



Co-Hosts: Dr. Daphne Scott and Dr. Katie Hendricks  
Episode 37: Are You a Burned Out Heroic Leader?  
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**Daphne Scott:** Welcome to the Super Fantastic Leadership Show podcast with Daphne Scott and...

**Katie Hendricks:** Katie Hendricks!

**Daphne:** This is *the* podcast devoted to supporting you in leading at the highest levels of effectiveness with the greatest levels of fun, and not burning out.

**Katie:** And not burning out, which has something to do with what we're going to talk about today.

**Daphne:** Yes, it does, which is burning out. We're not going to talk about burning out as much as we're going to talk about, "Hmm, what is burning out really all about?"

**Katie:** So we're going to do a dive into it.

**Daphne:** We are. We're going to dive into it and talk about sustainable performance and how we create that for ourselves and what that looks like. We're in particular obviously talking about it in the context of leadership. I think we're going to reframe this a little bit too, Katie.

**Katie:** I love it. I'm over here clapping my fingers and thinking about that most of us have this whole idea of being our best, you know, aiming for being our best and achieving and getting there. We don't really give a lot of attention to sustaining. I think sustaining is such an important word, and I'm really glad we're going to dive into that today.

**Daphne:** Yeah, great. You actually just sparked a thought in me of something else around sustaining and being the best. I'm going to make sure I grab that and bring that into the show. But before we embark on our path, let's share some appreciation. I want to say a word about why we start the show with appreciation. What's that all about?

**Katie:** That's a very good point.

**Daphne:** Yeah, because we're 37 episodes in here. I like to put my attention on things I appreciate, because I know when I do the impact it has on me for my openness and my curiosity

and my learning. I really like to bring appreciation into many, many things in my life, but in particular when we start the shows. I think it's a very valuable practice. It's a mood elevator for me.

**Katie:** Wonderful. I hear the personal experience that you have, and I imagine other people have that as well. It's also confirmed by research... One of our intentions with you all who are listening is to create a thriving relationship with you so that the whole podcast occurs for you as something that is nourishing and enlivening.

When you have a higher ratio of appreciation... We don't start our episodes out by complaining about everything that's wrong. That would create a completely different kind of atmosphere. We're using appreciation as the context in which the show occurs. I love that we've chosen to do that. I want to appreciate you, Daphne.

**Daphne:** Oh, well, thank you.

**Katie:** It occurred to me how much I appreciate you, and I don't think I've actually done that on the show. There are many things I appreciate about you. One is your fountaining energy. You seem to have an endless source of energy that bubbles up. It's not like a tsunami. I don't feel overwhelmed by it, but I always feel buoyed and refreshed by coming into contact with you. That's one of the things I most appreciate about you.

I also appreciate how smart you are in a way that I really love. You're open to having new things come in and affect you. You're open to being impacted by life and integrating what you're learning and letting that allow you to become more of who you are. I think because you have that, wherever you show up, other people get to experience that same kind of enlivening and learning and renewal. So those are two of the many things I appreciate about you.

**Daphne:** Well, thank you, Katie. I'm really breathing that all in. Thank you. That really landed in my heart.

**Katie:** Oh good. I'm so glad.

**Daphne:** Thank you so much for appreciating me. I appreciate you so much, and I love doing the show with you. We have a great time. So thank you so much for sharing that with me. Well, now let's talk about what we can appreciate about this idea of burning out. Katie and I were giggling before the show, as we typically do, that the past couple of episodes have sort of had these themes.

We did one on stress. That was a couple of weeks ago. Then we looked at office space and how to create more engagement for ourselves, and now we're talking about burnout. There's a little overlap here with episode 35, which has to do with how we think about things and such, so you can go back and listen to that. What I really want to make a point of when we talk about burnout is I'm not talking about stress. I'm talking about a lack of vitality.

**Katie:** You're talking about depletion.

**Daphne:** Yes, and I find that people confuse these two. Certainly being depleted probably feels stressful, but this is not the same thing. I'm talking about a complete depleted lack of vitality.

**Katie:** I'm so glad you're bringing up that distinction. In one of our recent episodes, we talked about the drought here in California, and one of the ways we recognize that there is a depletion of water is by looking at the reservoirs and the level of the reservoir going down and down and down. That creates stress, but it's different than the actual level in the reservoir. What we're talking about here with burnout is what level of resources and renewal and flow and nourishment you have in your reservoir. When that gets depleted, you get burned out.

