



## S2:E1 - Caroline Flanagan | Solving the Imposter Puzzle

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### Caroline Flanagan

**Beth Stallwood:** Welcome to the Work Joy Jam. I'm Beth Stallwood with the host of the Work Joy Jam and founder of Create Work Joy. And we're all about creating and cultivating more joy in your working life. This week, my guest is the fantastic Caroline Flanagan. Caroline is an ex city lawyer turned author, coach and speaker, and her expert area is all around imposter syndrome.

And it's one of those subjects that I know so many people are grappling with at the moment. It's one of those things, that little voice in our shoulders that maybe tells us we're not good enough. We're not welcome here. We don't belong. Someone's going to find us out that sits there and can be a real sucker of joy out of some of your working life.

So have a listen to this podcast, we talk a lot about the imposter. We talk a lot about Caroline's personal experience, where taking that step and the courage to leave her city legal job. And to move into the world of helping and supporting people. I really hope you enjoy this episode. Hello and welcome to the Work Joy Jam.

In this episode, I am joined by the fantastic Caroline Flanagan, and I'm really excited to dive into our conversation, but before we dive in, Caroline, can I hand over to you? And can you give us your intro and tell us a bit about story so far.

**Caroline Flanagan:** Hi Beth, it's an absolute pleasure to be here.

I'm Caroline Flanagan. I am a speaker, a coach. I'm an author of two books now, which is very exciting and the host of the Caroline Flannigan podcast. So a little bit about my story in a few minutes, I'm an ex city lawyer. So I havenine years under my belt of working in the city at a big global law firm. So very corporate background and training, but I left that world behind well sort of left behind that world, certainly in the context of me being a lawyer in 2005, after my second son was born and very quickly fell into coaching. I discovered coaching retrained, and set up my coaching business in 2007.

And I've been coaching really ever since but added to that over the years, I've built a speaking career, which has been fantastic, which actually. Back into the city so that I'm now speaking to

corporate audiences. And, and I'm really enjoying that. It feels like I'm kind of back in my old playing ground.

**Beth Stallwood:** Amazing. And it's a really interesting, and I'm going to pick into this first because I'm always fascinated about people's careers. Is that transition from city, lawyer to coach isn't one that happens all the time. It's not one of those career paths that you think, oh that's the natural next step from, from city lawyer. What made you. Head into that direction. And obviously you've been massively successful in that direction, but I'd love to know what's that, what's that what going on in your mind when you go, okay, City law to being a coach

[00:03:51] **Caroline Flanagan:** you're in this and if there's any lawyers listen to this, I'm sure that this will resonate when you're in the thick of it. And you're in the city and you're working really hard. It's actually very hard to imagine yourself doing something else because the world is so all consuming. I reached a point in my career where I realized, you know, I was looking around me looking above me and thinking, do I want that for myself? In terms of career progression, what was on offer was making that, having those thoughts?

[00:04:17] I was obviously evaluating what my career could look like having two young children and previously working kind of 70, 80, 90 hour weeks and how that was going to work. So all I did know was that. Where I was and where I was heading, wasn't necessarily going to be the right thing for me anymore. And I think initially what I think what helped me make that big step, and it was a big step Beth, because I'd worked really hard to get there, you don't come become a lawyer and work for that kind of organization overnight, it's not something you just throw away recklessly, but I felt this quite burning desire, burning feeling that there was something else out there that I could do and be amazing at and still really passionate about. And it's not that I didn't think I was a good lawyer. I was a great lawyer and I had great potential in that career, but it wasn't the thing that I wanted to have like in my epitaph, you know, the end of my life look back and feel that I had been a lawyer, just been a lawyer my whole life now. I love lawyers. I'm married to a lawyer. In fact, I have enormous respect for them. So it's not about saying that a whole lifetime spent in the law isn't a great career, but for me, I felt I had so many other talents that weren't being didn't have the opportunity to be expressed in that career. And that's what gave me the courage to leave. Even though I didn't know what I would be walking into.

**Beth Stallwood:** So interesting. And I'm just going to pick up on a few things, because I so often work with people who are in the same space as you, which is almost that zone of, I, I think there's something else out there. I think I want to do something else, but the career I'm in with us in the city or, you know, in any other kind of career. It's so hard when you're in it, to be able to think about the other things, because you're right. Some of the jobs that people are in, so many of them are totally consuming. Aren't they they're massive amounts of hours. It's taking up a huge amount of your brain space. There is an obvious next path within it, which seems like the thing that you put it in the, you should do, because that's what you've been trained for. That's where you've been headed. Maybe your career so far and you're right. I think it does take a lot of courage to say actually, that well-trodden path might not be the one for me.

**Caroline Flanagan:** [00:06:39] Yes it does. But I think it's also important to make that distinction between that feeling and the kind of just having a bit of a bad time at work feeling because we have that as well.

