Julie Nerney

**Amy:** So a very warm welcome to everybody. Thank you so much for coming along today to the Wellbeing Hour. I am Amy.

**Angus:** I'm Angus.

**Liz:** And I'm Liz Clarkson.

And our colleague Nick Lander is also here today, working away in the background, supporting all things technical. And of course we have our fantastic guest, Julie Nerney, who I'll be introducing more formally shortly. For those of you that don't know much about Headtorch, we are experts in mental health.

**Amy:** We work with organizations to help them develop a mentally healthy culture. So we work with every level within an organization, senior leaders, people, managers, frontline. We work nationally, we work globally and we'd be very happy to have a conversation with you about where you are on that journey and how we might help you to, further that, path.

And Angus will tell you a little bit later on about how you might get in touch with us, to further those conversations. So very warm welcome to this Wellbeing Hour just to give you a little bit of a heads up on the schedule for this. So very soon I will introduce Julie. Then she will introduce herself to us using a mystery object.

We don't even know what this object is. It could be a horse. Who knows? And, then Julie and I will move into conversation, really. And then later on in the session, Julie is going to pose all of us here a question. So that will be then your opportunity to respond to that question and, or to ask Julie any other questions you may have for her after hearing our conversation.

Julie and I will then return, to conversation just one on one and she'll share some top tips before I pose some quickfire questions to her. I'll then hand over to Angus who will, who will thank Julie more formally and then tell you about what's coming up, on the wellbeing hour, on the, Headtorch calendar.

So it is my pleasure then to introduce to you Julie Nerney. Julie Nerney is MBA Charter Director and Fellow of the Institute of Directors. She is a serial entrepreneur, ladies and gentlemen, starting, running and selling no fewer than 14 businesses in the UK and overseas. As a business transformation expert, she's taken the lead in complex change programmes, whole organisation turnarounds and high profile projects, including the delivery of the transport operation for the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games.

She's worked in dozens of executive and CEO roles and is currently the interim MD for the rail business at Nuclear Transport Solutions. Nothing gets in Julie's way. She is also the non-executive director of the UK Supreme Court and Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. A board trustee of NEBOSH, co-chair of Getting On Board, guest lecturer at Oxford Saïd Business School for the Global Leadership Development Program. And not only that, she's just about to publish her second book called Business Morphology. I believe that comes out in about four weeks time. So Julie, absolutely delighted you could be with us today. Do share with us your mystery object and introduce yourself.

**Julie:** Thanks so much, Amy, for that very kind introduction. And this was a real challenge for me. I could have chosen so many symbols. I was thinking about pivotal or memorable points in my life, things that have shaped who I am. But I realised that's just like trying to pick your favourite child. I couldn't do it, they're all important in their own ways for different reasons. So, I went down a slightly different route, and I'm going to share with you today... My jigsaw app on my iPad. and the reason for sharing this, three reasons, firstly, when you tip pieces out of a jigsaw box, it doesn't seem to make any sense, and it requires you to find a way to navigate what looks like chaos or seeming disorder to reach the outcomes. And I thought that's a good metaphor for what I do when I'm leading organizations through change. And it also requires you to think about how you derive simplicity from complexity. And that's one of my biggest motivators for working in the change space, you know, not fearing ambiguity and knowing that there will be an answer no matter what challenge you encounter.

And knowing each time you do it, you find a better or faster way to do things. And on this app, I've worked out the fastest way now to sort my edge pieces, the ways to organize different colors to finish the jigsaw in a faster time. So that's the first reason I chose it. secondly, it also resonates with my slightly unconventional career history, which, Amy gave an overview for.

Someone did once say to me, my CV looked like insects had died on a piece of paper because it made so little sense. But actually, when you look beyond the various individual pieces, I think you can really see the whole picture. And you see the common threads throughout it all. And lastly, and most importantly of all, it's a really important tool for how I manage my own wellbeing.

I've been told by many people that I am ferociously well organized, which I can manage to do so many things at the same time, and I'm a really good multitasker, but that means that being still is a real rarity for me. As is doing one thing at a time. But when I pick up this app and I start a jigsaw, I can't multitask anymore.

I have to have a singular focus, and so I use it as a great tool to help me unwind and slow down. So thanks for the challenge for choosing a mystery object, Amy. That's why I chose my jigsaw app.

**Amy:** What a fantastic descriptor. What a brilliant, I love that, from chaos to simplicity. And as you say, it's got, it's a fantastic metaphor, isn't it, for so many, for so many things, and especially this world of workplace mental health as well.

So Julie, you've, you've got three key areas in your very, very busy life, your primary interim roles, your chair non exec positions, speaking, teaching, writing. What do you get from having that combination of, of three kind of key things happening?

**Julie:** So what I get now is quite different from when I started. So when I started, I think I was on a treadmill of busyness and I was collecting things to do to keep me occupied,

and that's because kind of why I was driving myself that way, what wasn't actually very healthy. What I get from it now, having been through my own journey of, discovering what gives me my equilibrium, is, is a real sense of purpose. and it's, it's taken me a while, I think, to get to a place where that portfolio of different activities all chime with things that matter to me and my values.