**Daphne:** Yeah, that's it. And guess what's right in the definition that I was going to read today? *Burnout*: the depletion of mental or physical energy after a period of chronic, unrelieved, job-related stress, sometimes characterized by physical illness. Some key points here is that a person who experiences this may lose concern or respect for other people. They can become cynical and have dehumanized perceptions of people.

**Katie:** That doesn't sound like much fun at all. I think burnout creeps up on people. They don't realize it. It's just like... I'm using water metaphors here. It's like dehydration. So many people don't realize they're dehydrated because the symptoms kind of sneak up on them. They don't realize it's dehydration. They think, "Oh my God, something is really wrong with me." It's often just that they need to drink more water. I think the same kind of situation occurs with burnout. If we're not regularly nourishing ourselves, if we're not filling the reservoir, then burnout is going to occur.

**Daphne:** Yeah, absolutely. So we're going to be talking today about filling up that reservoir. Before we get to that, Katie, this is the spin I wanted to put on this from leadership. This is one of the things I wanted to talk about, because one of the things I was interested in... I was like, "How do we burn ourselves out? Do we work too many hours?" Then I was like, "Well, what's too many hours?" I don't know. Somebody's 60 hours could feel like my 30 hours. Right?

**Katie:** Yes, that's very personal.

**Daphne:** Yeah, it's very personal, so who's to say? But I wanted to talk about this from the context of the hero role in the drama triangle.

**Katie:** Oh, extremely cool.

**Daphne:** Thank you, thank you. I wanted to have you do a little refresher for our folks on the drama triangle, which we also covered in one of our previous episodes. I thought it would be nice to revisit this model a little bit. That way people can really get with, "Well, what do they mean by the hero? Isn't being a hero a good thing?" Well, not in the context in which we talk about it, necessarily. So maybe we can start off with a little review of the drama triangle.

**Katie:** Yeah, beautiful. Well, what we've noticed, and this started with Stephen Karpman back in the 60s... He noticed a particular kind of interaction that people had over and over again, which

he named a certain way, which we call the *drama triangle*, because what people are adding to their interactions is drama. They're not just responding and being authentic. They're adding something to it.

These three roles that are very reliable really have to do with stepping out of your own accountability, creating your resources and your interactions. When you catch yourself in victim, which is one of the roles... Victims think of themselves as helpless and sometimes hopeless and sometimes clueless, that they're at the effect of. Things just happen to them. It's not their fault. They complain a lot, and they whine. They may whine internally, but sometimes you can hear them. The victims are like, "Oh man, now I have to stay late today." They kind of sound like that.

That leads us to talking about the villain. The villain's role is to blame. The villain blames either other people or themselves or the whole situation or God or the company or the other team, but they blame. When they're blaming, they're, again, not taking active healthy responsibility. They're villainizing other people or themselves. They're the ones who are critical or perfectionist, and you can't ever do anything right. They're the people who are always saying, "Oh, that whole paragraph there needs to be rewritten. I can't believe you didn't see that."

Then the hero, which I've also gotten really fascinated with, particularly lately... We wonder, "Gosh, don't we need more heroes? It seems to me like the world could use more heroes." Well, the problem with the hero is that they go outside of being 100-percent responsible in the direction of being *more* than 100-percent responsible. They're the people who help without being asked.

They're the people who say, "You guys go ahead. I'll stay later. I know where everything goes, so I'll finish things up." They're the ones who are the martyrs, the ones who take on more than their own job. One of the big problems with that is that it is not sustainable. You cannot do all of the work and carry on as a normal human being. So the hero is going to move into villain or victim, guaranteed. The hero requires other people... Like when I was in my super-competent role, which is a version of the hero...

**Daphne:** I love it when you talk about your super-competent role.

**Katie:** I know. My super-competent, which melted down about six years ago. Before she melted down, she had the viewpoint... When I was wearing my super-competent glasses, everybody else looked like idiots. "Can't they do anything? Do I always have to come in and fix things?" It actually took me a while, as it does with anybody when they're stuck in one of these roles, to see that people were doing just fine until I walked into the room, and then they would all kind of go stupid.

