

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript  
Episode #14  
“Finding boundaries, balance with Sarri Gilman”  
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Ken Harvey: 00:00:00 Coming up in this episode. We'll spend some time interviewing Sarri Gilman, who's a world famous psychotherapist, author and TEDxSnoIsleLibraries speaker. We chatted with her about her two books, Transforming Your Boundaries and Naming and Taming Overwhelm. We really enjoyed chatting with Sarri and we hope you enjoy this interview as much as we did. Afterwards, stay tuned for a short surprise feature.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:31 Welcome to season two and episode 14 of Check It Out! The Sno-Isle Libraries Podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.

Speaker 2: 00:00:39 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:46 So Paul Pitkin and I are here in the studio and we are actually really pleased to spend some time with noted author, speaker, and licensed marriage and family psychotherapist, Sarri Gilman. And Sarri is joining us by phone. Sarri is a world famous speaker. She's worked in private practice as a licensed marriage and family therapist since 1986, and she lives here in the Pacific Northwest on a beautiful island and I think that's the Whidbey Island.

Paul Pitkin: 00:01:14 It would be, yes.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:16 Whidbey Island. And she's the author and founder of the Transform Your Boundaries series and a more recent book entitled Naming and Taming Overwhelm. Sarri, thanks for joining Paul and me.

Sarri Gilman: 00:01:29 Oh, it's wonderful to be here. Thanks for inviting me. Happy to share with your audience too, welcome listeners.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:39 Well, and we're really pleased because we have seen the size of our listening audience continue to grow and we expect that

(Continued)

there'll be a number of individuals out there just looking forward to hearing what you have to share with us today.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:01:55 Great. Thanks for having me.
- Ken Harvey: 00:01:58 So Sarri, sometimes, the older I get, the more I see that what is simple can be very profound, and there were some very simple concepts that I felt like you shared through your TEDx Talk a few years ago, but which have really caught fire with so many individuals who viewed that talk, I think we've gotten close to 500,000 views of your talks so far. And I just wanted to say congratulations for that and congratulations for sharing something that so many of have found to be profound.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:02:36 Well, it is so incredible to hear from people who watched that TEDx Talk from all around the world and to get emails from him and to see messages if they leave on there, it is so moving and I continue to hear from them even though we taped that a few years ago, I continue to hear from people at least a weekly basis about that TEDx Talk and how it's helping them understand boundaries.
- Ken Harvey: 00:03:06 Yeah. So that talk was about the power of setting boundaries and retaining them in your life. And for those who haven't seen the talk or maybe even those who've seen it but are still having a percolate through them, would you take a minute to maybe explain a little bit more about what these boundaries are and why they help to take care of us?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:03:30 Yeah. Well, all of us have our sense of our own internal boundaries and boundaries are just your collection of very yeses and your nos. And so I like to keep that concept really simple because when you start thinking about, well, what are boundaries and do I have them? We're all born with a sense of what's a yes for us and what's a no for us, even little toddlers have that babies have that.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:03:56 So you can never lose that no matter what you've been through in life, but there are times when we really need to pay attention and do listening to our yeses and nos. And if we're not, we get into all kinds of difficulty and a lot of resentment and a lot of emotional pain. And so paying attention to your yes and no, and really listening to that compass is what the heart of that talk is about.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:04:23 And it's about my own journey, kind of learning how important boundaries are. And I just want to say all this was really before

the Me Too movement, it was before we became such a divided country politically in such a loud way. Boundaries seem more obvious now in 2018, 2019 than they may have when we recorded that talk.

- Paul Pitkin: 00:04:54 It's funny that you say that because I wonder, you say boundaries are more obvious. It seems like they're more obvious in both directions. There's people expressing their boundaries and people trampling over other people's boundaries.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:05:07 Right, it's become like this huge topic and people really want to talk about it now. And what's interesting is when we recorded it, this wasn't like considered a hot topic, then it was more introducing a concept that feels really important to everybody because we're actually always dealing with our boundaries, and now it's become a very loud topic. But I felt like I was given this huge opportunity to talk about something that I think is always essential for humanity, and that is how we deal with our boundaries and how we relate to each other.
- Ken Harvey: 00:05:47 So why do you think that boundaries actually help us take care of ourselves?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:05:54 I think it's the job of our boundaries. I think when we dig down into that compass. See, I've sat with a lot of people as a therapist over many, many, many years. And I think the more I listened to people talk from their compass and sort out their yeses and their noes and is this really right for me? Does that fit for me? When we get down into that both sorts of questions, it really becomes a question of, what will take care of you? And what's the best way to take care of you?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:06:27 Whether it's in a relationship or in a job or in your family or in your community or now in the world. What is the best way to take care of ourselves and each other? And it really is a question, there isn't a known answer, it's a question that makes us figure out how to take care of ourselves. And oftentimes we're kind of pushed to that question after we've not taken care of ourselves for so long and we're so depleted and then we come kind of crawling to get a boundary up because we're so depleted.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:07:09 I think I know the answer to this question, but is it possible for somebody to lose contact with their compass to really not understand what their boundaries are and what is good for them secondarily?

- Sarri Gilman: 00:07:26 That is a great question 'cause I get asked that a lot by people who often wonder like, can you permanently lose contact with your compass? Your compass can go quiet on you. If you ignore it and ignore it and ignore it, it will become quiet and you won't be able to hear it after a while. And it's like you've broken trust with yourself because if you've said to yourself a thousand times, "I'm going to walk out the door at 5:00 o'clock today, I'm going to end work at 5:00 o'clock, no matter what, I stop at 5:00."
- Sarri Gilman: 00:08:00 But then every time you do that, you push past that boundary and you stay late and you go to 6:00. That part of your soul is listening to you, your compass inside of you realizes you don't really mean it when you say it.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:08:16 Yeah, you're just lying to yourself.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:08:18 You don't really listen to your own boundaries. And so if you violate that trust with yourself, your compass will get quieter and quieter 'cause it'll stop giving you the information because it realizes you're not using it. And so oftentimes, I worked with people whose compass had may have gotten quieter on them and it's hard for them to hear their yes and the nos. And we have to kind of reconnect and reestablish trust with themselves that they're going to follow through on a boundary that they set.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:08:51 And think about it, all of us kind of break boundaries with ourselves all the time, but if you do it in the serious life stuff like, well if you do it for the things that really matter and really count, then your compass will start to go silent. It doesn't leave you, it is always in there, you can't lose your sense of your boundaries, but you can lose your ability to recognize what you need because you're not listening.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:09:20 And so we have to begin by listening again and reconnecting and people can always reconnect back in and reestablish trust with themselves.
- Ken Harvey: 00:09:31 So, you know, one of the things that just comes to mind Sarri when I hear you talk about boundaries and when I was watching and listening to your TEDx Talk is just thinking about different individuals and voices that I've seen and heard, who've talked about, that essentially all fences ought to be pulled down. That there should be no boundaries and because somehow the boundaries divide us or separate us and somehow they keep us from truly being who we are. And so it seems to me like they're teaching or advocating the exact opposite in some ways of what

you're advocating and they're promising that in fact, by removing the boundaries you find your better self or your greater self or your safer self. So what would you say?