I, I like to put my heart into the work that I do. And so things having social purpose or value or an impact where it might make society for a better, a better, for the better, even if it's just that little tiny corner of society or the world that I'm operating in, it is what I get from all of those things and they are

different mechanisms, but they all have that same, same common goal

**Amy:** So having that really strong purpose then in what you're doing, what does that actually give you?

**Julie:** It makes me more connected to my work for genuine reasons. You know, we, and we all end up in situations in life, don't we, where we either stumble into something that we didn't quite expect to be there, or we make a choice to do something because there's a level level of obligation or duty or requirement for a short period of time.

And very rarely do we get the opportunity to really take stock and say, what is it that we want to do and why? And I think, for me, it connects me more with my authentic self. I went through a period of my life where there was kind of the work me, and then the personal me, and that's a really unhealthy place to be,

because what was driving me to work was not coming from such a positive place. Whereas now, it kind of joins all the elements of who I am, and it allows me to show up in a... really authentic way. It gives me permission to be human. it allows me to spend my time on the things that, that matter most to me, but it's been a journey to get there,

it's not somewhere we all start out in life, is it?

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely. Fantastic. So powerful, isn't it? When, when, when you can have that. In your, in your working life, that real sense of genuine, this is me, take it or leave it. And I'm here with, with all my sense of, of, of purpose. fantastic. You talked there about the fact that you didn't always have healthy drivers.

**Julie:** Let's, let's roll back if we may. What, what had been driving you since age seven? I didn't really have a traditional start in life, I didn't have that kind of, I shouldn't say nuclear family in the world, that I work in now, but that traditional family, it was, very dysfunctional. It was a very damaging environment that I was in.

So it meant I was in the care system, when I was seven years old, and I lived largely independently since I was 13. So I was either sofa surfing with friends or sometimes sleeping rough as I was technically homeless for around four years of my life. So that puts you in quite a different, different space in terms of your start for life.

And so you look for the things that you can hang on to that help you get through that, and at that age, school was the thing that I hung on to. I was fortunate enough to be academically bright, so I had fantastic support and sponsorships. from some brilliant teachers, first my primary and then my secondary school.

And so I threw myself into my studies. Work colleagues have a nickname for me, nerdy Nerney, but I was the school swot. You know, I, I threw myself into everything. I did every afterschool club and, and, extracurricular activity because I didn't, I didn't have a home to go to. So there was no pull to take, to take me away from there.

And whilst that was, a valuable experience in some ways, because It gave me a real sense of how to be self sufficient. I learned how to be resilient. I was clearly operating independently and being very resourceful, all of which I think are good skills to have for life. But what it was actually doing was substituting the self worth and the value that you get from being in a loving and supportive family environment.

And I was substituting that with this sense of achievement, which was through academia then, but actually when I started in the workplace, I then translated that into my work. That was the kind of unhealthy driver. It, it wasn't, coming from a place of intent. It was coming from a place of necessity.

And of course, when you're a child and you're just having to survive, let alone thrive, you're not thinking about that, you don't have that level of self awareness. And it was only much later in life, when I had a, a significant mental health crisis that I was forced to really examine what was driving me and how healthy that was or not.and, and, and that's the journey that kind of made, made me come to that realization and that understanding and, and really connect with, with my authentic self at work.

**Amy:** So what I'm hearing, and correct me if I'm wrong, but what I'm hearing is that you, you threw yourself into academia, and that gave some sense of control?

**Julie:** Yeah and achievement. It felt like I was driving my self worth. I was driving my value that way. Because we all have people in our lives, I hope, if we're fortunate enough, whether it's friends or your partner or your family, that will cherish you for what you bring and will reinforce your value. And when you didn't have that, I was deriving my value from getting an A. or acing a test or, you know, finishing an impossible task when you translate that into work, and coping patterns that you have in childhood are there for a reason, and actually understanding this now, I realize that that was an incredibly powerful coping mechanism for me to survive a very difficult childhood.

But actually, when you take that into adulthood, You don't need the same coping mechanisms and you take those patterns into your adult life and they might not be so healthy anymore. So as I, you know, as I became a young adult and growing into my career, that value was still about those badges I was wearing and the career ticks in the boxes.

it wasn't about me. So there was a real disconnect. There was the work me. Quite outwardly, successful by a reasonable set of measures, quite extrovert, very chatty, as you can tell. but then the me at home was very different. The me at home was the seven year old that, you know, didn't feel like they were worth anything.

And that's really unhealthy. But from a mental health and equilibrium perspective, that disconnect was creating a fracture in my identity and who I was.

**Amy:** Yeah, yeah. And you told me before that you didn't actually take a holiday until you were 27.

**Julie:** Well, this is the thing about throwing yourself into work, right?

So it's that same substitution point. So I mean, I dropped out of my A levels, I bought my first business for a pound. And, I think people look at me and I think, oh, you've got drive, you've got tenacity, you've got energy. It kind of makes sense, but actually I think it's my risk appetite that drives this because when the worst that has happened to you has happened and you've lost all of your security in life, then dropping out of your A levels and buying a business for a pound, it just doesn't seem like a scary thing to do, right? Because you say to yourself, well, what's the worst that could happen? I can finish my, as I did, finish my qualifications part time and catch up. And that set me on the treadmill of starting and running businesses.