**Daphne:** Because you required that, right?

**Katie:** Because I required that.

**Daphne:** And you were seeing it that way too.

**Katie:** I was seeing it that way. Then because people wanted to be in relationship with me, they would take on the role I was requiring.

**Daphne:** Absolutely. The point here that I really wanted to dive into, Katie, especially in leadership, is this hero dynamic.

**Katie:** The hero dynamic. "Come on, gang. You can do it. I know if we all gather together..."

**Daphne:** Yes, that's one version. The cheerleaders.

**Katie:** "All right, you guys. I came in and I noticed that *you* were late and *you* didn't clean up your desk again." They can be the villain as well.

**Daphne:** Right, and they will switch roles. I think this is really a key point too. Eventually you'll get tired of playing the hero.

**Katie:** I don't know about that. The problem is that the hero gets really rewarded.

**Daphne:** Well, yeah. What I mean is tired of playing the hero, but you'll move to villain or victim then.

**Katie:** Oh yes.

**Daphne:** Yeah, the hero does get rewarded a lot. I think this is a key piece. Katie, when I work with groups and I describe the hero, they're like, "Yeah, but isn't it good to help people?"

**Katie:** I would say, "No, actually it is not."

**Daphne:** Not without their permission it's not.

**Katie:** Well, also there is a huge amount of research that's just coming out about the value of engineering workplaces and projects so that people make their own discoveries. If I'm constantly telling people what to do ("helping," in other words), it disempowers other people from both growing and discovering and integrating new growth. It actually stymies new creative innovations from other people. It stymies productivity, and it keeps people in the roles of looking to another person for leadership rather than engendering their own.

**Daphne:** Yeah, exactly. That was the point I really wanted to make, was about teams that see their leaders as being the one responsible for fixing and taking care of "everything," but more so, if you're a leader out there, the leader who thinks you have to take care of everything and fix problems. I think that's more the piece I wanted to point to from this hero role. I'm convinced, Katie, that that is what leads to burnout. It would take a band of wild horses to convince me otherwise.

**Katie:** I love that point of view and that assertion, and I agree with you. Just imagine your reservoir, and everybody on your team has a big fat straw, and they're in there sucking. You're not doing anything to refill your own reservoir. You are giving it all away.

**Daphne:** I'm convinced this is what burns out, especially people in helping professions.

**Katie:** So-called helping professions. "I'm here to help."

**Daphne:** I'm convinced that's why people burn out, especially people in health care, who have a big passion around health care. I'm convinced that's why they burn out. I'm convinced that's why leaders burn out. That's really where I wanted to have the conversation today. I don't think it's from being overcommitted or having too many tasks.

**Katie:** Nope, I agree.

**Daphne:** That is only the symptom of a much deeper-rooted problem around this hero idea.

**Katie:** Yeah, and the shadow side, the underbelly of the hero is really a low level or a high level of contempt for others.

**Daphne:** Say more on that, because that's where I wanted to head next.

**Katie:** Well, it is the viewpoint of, "You people are basically clueless. You wouldn't be able to function without me. I have to come in here and structure things for you." It's kind of a plantation mentality. You know, the master comes in and hands out the roles and then keeps an eye on people, because basically the belief is, "If I don't keep an eye on people, they're going to either malfunction or they're not going to work up to their capacity. I must be the cheerleader or the taskmaster, but I have to be extending myself in order for everything to work."

**Daphne:** The basic premise here is that in that role you must see people as completely incapable of taking care of their own situation.

**Katie:** Yeah, or solving the problem or innovating something new or mastering a skill that they would need to move to the next level of their own evolution, their own capability.

**Daphne:** I loved what you were saying also around if you're taking all that responsibility people don't get to thrive. They don't get to flourish. I work with leaders on the art of delegation. I think this is the number-one reason also (another big theory of mine). It is driven by this whole idea. They're like, "I'm not good at delegating," but really what's driving not being good at it... It's a learnable skill. What's driving it is there's that part that doesn't want to let go of being the hero, of being the fixer.