- Sarri Gilman: 00:10:29 Well, I've read those spiritual philosophies myself. This is very familiar territory, and my answer to that is that it's both end. There are times when removing a boundary is a really important thing to establish a connection or to feel a sense of oneness, and you have to be really safe and in the right situation and circumstance for that. The planet that I live on currently requires-
- Ken Harvey: 00:11:07 Does that the same planet that we're living on? I just wanted to check.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:11:11 I think so.
- Ken Harvey: 00:11:11 Okay.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:11:13 I think so. The planet that we're on is really struggling with boundaries and we're not at a place where it is safe to just walk around with no boundaries because you ended up not protecting the things that need to be protected. And so we find ourselves in a mess with things like climate change, and with some very big issues that we're grappling with on this planet.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:11:40 We end up dealing with war when what it is that we want is peace. And so there's a lot of sacrifices made if we aren't examining where our boundaries are, and what our limits are and what's okay for us and not okay for us and respecting different individuals.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:12:01 So there are people that live in whole countries where they have no voice in anything, and they're living under dictatorship. And they made sure like all their boundaries have been taken away from them. So I consider that philosophy of kind of that, that state of let's just all get rid of our boundaries in day one, I consider that maybe an idealistic something that people want to move towards and maybe move towards on a spiritual level, and they have to be in a really safe container for that.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:12:38 And you have to look at kind of what's going on around us and say, "Does that make sense to the planet that we're on and the issues that we're grappling with right now?"
- Paul Pitkin: 00:12:51 We talk about this and I think this is, I've heard you talk about this, not just in TEDx but another forums. But I think that one of

the things that people have a problem with when they're talking about boundaries is that we have a very simple idea of what a boundary is, that basically, a boundary for me is I tell you to stop doing something when I don't like it. And yet, boundaries obviously incorporates so many more things. Can you talk a little bit about like the broader description of boundaries beyond what is obvious to us?

Sarri Gilman: 00:13:25 Well, I love the way you're saying beyond what is obvious to us because that would be the broader description. Beyond what is obvious, the things that we have to ask each other about. If I'm sitting with a person and their belief is that they want to feel no boundaries, they're entitled to that. That's okay, that's what they've been working on in their lives and that's what feels true for them, then that's what feels true for them.

Sarri Gilman: 00:13:58 But when I look at all the, and it's not even all the issues, I look at anything going on between people and we're all in a relationship of what is our relationship to each other? What do we agree on? What do we disagree on? Where is the respect between us? And I think of boundaries as a relationship of respect, where we're able to respect each other blinds.

Sarri Gilman: 00:14:27 And there's kind of, I like to do a lot of work on the personal boundaries between us as human beings and in our relationships and in our families and in our communities and in our work. But there's also looking at boundaries around every issue that comes up in the world around us, whether it's about recycling or if it's about, you know, whether we should use wind or if we should use gas. Is there such a thing as clean coal?

Paul Pitkin: 00:15:02 Can you be specific about how that reflects a boundary issue?

Sarri Gilman: 00:15:07 Well, if we look at how we make decisions and boundaries are about how you make decisions and decision making is all about your boundary system. And so when we make decisions about things large and small in a community, or in a city or in a country, or even the Paris climate agreement between countries, this is how we make decisions together.

Sarri Gilman: 00:15:37 And the only way to do that is to be respectfully understanding each other's boundaries and to be able to work with those as opposed to working against those and violating those, which is what we have a human history is all about.

Paul Pitkin: 00:15:54 It's almost when people talk about being like, you know, they're hard bargainer that's almost an example of somebody violating somebody else's boundaries.

Sarri Gilman: 00:16:04 Yeah. Well they can still hold their own kind of hard bargain, but they have to see if they really brought anybody to the table with them. Did they get actual consensus of somebody else's boundaries? Did they agree to it? Because otherwise you end up feeling violated.

Paul Pitkin: 00:16:24 When you feel violated, you feel resentful?

Sarri Gilman: 00:16:27 You feel resentful and wars starts, all kinds of things get started. And so we're talking about big picture thoughts here and that's really why I'm involved in kind of the whole boundary work is I think start small, work one person at a time, let us each try to grapple with these very big concepts but in a way that is simple and easy to understand. What's my yes, what's my no, what's important to me? What kind of decisions am I making? And how do I interact with the decisions of those around me?

Sarri Gilman: 00:17:04 So that's really where we are in this work on boundaries as human beings. We are just at what I would consider those beginning baby steps. We don't even have that mastered yet.

Ken Harvey: 00:17:22 So you know, Sarri ...

Sarri Gilman: 00:17:22 So for us ...

Ken Harvey: 00:17:22 Oh go ahead.

Sarri Gilman: 00:17:22 Go ahead.

Ken Harvey: 00:17:22 Finish your thought there.

Sarri Gilman: 00:17:22 So for us to look at kind of the big global issues is difficult because we really have to first master some of these beginning steps as I like to think about.

Ken Harvey: 00:17:32 Well, you know, I think that there are a lot of spiritual masters and other wise individuals out there who talk about kind of mastering self-first, is the key, creates the foundation for peace and harmony between people and nations. Right?

Paul Pitkin: 00:17:58 It does make you think about it though, that when we talk on this greater, on this bigger platform. And it's like if people don't understand their boundaries, if people don't understand the

importance of boundaries, then you can have calamitous policy that comes out of that. And that's kind of, it's interesting and it's scary and it shows the importance of what you're talking about.

Sarri Gilman: 00:18:24 Yes. And this is really why I'm in it, is because I understand that in order for us to deal with those bigger things, we have to roll up our sleeves and do this work, which is we all have to become boundary experts, all of us. We must become experts at this. And it is not easy work, just like you're saying, Ken. This is actually very challenging work to just do the work in your own life, on your own boundaries. I can sit down and talk theory with people all day long, but I'm not even interested in that because we have to roll up our sleeves and just practice becoming boundary experts and then we can have, those greater conversations because we'll be ready for the next step.

Sarri Gilman: 00:19:06 And all I can see in front of us is that most people are confused around how do we get to these beginning steps and when you listen to the noise around us, around boundaries, it sounds very loud, it sounds like a shouting match, it sounds like people are angry and confused. But ultimately I just ask us to do the work. Just start becoming an expert in your own life, start really listening to what's a yes for you, what's a no for you, and really stand up for those things. Show up honestly with your yeses and your nos, be willing to be a little more brave and courageous and instead of making an excuse for something, explain what your boundary is.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:50 Hold on. I think that this-

Sarri Gilman: 00:19:51 And use the B word.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:52 Yeah.

Sarri Gilman: 00:19:53 Don't be afraid to use the word boundary.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:55 Yeah.

Sarri Gilman: 00:19:56 The boundary for me.

Ken Harvey: 00:19:57 Well I think this is a great segue to your second book because I'm thinking back to something Paul mentioned earlier about what happens when a boundary is not respected? What happens when a boundary is crossed, and there's a sense of awe ... And I think you are, he said there's a sense of violation and your work and the work of others kind of really reveals at when boundaries are violated or crossed without permission,

there's trauma that occurs from that. And I know that your work involves dealing with a lot of individuals who, they're not starting from ground zero, they're starting in a deficit because of earlier life traumas.

Sarri Gilman: 00:20:43

Yes.

Ken Harvey: 00:20:44

And that trauma and as any of us are dealing with traumatic events or things that may cause a stress, that's where we can find ourselves in this state of overwhelm, which was your second book. So talk to us just a little bit about why you wrote this second book Naming and Taming Overwhelm?

Sarri Gilman: 00:21:14

As you dive into becoming a boundaries expert, you're going to deal with more and more challenging situations with boundaries. And at some point you can realize that you're working with situations where you're in a room with lots of people that are very overwhelmed by what they're dealing with. And we get these challenges where it's almost like our boundaries can't reach that challenge because you need the next set of skills. And our next set of skills after understanding boundaries as we have to understand how to deal with overwhelm.

Sarri Gilman: 00:21:53

Because that's kind of what happens as you move along this learning, and I noticed that as people got overwhelmed, it was really hard for them to figure out what to do next, to take care of themselves, back to that original piece of what boundaries do, which is how do I take care of you? How do I take care of myself? And overwhelmed when we get overwhelmed, we come back to the same question. I don't how to take care of myself. I'm too overwhelmed. I'm overwhelmed with circumstances.