And I look back now with a wry smile because it's patently obvious I like starting things and fixing things, but I get terribly bored with the status quo. I didn't spot that trend when I was in the middle of it. And so I was on this treadmill of starting and exiting and being curious. And that kind of opportunistic streak, I think was driven by the fact that my risk appetite was much less risk averse because of the things that had happened to me.

Because when the worst that can happen has happened, you don't worry about things so much. I was on a treadmill, so I didn't stop. I didn't have a break. And when you own your own businesses, you work seven days a week, so I didn't have a holiday. I didn't stop. Also not healthy, right?

**Amy:** Because how old were you when you bought that business for a pound?

**Julie:** I was 17. I was in the middle of my A levels. Yeah.

**Amy:** Wow. Yeah. Yeah. So what was the impact then looking back now? What was the impact of not taking that holiday?

**Julie:** Well, I guess that the tipping point, which was kind of my major mental health crisis happened some years later, so I'd gone through that, phase of my working life as an entrepreneur. I'd then gone through a kind of intervening period where I thought, Oh, I'm going to semi retire and write books and be a non exec and then realized I've got a bit bored and started working in the transformation space. And those tend to be again, quite fast paced, short assignments, high intensity work.

So actually I was, I was following the same pattern, just in a different way. I was, doing an interim assignment and I was staying in an apartment close to where the work was. My alarm clock went off one morning and I remember switching it off and I was stood in the hallway of this apartment looking in a mirror kind of having a word with myself.

I was clearly trying to get myself to come back into the room and to shape up. And when I looked at my watch, it was two and a half, hours after my alarm clock had gone off. I have no idea where those two and a half hours went. I have no idea if I was still asleep, how long I'd been standing in the hallway.

It was almost like I was having an out of body experience and I was coming back into the room and reconnecting with myself, but with no recollection of what happened. And I'm a control freak. And that really scared the bejesus out of me because control freaks don't like losing control. And so I picked up the phone to my coach because I'd really quite frightened myself, but I still needed somebody else to tell me to take a break, which I find astounding now when I look back at it. And I was planning to go to a networking lunch that day, go to work. And so even in that really dark moment, I needed somebody else to tell me it was okay to stop. but I did stop. I took her advice,

I went home and it was the physical manifestations of what had happened that hit me first. So I slept. I slept for more than 16 hours a day, every day for a fortnight. I was clearly exhausted. I had this horrible tension in my neck and shoulders and chronic headaches. So I was having these deep tissue massages.

You can go for a massage, it sounds really nice. No, these were really quite painful. trying to unlock all of that, stuff I was carrying in my body. But once I got through the kind of physical side of things, I knew I had to understand how I got there because I didn't want to be there again and I needed to take the time to really explore that, and on the advice of my coach, I went away on a therapy retreat. It's a week long program, it's called the Hoffman Process and it fundamentally changed my life, completely changed my life and my approach to work. It's almost 20 years ago now. Because whilst on the one hand, I do have skills and expertise which are valuable qualities for me as an individual, but also for the organisations I work for and the kind of work I do.

But it was why I was doing it, it was that motivation about substituting that, that, that self worth. And so when I went into this therapy retreat, we were all asked in a group, I mean you could literally, I could think of nothing worse, to stand up and describe ourselves in three words about what had brought us there.

And the three words I used were Harmed, Abandoned, and Worthless. And that's what I'd been carrying around with me deep in my subconscious since I was seven years old. That's what had been driving me to run faster, be better, you know, work harder, don't fail, don't fall over and be resilient, you know, just keep going and keep going.

So through that period of running my own businesses, and when then I working in change and transformation, and it is no surprise, with hindsight, which is of course a beautiful thing, isn't it, that at some point I was going to fall over. That it was just an utterly unsustainable way of operating. But until I could peel back all those layers of the onion and get into the core of me and go, so what was driving me to work in the way that I was?

I couldn't actually make the change. And the nice bit of sharing this story is, despite all my scepticism going into that therapy retreat, when I came out a week later, I didn't feel like that about myself anymore. And I never have since. You know, we all have good days and bad days, but I never... I've never felt that damaged anymore, and I've just reconciled myself with that.

And that was the, quite an extreme tipping point to go through, but that journey of self realization is what made me really value myself. So I value myself, I value Julie. I value me as a human being, what I have to offer, with all of my flaws and inconsistencies and everything else that makes us lovely human beings, joyously human.

But therefore I'm working now for a positive reason, not for a negative reason.

**Amy:** Thank you so much for sharing that incredibly powerful story. And I think it's, you know, for, for some people, that kind of support is an absolute, for you, you know, it's the, it was the game, it's the game changer. And for other people, it'll be something different, right?

Can I just ask you to reflect on where you were working up to that time, had anybody there noticed, had any conversations with you? What, what had been the workplace approach to how you were showing up?

**Julie:** I often get asked this question, were there any obvious signs and did people spot it?

And I think the challenge is no, it was so incrementally driven. So there are two parts to answering your question, Amy so A, when I was running my own business, I was creating my own environment and I wasn't taking the time to stop and look and observe and check in, not only on myself, but with other people.