**Katie:** I thought you were going to end that sentence with "Doesn't want to let go of control."

**Daphne:** Well, that too. I think that's a big part of it. I think the hero likes to have that control.

**Katie:** Yeah, but also being seen as the good guy, *the* good guy.

**Daphne:** "I'm here to help."

**Katie:** "I'm the one who pulled this off. I'm the one who gets the bonus, because my team finally pulled it off. It took a lot of late nights on my part, but we finally did it."

**Daphne:** "We climbed the mountain. We overcame all odds that were against us." Yeah, exactly. Arms up in the air in triumph.

**Katie:** Before you take to bed for three weeks.

**Daphne:** Right. So I am convinced that's what's leading this. Now you said something at the beginning of the show that I also want to point to, which is around this idea of being the best. I think this also fits into the same drama format. This idea of being the best, having the best. What sparked that after you made that comment, Katie, was I've just finished reading the book *The Paradox of Choice* by Barry Schwartz. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the book or not.

**Katie:** I'm familiar with him but not that book.

**Daphne:** He wrote a book *Practical Wisdom*. He has written for years. He's from Swarthmore College. He talks in his book about how many choices we're given and how we like our freedoms but how paralyzing that actually becomes. He has identified these two types of people. One is a type he would call a *maximizer*. Maximizers are very concerned with getting the best, having the best of everything. *Satisficers* have more of a perspective of, "This is good enough."

The difference between the two... You would think the maximizer would have more stringent boundaries around what's the best, but the truth is they're the ones who actually have to have moving boundaries, because finding the best when you have 260 different stereo systems you could choose from...

**Katie:** Oh boy, the research.

**Daphne:** He did this great thing. He goes into these stores, and he's like, "Okay, here are all of the CD players. Here are all of the receivers you could get." He said in one store you could put together 6.2 million different options of stereo systems. It's actually the satisficers who have more strict boundaries. "This is good enough."

**Katie:** I suspect there is some perfectionism in the maximizers.

**Daphne:** Yeah, I suspect that. He actually does point to that in his book. Also when you were talking about it at the beginning of the show, I thought, "Oh, I hadn't even put that together." Actually the other thing that can lead to this burnout within that drama triangle structure is getting hooked in, "I have to be the best. We have to be the best. We have to hit the mark."

**Katie:** "We have to be *the* best." Motorola used to have... I don't know if they still do, but their whole mission plan was, "Get it right the first time." So the opportunity for learning and the growth curve, you know, not so much.

**Daphne:** That's a lot of pressure.

**Katie:** Exactly, a lot of pressure. At the base of all of this, I think the antidote for the hero... The big thing the hero needs to learn that would lead to renewal and deal with the whole problem of burnout is what we call "sorting the two files," really letting yourself focus in any situation on, "Is this something I actually can change or control, or is this in the big file called 'things I actually cannot change or control?'" You know, other people's behavior, other people's choices.

If I'm putting my attention especially on the things I most love to do and that I'm the best at and I then am cultivating that in the people I associate with... "What are the things *you* most love to do? What are *you* the best at? What are the traits that are so easy and natural for you that as you do them they give you a sense of renewal?" It's a completely different model than, "I must work and work and work until I achieve something, and then I'm basically going to collapse or I'm going to have such health problems that I'm not going to be able to enjoy my achievement."

**Daphne:** Again, we can see that overlap between burnout and stress. I wanted to make that point at the beginning of the show, because there is a real overlap here where they fit in.

**Katie:** I can remember years ago when I was first getting into the therapy field, which I used to do until about 20 years ago, I looked at the stats on burnout for mental health professionals. Back then, the average length of time a person stayed in the field after all of that training was five years.

**Daphne:** Yeah, that still holds true today.

**Katie:** Wow. Isn't that amazing? So the reservoir runs dry in five years.

**Daphne:** If you're not refilling it.

**Katie:** I'd like people to take a measurement of that. Where are you in that curve? Are you in your fourth year? Are you getting symptoms of burnout?

**Daphne:** It sneaks up on you. I think that's the other good point you made, Katie. It has a way of sneaking up on us.

**Katie:** "I'm just getting more colds these days. I must be around people who are not well."

**Daphne:** "I notice I've been tired for the past four or five days."

**Katie:** "I can't remember when I was not tired." But you just keep going, because the hero just keeps going, like the Energizer Bunny.

