go of what we're really talking about is how can you fill your resilience tank?

[00:09:19] How can you thrive? How can you engage with your emotions? And so there's this framework that I use. For coaching emotions. It's one that I've been thinking about so much because I'm preparing for this new workshop on the art of coaching emotions. And I'm not ready to commit to this yet, but I keep thinking this might be a book, because it's so energizing to me.

[00:09:41] But in this process that I use for coaching emotions, it's really simple. There's just three steps. And the third step. Is to expand the story. If we want to engage in a healthy, powerful way with our emotions or other people's emotions, part of that is to learn how to expand the story. And rut stories. Like you said, they keep us stuck and they bring us down and they drain us and they are a catalyst for all kinds of emotions that many of us don't want to experience

like fear, anger, sadness. And when we're in a river story, we are able to take action and realize our goals and have the kinds of relationships we want to have,

[00:10:30] Another tool that I use a lot is the ladder of inference.

[00:10:34] And basically the idea there is things happen. And then we add layers of interpretation and that leads us to a belief. For example, this is something I reference all the time because it's one that so many of us might be able to connect with my.

[00:10:51] Husband. And I have disagreements about how to load the dishwasher. And we've been together now 25 years but we have, disagreements about cleaning and the kitchen and specifically the dishwasher. And there were many years where my interpretations and the story I told was really damaging to our relationship.

[00:11:11] And that is the. You know, he doesn't respect me. He wants to exploit my labor because I'm a woman and he's the patriarchy and all of that. That's the layers that I was adding. And it's not true. That's a major red star. And it's one that kept me from a lot of joy and fulfillment and connection.

[00:11:34] And when I shifted that story and it wasn't like overnight, these things take time and there's a lot of other digging to do to be able to fully race it, release it. It was like, now it's funny. I, you know, we have these like joking conversations and he has not changed and that's not the point.

[00:11:52] The point is not to change other people. The point is to change yourself so you can be present and in healthy relationships,

[00:11:58] **LesLee:** Yeah, I love that. And so the second thing that I was going to ask, and I think you just really talked about it is, what, if it is the case, what if he loads the dishwasher horribly or this district does feel like it is really dysfunctional?

[00:12:13] I think the way you can interpret this as like, but that's the reality you're telling me just to ignore the reality. Is that what this is? And what I just heard you say is no, it's about yourself and how you're orienting to it. But I don't know if you want to say anything else about.

[00:12:27] **Elena:** Yeah. I'm so glad you asked that, it's not like resign and just sit back and say, well, I guess this is how things are the most impactful years I

had in the school district were those after that turning point, again, if I looked at the baseline data, there were a lot of problems in the school district.

[00:12:45] But when I went into meetings in the mindset of this district is so fucked up and I went into meetings and I was looking at the other people, like they are the enemy, they're doing all these things wrong. I'm right. There were no points of connection.

[00:13:01] I was an ineffective communicator and I didn't have any traction on my ideas. When I went into meetings, thinking, how can I partner with these people? How can I understand their perspectives? How can I see a wider field than what I'm seeing? How can I look for ways to move forward? I was so much more effective and similarly, even with my husband and understand.

[00:13:24] How he thinks about the dishwasher. He actually does have some reasonable thoughts about why the bowls go on the top, where the glasses go. And in the end there are certain things which you have to say, I need to let go of this. It's not worth it. And then your energy can be directed to where it is worth it to figure out what do I do about this situation in a way that is not late in with interpretation and.

[00:13:50] My own projections. This topic we're talking about is how do we access and direct our energy. That's what it means to thrive and to be resilient. These are times when our resilience is really in general, low, two years into a global pandemic and the exhaustion of it. And how can we be very intentional about.

[00:14:14] We spend our energy doing and the conversations we have, how can they be most meaningful and powerful?

[00:14:20] **LesLee:** Okay. Thank you for that. And to your question, can I

[00:14:23] **Elena:** tell a story, please tell a story.

[00:14:25] **LesLee:** I can, I have so many stories to tell about this, sadly. When I first started thinking about this.

[00:14:31] You know, me, I'm a make my flow chart type person. And the first thing that I did was I thought about what are the realms of my life, where I am choosing to see. And then what are the ones where I'm not choosing to stay where leaving actually isn't an option and how that difference has resulted in me orienting in different ways.

[00:14:52] So where I can choose to stay or go, I can choose to stay or go in my jobs and my friendships and different chosen relationships. And really the only thing where I was like, where can I not choose?

[00:15:06] Was life more generally of just like the situations that happen or in parenting, I'm just constantly going to be in relationship with my children. That is not something that will ever end that is not an option for me. And so I really started thinking about stories where I could choose to stay or go and I needed to make that decision.

[00:15:27] And one of them, I was thinking really recently, even in my current work relationship and my role that I'm in right now at bright morning. This was a little example, but what was happening with me was that as you know, I'm a perfectionist. And when I get to the root of my perfectionism, it's this.