Sarri Gilman: 00:22:27

And I may not even be able to take care of myself, it may not even be possible given the situation. And so I felt like that was the natural followup, that was where the hard questions in the room lead too. And I felt like there are certain industries that are a little more exposed to overwhelm than other industries that people work in.

Sarri Gilman: 00:22:53

So people in healthcare and human services, I felt have a lot of vulnerability to becoming overwhelmed. And so was written to really kind of take their boundary expertise a little bit further and give people a little bit more of the hand railing of what you can hold on to when you become overwhelmed, because it's very likely that many of us are going to face that.

- Paul Pitkin: 00:23:22 When somebody is overwhelmed, does that kind of similar to what I asked you about earlier? Basically they can't hear their compass, their boundary compass anymore?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:23:33 Yeah. So what happens is it something that also happens in your brain. When we become overwhelmed, the first thing that goes down inside your head is your decision making ability. And what's difficult is that we're often are challenge to make a lot of decisions when we're overwhelmed.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:23:56 Exactly.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:23:59 And it's really hard to make those decisions because our decision making kind of loosens up or breaks down, I don't know how to explain it, but it was something that I observed in people in therapy for a long time and just kept making notes about it. And then the science kind of started saying that actually there's an explanation for this, in the brain, the prefrontal cortex where our decision making is, is the first thing to kind of go down when we get too stressed or too overwhelmed. So, the science kind of caught up with what I was observing and I thought, "Oh, well that explains why I see this."
- Sarri Gilman: 00:24:42 Now in boundary work, it's all about making decisions as we were just talking about. So if you're overwhelmed, it's going to be hard to make decisions. And so first I want you to work on how to recover from being overwhelmed and not worry so much about how to make decisions.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:25:01 It's kind of a raw deal because I know when I feel overwhelmed, it's usually because I have a lot of decisions to make. And then of course, this part of my brain is making it hard for me to make decisions. That's great.
- Ken Harvey: 00:25:11 Well, some of what I pictured as I was reading your book about this Sarri was kind of getting back to that compass idea and times in which I've watched television or movies and say maybe one of the characters in the story has a compass out in there, but they're standing in a place where the magnetics are causing the compass needle to go around in circles. And so they don't know where to go. They don't know which direction to go and they're like stuck.
- Ken Harvey: 00:25:42 They are just emotionally or intellectually stuck in this place and not knowing where to go from there. And it just seems ...

Sarri Gilman: 00:25:54 And instead we all work harder when we get overwhelmed rather than stopping and taking a rest and saying, "Wow, I can't think, my compass is spinning. I've got more decisions to make than I can make." And the best thing to do is to step away from decision making and rest. But you often feel like a sense of panic inside and urgency, like you have to make decision.

Ken Harvey: 00:26:19 That you have to do something.

Sarri Gilman: 00:26:20 And you can't rest, right?

Ken Harvey: 00:26:22 Right.

Sarri Gilman: 00:26:22 And that is the worst thing to do. This is how people end up having heart attack. This is how people end up having chronic disease. This is bad for you. When you notice that you are overwhelmed, step away and step back and let 24 hours pass, let yourself kind of decompress a little before stepping in a little bit, and then trying to tackle it kind of one problem at a time.

Ken Harvey: 00:26:52 Yeah. Isn't that always what happens in the movies? That it always turns out bad when they don't know which direction to go, but they feel like they've got to make a decision and they invariably make the wrong decision and they walk straight into danger.

Sarri Gilman: 00:27:08 Yeah. Well we can look at a lot of that, that's true, Ken, for so many awful things. I'm thinking about 9/11 and all the firefighters that we lost, right?

Ken Harvey: 00:27:22 Yes.

Sarri Gilman: 00:27:23 I am thinking about a couple of other things that I can think of at a local level where it was a traumatic overwhelming situation and the outcome for the people that went in to help with pretty disastrous afterwards because there wasn't enough sort of standing back for a moment, regrouping, thinking it through, making sure all systems are working, making sure people are getting enough rest.

Sarri Gilman: 00:27:55 The most important thing to do when you were overwhelmed is to get more rest. I don't know how to say to people, unplug yourself, stop yourself, when you pull back and rest, you are going to come in so much stronger and so much safer and so much healthier to face whatever you're facing. We can't maybe change the overwhelming condition, but we can slow things down and say, you're kind of have you ever been like in a

medical situation? I was in one of these. When you're in a medical situation and suddenly the doctor comes in and says, "Look, we could do surgery, or we could do treatment, we could do ... You have these two options," and you're like, you haven't even like Googled any of this stuff.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:28:40 Up until 20 minutes ago, you didn't even know you had some serious disease, right?
- Ken Harvey: 00:28:45 Yes.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:28:46 And now you're at the next point of start making decisions and it's overwhelming in healthcare to be in that situation and to not know that it's okay to say, "I need 24 hours, I need 12 hours, I need three hours. I need to step away from this before I look at the situation, I'm going to need more information to make a decision. I need to slow this down a little."
- Paul Pitkin: 00:29:13 Sarri ...
- Sarri Gilman: 00:29:13 How much-
- Paul Pitkin: 00:29:14 Oh sorry, go ahead.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:29:15 ... and asking people how much time do I have? Can I step away from this for three hours before I make a decision? Can I step back? Is it safe to step back for 12 hours before making a decision? And sometimes, you know what sounded so urgent to you, you were being told surgery or medication is like, no, that can wait 12 hours.
- Ken Harvey: 00:29:36 Right.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:29:36 And you're like, "Oh, okay." And you can actually step outside and just get some fresh air and like decompress a little before you look at how you're going to make this decision.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:29:50 I was struck by when you talked about people when they're feeling overwhelmed and they have all these decisions to make, and they try to take a moment to themselves but they feel this panic, like they're supposed to be making a decision and it feels to me and I feel like I've felt this before, almost like, have you seen some of your patients actually go through kind of a paralysis where they're incredibly stressed but they can't make a decision?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:30:17 Right.

Paul Pitkin: 00:30:18 Which is kind of the worst feeling in the world.

Sarri Gilman: 00:30:21 Right, the brain just is not online, that is exactly how overwhelmed works. And so I like you to do things that takes the stress off the brain, and it's just like if you had tennis elbow or you had a broken arm. I wouldn't send you out to play tennis with your broken arm. We've put it in a cast and we'd say, "Give it a rest. Rest it for six weeks. Let's see how the bone heals. No tennis while your arm was in a cast." That makes sense to everybody. It's the same thing with your brain.

Ken Harvey: 00:30:56 Except to a type A workaholic.

Paul Pitkin: 00:30:57 Correct. Yeah.

Sarri Gilman: 00:30:57 Right. Same thing when it's in your brain, the best thing to do is to rest, stop problem solving. That is the one thing the brain cannot do when you're overwhelmed as problem solve. And so you take your brain away from problem solving and you give it something else to do that's relaxing, it doesn't have to solve problems for a few hours. And you're saying to your brain like, "Take a little break here. You don't need to solve any problems right now. We're going to watch TV, we're going to knit, we're going to go out for a walk. We're going to play with a dog. You don't have to solve any problem," 'cause the problem solving isn't working, it's broken.

Sarri Gilman: 00:31:36 And the only way for it to come back online is for it to go and get a good rest. And so sometimes I have to unplug people for a long period of time, like six weeks.

Ken Harvey: 00:31:48 Wow.