And I look back with hindsight now and think what a missed opportunity that was, because I probably missed the fact that other people might've been struggling as well. When I was working in change roles, you have moments where I think organizations will spot when somebody isn't quite on their A game and I see it now with people and I take the way I hire people, the way I recruit them, the way I manage them has completely changed as a result of that experience and I really try to understand the people behind the job title that they wear

If you're going to bring your whole self to work, you bring everything to work. You bring the fact that you've had a terrible night's sleep and your kids have kept you awake. You bring the fact that you're worried about the fact that you're caring for an aging parent. You don't put it in a box,

it's with you. So being self aware for myself is one thing, but being self aware for your team. So about how people show up every day is important. And there were some conversations when I was in those change roles in the run up to that tipping point for me, but because it was a very stressful and intense environment anyway, you would often get flashpoints or bits of fractiousness where it was just difficult or challenging and it was almost accepted as, oh, it's just because this is a really difficult thing to do, and we're up against deadlines.

And I don't think anybody really stopped to go, actually, is somebody okay here? and as I say, I changed the way I recruit and I manage people, and I try and influence the organizations I'm in now differently. Because if you look at it through an organizational lens, the organization's success is entirely down to the people who are in it.

And you only get the best out of people by creating an environment that allows them to be the best version of themselves. and people are not robots and everybody is different. So as both organizations and managers, you need to be adaptive to different people's needs in order to get the best out of them.

And then you truly get the greater than the sum of the parts equation. when you get high performing teams. But nobody noticed that about me and people made assumptions, the same way that people look at my start in life and the things that have happened to me and I've had major health crises, physical health crises, as well as mental health crises.

And they go, Oh, you make sense. We make lazy assumptions about people. And it was a lazy assumption that, Oh, well, that's the change team. They're in a high stress environment. They're going to get a bit stressy every now and again. Nobody went, well, actually there is a line here and are we over the stupid line are people okay?

So from an organizational perspective, it wasn't there at all.

**Amy:** Yeah, yeah. And I think just, just shifting to, you know, how you approach work now, how you approach the people that you work with now, that element of not being lazy, but rather being curious. Yeah. How does that, how does that superpower of curiosity.

support you in your endeavours to support your teams?

**Julie:** A, I think curiosity is a completely underrated leadership skill I think it's esse ntial and it's essential because it's encompassed in having the humility to know you don't have all the answers right? And that was my mistake and when you're we're working and your work is driven by a different reason, you're in that kind of hero leadership mode where you're running up a hill as fast as you can saying, follow me, exhorting people to, to follow you.

And it's like, you don't have all the answers, right? And that isn't a sensible way to lead. And I've been at work for 35 years now. Thankfully, leadership has changed over that period of time, but it's not sensible and you won't get your best out of your people. And so the best people I've worked for have the confidence to lead, but the humility to know they don't have the answers.

And humility starts with being curious. And I remember working with somebody a few years ago who never asked a question. I said, are you not curious about any of this and he said no, it is what it is and I thought, and as an innately curious person, I find that really hard to understand why you wouldn't be interested in finding out more. But so I, I choose to start from a position of curiosity.

So when I, when I interview people, I only ask them three questions now. So I, I say, what makes you go home at the end of every day, punch the air with joy and go, I had a fantastic day. It's not about the task. It's about how somebody feels, how work makes them feel. Conversely, what makes you go home, kick the cat, have a gin and tonic, whatever, whatever the opposite thing is.

And I ask them those two questions because I'm trying to work out if they're going to be able to succeed or not in the environment we're in. So if somebody says to me, Oh, cause I get mired in bureaucracy and meetings and paperwork, and the role is in a public service role where there's lots of briefing documents and stuff like that to write, it doesn't matter how technically skilled you are, you are not going to be happy in this environment.

And so I try to be curious about what drives people to feel good about the work that they're doing when I interview them. So I can be sure that it's the right cultural fit, because when you're interviewing people, all of them have got the skills to do the job. It's not, it's not about that then. It's about how, how are we going to get the best out of each other?

and I also ask them to tell me their potted history. Because I'm interested in their life and I'm interested in what brought them to that destination and I'm interested in why they think this is the right role for them and I'm interested in learning a bit more about who they are and what matters to them and the fact, you know, they might have families, they might have young children, they might have different responsibilities, they might be a marathon runner, might be all of these things because then I can make an accommodation when they come and work for us that says, great,

if you're doing marathon training and you need to start later every morning, that's fine with me. So you're then creating, it's, it's the start of creating that environment that allows people to be the best because you listen, ask questions first, and then you design a workspace that allows them to thrive mentally and physically.

**Amy:** Yeah, it's creating that, that safe space, isn't it? how else do you enable people to be able to say no?

**Julie:** Well, you have to have a permission environment and I think a culture of feedback. So feedback is one of these things where you say the word feedback and you can almost hear everybody go, because nobody likes giving it,

nobody likes receiving it. Everybody thinks it's really hard, but actually it's just a culture of candour really. So I'm really clear with teams, and particularly because I work in a kind of project environment as well, that when we start about contracting over the rules of engagement and how we want to work and what's going to be okay and what's going to not be okay as a generic set of, kind of things that we can all sign up to.

But then I encourage people to talk about what works for them and what doesn't work for them, because we all choose not to show some of ourselves. And that's a choice, isn't it? When we show up, we have our hidden selves. We have our blind spots that we can't see unless other people talk to us about it. But I encourage people to show as much of themselves as they feel comfortable to say, actually, when I'm having a bad day, this is what you'll get from me.