[00:06:49] Right. And I think it's really important that we don't wake up and think, oh, you know, this job just isn't for me. I'm just going to leave and go and wait for an epiphany about what I thinking you're doing in this world. So, you know as well I'm working in this space, I can really feel like it's really important to, to confirm that.

[00:07:07] But actually there's, there's a lot within often when we feel an unease or discontent within our current work, there's a lot within that, that we actually have the ability or a bit of control over that we can change. And you know, what is a lot about that sort of approach and that mindset and being, having ownership over your career.

[00:07:28] So I think there's lots. So there's, there's lots of space for us to explore those things, feelings of discontent and see what we can do with them in our current environment, in our current role, before we take a massive leap, but by the same token if the kind of, for me, it was like a real pull.

[00:07:48] Like if you feel like you're being pulled towards something, it then doesn't matter so much what? That you don't know what that is it actually feels quite intuitive, then that is something that's worth listening to. Hopefully I've explained that distinction.

[00:08:03] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:08:03] I really get it. And that exploration of the feelings of discontent is I put that into the bracket of, have you just got a bit of work gloom?

[00:08:12] Is there some thing that, you know, you're not taking ownership of? Is there something, is there a relationship that you're struggling with at work? Is it that you're a bit bored. Is it that there's just some frustrating stuff. Is it just that in life, in general, you're a bit tired or there's something just not, you know, sometimes it's like, if you just had a good night's sleep you probably feel better about this. And I think that's where, when we look at work joy and thinking about the work that you're in versus doing something different and both of those things are brilliant options is actually really exploring, first of all, how do I get a bit more joy just into my everyday working life and feel it and be able to understand actually, is that feeling that I'm having of discontent because I feel something else is putting me towards it or is it actually, I can fix some of those things and let's be really clear here.

So one of the things about work joy is it's not about being 100% happy all the time, because that is not how the real world works and we are, we are very much based in that. What is the real world and how is that going to work? It's not about that. There's always going to be stuff that in any job, even when you have, like, it sounds like you've kind of found your calling in life and you're kind of really cool in it, but there's still stuff that annoys you, right?

[00:09:23] There's still stuff that gets frustrating in the work that you have now. So it's more about how do we understand and find those bits of work joy. How do we cultivate them? So we get more of them in our daily life. And I honestly think that when you've got that, if you are in the job or the

career that you're happy with and that you actually think actually I could really be doing a great thing here.

[00:09:44] You feel less of the work gloom anyway, because you're just having that more balanced into the joy side of things.

**Caroline Flanagan:** Absolutely. And I think it's something that struck me when you were talking there, Beth is about, you know, those things that we can do individually to kind of lift the gloom. Find more work joy. Involves looking inwardly. Right. So looking at what's going on with ourselves, our approach to our work, our mindset, and one of the things that comes up with a lot of my clients who may reach a point where they're considering going elsewhere, because they've reached a saturation point or something.

[00:10:20] And one of the things I like to remind them of is that there are certain, where the issue comes from within us, we're going to end up taking them with us to the next place. So if, for example, to give an example of one of my clients at the moment, if you are sort of thinking, I need to leave, I don't belong here. I need to be doing something else, and the reason for that is because you feel that where you are, people don't value you in that, or you're getting feedback that you don't like. I always say to my clients, you have to understand that some of that stuff you will take with you. You will take that feeling of am I valued enough with you to the next thing you go and do?

[00:11:01] So what we don't want to be doing is to be jumping from one job to another, hoping that the next step, the next choice will just magically fix everything. And that's why it's so important. I think, to do the, that exploratory work, and do the work on yourselves before you make any decisions about leaving.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:11:19] That's such good advice there because I see this happen as well. We get people who are thinking, if I go over to this new, lovely, shiny new world, it's like at Dorothy in the wizard of Oz and here's the Emerald city. When I get there, everything will be fixed. It's like, ah, okay. But that's still an organization. There are still bosses and colleagues and processes and policies and culture. And I've still got my own baggage that I'm bringing with me as well. Just because they go somewhere else. That will be better. I'm not sure that's always true. Sometimes if you've been in a, you know, if you are a person who is currently a square peg in a round hole and you haven't quite found your tribe and your work and all of that kind of stuff, it probably will be a bit better.

[00:11:59] And you'll definitely have a honeymoon period. Right? Cause you go to a new job. You're like, oh, this is amazing. It's wonderful. But then the reality strikes and there is still all those things. And if you are carrying some of those things with you. If you are a person who doesn't find it easy to feel valued, if you're a person who doesn't necessarily feel like the feedback is right or good, or you haven't been able to rest with that feedback and know what it means for you, that is going to go with you. You're so right. And doing the work for yourself first, so that when you do go you're in a great position to be able to. Do you well to feel good about it and to enjoy your job is really, really good.