Sarri Gilman: 00:31:51 Six months, depending on what they've done to themselves, so that they can really come back to their full capacity and be at a really healthy place again. Now, that's not always, but if you learn to work with yourself and start recognizing your own internal signs of overwhelm and then you start treating it like, "Okay, I'm going to put a cast on my brain, I'm going to stop it from all problem solving. I'm going to do simple things. I'm going to cook something, just follow a recipe. I'm just going to do easy things where I don't have to solve problems and let my brain rest from that rather than spinning and spinning. And when my brain feels recovered then I'm going to go back to it."

Sarri Gilman: 00:32:35 You can push yourself to the point where you know it's going to take a longer time for it to heal. Go ahead. What were you gonna say?

Ken Harvey: 00:32:43 Well, I was going to say, Sarri, as I was re-looking at this book on overwhelm that you've written. I noted that there were several words that just really jumped out at me and definitely rest was one of those. And so you've been talking about unplugging and putting away the problem solving equations for a while and all of it.

Ken Harvey: 00:33:06 There were some other words too that I had wanted to just follow up with you about you. You used the word stress and you also used the word distress. And I wanted to ask you, are those two words interchangeable or what's the relationship between those two words?

Sarri Gilman: 00:33:26 Well, I think stress is a more commonly used word, so I think people are used to saying it, that they're not used to paying attention to it. I mean, how many times a day do you hear people say they're stressed? I think that word just comes at us all day long, and not just because of the industry that I'm in. It's not that [crosstalk 00:33:52]-

Ken Harvey: 00:33:51 No, you're right. I hear it. I hear it constantly, constantly.

Sarri Gilman: 00:33:55 Right, and you're in the libraries and you're running the foundation and you hear it, you're not a therapist. But I do, I hear the word all the time but I mean I hear it in the culture, I hear it all around us. Like the word stress is so commonly used, but it's almost like having somebody sneezed and you'd just say, bless you. It's like there isn't some kind of indication that means you have something going on that's very serious.

Sarri Gilman: 00:34:20 Like if you're stressed, this is serious, that means you're getting physical symptoms, that means you're having emotional symptoms. It means you need something that you're not giving yourself what's going on here. And it might mean that there's something going on around you that you can't control, but it's serious, stress is serious. Now distress, I think of distress as you reach a level emotionally where your feelings, your terror, your upsetness about something is covering you completely.

Sarri Gilman: 00:34:59 So you can be, so when you're distressed, I think of your emotions is completely covering you up and kind of in the lead. Like it's all emotional when you're in distress.

Paul Pitkin: 00:35:12 So you can't really think rationally or anything. Is that what you mean? Is it that kind of [crosstalk 00:35:17]?

Sarri Gilman: 00:35:17 You may not be able to think at all beyond the feelings because you have so many feelings going on when you're distressed, that it's all kind of emotions first. So everything that you're saying is coming out emotional, everything that you're feeling is emotional, it's just a very high peak intensity of emotions and it may not even feel like it's in your control when you're distressed, it may feel like you don't know how to help yourself emotionally.

Ken Harvey: 00:35:51 I have a perfect example for that. And I was listening to a surfer talking about being out surfing one day and he was surfing the waves and the big breakers were happening and it was really enjoying that tension, that sweet tension between hitting the wave just riding and curving along the face of that big wave, knowing that it could roll and roll over him and was handling the stress really well and experiencing both the exhilaration from the adrenaline and the cortisone, I think it's cortisone or cortisol. I can't remember which of the-

Sarri Gilman: 00:36:36 Cortisone.

Paul Pitkin: 00:36:37 Cortisone.

Ken Harvey: 00:36:38 Anyway, it was experiencing the stress but it wasn't an unpleasant thing, it was using it for enjoyment but then he did get rolled over and found himself pushed down by the wave down in the water and held down by the wave and not able to get up back to the surface. And suddenly the stress became overwhelming and there was a sense of I'm not in control any longer.

Sarri Gilman: 00:37:12 That's a really good image.

Ken Harvey: 00:37:14 And so it turned into distress.

Sarri Gilman: 00:37:14 Exactly.

Paul Pitkin: 00:37:18 This concept of distress where everything is emotional, you said, you know, that every response you have is emotional, every thought you have is emotional. This must come up when you're talking about helping married couples and things like that because I think about, you know, I think we've all been distressed and we've also dealt with people who are distressed. And when you talk to somebody who's distressed, you may say

something that you mean, that means nothing. That it's just a factual thing and their response to it is emotional. And all of a sudden from there-

- Sarri Gilman: 00:37:51 Very reactive.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:37:52 Yeah, very reactive, and all of a sudden there's a fight and it must have come up a lot when you're trying to mediate between people.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:37:58 Yes, and when I see that I tried to bring to the attention of a couple, let's talk about the stress level that I'm seeing in the room and let's talk about what else is going on that your stress is at such a peak level and that you're so distressed and so easily reactive, because that emotional reactivity comes from being in such a state of distress.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:38:30 And distress to me means I don't know how to meet my emotional needs, like I don't know how to soothe myself, I don't know how to take care of myself emotionally. And so my feelings have now gotten gripped up into such a state where I don't know how to help myself come back down. I'm just going to stay in that state of feeling.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:38:52 And a lot of stress to distress is all about what practices do we have? How do we meet our emotional needs? How do we feed ourselves when we are upset? How do we calm ourselves? How do we talk to ourselves and deal with our feelings? And you know, there isn't a lot of time given to that in our culture.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:39:18 Is it possible to be distressed and not know it so that you're having all the symptoms of being distressed, but you don't realize that you're doing it?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:39:29 Yes. And it's really helped to point out to somebody, I see that you look and sound different and you sound distress to me. I'm hearing how upset you are, what are you feeling? And help them to kind of connect to it. And oftentimes, people will notice that maybe our feelings are not proportional to what the actual experiences, right?
- Paul Pitkin: 00:40:01 Yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 00:40:01 Right.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:40:02 And so there's this lack of proportion to it, this overreacting we'd call it, we have a lot of words for this, but really the stress

and it's just, stress is met by us. Stress is cared for by us understanding how to take care of what we need and how to give ourselves what we need.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:40:24 And that's can found very selfish to people, so people don't put a lot of time on that. But that's how we take care of stress, that's how we avoid being stressed. As we look at what all of our needs are and we pay attention to them and we meet our needs, recognizing that we have more than one need, which is I've got to get that assignment done, or I have to take care of this problem. We have lots of other needs and when we learn to take care of those, our emotions calm down and we learn to feed ourselves emotionally.
- Ken Harvey: 00:40:59 So Sarri, one of the things that I just heard in your response to that question was something else that I found really fascinating in your book, and that was this whole idea of if you see someone in distress or in a state of being overwhelmed, especially if you're a professional caregiver or essentially an unpaid caregiver in a relationship with someone that, it's really important to not attempt to try and solve the person's problem but to provide them aid by being there to listen. So talk a little bit about how important it is to simply listen to others.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:41:59 You know, it's an incredible, incredible healing for us to just have somebody who cheers us, I know you've done this at the library where you've had reading rover where the dogs come in and kids read to the dog and the power of the dog of reading to the dog, that the dog doesn't say anything back. It's just listening, right?
- Ken Harvey: 00:42:25 Right.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:42:26 And listening to the reader, well it's the same thing when we're overwhelmed and when we're stressed, it is so important so that the stress emotional part of us to be heard and to be understood just by having somebody listen, listening is more important and does more for us than anything else is going to do in that moment. And just it leaves us so that we're not alone in it. Nobody has to solve anything, that dog doesn't need to say anything back to that little reader.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:43:01 It doesn't even need to say good job at the end, it is just the act of listening that help all of us. And there are all these different like little projects around the world where they have listeners, where people set up booths and they set up little benches in the community and they just sit down and people just listen to each other, storytelling, we have our story heard. But so many of us