And for me, if I haven't had a good night's sleep, whatever the sleep version of hangry is, that's me, right? So I say, if I have not had a good night's sleep, and we encourage people to talk about those kind of things that are going to trip them up or not work optimally. So if somebody comes in then, and like in the example you said, did somebody notice what was happening to me?

If I'd come in in the morning and I've been a bit fractious and a bit snippy. Somebody would have said, Are you alright, Julie? Did you get enough sleep last night? Do we need to make some allowances for you today? Because they know that. And we don't know that unless we share it. And by doing that contracting with teams up front, you're creating an environment where it's okay to say no.

It's okay to say, I'm going to struggle with this. It's okay to say, you won't get the best out of me if you work with me like this, and it allows us all to learn a little bit more about each other and adapt our styles so we can accommodate that and it, it feels open and welcome, and by creating that contracting phase upfront, you then set the stall for it being okay to say things, and then you can give each other feedback and we constantly check in.

So whether it's set piece meetings, we say at the end of every one, is that still working? Do we need to change it? Are we still getting value out of this? You know, my one to ones with people, my first three questions is, how's it feeling for you right now? What are you enjoying and not enjoying? And what do you need more of or less of from me?

It's not about the tasks of their job. And I think that's, you know, people centered leadership, you know, people talk about it being authentic leadership. It's just being people focused, right?

**Amy:** Yeah, it's all about relationships. And, and as you say, and you know, we talk about this time and time again as well in, you know, in what we deliver is the, that it's everything, isn't it?

That if you have that relationship, if you've built that trust and rapport, then A, you're more likely to say, I'm not well. And then B, if you're on the, on the other side, you're more likely to notice if somebody's not their usual self and, and be curious and start asking some questions.

**Julie:** It's interesting when you say that they're kind of asking for help it there because I have some people I've worked with who will put their hands up very easily and I have other people who are like a swan swimming and they could be flailing under the water and they will never show me and that always rings alarm bells for me.

I'm more worried about them because I can't see below the iceberg. I don't know what's going on for them.

**Amy:** No, I know. It makes it very interesting, apart from anything else, but again, you know, often people when it comes to mental health in the workplace, people want an answer.

You know, is it this or is it that? Well, actually it's a bit of that, you know, you, it's, it's grey, right? It's not, it's not a black or white answer. It's, it's definitely grey.

**Julie:** And it might not be one thing.

**Amy:** It's being okay with that, isn't it?

**Julie:** Yeah. And it could be a tipping point. As I say, you know, mine was a...

Long burn over many years of incrementally adding to things. You, you kind of don't go from zero to, to fine to not fine in one go. There's a, there's a build here and we don't notice sometimes the triggers or the things that should be the early warning signals, and instead, we only notice it when we kind of cross that line.

And, as you say, it's not binary. It's, it's not that straightforward.

**Amy:** It's really not straightforward. Lovely. Well, Julie, we could talk and listen and listen and talk for quite a long time. I'm going to bring up your fantastic question now that we're going to pose to everybody here in this session and it's going to be your opportunity now to respond to this question that Julie has and or to ask her any other questions that may have come up for you whilst she was telling us her

incredible story. So Julie, do you want to just talk us through your, your question here a little?

**Julie:** Well, hopefully my motivation for posing this question's pretty clear now, Amy, which is I, I realised that my drivers for work were incredibly unhealthy. So I'm posing this question to encourage people

to be curious about themselves. To have that kind of growth mindset that, engenders a good level of self awareness and to ask the question, you know, what, what is it that makes you go to work every day? What's driving you? Does it, does it give you the right amount of stretch?

Does what drive you come from a good place and a positive place? How does it connect with what intrinsically motivates you as an individual and your sense of purpose and value? So that's why I'm posing this question. From bitter learnt experience.

**Amy:** A great and powerful question. Thank you for for sharing that.

So if you have a question or a comment, please do put your hand up and we can bring you into the conversation here. And you can ask Julie directly or respond to Julie's question directly.

**Julie:** And I'm more than happy to answer any question. Yeah, nothing's off limits when I agree to do this. There's no, there's no question you can't ask me.

**Amy:** It's very generous. And Nick has also put the question in the chat for you there. If you just want a reminder of it.

Angus.

**Angus:** Okay, Julie. So I have a question for you. How do you, how do you help somebody? Who to you, it might be obvious, right? They're not being their true self. How do you help that person find the true person that's in there?

**Julie:** Well, that's a really good question, Angus. I think even if you can see it, the individual concerned has to want to see it for themselves.

People ask me about having done that therapy retreat and they go, well, don't you wish you'd done that kind of years earlier, because you would have saved yourself all that pain. But I wasn't ready to notice that about myself. And I wasn't ready to do the work that I needed to do to reconcile myself with

my past. And so I think if you notice that somebody isn't being themselves, that's one thing. And you can encourage people to be curious and you can invite them to ask questions. You can, with kindness and compassion, you can share what you're noticing about them and saying, I'm noticing this is different,

are you okay? And you can be proactively checking in. But that person really needs to be open to responding to those questions. And you can pose the best questions in the world and put the right support in place, but they have to come and meet you. So I don't think there's a magic bullet here for me, certainly,

and I'm happy to be advised otherwise by anybody if they do have one. But I think it is about noticing, operating with kindness and compassion and sharing what you're observing and encouraging that self awareness in the individuals and then signposting appropriately. So if somebody said, well, actually, yes, I'm really glad you noticed that I'm having a really difficult time and I need some help being very clear about how you can signpost to help and support and that help and support will vary

for different people will need different things. So some people will benefit from coaching. Some people will need different kinds of support. So I think it's about being a conduit to whatever they need and not being prescriptive about how you help them overcome whatever it is that they're dealing with.