[00:15:47] I need to feel worthy and to feel right, and to feel like I am a value. And I was telling myself the story and really, really living into the story of overworked. Of that. I just constantly had to be producing and I had to be working constantly. I had to be getting ahead. I had to be doing the next thing that just getting through my to-do list.

[00:16:11] Wasn't enough. It was what's the next thing that's going to be valuable. And that was resulting in me working really late nights of not seeing, not working on the weekend as an option. If there was one more thing that I could do, I would do it even if I had done what was on my list for that day. And I realized that for me to stay and to truly thrive where I was at and to be in this for the, long-term not just for myself, but for the team that I'm leading and the model that I was setting for them, that that was something that I needed to stop that I have to let go of.

[00:16:47] That really isn't serving me, even though I think it tricked me into thinking that it was serving me well, because it was like, well, that's what makes me effective. That's what's made me successful and. That has led me to set my word for the year, which is boundaries. The other night it was like 10 30 and I was wrapping up my work.

[00:17:06] And I know that sounds really late, but I take a break when my kids come home and then just, do a little block at the end of the day. But when I was wrapping up my work, I went to take my laptop into bed, to finish working, getting ahead on a few more things. And I said, boundaries. And I took my laptop into the office and I put it down, plugged it in, came back and did some reading before I went to bed that night.

[00:17:26] And it really was empowering and just added this other dimension to my life. And was this baby step of having something besides just work and being a parent and getting through the slog of life that 20 minutes of reading before I went to bed was a really small thing, but it was a really important thing to help me move forward and to start seeing other possibilities that are out there.

[00:17:52] Hmm.

[00:17:53] **Elena:** I love that. And I have to say, as your boss, I love hearing that, I love hearing that you are taking ownership of that setting boundaries and shutting down and putting limits around how much you work and I think one thing you said that's so important, Reemphasize is you weren't getting something from all of that, right? Anything we do that is counterproductive, that is, in some way or another, not serving us, we are getting something from it, whether it is. The glass of wine every night or working super long hours or gossiping and complaining, we're getting something and so this first part about like really interrogating, what am I getting? And when I'm coaching and I use this framework or this modeling, you have to understand that becomes a part of your identity that perhaps unhealthy

[00:18:48] story or habit. And in order to release it, you have to release that identity. And there has to be. A new identity to step into. Think about it as, an outfit or a costume. You got to have something else to put on. Cause you're not going to stand there naked in the freezing snow.

[00:19:04] And so as a coach or thinking about ourselves, it's like, okay. So if this is who I am not going to be this person anymore, I'm not going to be a person telling a victim story or thinking that the only way for me to be valuable and worthy is by overworking then what is the story you're stepping into?

[00:19:22] That's why again, this phrasing, I use this expand the story and when we're coaching or when we're thinking about ourselves, like, so who do I want to be? What do I step in. Yeah. And I think the other thing that's so important for people to hear is that this is a process. Sometimes we talk about transformation.

[00:19:41] Like, the caterpillar coming out of. Cocoon. And it's this big moment and you immediately see that slimy little thing turned into a beautiful butterfly, but that's not really how it happens for human beings in our process. It's slow. We also sort of go forward and backwards up and down.

[00:19:57] We slip into the old patterns, the old habits, but what you said about those 20 minutes and catching yourself. We have an episode coming up that is about the end of month routines. And how do you live your commitment to your word for the year or your resolutions or your goals? Because the reason that we don't live those is they live in this beginning of the year energy.

[00:20:22] And then we forget, we dropped them. We don't turn them into habits, daily habits and practices. And that's what I hear that you did with that commitment.

[00:20:30] **LesLee:** Yeah. And I think what you were saying about the fact that it didn't just happen immediately. I can literally see that with some post-it notes that are around me, that date back from months ago.

[00:20:40] So this is January 11th, where that happened. And then I can think back to being on the airplane on the way to our retreat a month ago and listening to a podcast episode. And in that someone had said, the only role that you're not replaceable in is your family.

[00:20:58] That jobs will come and go, but it's your family. And that is a lesson that I continue to learn. I have that aha like, oh my gosh, you know, who do I want to be? And how do I want to be present? What else do I want to do?

[00:21:09] And how do I want to live? And so I was re anchored in that. What does that mean? That was sparking some of the thinking about boundaries that, happened a couple of weeks ago. And then from months ago I have this post-it from one of our team. Meetings where we were reflecting and it's St in front of me. And it says, what if it all matters? How I spent my time, what I did, regardless of what happens with my work. I'm more than my work that was from months ago. And it was just these little reflections. And so for people who are listening,

[00:21:38] what are those conversations that you had where something resonated in you where you felt a little bit warm inside or where something was sad, or you had this realization that you felt like, am I a little bit out of alignment with what I'm saying? I want it to be true or what really is speaking to my heart, but I am not living out on a daily basis right now.