end up isolated and alone with our pain and with our overwhelmed and with our stories, especially our stories of trauma.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:43:41 And it helps us carry those when somebody else is listening and then we don't have to hold it alone. And we know that we're also, that part of us is also seen and recognized by somebody else. So that when somebody sees you after they've listened to you and they know where you're at, they're able to just acknowledge you, just by looking at you, you feel more seen and more visible and you're not all alone with the overwhelming pain.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:44:11 And it's that aloneness with it that really destroys us from the inside out. Aloneness is like the worst thing for people because human beings just aren't made for that, we're like pack animals, we are social creatures.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:44:30 It's such difficult thing, you're talking about listening to somebody and just listening and not trying to problem solve. Sometimes a really difficult thing to do, I think our impulse is to jump in and problem solve rather than listen. And that's a tough skill to develop.
- Ken Harvey: 00:44:50 So Sarri, I want to give us a chance. Take a little break here. I want to remind the audience that we are talking with Sarri Gilman who is a local author and a psychotherapist, family and marriage therapist and has done a TEDx talk for Sno-Isle Libraries and we're going to be right back with her in just a minute.
- Speaker 5: 00:45:13 When you give to the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation your gift touches generations, your donation helps turn babies and young children into readers, turns students and first time entrepreneurs into successes, and helps maintain the lifelong learning of adults, seniors and our home bound neighbors. You can be part of the change you're looking for. Your one time gift, monthly gift or memorial gift can make all the difference. Please consider investing in children, seniors, and others through the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation today.
- Ken Harvey: 00:45:44 If you have a great library experience you'd like to share with us, we would love to know about it. Drop us a line at [Checkitoutpodcast@Snoisle.org](mailto:Checkitoutpodcast@Snoisle.org). Again, that's [Checkitoutpodcast@Snoisle.org](mailto:Checkitoutpodcast@Snoisle.org), all one word. Who knows, we might even invite you to share your story on our future podcast.

Ken Harvey: 00:46:04 Okay, so we are back on the phone with Sarri Gilman and Paul Pitkin and I are having a delightful conversation with her. We're talking about a her two books, Naming and Taming Overwhelm and also her book about boundaries and I just really Transforming Your Boundary.

Sarri Gilman: 00:46:27 Transforming Your Boundary.

Ken Harvey: 00:46:27 Yeah. So we were talking just before the break about the relationship between stress and distress, and we were talking about the need for rest, and the need to listen to others when we see them becoming overwhelmed or in a state of overwhelm. I was wondering, Sarri, if the state of overwhelm is something that's actually scalable because in your book you start off talking and a kind of addressing it on an individual level kind of at a personal basis and then you address some of your chapters directly to healthcare practitioners and professional caregivers.

Ken Harvey: 00:47:16 But then you expanded even further, so do you want to talk a little bit about that kind of how it can scale up?

Sarri Gilman: 00:47:24 Yeah, so it's kind of the ripple in a pond, because I noticed that when we talk about overwhelm, I can't just talk about overwhelm individuals, because whole organizations can be overwhelmed, whole cities and towns can get overwhelmed like we saw in Flint, Michigan with the water crisis. The fires in California.

Ken Harvey: 00:47:54 So this is like the camp fire, fire ...

Sarri Gilman: 00:47:55 Right. Our whole country can be overwhelmed by an issue that's happening at a national level. So overwhelm happens to us, it scales up. And so I notice that, well, what do you do when it scales up? What do you do the same thing? Except you have to spread the practices, rule in all organizations, rule with systems, just like people do I guess disaster preparedness, right?

Ken Harvey: 00:48:32 Yes.

Sarri Gilman: 00:48:34 It's like, you know, you have to also do overwhelm release. Rule with system and in organization and oftentimes I'm called to, I'm more often called to non-profits because that's the world in which I worked for a long time and the whole non-profit can be overwhelmed or the whole city is overwhelmed, and people are saying to me, "Well what do you do with that kind of overwhelmed?"

- Sarri Gilman: 00:49:01 And it's the same thing, I worked with a bunch of climate change, scientists, who were feeling overwhelmed and I worked with them just on the same processes, and it's the same process. We still have to be able to acknowledge our feelings, we still have to listen to the person that is overwhelmed. And oftentimes we go into overwhelming situations and people start just giving out more information and just overwhelming people further, rather than going into the situation first, no matter what the situation, whether it's a school building, a community, a tribe, an entire group, and first going and listen, first listen.
- Ken Harvey: 00:49:55 You know what I find so interesting about what you're saying is, and some of my previous work in emergency management and crisis management from disasters and all, is there was a portion of the training and work that I did around the critical incident mass casualty incidents and then critical incident stress debriefing, where something really bad or traumatic happens and it may happen to a number of individuals or might only happen to one individual. And yet, what happens is so traumatic that if a death occurs or injury occurs, it's so traumatic that it affects those who come to give aid.
- Ken Harvey: 00:50:41 And that if you don't spend some time with those individuals or the organization, and essentially forced these individuals who are trained to do something, that's their job. They react, they respond, that they go in and they do something. But if you don't help them after they've done something to actually sit down and listen and just listen to them and let them tell the story.
- Ken Harvey: 00:51:10 And really kind of work at, bring it to the surface so that it's not just inside it really has a very corrosive effect inside them, and quite often leads to individuals perhaps resigning their positions later or making bad decisions, doing some harm to themselves.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:51:30 Yeah, let me speak to that from a trauma standpoint. You know, people often call me and say, we're like come and speak to group on trauma, there's been an incident, blah, blah, blah, something very specific has happened somewhere. And I say to them, I'm not going to come speak. I'll come listen like what needs to happen is the people that are affected just first need to be heard.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:51:54 And that is what happens first but often time during a trauma, people want to bring people together and they have to listen to a bunch of people speak to them, and that's really not the first response. The first response is just go in and listen so that people can get heard and not be so alone in their distress.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:52:19 So that's what trauma but also what overwhelmed, you know, I've seen in organizations and I've seen companies that aren't experiencing any kind of trauma, but they are completely overwhelmed inside how they're operating their business, how much stress employees are having, how short staff they are and how overloaded everybody is? And so sometimes it's about load and people aren't listening to how overloaded they are, and then they're not problem solving because everybody up the line is also overloaded.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:52:56 So I'll see a whole system that maybe isn't experiencing any trauma, but they're completely overwhelmed. And then the CEO will say to me, "We want to know how to help them not be so overwhelmed," it's like, "Well, how much are you listening to how overloaded they are?" Well, we just need them to do more stuff, I don't know. How are you listening to how overloaded they are? How are you hearing it? How are you getting your input? And what are you going to do about that?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:53:27 Because once people are overloaded they stopped communicating with each other. So inside of the work office or inside of the community, people stop responding to each other, because they're too overloaded.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:53:39 It makes me wonder, when you're talking about overwhelmed, communities are overwhelmed organizations, people within or people who've experienced trauma. Do these people ever, can you become so overloaded or traumatized that you actually cannot express yourself to be heard? Can you be sort of cut off from your experience so that you can't really be heard? You can't talk, express yourself well enough to be heard?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:54:08 Yeah. Well that can be an experience from trauma is that it can take a while for a person to feel like they can find the words and sometimes just sitting with them until they can do that is really important. And maybe they don't have the words, but they can be with other people who do have the word, and other people can express and they can at least be in the room and able to listen. But I just want to make that distinction that when I wrote the book on overwhelm, I see trauma as inside of overwhelm as a part of overwhelm. But I see overwhelmed as its own thing as well that you don't have to be traumatized to be overwhelmed, but you can be traumatized and be overwhelmed, it can be both.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:54:58 And you can also be overwhelmed and not be traumatized at all, but you can be completely overwhelmed and experiencing all the symptoms of numbing and shutting down and not being