**Angus:** Yes, Marston, thank you.

**Amy:** Absolutely. Yeah, and actually also I think within, within that it's also about being okay if somebody says, I'm fine. Isn't it? It's about, it's about being okay to go, okay, and then the next time not shying away from it again and be more specific again, I've noticed X, how are you? So it's always showing the person that actually you're there and you care and you've, you've noticed.

Yeah, fantastic. Lindsay Morgan. Lindsay, just tell everybody where it is you work and then fire away with your comment or question.

**Lindsay:** Okay, so I work for RSA. We are, a general insurer in the UK. I'm recently, Amy, I've been in the same job for 10 years and two weeks ago, I've moved back into HR.

I'm now working with our Irish teams hence my absence. I've been so busy and I was so excited that I could have time in my calendar to attend one of these sessions because I just, I find them so valuable and Julie, I've made two full pages of notes on what you've said. So thank you very much for that so far.

**Julie:** Oh, bless you.

**Lindsay:** But I, I have a question for you. So I was intrigued. You said you, you went on a retreat and you were asked, three words to describe yourself. And you, you, you shared what, what those were. What three words would you use to describe yourself today?

**Julie:** Purposeful, content, and I choose content deliberately rather than happy, 'cause everybody can have highs and lows, but actually being content every day is, I think, underrated, and joyful. I choose to spend my time on things that bring me joy and whether that's work or the things outside of my life. So yeah, purposeful, content and joyful is how I describe myself, Lindsay.

**Lindsay:** Thank you.

**Julie:** Thank you, Amy.

**Amy:** Wonderful. Thank you for joining us, Lindsay. Thank you. Alison Moore, you've added something into the chat. you've said it's being in a position. Healthy Drivers for Work being a... In a position to make a difference to others, workplace, environment, safer and healthier. Given I work in health and safety, this is always the main driver.

**Julie:** Previously, in other positions, my driver for work was money to pay bills. Not exactly healthy, but required. Alison, would you care to, open up your mic and tell us a little bit more about your thinking?

**Alison:** Well,

I work in an organisation called DSM Firmenich. So I do, so we are a manufacturer of vitamins. So we sell vitamins and animal feed. So it's a big manufacturing site. About 300 employees, about 300 contractors on site at any particular given time. And I work within the Occupational Health and Safety Department on that site.

**Amy:** So tell us a bit more about your drivers then.

**Alison:** So my driver for health and safety has always been to make it safer, make it healthier, make people happier. Happy staff are productive staff. Conversations save lives. And the amount of times that you see people like not purposefully ignoring a red flag, but not having the tools in their toolbox to be able to deal with that red flag when that red flag shows itself.

So I have been very focused in the last like six months or so and trying to get like a SafeTalk was a course I managed to reach out to the local community around about me, the North Ayrshire Health and Social Board were delivering this course into like colleges and workplaces, so I had reached out to them and we had collaborated a wee bit and we managed to get them to deliver this course on our site to a small number of volunteers.

I've now had the volunteers all put through the Public Health Scotland's Mental Health First Aid course. So I think that's a great step in the right direction to try and... make the place healthier and safer is by having people on site who are aware, who can notice the red flags and hopefully my driver, my right driver to improve in the next couple of years is to try and get similar training to every single person who is in a line manager style position because you can't expect people to know how to react if they don't have the tools and their toolkit.

**Amy:** Lovely, Alison. Thank you so much. Jim Boyd. I'll just bring you in very briefly. what's your question for us today?

**Jim:** Hi, Amy. Thank you. Hi, Julie. Thank you very much for your talk there. Very interesting. my question is actually related to your story rather than answering the question you gave us directly.

One of the words you use to describe your feelings

given your obvious value and, achievements that you had, who was it that you were perceiving yourself as being worthless to and why?

**Julie:** That's a great question. my, my worthlessness came from, a place of not feeling like I was valued as an individual. because, my My parents divorced and my mother moved on and left her children basically, in a, in a care environment.

So when you're a child and you have that kind of unconditional love relationship with your parent, you think, well, if they've left me, there must be something that's wrong with me. It's not until you're an adult that you can understand some of the other drivers for that. So I, I concluded to myself that I must be worthless.

I wasn't worth keeping in their world, because they didn't want me. And so that's where the drive, that's where it came from. so it, it came from not having parents that reassure you and encourage you about your worth and your value in life. So I didn't value myself as a, as a human being. So I placed that value then in, in my achievements.

and as I said earlier, that's where the disconnect came.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

No problem.

**Amy:** Thank you for sharing that, Julie. So delighted that you've got the, you've had the support to, to move on from that. thank you for sharing your thoughts and questions, folks. We're going to, move on now to hear some of Julie's top tips.

**Julie:** So Julie, if you would just like to, talk us through these ones. Make sure that your organization's purpose is aligned to attracting staff. One of the things that, as I mentioned when I recruit staff now, one of the things that strikes me,Alison who put the work in the chat, is people come to work ultimately to earn money, right?