[00:12:38] **Caroline Flanagan:** Exactly. And even, you know, from a position of strength, I always say, well then from, you know, sort of weakness or from fear, right?

[00:12:45] **Caroline Flanagan:** Because it feels like, oh, it's just not worth, so I need to go else where. And what you want is that sense of actually I'm choosing this and this is good for me. And I'm really being intentional about it.

[00:12:55] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:12:55] Definitely. And I think just one of the things you said earlier in the conversation, as well as that you, you personally felt the real pull towards something.

[00:13:06] And I love the concept of being pulled towards something rather than being pushed away from something, because that's where you get stuck there. And if I'm really excited about it and I feel like it's the right thing to do, and it has some purpose behind it and it, and it fit it, it feeds your energy.

I often think that if you're being pushed away or if you're feeling like, oh, I don't want to be here anymore. The energy is a negative energy or going with versus that positive. Oh, I'm really excited about this and I'm making a choice and I'm, I'm doing it for the right reasons for me.

[00:13:41] Amazing. I'm loving the advice so far and what I want to do now, if it's okay with you is okay. You have a new book out at the time of recording. It's, it's actually coming out tomorrow at the time of recording, which is amazing so it will already be out and I'm sure be a massive bestseller by the time the podcast comes out.

And this book for you. It's your second book. And rather than me tell everyone about it, you're the author. Do you want to tell us a little bit more about the book, what it is, and also what prompted you to write this message and get the message out there?

**Caroline Flanagan:** So the book is called, Be The First, the subtitle is people of color imposter syndrome and the struggle to succeed in a white world.

[00:14:28] So it kind of is what it says on the tin and the fact that it is very much a book that's targeted at the experience. You know, I wrote it for the person of color who works in typically overwhelmingly white corporate organization and to address and to empower them in a situation where they so often feel quite isolated and excluded, and that there are barriers to their success that they just cannot overcome.

[00:14:56] So what I wanted the book to do Beth was two things. First of all, It's really important to give a voice to those challenges, to those things, is that all really quite specific and quite unique to that community, to people of color. I talk about imposter syndrome and this is one of my core topics where I go in, I go into organizations, I talk to a very diverse audience about this issue and you and I both know that it's something that afflicts actually, most people, you know, some research is saying is up to 90% of the population that have experienced Imposter syndrome at some time in their lives. However, there is something very particular about imposter syndrome as experienced by your kind of person of color. Who's like the only black woman in her whole team or in her whole department, or, you know, the only black leader of which there are not very many at all.

[00:15:49] So it's very unique in the sense that. Whereas normal imposter syndrome is very internally generated, right? It's all about our own internal feelings. And if you look at most people who suffer from imposter syndrome, a lot of them have some very great achievements to their name. There's some great successes, but it's the internal doubt, right?

[00:16:11] That's what makes it so unique, but what complicates things when you're a person of color and you're a minority right. In an organization, is that you've got this external feedback. That's effectively telling you you're an imposter telling you that you don't deserve to be there. And obviously that's not direct, it's not blatant and using those words, but it's felt like in the corridors, when we had corridors and went to the office now a little bit, it comes in different forms, but it's felt in the conversations, in the references to maybe a private school background or an Oxford education that you as a minority person of color didn't have access to it's felt in the very kind of cliquy environment where people sort of knew each other or they all live close to each other and they've had very similar middle-class upbringings. And it's felt in the way, for example, that, you know, it's very hard for a person of color to get a sponsor in an organization. And that's something that without a sponsor, certainly. In the field of law, it's very difficult to get head since go into leadership. And it's felt by the fact that, you know, if I think of myself as a three-year qualified lawyer, for example, looking up at the partnership and thinking, how can, how can I see myself there when there is no, no one, there's no one who looks like me, no one there no black, black partners who's ever I've ever stayed long enough or made it to that top.

So all of those, those sort of things elements that amount or kind of systemic bias, create this external impact of you feeling you don't belong in that environment. So that's why I wanted to write a book that was so specifically addressing that challenge. So it gives me a voice to those challenges and I've done that through telling my own story.

There are some quite few dotted examples of clients I've worked with or people I just encountered and having my network who want, whose experiences I share. But I didn't want to stop there, Beth. One of the things I feel really passionate about, and particularly at the moment where, you know, the, the one and only, but very positive outcome of last year at black lives matter. And, you know, the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of this, at the hands of this policeman, one of the positive things is, is the openness, right? The conversation, the narrative we're having now about, race and inequality and the lack of diversity. But I wanted to. Take it a step further for me, that's just the beginning And what we need then is the strategy is the, what next? What are we doing? And then, and then I'll stop and let you get a word in edge ways. I get very excited about this. The important key point. The change that needs to happen at a systemic level, right. Cultures need to change. And these organizations and the problem with that is that while that is going on, you know, cultures aren't and changed in a day.