able to figure out how to get yourself out of overwhelm. And so when you ask about scalability, it's interesting, I'm trying to make the work accessible to people online through online classes where they can just do it in small groups as a team and work together on their own overwhelm and look at strategies to get out of being overwhelmed.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:55:36 And I've been invited to do something nationally with representatives from every one of our states, who's work with health care workers to have big time overwhelmed.
- Ken Harvey: 00:55:51 Wow. That's fantastic.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:55:53 Yeah, and I'll be working with them kind of on across the country. And so the work is scalable, it's the irony about overwhelmed is that our solutions are actually very simple things to do. It's like saying yes in chicken soup, it's very simple things ironically that help us get relief from being overwhelmed. But we have become so sophisticated and so technological that like we're overlooking the simple things that helped us, so I'm kind of a voice for that.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:56:28 Yeah. The culture programs as the problem solve all the time.
- Ken Harvey: 00:56:31 Yeah, you wish that it was intuitive but it actually ends up being counter-intuitive.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:56:35 That's interesting and that we're in a culture problem solving all the time and I'm saying like, "We have to take a rest from that."
- Paul Pitkin: 00:56:45 Exactly. It's like the culture is constantly telling us to do what is actually making us more overwhelmed.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:56:51 Exactly.
- Ken Harvey: 00:56:52 So Sarri, what are you hearing from workshop participants as they go through this with you?
- Sarri Gilman: 00:56:59 Well, I will say, what has surprised me when people do this is how much grease comes up in the room for people. Now I've learned to expect that, but I'm surprised at how attentive people are to it and how much it helps them immediately. And I tried to even make the workshops themselves not to be overwhelming, like every part of it is very well-thought about. And I actually do the things in the workshop that helped bring people together so that they can experience what it's like to

come out of some of their own overwhelmed, can share about it honestly.

- Sarri Gilman: 00:57:47 And I got to do that with a collection of all the hospitals in our state with their chief medical officers. At first it was a little intimidating, I can know how would they hear this, they get trained on everything. And we really worked on the distinction between overwhelm and burnout. Like I don't like saying like in our culture, we really talk about how to treat burnout and what happens when people get burned out, and how awful it is that people are burned out and how to help them do more self-care.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:58:25 But I really think that the system's burn people out. And so I think when we say the word overwhelm, we're taking it off of people's shoulders and we're sharing the responsibility and owning it and saying the system is burning people out. And the healthcare, the medical officers that I was working with, things really resonated with that because they were like, "Yeah, our system does burn people out. It is part of a systemic issue that we are overwhelmed," and they could own that. And I think once you're in a room with people that start owning the truth about this, when we change our language a little bit, what we call things really helps people to heal those better than. And I think overwhelmed is, it feels different than the word burnout.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:59:13 Does the burnt out sound hopeless?
- Paul Pitkin: 00:59:16 Well, it's always, it reminds me of people, oh, that guy's a burnout or she's a burnout, they burned out.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:59:23 Yeah, it's like your fault.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:59:24 Yeah, it's like you crashed and burned.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:59:25 It's like you're being blame, somehow it's your fault and it sounds very hopeless. Overwhelm is more of a condition that I think is like a state of being that a lot of us, we can all say we've been at, at different points, different days, different times and it doesn't have the stigma.
- Paul Pitkin: 00:59:42 And it's easier to wrap your mind around it too, I think as a concept. Just saying, "Oh, I got to fix the fact that I'm burning out, it doesn't really ..." Like you said, it's hopeless and you can't really wrap your mind right.
- Sarri Gilman: 00:59:55 And you're alone in it. So if we will send you home we say, "Do your self-care because you're burned out," and it's like you have

to fix this by yourself while you're burned out rather than I'd like us to use an approach that is different and that's why I wrote that book to give people a different way to look at that.

- Ken Harvey: 01:00:11 Well, it's interesting to me that sometimes the systems that we attach ourselves to are self-replicating and so they want us to constantly reach higher work faster, grapple harder and bigger problems. And so it can in some ways kind of create almost impossible expectations to live up to. And those are all layered on top of whatever we might've come out of childhood with and what we might be a refugee from.
- Ken Harvey: 01:00:54 And so I just think it's interesting how, especially someone who's going into a decision making career or, well, I think every career almost all have some decisions associated with them, but especially individuals who find themselves with some title or authority.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:01:14 Right? Look at what happened with Elon Musk in the news recently, right?
- Ken Harvey: 01:01:19 Right.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:01:20 I was watching that unfold and all I was thinking was this, he's completely overwhelmed, somebody throw him a lifeline, look at what he's saying this is every sign of overwhelmed. And I felt such concerned and distressed readings what was happening with him and what he was saying out loud. And I felt like nobody around him understood that he was completely overwhelmed.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:01:50 Like he was saying, "I haven't slept in days." He was describing overwhelmed. He's saying, "I have tough days. I haven't seen my family in a year." It was like, at what point do you step in and go, you need to rest, dude.
- Paul Pitkin: 01:02:05 Yeah, take a month off.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:02:09 You need to rest. And that's what you're saying like with we've become so complicated and we're expected to solve tougher and tougher and more and more challenging problems. And sometimes that's not really how to go about something.
- Ken Harvey: 01:02:25 Well in your book, you wrote about one person and an executive director of a non-profit who you spend a little bit of time with and she mentioned that she was dealing with a lot of frustration around beetles. Would you mind just sharing that

story a little bit? Because I thought that it was really profound of what can happen to any of us, whether we're an executive director or just a homemaker or working in our garage or working in our yard and what can happen to us.

Sarri Gilman: 01:03:05 She had this vision of what she was going to do in her job as an executive director. But you're right, you could have had this vision of what it was going to be like to be a mom or what it was going to be like to start a company. Whatever your vision was, so she had this vision of what she was going to be doing, but when she got to the job, she was really dealing with, there was literally a beetle infestation in the walls of the building that she was working in. And she has to deal with raising all this money and doing demolition and rehabilitation and fixing walls with a beetle infestation. And she was so upset about it because she wants it to get on and do this whole other vision.

Sarri Gilman: 01:03:51 And she's like, "I cannot perceive here," and I'm so overwhelmed by this, there's all these beetles, how do I do my vision and just deal with the stupid problem? This stupid little problem is the problem, like that is on your desk. That is what you have to deal with, it's not the idea of the imagination of what we hope we're going to get to deal with. It's the beetles in the wall, it's the thing that shows up on our desk that we didn't really want to be doing, but it is the thing that requires our attention and if we don't give it our attention it's going to grow and it's going to become an infestation.

Sarri Gilman: 01:04:33 And I would say that's very similar to what happens with overwhelmed. If we don't give it our attention, it's going to spread and it's going to spread throughout an entire company an organization, a whole city, a whole water system, a whole town. It's just going to spread. And so she realized that she needed to then go back and just for a couple of years deal with raising the money and dealing with the beetles in the wall. And then she went on to do a great vision after that but it took time to do with all those beetles. And it was a profound lesson for her and I think for any leader.

Ken Harvey: 01:05:11 Yes. I think you're right. And I so appreciated reading that story because sometimes we need permission, or we need to give ourselves permission or to receive permission to just reset expectations and just deal with what's in front of us, or just to sit back and not try and solve it immediately, but just be given time to think it through and be given more information, better assess the situation before having to make a decision. And sometimes we just don't give ourselves enough time.

Sarri Gilman: 01:05:51 Yeah, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 01:05:52 So what do you do to unplug?