So we pay the bills, there is a fundamental transaction. But actually going beyond that and being really happy and having a sense of purpose means that When you're, doing your, staff recruitment and you're trying to attract people into your organization, you should be selling the purpose of what you do and the difference that makes.

So you are connecting again with that intrinsic motivation for other people who are motivated by the same thing. So whether it's, as Alison said earlier, it's making sure that people go home safely at the end of every day from work is a purpose that would connect you with people with that same motivation because I think you just get more out of people in that way when they're in a, in an organization which is happy.

**Amy:** So I think that that purpose bit is, is often forgotten. People talk about benefits, they talk about pay, but they don't talk about come and work for an organization that does this. so that's why Great.

**Julie:** Somebody once said to me, you don't realise you have kind of informal mentors until you realise you've been quoting something that somebody told you 30 years ago still. And somebody once said to me, fairly early on in my career, were curious about why I hadn't applied for a role and I said, well, because I can't do all of it.

And he said to me, if you're not flying by the seat of your pants at least three times in the first six months, you're frankly overqualified. Now, it was quite a fun way of making this point, which is when we recruit people, if we recruit people who can do everything in their role, we're not giving them space to grow or learn

and I think as an organization, we have a responsibility to say, come and join us, connect with our purpose and what we're trying to do, bring your skills, but also here's the opportunity for you to grow. You either learn about a new industry or you learn about a new environment or you have a chance to progress your career in different ways.

So I think it's really important to have that developmental space. So as well as making that part of your hiring point, there's also about how you task people and the things you ask of people at work is protecting enough space to stop, pause, reflect, be curious. It helps people in their career growth, but it also helps people with their own growth mindset, self awareness and maintaining a good mental health as well.

**Amy:** Fabulous. Know your people, understand what each of them brings to your organization that makes you different.

**Julie:** So I talked about that earlier. So that's about being curious about your team. Ask questions, be interested, understand who they are, and then change the way you lead, manage and support those people to get the best out of them.

**Amy:** Wonderful. Support heightened levels of self awareness to proactively manage resilience tipping points.

**Julie:** So this is the point that Angus made earlier when you notice that people aren't themselves. How do you encourage people to be curious about themselves? Some people will be naturally more open to that than others.

Some people you might have to, with kindness, encourage them to see things that they can't see themselves. I know from having gone through that experience I shared earlier, there are three or four things that I do now that I keep in my routine. And I know if I'm finding it hard to do that, that means I'm closer to being more stressed than I really think I am.

We don't notice this about ourselves. It creeps up on us. So I think organizations have an obligation to support that level of self awareness. because it's hard to do for yourself.

**Amy:** Yeah, wonderful. And create opportunities to build support networks that reinforce value and aren't afraid to challenge blind spots.

**Julie:** So this is the thing that I think you can best do to look after yourself as an individual, and this is where I think organisations could sponsor this, more. Which is, we all underestimate our own value. I mean, I've talked about the extreme reasons for why I didn't value myself. But unless you're a narcissist, nobody rates themselves better than the people who give them feedback on a 360 degree report, right?

We always underestimate the value we bring and the impact we're having on others. So make sure you build yourself a good support network. It could be peers or other people through different places, different parts of where you work. It can be through a more social group, through friends and family. But you need people around you who I think can see your value when you can't see it yourselves.

But you also need people who aren't afraid to challenge you when you can't see that you're in a place with a blind spot. So it might be when you don't realise that you're struggling and you need help is a great example of that. If organizations did more to sponsor those opportunities, convene, facilitate those networks, you know, and I met Amy and the Headtorch gang because I was speaking at a network event, which is a great example of this, where they create a safe space for people to look after each other.

Then I think, again, that will help people with their self awareness and, and optimizing their own performance for themselves and the organization.

**Amy:** Lovely. And encourage a culture that values curiosity and a growth mindset.

**Julie:** Which I think we've been talking about for most of this session.

And I think you need to keep challenging it because it's one of those things that it's easy to go, Oh, that's a good thing to do. It's like, it's like the, I had a nice afternoon and biscuits risk of a training course, isn't it? Everybody has a good afternoon, they do it for a couple of days and then they go back to what they were doing before.

So an organization has a responsibility to notice that I think. And keep encouraging and go, we had a peak of change and people were doing that. And now they're not anymore. How can we reinvigorate it? So it becomes a habit and it becomes just the way that things are done around here.

**Amy:** Absolutely. it's crucial, isn't it?

That we keep that program of development going as sort of reminders in, in lots of different facets. Fabulous, Julie. Okay. I have a few quick fire questions for you. Are you ready?

**Julie:** I'm slightly scared about this bit, but let's go for it.

**Amy:** Just enjoy. So what does vulnerability mean to you?

**Julie:** Compassion.

**Amy:** Lovely. What little thing do you notice, zoom into, celebrate every day?

**Julie:** I do my appreciations and gratitudes every evening before I go to sleep. I write three things I'm grateful for, always really easy, and three things that I appreciate about myself, sometimes much harder, but I do it every day.

**Amy:** Fantastic. What message would you give your younger self?

**Julie:** It doesn't matter.

**Amy:** Nice, yeah, just letting it go. And what message would your younger self give you?

**Julie:** You're great.

**Amy:** Oh, love that. What do you say to leaders that use only plasters, give lip service, when it comes to supporting, promoting, protecting workplace mental health?