**Daphne:** Yes, the hero just keeps going. This is the point I wanted to make about this whole idea of burnout. Again, when I read about this a little bit, Katie... I didn't read about it much because I have my own ideas.

**Katie:** Well, that's good. I'm glad you have your own ideas. You should hold on to those.

**Daphne:** Again, people really pointed to the external circumstance, and I really want to keep coming back to it isn't just... I'm not saying external circumstances don't have some influence, but it's more inside of us and what we need to do and how we need to take care of ourselves that matters more than anything when it comes to burnout.

**Katie:** It absolutely does, and that is what I'm calling "sorting the two files." Those are things you actually do have control over. I want to share with people as a tip to mastery the key to refilling your reservoir. It's so simple that you probably are not going to believe it when you hear it. It has to do with circulating your attention.

It has to do with giving yourself curious attention, giving the environment attention, coming back to you, noticing one of your colleagues and the sound of his or her voice, and then coming back to you, noticing your breathing. The circulating of your attention throughout the day is the best way to fill your reservoir in a sustainable way.

**Daphne:** That, Katie, was one of the reasons I wanted to do this episode on burnout, was because of what you just described there, that loop of awareness, which is this ability to give ourselves attention and give the other attention. That was a skill I learned from you years and years ago through your readings and things you and Gay had written.

I felt like it was such an important thing for people to hear about, because I imagine as everyone is listening to us, they're probably like, "Well, what do I do then? What am I supposed to do?" I think one of the really valuable pieces as you're being with others or if you *are* a leader is giving your team attention, but also bringing the attention back to yourself. How are you feeling?

**Katie:** How are you feeling? What are you noticing? Just noticing your body sensation. Here's the thing. Attention itself is nourishing. Attention itself is as nourishing and as important as drinking your water and eating healthy and exercising. You need attention just as much as you need those other nutrients.

I tell you, heroes don't give themselves attention. They keep hoping that somebody else is going to give them the rich kind of attention they give out, but they give out and out and out, and that's how they drain the reservoir. So I challenge you who are listening to give yourself attention whenever you think of it, because I guarantee you your attention is going to be out. Whenever you think of, "Hmm, where is my attention?" give yourself some.

**Daphne:** I love that. Give yourself some first. I think that's the whole point about burnout, and it's very simple. I like what you said, like you won't believe it. I want to say I've been practicing this for years. It does feel a little clunky the first couple of times you try to do it.

**Katie:** It feels a little awkward, like, "I don't quite know what I'm doing here."

**Daphne:** That's normal. It should. It's a new skill. It's so simple that you won't think it'll work, but don't take our word for it. Give it a try, and let us know.

**Katie:** Yeah, let us know how it works for you, what you notice. It is filling your reservoir. That's what I want you to keep in mind. It is attention to you, curious attention, loving attention, noticing, that fills your reservoir.

**Daphne:** Of course, there are other ways to fill your reservoir too, so taking care of yourself, getting plenty of sleep. We've talked about that. I like to talk about paying attention to what I call the sprint and renewal process, sprint and recover, that life isn't a marathon.

**Katie:** All of those things are really valuable, and I think the loop of awareness is something people haven't put in there along with their exercise regime, and it's something you can do all throughout the day.

**Daphne:** Yes, exactly. It doesn't take a whole lot of energy once you really get it down. All right, we're going to wrap up the show. I think we made burnout really simple.

**Katie:** Yeah, that was my intention. It's not a complicated thing. Let's make it really simple and something that you can take charge of today.

**Daphne:** Yeah, so let us hear about it. You can let us know on social media and also at [www.daphne-scott.com](http://www.daphne-scott.com). Also check out Katie's trainings that are coming up. She has one coming up at the end of January.

**Katie:** End of January and first part of February, which is really about putting all of these skills we've been talking about in all of our podcasts to work for you in your life, both at a personal level, at work, and in your relationships.

**Daphne:** That's an area of expertise with you and Gay, working with intimate relationships. So yeah, take her courses, because you will get live practical application.

**Katie:** While having a lot of fun.

**Daphne:** Yes, while having a lot of fun. Absolutely. All right, we hope you remain more inspired than ever. If you dig the show, you can support us with giving us some ratings on iTunes. That's always helpful. Let us hear from you, and most importantly, keep living a super fantastic leadership life.