[00:19:19] And what I, you know, what I say to them, my clients and what this book is saying is like, in the meantime, what I don't want, you know, what, what we don't want is the sense of powerlessness and waiting for cultures to change, waiting for the system to be fixed. It absolutely needs to change, but in the meantime, there's so much more than you can do.

[00:19:39] And so ""Be the First"" is my book. That is the book that aims to do that, to give you that strategy. So you're not feeling so powerless anymore.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:19:48] Great. I've got so many things to pick out on there. Are you okay if I kind of go back a bit and then I got totally lost in your excitement as well, but I did write some notes down to come back to because I was like, oh, I'm loving everything you're saying.

[00:20:00] And, thank you. First of all, for me for doing this amazing work and for getting your message out there. And, I think there are many people really affected by black lives matter and what happened. And I agree with you. I think it's good that we are now having a more open conversation about this and that people like me, who isn't a person of color can come to it and say, okay, how can I be part of helping make this happen?

[00:20:27] And what do I need to do to make things change? And, so amazing. I'm going to cycle back a little bit to think about the, the things that you have within your book about being the first and that there's a few questions I have. So I'm going to start with a bit of an observation about this is that, so 90% of people, and I reckon a hundred percent of people that I work as a coach are struggling at some level, small, medium, big, enormous, totally overwhelming whichever level it is with some sort of imposter syndrome.

[00:21:02] And you're right. A lot of that and it, and it's in its standard form. If we were to put in a box that says it's standard form very much internally led very much around kind of that feeling of insecurity very much something that actually working through a number of things you can start to manage and understand it and learn to live with it.

[00:21:22] I don't think you already get rid of it but learn to live with it and what it's telling you. The thing that I'm really interested about what you're saying here, and I think I can totally see it. And it's a challenging one is, but what if the external factors are kind of backing up what your imposter is saying? What, if you can't see that you could should be, could be there because people don't look like you and people are very different from you and they're in very different, , clique's to you and all of those things you were talking about in organizations like cliques and little groups of people and people who, you know, the sponsoring factor, where it is so often, , the bias of ah, that young person reminds me of myself and therefore I'm going to sponsor that person.

[00:22:10] Not, I think many times, most of the time, not deliberately anywhere they're going well. I want to sponsor a white person. It's just that, that, that is such a finished device is a really strong one within arthritis. It's like, oh, they went to the same school as me. They've got the same hair. We do this together.

[00:22:27] We've got this kind of bias going on. I can imagine that feels really hard. And again, just as a kind of better reflection here as well is. You're absolutely right. Systemic bias is a massive problem and there is a lot to solve. And I am heartened in many organizations that I've been working with to see that people are on a mission to do that.

[00:22:50] And you're absolutely right. Cultural stuff and systemic stuff does not change overnight. There is a long term plan to make that happen. So I'm going to get to my question in a second again. I'm going to let you talk again. So my first question on this is when you're in that position of being a person of color of being maybe the first being the only, not seeing those people in your organization in more senior positions, not really feeling like there's those role models for you and you don't want to wait for it all to be fixed so that you can, you know, in however many years time you feel part of it, what is your thinking? And, I mean the answer will probably be read the book, but I'd love to summarize. What is your thinking about what can people who are in that position right now?

[00:23:43] Who've almost got that double track of imposter syndrome going on, not just the single track of it, who are in organizations who are making efforts and trying and doing things, but it's not there yet. What kinds of people do to take some ownership and to start feeling good, to start feeling, maybe some of the joy to start feeling that they can do those things and be the first.

[00:24:03] So that's a big, big question and take it in whichever way you would like to. And we'll head down that path.

[00:24:10] **Caroline Flanagan:** [00:24:10] Sure and that's a million, a million dollar question, you know, what we, what can we do about it? , which probably explains why my book ended up being 400 pages instead of the 250, I thought it was going to be, but so talking all seriously now. What I'm going to speak to is my personal experience. So there are lots as, you know, lots of different tips and tricks and things you can try and strategies That are out there that people suggest. And what I have found is that sometimes those will work for for people or they'll work for you some of the time and not others. So none of what I'm about to say is actually saying, oh, everything else you've ever heard about how to cope with imposter syndrome. It isn't true. However, what I found personally was that while some of those tips and tricks might get me kind of take the next step and give me just enough of a boost to kind of be brave and sort of push myself through it.

[00:25:11] They were never transformative, like nothing ever changed. So I just found that every time I encountered there was another goal I wanted to achieve, or even just showing up to work some days and trying to perform at the level of which I was required to work. It was just so exhausting. Back to this, like to the beginning, every single time with my imposter syndrome and having to battle it.