Sarri Gilman: 01:05:57 Well, I love to knit, so I have almost enough yarn in my house to open my own store. It is something I do a lot of and I say that knitting is, has the same effect on your brain as meditation does.

Ken Harvey: 01:06:13 Wow.

Sarri Gilman: 01:06:13 So I knit, I also do have a meditation practice, I journal, I'm a really big into writing and I also have like a morning writing practice where the first thing I do when I opened my eyes as I pull out my journal and my pen, even before I go to the bathroom.

Ken Harvey: 01:06:34 Really?

Sarri Gilman: 01:06:35 Yep, and I just write a couple pages. I'm not trying to write anything interesting. I might be writing down a dream or just thoughts that I'm having, whatever it is before I even get up out of bed.

Ken Harvey: 01:06:44 So that's the first thing you do, you are truly a disciplined person.

Sarri Gilman: 01:06:50 That is the first thing I do.

Ken Harvey: 01:06:53 Wow.

Sarri Gilman: 01:06:54 I believe in all of this stuff. I've been using it a long time and I'm a fairly calm person. And I deal with a lot of challenging situations and I have to keep my balance, I also exercise most mornings of the week before I sit down and seek clients, I exercise first. So I have a lot of practices, I also do cross country skiing in the winter and in the summer I do kayaking.

Ken Harvey: 01:07:30 So you take self-care seriously.

Sarri Gilman: 01:07:31 I take self-care very seriously and I also see my friends, I socialize, I spend time hanging out with friends. And I would say the friend piece was the later piece to come on, all of these practices have been developed over many, many years and I'm just now started guitar lessons again. So that's a self-care thing that I do to relax. And I used to play guitar a lot and it got away from me and so I committed to a year of lessons.

Sarri Gilman: 01:08:05 So I'm like in my fourth month of lessons again. So I do a lot of these things, people on Whidbey Island will see me jogging out on the road and they may be a client of mine and they'll say, "Oh my gosh, I saw you out jogging, and I know you're always telling me exercise is good for you. It's nice to see you doing it." And I love when people catch me doing the thing that I talk about doing, so that they see that I do it as well.

Paul Pitkin: 01:08:35 Well, I imagine when you're trying to reconnect somebody to their boundary compass and you're saying you got to ... you actually have to honor some of these boundaries that you make for yourself and then it's good that they can look to you and say that you're, "Oh, I'm going to take guitar lessons for a year," and you actually do it.

Sarri Gilman: 01:08:54 Yeah. And I just recently stolen to this collaging process called Soul Collage. So I went and trained and became a facilitator and I've been spreading that work because it feels like really good self-care because you really get to listen to yourself, it's a good practice. So I spent an embarrassing amount of time doing self-care, a lot of it, like I know I shouldn't say it out loud because people will be like, "Oh my God, no way, I can't do that."

Sarri Gilman: 01:09:27 And so I don't want them to feel like they can't do it, but I start out every day at least two hours of self-care before I dive into doing anything else. That's a lot of self-care time.

Paul Pitkin: 01:09:39 It takes a lot of discipline too.

Ken Harvey: 01:09:41 Well I'm impressed that you kind of listen to yourself and apply it.

Paul Pitkin: 01:09:46 Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 01:09:46 Hey, we've only got a couple more minutes and I wanted to just mention that, I heard that you are working on another book and so I wanted to just give you a chance to maybe tease our audience about what you got coming up next.

Sarri Gilman: 01:10:04 Oh, the next book is on trauma and healing, and it's a look back at decades of experiences, it's all story about all the different ways that I've seen people heal from trauma and that there's no particular one path, there's no one thing that works for everyone. But there is an understanding that there's many paths towards healing with trauma. And so I'm writing this up to really share how wide that sense of path is so that people don't give up, and to share some stories of things that I have found a

lot of hope in over the years of seeing people heal from trauma, even when it felt hopeless.

Ken Harvey: 01:10:56 So when do you think readers might expect to see that available on the market?

Sarri Gilman: 01:11:03 Well, I'm excited to say the book is written. So now I'm in rewrite and I'm in-

Ken Harvey: 01:11:10 So is this where all your early morning journaling is coming in, and coming in handy?

Sarri Gilman: 01:11:15 No. I wish, I wish I could get up and start writing a book. No, I have to work with my dreams in the morning. I'm not sure how long the rewrite is going to take at this point, because of what I understand about stress, I don't like putting a fourth date on myself.

Ken Harvey: 01:11:34 And I don't want to do that to you, so I don't want to create any overwhelm.

Sarri Gilman: 01:11:39 Yeah, I would expect to see the book sometime next year.

Ken Harvey: 01:11:44 Oh, okay. Well I think that's good.

Sarri Gilman: 01:11:45 Yeah, I already did some readings from it in public. Yeah, I've wanted to test out how people feel about the material and if they feel as emotional about it as I do and or as touched by the stories as I am. And I got to roll some out and I'll continue to do that, just share excerpts where I can to make sure it's touching people.

Ken Harvey: 01:12:11 Well, Sarri, we only have about a minute left and I did want to just kind of get your thoughts about your experience with the public library or Sno-Isle Libraries in particular and what your feeling is about libraries and Dewey, the internet is out there, should we even exist this anymore? Is there a need for a library?

Sarri Gilman: 01:12:37 It would be like saying, is there a need for democracy? Because in my book, libraries are one of the incredible protectors of democracy, just like journalism is, public schools are and libraries are, these are kind of our pillars of democracy actually and I love knowing ... First of all, I don't know how many people listening spend as much time walking into their library to see, because you can get so many books downloaded now from the library.

- Sarri Gilman: 01:13:10 Like you don't have to go to the library, the library goes to you. But when I go into the library, those computers are always in used. I remember when the library is first put computers in and I was thinking, "Wow, I wonder how this is gonna work." Well they are always in used, the library is always looking at how to share resources in the community that everyone can have and how significant is that.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:13:41 And if things, you know, the other thing is that you can look all kinds of things up online, but I don't trust a lot of that, like when I do research for my books and I need to like verify information. The first person I turned to was a researcher at the library.
- Ken Harvey: 01:13:58 Really?
- Sarri Gilman: 01:13:59 Because I know I'm going to get accurate information back, I know they're going to show me research that is reliable, and the stuff that I find on Google or Wikipedia is questionable. I know that librarians are particularly good at researching and finding the truth and finding as much information as you can on subjects. So there's a lot of resources that our libraries particularly Sno-Isle that are, I'm always referring people to like when people are like changing jobs and they need help doing a resume.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:14:36 We have people at the library that will help you do a resume. If you're starting a business, we have a whole library system that will help you with your small business getting started. We have one of the library helps with non-profits and fundraising. I mean, these are resources that you can't get anywhere else.
- Ken Harvey: 01:14:56 Yeah, and if you had to buy each one of them, it would be pretty expensive.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:15:03 Oh my God, the education that I got doing TEDx with Sno-Isle Libraries with an education that just upped me by like 20 years of how to think of an audience online, how to work with people that are listening and learning through an online platform.
- Sarri Gilman: 01:15:23 I've learned so much by just preparing my TEDx Talk that I would not have learned because people don't know that behind the scenes we also received coaching and understanding and learning about TEDx as a platform. And I just learned a whole lot about how online things work for learning that I wouldn't have known otherwise and I've used it in my business. Now, I have an online school because so many people come to me came to TEDx who then want more. So, it just forced me to create things

that I wouldn't have even thought about had I not done with TEDx.

Sarri Gilman: 01:16:07 But I also think it protects their democracy. I think about so many people, including myself, the first classroom that we have was the library.

Ken Harvey: 01:16:20 That's true. That is true.

Sarri Gilman: 01:16:22 You know? Right?