**Julie:** Oh, so if I talk to them from a business perspective, I would tell them about the value they're destroying in their organisations by not doing this, because their value is only created by their people. Wow.

**Amy:** That's super powerful. What's going to revolutionise workplace mental health?

**Julie:** Kindness. Kindness and leadership.

**Amy:** Kindness and leadership. Kindness. That great companion to curiosity when it comes to superpower. You are a superpower. Thank you so much. I'm going to hand over to Angus now, who will give more formal thanks to you, but thank you. Thank you.

**Julie:** Pleasure, Amy. Thank you.

**Angus:** Julie, thank you very much. That was inspiring.

It was fascinating. It was wonderful. So thank you for coming on the Wellbeing Hour. I was struck when I saw you speak at the Women in Nuclear Conference in Manchester. how honest you are, how open you are, and dare I say how raw you are. Yeah. There's no hold bars and no pretence here. And it's exactly what you've done today.

Yeah. It is really fascinating seeing somebody just being the way they are. Yeah. And, you know, some brilliant tips there. Letting go of those childhood values. So many of us could learn so much just from that. you know, We do hang on to things, you know, and it's, it's not serving us and letting go of that, is something I'm going to take away, actually.

I really like the, the thing you said, I really value myself as a lovely human. Yeah. It's great language. It's wonderful. And, the curiosity to understand people behind the title. getting under the, you know, getting under the skin, if you like, and getting to know people. And that technical term. Are we over the stupid line yet?

Yeah. I think we should probably put that up on the board in the office, Amy. Yeah. Seeing as we spend a lot of time flying by the seat of our pants. and getting the best version of ourselves. That culture of feedback. We have a client. And, I was on the phone to him not long ago, and he said, My gift, my gift to you is my feedback.

Yeah. And I thought, it's an amazing way to think about giving feedback. It's a gift. And,you know, creating a culture of feedback is incredibly, incredibly powerful as well. And purposeful, content, and joyful, and kindness. I think those should all be part of the values of every organisation. Imagine if they were.

Imagine if that was to become the norm. Yeah, we don't often hear words like that actually enshrined in an organisation. So Julie, thank you very, very much. On behalf of all of us at Headtorch and everybody here, like to really thank you for your time today and we do really, really appreciate it. Thank you.

**Julie:** It's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you, Angus.

And I, can I just pipe in again just for a second, because I just also wanted to share which, what hangs permanently from my, from my computer screen, which is this. It says, if you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much room.

**Angus:** Fabulous!

Right, well let's add to that. Are we on the timeline yet? There's some

great comments in the chat as well. Thank you, folks. Yeah, fantastic comments. okay, so coming up on the Wellbeing Hour we have Professor Rory O'Connor. Rory is a professor at the University of Glasgow, in health psychology. He is director of Suicidal Behaviour Research Laboratory and president of the International Association for Suicide Prevention.

He is a global name in suicide and I think this is going to be a really fascinating session that we've got on the 12th of October. So please join us for that. And coming up in the Headtorch calendar, we're running a session with an organization called Simply Brilliance, Mental Health, Fix the Cause, Move the Dial.

That's with myself and Amy running that on 10th October. Then we have Rory on 12th October. We also have the Wellbeing Hour with Kate Goodger of Laing O'Rourke and now Kate's big claim to fame was, she was a sports psychologist with the British Olympic team. So I think, again, going to be a really interesting Wellbeing Hour.

So that's 15th November. And Chas Howes on 6th December, he was FD at Superdrive. again, we've got a whole mix of lots of really interesting stuff here, so please join us when you can. I would love to see you here. and get in touch. We have a free health check, a mental health health check, one hour consultation.

So if you'd like to do that for your organization, let us know. and we have all those tailored solutions for senior leaders, people managers, frontline people. So we'd love to hear what you're doing in mental health and if we could help you. Follow us on LinkedIn, keep in touch with us and, we will, keep you in touch with what we're doing.

**Amy:** I'm just noticing there's some really lovely comments in the chat actually, Angus. Yeah. Pegs Bailey, you've said how crazy that just rocking up as ourselves is seen as ground-breaking.

yeah, I mean, I hope that more and more of us feel able to bring our whole selves to work with all the messy humanness that that brings. How lovely. That's a really lovely comment. Thank you for sharing.

A final thought from you, Julie.

**Julie:** just, reading some of the things in the chat, I'm, I'm really encouraged to see people who've been through a process of really understanding themselves and their drivers for work. It's clear that people on this call have been very thoughtful about this already.

And, I'm just really pleased to see this. And yes, I agree with Peg's, wouldn't it be great if just showing up every day and being ourselves was, was the way we, we, we went in the world. It's been a journey, I think, in, in work and in organizations to do that. But the more conversations like this, we have, the more permission we create to make it happen. And we, we make change happen one person at a time, one step at a time. And we've just got to keep driving forward. So the work that the team at Headtorch do, and, and other organizations so vital in this. yeah, I think these conversations are, are, are a good part of that dialogue.

**Amy:** Thank you so much. Great. Thank you very much, everybody. Hope you can join us next time. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Bye. Thanks. Thank you.