[00:25:36] So what worked for me, and this is my answer to your question is it was the moment when I decided to stop trying to kind of battle and get rid of imposter syndrome as if it was a bad thing that I needed to get out of my life in order to be able to achieve now. I think it's something that you've already said, but about if I did have imposter syndrome, actually it not going away. So I firmly believe imposter syndrome is an innate part of you. And the mistake that we're making is in what we're making that mean about us. So, and what we're making imposter syndrome, what we're, the impact we're, we're allowing it to have on us. So by way of example, What I ended up doing was saying, okay, what if I just stopped? Like not wanting to have imposter syndrome? What if I stopped not wanting to feel like an imposter? What if I actually just accepted that I have imposter syndrome. And that maybe I was an imposter. Now that sounds really counterintuitive isn't it? Cause that's like feeling like an imposter is the thing that makes you feel bad. But what I found was that, well, two things, and this is the, the message I say I send out. So when I'm talking about this subject, it's two things. First of all, your imposter syndrome has no grounding in reality, right?

[00:26:57] In the sense that you can feel self doubt. You're not good enough, even though you have. I don't know a high profile job or you had the promotion, right? So it's got no grounding in reality. And other people tell you you're good enough, but imposter syndrome is not interested in that. But the second point in this is the key somewhere in your imposter syndrome is a grain, at least one grain of truth.

[00:27:21] So somewhere that there's an element and that's something trying to tell you about actually how things really are. So in my case, and in the case of the lone person of color in the room,



they feel like an impossible. Of course they do, because that's a room that's full of white people. So it's perfectly normal and logical that they would feel that they didn't belong. Same if it's, I mean, even if we look at it and it's not, so the person of color, maybe it's a woman and she's on a board. Right. And the board is all male. Again, she feels like an impostor. She kind of is one. Everybody else is, has this commonality and she stands out. Right. So that acceptance, acceptance piece.

First Beth, it sounds like, , resignation, right? It sounds like give up, you'll always be an impostor. You'll always feel like you don't belong and it's the opposite because then suddenly it frees up all our energy to go. Well, actually. Okay. So if I'm an impostor, like what does that mean. What am I going to make that mean?

[00:28:24] And that is where the opportunity lies for turning your impostor syndrome, which I believe will never leave. It's an innate part of you into something that becomes a strength and a powerful asset. And the way it does that is by really honing in on that point of difference. That makes you feel like an impostor, and I'm really encouraging you to see actually that's where my value lies. I don't need to be like everybody else because I'm uniquely me. And then having to find out and do the work, then this is an important bit of the solution is then it's like, well, who am I right? If I'm the impostor and I'm here and there's something about me, that's, you know, I'm completely different to everyone else.

[00:29:03] What is that? And what is the, where's the value in that? And the explore to what you do to find the answer to that question is where is where it gets really exciting and how you turn it into it.

[00:29:16] **Beth Stallwood:** So I am totally in love with your description here. And partly because I think, it is applicable, you know, as you said, if you're the only woman in the room, maybe if you're the only person with a disability in the room, maybe you are the person of color in the room is how freeing, and I think you did use the word free and it was exactly the word I was thinking of when you said it, how freeing it is to say. I am the different person here. Rather than fighting the idea, why don't I work with it? Why don't I spend the energy that I spent worrying about it and turn it into something that is more joyful and that's exploring. And that's kind of understanding and investigating and thinking about how could I use that for my own benefits rather than for. Something to worry or keep me Swalwell, keep me in a box or keep me not doing what I want to do, because I don't have the other people in the room feel like part of my tribe.

[00:30:16] I, I think it's amazing. And those two things I wrote down. Number one, your impostor has no grounding in reality. And two, somewhere in it is a grain of truth. And that idea that those, both of those, I say this a lot and it's probably on almost every single one of my podcast episodes. And people were like, Beth, you're really boring now is that two things that seem different can be both true at the same time. . So it seems like those two things that if there's a grain of truth, but it's not grounded in reality, it's like, hang on a minute. Those two things can't be the same. It's like, well actually in the real world, it's not all binary.

[00:30:48] It's not, it's either one thing or another it's, there's two things here. Your impostor isn't grounded in reality, but there's some truth in it somewhere. So what is that truth? Understanding it and working on. And then the other bit that I was totally loving was then you have to do the work.

Yes. So many people, I don't know if you get those come to me and they're like, Beth, please wave your magic wand at me and make it all better.

[00:31:12] And I'm like, okay, reality, silver bullets don't exist. There isn't one solution to this. It's a lot of things that you can do over time, but you have to do the work, the work. If you look at it at a, you know, as you're saying, it can be really exciting. Suddenly you've got this new energy from understanding that you don't need to keep fighting this thing, but doing the work on who are you, what do I want?