[00:21:59] Our body is probably realizing that before our mind does. And sometimes like, where might I be a little bit out of whack? And then can I see that story that's holding me there and what does it take to release that? And I

really do like this thought of what do I need to step into? And that could be a different story that might also be a different relationship.

[00:22:22] I was thinking about one of the situations I was at, and it was one person who was like my trusted person and I had lunch with them every day. And I knew that this was going to be the thing that we would talk about, about how dysfunctional it was or how crappy that morning was either.

[00:22:36] How do I change that conversation immediately when we get into it, don't even let it get to that point, or start a new lunch routine, you know, what are the actual steps that you need to take to support yourself? If you truly do want to live a more. Open and empowered life.

[00:22:53] **Elena:** I love so many of the examples you gave really about how to do this and how to break this down and the process. And I think I just want to keep emphasizing, what I'm hearing is. Transformation doesn't just happen, all by self magically. There's these moments that some of them are instigated by things that you experience or hear or share.

[00:23:17] It's that moment when you notice there's something here, there's some information this resonates, and then even your reference to post it notes. To writing things down to capturing the information, the data, the reflection. And perhaps sometimes connecting with others and sharing and having a community, whether that is friends, family, coach, a therapist, there's some interplay there.

[00:23:44] This is a process. And the need for structure. And this makes me think about the podcast episode last week, which was about morning routines. And one of the things that I've been doing in my morning routines and my journaling is writing about.

[00:24:01] My word for the year and how I lived it the day before and how I plan to live at that day. And I've been realizing that without doing that it's not at the forefront of my mind and my commitment slips because the urgency takes over and the everyday everything.

[00:24:18] So much to talk about.

[00:24:20] **LesLee:** Yes, yes. And all that resonates. And as you're talking, I'm looking out of my peripheral vision that my boundaries post-it note. And when I first walked into my office the big boundary sign on my whiteboard being like,

it's the only way, because I have all of these years of operating in a way that is not in alignment with what I want to be.

[00:24:37] And so giving myself the grace and the tools and the structure to start, trying to make that pivot is really intentional, but something that.

[00:24:46] **Elena:** So, what are you as it relates to boundaries? What are you releasing? What's the story you're really saying about you and boundaries.

[00:24:57] **LesLee:** And I think there's a lot of things.

[00:24:58] I think I'm releasing this really deep belief that I exist to make other people's lives, not have to have anything hard. And then. Hmm. And that's, I mean, I know we've had different conversations.

[00:25:18] Like I exist to make your life easier. I exist so that the people that I manage don't have to feel, but the turnout, that they have as easy of a life I exist so that things are smooth with my family. I exist so that everything is done very efficiently at health. And I don't think I would ever until you asked that question and I just articulated that, that is not the way that I see myself.

[00:25:44] I am very much LA you do your thing. I'm not a pampering person. I do not coddle anybody. So saying that aloud feels really in contrast to the way that I see myself and the way that I feel like I show up. But deep down, I feel like that is the story that I'm holding on to. And if I don't do it, nobody does it that I think there's something that's probably rooted in ego too of nobody can do it as well as I can.

[00:26:12] And so therefore I'll continue to push those boundaries that, because what you said, like, I will get things out of that, right? Like I will people tell me how great it is. Things will be better. I will personally benefit because things will be smoother. There's a lot of things, but I think what I have to release to have the boundaries is that.

[00:26:31] The trade-off and me more fully and who I will be. And the life that I will have will be better if I Institute those boundaries, even knowing that there's going to be some trade-offs to that for me and for other people.

[00:26:48] **Elena:** thank you for sharing that. That's really powerful.

[00:26:52] I think I want to just add that this may or may not be the case for you, but it is often the case for many people that are our deepest sort of stories

that we hold about, who we are, are ones that were formed in childhood. And coaching and therapy are both great to understand the connection particularly when the stories are not serving our best interest, there can be a sort of entanglement with childhood and the difficulties or traumas that people experienced. And so just want to make that connection for folks that yes, there might be an ego part and there might be the social conditioning around things.

[00:27:30] And. When these stories feel super deep and you can just sort of feel that it's worth looking at who you are as a child, the role you play in your family and all of that context understand because that understanding can help you release it and have compassion for yourself to be able to look back and say, wow, That's who I needed to become as a four or five-year old to keep myself safe or to get my needs met and to be able to, as an adult, love that party herself and then release it and recognize, and now I am 41 or 52 or whatever it is.

[00:28:11] And I want to be this age and have a different relationship to the phenomenon in my life. So all of these opportunities for. Self-compassion, which is also part of the, how do you coach emotions framework? The framework is represented by the acronym ACE, which is acknowledge and accept emotions, cultivate, compassion, and expand the story.

[00:28:35] just had to say that, cause that framework is so often in my mind in coaching and in thinking about myself and that self-compassion piece is often. Leslie, thank you for sharing that felt really personal and powerful. And

[00:28:49] I appreciate hearing that. Yeah. Thank you

[00:28:51] **LesLee:** for having me.