Ken Harvey: 01:16:22 Yeah.

Sarri Gilman: 01:16:24 That's our first classrooms and it still is, it's your first classroom and that's not going to change but that protects our democracy. It's recently an important resource, we have to have some place in our communities that hold all of this knowledge that is freely shared so that we all have the same information, and we all have access to information, whatever that information is, whether it's online information or information in book. However you get it, you guys even rent out toys for children, you can get iPads, you can get toys, you can get all these things borrowed at the library and these are ...

Sarri Gilman: 01:17:12 I remember bringing home all those math games that you guys have at the library, which were unbelievable because they don't have them in regular stores, but they were great to use with kids. So, there are just so many things and the programs that you offer, I just say to people all the time, even in therapy when they want to break their loneliness, I say, "Look at the programs happening at the library and see if there's something you can go to."

Ken Harvey: 01:17:43 That is incredibly accurate that so many people are using the library as a way of really socializing themselves and becoming part of the community, because more and more people are using the library. This is a gathering place.

Sarri Gilman: 01:17:56 Yes, Mukilteo has like a knitting club that meets there. Yeah, there's all kinds of gatherings could happen at the library.

Ken Harvey: 01:18:06 Well, Sarri, this has been an incredible time being, having spent this with you and really appreciate what you have shared with us and with the listeners.

Paul Pitkin: 01:18:16 I got to say real quick that, once this particular podcast gets posted I have several people I'm going to direct to listen to it. That's how good it was.

Sarri Gilman: 01:18:26 Oh good. Well, thank you so much for having such a thoughtful conversation, that's really nothing I like more.

Ken Harvey: 01:18:33 Well, it has been incredible not only having you on this podcast, but also working with you through the TEDx process and the other interactions you'd have done so much for the community in different roles that you've played and it's clear that you're continuing to make an impact around the world. So, gosh, we just love having you as part of the Sno-Isle Libraries family.

Sarri Gilman: 01:19:00 Well, thank you so much. I love being part of it and I love what you guys are all bringing to the table. So thanks team and everybody have a great day out there who's listening.

Paul Pitkin: 01:19:10 Thanks a lot, Sarri.

Ken Harvey: 01:19:11 Yeah, thanks Sarri.

Ken Harvey: 01:19:21 Well that was really interesting having that conversation with Sarri, what'd you think?

Paul Pitkin: 01:19:25 I thought, I mean, there were so many different levels and so many different places, and so many different things that I've recognized in other people and myself that you never really understood as a boundary issue or something being overwhelmed, something being a symptom of overwhelm or the emotionality of distress. I've seen all these, you see these behaviors every day and yet we just go, "Oh, that person's in a bad mood, or that person's, you know, high strung today," or something like that. And we don't put them in these, look at it the way that Sarri was talking about.

Paul Pitkin: 01:20:00 And I was also really fascinated by how much of all that these things that we think of as separate things really do come down to boundaries. And if you are-

Ken Harvey: 01:20:08 Absolutely.

Paul Pitkin: 01:20:09 ... respecting your boundaries, you have a better chance of not experiencing overwhelm. And if people come together and they respect each other's boundaries, they might make better public policy decisions and might be able to deal with community

overwhelm. I thought that the way that it intersected was fascinating.

Ken Harvey: 01:20:27 Yeah. Well one of the things I didn't mention during our conversation with Sarri was that, I actually had the distinction of being a poster child for overwhelmed. Earlier in my career, I was on the front page of a newspaper, my wife and I, and the headline was exhaustion and it had to do ...

Paul Pitkin: 01:20:49 So you literally were the poster child.

Ken Harvey: 01:20:50 Yeah, it was all about my not being able to set boundaries and saying yes to everything, not wanting to disappoint anyone. And so someone would want me to be on a board, I'd say, "Okay." And if someone wanted me to do something after work, I'd say, "Okay," and then, but the problem is, is that when you're saying yes to everything, you're actually saying no to maybe some things that really matter and but you essentially start running out of steam and I was running out of steam at that point and hit the wall, had a kind of an emotion and not an emotional break but a physical break.

Ken Harvey: 01:21:22 So I mean, so much of what she was saying I had lived it through, and so I really appreciated her talking about listening to that compass and keeping those boundaries in place and then dealing, and ways of dealing self-care wise and with being overwhelmed.

Paul Pitkin: 01:21:42 No. And it's always something, as we talked about in the podcast where when you're being told by the culture to always be problem solving and always charging forward and always pushing, it's counter-intuitive for people now, which is sad but to do what Sarri was saying, step back, don't make a decision.

Ken Harvey: 01:22:00 Or unplug.

Paul Pitkin: 01:22:01 And unplug.

Ken Harvey: 01:22:02 That smart device.

Paul Pitkin: 01:22:03 Oh from that phone you've been staring at for the last three hours. Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 01:22:06 Right. Hey, so one of the things just wanted to let our audience know a lot of the things that Sarah was talking about, you can find in the Sno-Isle Libraries catalog. You can go in and you can put in the search engine the words overwhelmed or trauma or

guilt or distress or stress. A lot of those things, we've got things in our collection that you might find very helpful in taking advantage of.

- Ken Harvey: 01:22:35 Coming up next, a spotlight on a community hero.
- Selma Bonham: 01:22:41 Hello, my name is Selma Bonham, I am 93 years old, I lived in the Mill Creek area for more than 20 years. I was born and grew up in Hartford, Connecticut, went to Penn State studied geology and did a master's degree at Stanford, finished in 1949. There weren't very many women majoring in geology in those days.
- Selma Bonham: 01:23:14 I was active in a lot of different groups after I retired in 1985, I think the first day we came to Mill Creek, I had to see the library up, I loved libraries for my entire life. And I thought I would learn about the community in a region. And sure enough, there was a small busy library still there and too small but very busy and active. And made many friends in the library, especially in a book discussion groups and that it's been going for 15 years which is very unusual for her book group. I organized the panel discussions and one of them was on a Patriot Act.
- Selma Bonham: 01:24:08 I guess it was World War II, I was in high school. They had identify aircraft in the library, we were worried about the German planes coming over in the east coast. So the library was a source of support in World War II. First, they didn't want girls in the group, but I managed to be allowed in and identify German aircraft and rolled bandages and shell books and check the shelving. It was fun for me.
- Selma Bonham: 01:24:52 I think my father who worked in a department store was one of the first to hire a black person as a salesperson, they could do menial jobs, but as a salesperson that was a first. That kind of thing really affected me. I saw that this could be done and that there are ways to improve our country, and I think that, that never leaves you once you're affected, you see how changes are made and how you can participate.
- Selma Bonham: 01:25:27 I guess, it was when I was the secretary of friends of the Mill Creek Library and the managing library, "Oh, February is African-American month. What can we do?" And I had been active in peace group in Lake Forest Park and I said, "Oh, let's have a flash mob," start singing the classic we shall overcome in the middle of an evening, not a very busy time. We just started singing and people joined in, everyone knew the song.

- Selma Bonham: 01:26:33 The event was actually successful, we did it over and over again about four or five times, I think. The Mill Creek Library does a fantastic job with the facility that they have. It's a center of the city to me, I mean Sydney Hall is the Political Center, but the library is the cultural center it seems to me.
- Speaker 5: 01:27:11 Hey, parents, your two to six-year-old is sure to enjoy the High Five Magazine available online from Sno-Isle Libraries. Treat your favorite preschooler to age appropriate stories, poems, puzzles and activities, every issue free to download with your library card from Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Ken Harvey: 01:27:30 If you enjoy this podcast, please subscribe so you can receive every episode automatically. And until next time, remember your library has a lot to offer you. So what are you waiting for? Check it out!