[00:31:38] You know, where is my uniqueness? That is hard, deep, personal, vulnerable work, right? It's not, it's not like, oh, I've had this revelation and now everything's perfect.

[00:31:50] **Caroline Flanagan:** Exactly. And it's, you know, that's for me is the, if you look at Be the first, the book, you know, the half of it is probably the first half of it covers what we've been talking about in terms of the experience imposter syndrome and that grain of truth.

[00:32:04] But actually, you know, there's like 200 pages. Of guidance about how you do the work that makes it sound overwhelming. It's not at all. What I do is actually take you through a step-by-step to help you do that. So what I, what I found when I had this, you know, I call it a revelation. It really felt like that that suddenly this freeing moment that, that you've also described was then the kind of, oh, how do I. It tied into that was a recognizing recognition of my value. I'm like, how do I hold onto this? Like, I feel great now that I've worked this out. But as soon as I walk out the door, I go into a meeting, how do I recapture this new energy, new sense of my own? But there's something, I didn't know what it was exactly, but there was something in me that was unique and special and worth holding onto.

[00:32:54] And I didn't want to get rid of. So I created what I have called the impostor speech, but, and what that is and reasons for mentioning it. Isn't exactly that it's how you do the work to answer the question. Who am I? And I love one of the ways I describe it is that if your imposter syndrome, it's not a problem you need to fix, it's a puzzle you need to solve.

[00:33:21] And it's almost like my imposter speech or other tools that are out there. If they can help you solve that puzzle of who you are and get to the bottom of, as you say, you know, what, what matters to you? What, how you got here? Like what your inner resources and strengths are, where you're going, what your goals are, who you are, in its entirety.

[00:33:41] Then once you've got that, this is my experience. And it's the reason why I'm sitting here talking to you today about a book that I've just bought out, or I've talked to you about all the other, all the other things that I've achieved in the last few years that I would not have imagined possible it's because I did that work and I'm able to reach, I'm able to reach a point where now.

[00:34:00] [00:34:00] My value comes through. You either get from me courage. If I'm, you know, it's really daunting or you get competence that I've been building up using this tool, or you get a spotlight on my value, like I'm able to do that now. Very, very very easily, very naturally. Now, as a result of doing that work.

[00:34:21] **Beth Stallwood:** Amazing. And it's really interesting there about kind of the steps to do the work and that phrase, a puzzle to solve, not a problems affects. If you start with that, I'm a

problem again, in that kind of negative mind space, aren't you? It's like, oh, I'm a problem. And I need to fix my own problems versus, oh, I'm a puzzle.

[00:34:43] And all humans are puzzles and we will have kind of deep and interesting things that are going on. And I think that that gives it that more, you know, coming back to the work choice side of things, a puzzle to solve is far more joyful than a problem to fix. Right. In my mind and going into [00:35:00] like visuals of like jigsaws and different puzzles and things, that's like, oh, isn't it satisfying once you've found a piece of the puzzle that works together.

[00:35:08] And also in my head that metaphor of the puzzle to solve is actually that can be an ongoing thing. This isn't something like. I'm done. And I think sometimes people want that. So I want to do that. You know, I'm ready to do the explore, who I am work. So what's the problem I need to fix. And I need to know exactly what the outcome is.

[00:35:29] I need to know what I'll be doing at the end of it. And it's like, again, I'm not sure where it life really works that way, but having a puzzle to solve, you might solve a bit of the puzzle this year and the next year you might solve another bit. And that. Longer term, thinking about yourself as an ever evolving, growing human is.

I personally think a much more joyful way to look at your own personal development and your own life and your own career than to looking at. Oh, I've got a problem on, I need to fix.

[00:35:58] **Caroline Flanagan:** [00:35:58] And it's just so much more and more joyful, more empowering, more transformational, right? So once you start and once that's your premise going into the world every day and how you show up to whether it's an exciting opportunity that seems daunting or actual a real challenge that somehow you got to find a way through when you got that sense of, you know, I am someone who is evolving, I've got these, I've got this much in my puzzle that I understand.

[00:36:21] And these, these sort of stresses but actually as I go along every new encounter, I have, I'm adding to that. I'm enriching who I am. And so the puzzle kind of grows if I'm not completely destroying the puzzle metaphor, but yet it continues to evolve and develop as you do. And for me, the longevity of that as a solution is honestly, it's.

[00:36:44] It's so much more powerful. I just think it's so important because I, I get honestly a bit frustrated with the, kind of have three tips to, to fix it or whatever. And, and I will honestly answer a question like that with, you know, we need to do less of doing work and more of the being work, right. The work on who we are and, and, and actually people struggle sometimes.

[00:37:06] Sometimes with hearing that and listening to it, because as you said, it is, it isn't easy work, but it's certainly the most reward.

[00:37:14] **Beth Stallwood:** I think that the, the world this fall, isn't it, you don't have to spend too long on Instagram or Twitter or something to find a here's the life hack that will make something we should take a long time take no time at all. And I have to say I'm a little bit like, Hmm. But sometimes things just take time and you are someone who, you know, humans don't have hacks. I mean, there's some stuff that you can do, right? There's some simple stuff and you know, it's always great to have the simple, here's one thing you can do.

[00:37:42] But that isn't necessarily that what might make you feel a bit better, but it's not necessarily transformational. You're absolutely right there. And I think that less of the doing stuff, more of the being is we're so programmed, especially like I worked in corporate roles beforehand and you're so programmed that the doing is the important.

[00:38:01] We've spent years being shuffled into this way of thinking that if you get this done, if you get this done, you'll be successful. If you get this done, you'll get the next promotion. If you can do, do, do and do more than other people, I might mean, especially in the legal world, like is how many billable hours are you doing, et cetera.

[00:38:17] So focused on the doing and so less focused on the being and you know, in your life, you've had that revelation that does actually, I need to focus on the being and now you're sharing. With the wider world is how do you focus on that and still be successful? And it is so refreshing to hear someone else who's thinking there is just a simple answer.

[00:38:37] There isn't one thing to make this happen.

[00:38:46] **Caroline Flanagan:** on that point on the being, but, you know, just to be clear, cause I know as you say with that sort of doing culture where programs. We're paying them to do that. And that does discredit often the being stuff. And I know plenty of lawyers and lots of my friends will go.

[00:38:57] If I mentioned the word being there will be some eyebrows and roll [00:39:00] their eyes and think, oh my God you've lost it. But the point about the beings, this is really important for something like imposter syndrome is. If you do the work on who you are, it enables you to do stuff so much more easily. That's not a fight all the time to be doing. And that comes back to what I was saying about every time I wanted, I wanted to do something that I found challenging or demanding, always having to come be back at the start battling my imposter syndrome, find the energy to like, take this next step and do this and do that. Whereas now that I've done the work on who I am. I just have to show up as who I am and the work I need to do, but it's the action stuff that let's face. It gets us paid, comes so much more easily. And without the struggle, that's the point it's not either, or it's being is a much quicker route and more effective routes to the action the doing that is necessary to operate right. And function in the world.

[00:39:58] **Beth Stallwood** And it's such a good point to make as well as it's not about one or the other. It's about actually do both, but let, let the. Like help you with the doing, cause it doesn't you're so right when you know what your values are, you know, how you show up at work, you know, what you're great at and what your strengths are.

[00:40:19] You can really focus your attention on the doing in the right way. And I, you know, personally as well, I know that the minute I decided to accept what my strengths are and also accept what I'm not good at, everything gets much easier. Like, okay, I'm just owning it. Like I'm not good at that stuff. So lets not work or do roles or work, do projects for clients, et cetera, that do the stuff that you're not so good at focus on the stuff you're really good at focusing on the stuff that brings you joy, that brings you that feeling of empowerment. That brings you the ability to achieve things that you want to achieve that are really aligned with how you want to live your life and your values and who you are.

[00:40:56] And you're right. The rest of the doing becomes so much easier.

[00:40:59] **Caroline Flanagan:** Absolutely. I can tell him very perfectly aligned, aligned on that.

[00:41:08] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:41:08] And I also have those friends that were looking at me or people that would look at me when I talk about like the being side of life and who would go, has something happened to you?

[00:41:17] Have you like joined a cult or a commune or something? And you know, and there are people who think that a lot of this stuff is just too fluffy and cheesy. And my answer to that. You know, don't knock it until you tried it because. I don't think any of the things really that are called fluffy are fluffy. They're the stuff that really help you be awesome at being you and be awesome at being an employee and be awesome at being a leader and all of the different things that you want to do in your life. I can, I can imagine, I can see those looks coming at you right now. And I know like, I feel for you within that zone, but you're so right. It's like, actually, you're more empowered now with that for sure.

**Caroline Flanagan:** [00:42:00] If, what you're already doing in terms of doing stuff is working for you, then that's great. You know, I'm not here suggesting that you do all the beings stuff through the imposter states, do the work on imposter syndrome. If you've got very kind of actionable steps that you can take quick fixes and they are doing the job, if they are doing the job fantastic.

[00:42:19] And we all want to get to that same place, the point is you, if that's not working for you and you're getting frustrated with trying to, trying to get your result, trying to build up your confidence, then why don't you try something else? If what you're doing is not working. So that's the point, isn't it. If you haven't already found the solution, then maybe try, try

[00:42:41] **Beth Stallwood:** And if you have found the solution it's working for you, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. You don't need to break it for the sake of it, but if something's not working or if you need a little bit more, if you need a little bit of a nudge in a different direction or some new and fresh ideas, then there's so many places that you can get those things from.

And I think we're in the stage where we could talk for about four hours about all this stuff and get like, totally nerdy about all of the things that we love to do. But for our listeners, I am going to like sedgeway us into our final, quick fire questions round, if that's all right with you.

So I'm going to bring back to the work joy theme now, and this is a personal question and I would just love to know for you, what is always guaranteed to bring you a little bit of work joy in your day.

[00:43:33] **Caroline Flanagan:** So at the moment, because we're on lock down and my children are home, it's definitely a smile from any of my four boys at home. So that's always really good. On a more professional side, I suppose, I think the reminder especially with writing the book and the pushing out of my comfort zone. Particularly on social media, just the reminder that it's not about me. It gives me a lot of joy because I identify with the way that the work I'm doing with a sort of bigger cause and a purpose. And I, I remind myself pretty much every day. That's okay. We'll read the book or maybe listen to this podcast and it will make a difference in their lives. So that is huge.

[00:44:20] **Beth Stallwood:** Love that. And I also love the fact that the first thing you think of is, , something that necessarily isn't necessarily work-related, but it does bring you joy is that moment, like when your kids are smiling at you or having a good day, and that my theory of work and work joy is that work and life are so.

[00:44:39] Blended. Now there's so much that is together and you can't, you spend more than a third of your life working. You can't really say and separate them, but actually if you have joy in your life, you'll have more joy at work. You have more joy at work. You'll have more joy in your life. It's just the general bigger things.

[00:44:52] So I love those two areas there. And the idea that it's kind of really connecting back to your purpose because guys are a great thing. obviously you've probably been currently reading your own book and kind of editing and making sure it's all ready to go. But apart from your own book, either what book are you currently reading? what book would you recommend to them?

[00:45:14] **Caroline Flanagan:** [00:45:14] Those are two very different things. , I'm having, it's weird when you're writing a book, it's quite hard to find something to read. I normally read a lot of nonfiction, really a lot of non-fiction books, but, I also love a bit of classical fiction.

[00:45:31] So I'm actually reading. Reading some Russian literature at the moment, which makes me sound very high brow. And I, it's not something I do all the time, but I just wanted something completely different. I'm reading *The Brothers Karamazov* I think it's called. So that's super highbrow and I wouldn't recommend that it's super intense and, , but, , I, I'm really enjoying what I've read recently that I really enjoyed was, *StoryBrand*, but I'm just going to check because I want to make sure I get the name of it, of it.

[00:46:04] Right. It's basically a book about storytelling and it's fantastic for storytelling in work, I think really important. I might have to give you the details in the show notes actually. So it's a great resource for being able to tell better stories and use them in your work, in your relationships, in your communication. But there's a, there's a trick in there, which I love, which is about recording each day. Something that's story worthy. That's the name of the book is called *Story Worthy* and recording something. And the whole premise is something story worthy happens in your day, every single day, but we're too busy to miss it.

[00:46:47] So this book gets you really thinking about what was, what happened to them. That was memorable about today. I love that really recommended.

[00:46:54] **Beth Stallwood:** That's a great recommendation and yes tell me afterwards and we will pop it into the show notes for this one. Love it. What I, my next one is what is the best or most useful bit of advice that you've had in your life from somebody else or from something you've read or from something you've watched that you always find yourself coming back to?

[00:47:28] **Caroline Flanagan:** [00:47:28] There's so there's so much, it's hard to choose. I would say the thing that has been with me, I feel all my life. This is really random Beth. So there's a song I can't, I have no recollection of who sang it but it goes the higher you build your barriers, the taller, I become inside.

[00:47:45] So strong is the name of the song. I heard that song when I was about 10 of something around about that age. And I basically listened to it on repeat. Every single day at school, like through my whole school, it got me through the most extraordinary challenges and difficult times.

[00:48:07] And I think I just internalized that song. So now it's the thing that comes back to me. And it kind of is that the advice, isn't it in song form that there's something inside so strong. I know I can make it, you know, like that is, that kind of gives me that boost when I'm having a really challenging moment that has always.

[00:48:28] **Beth Stallwood:** I love that. And I feel like it's your theme tune. I have something like that. That kind of like you come back to it and you sing it over and over again. I've tried for life. I can hear it in my head is playing in my head right now. It's fine. I think it's definitely the 80s.

[00:48:51] I can hear it. We're going to put it on as the theme tune for when we do something on Instagram with this. So I love it. I know that I can make it though. You're doing me wrong, so wrong. I love it. Love it. Brilliant. I love you're the first person on the Work Joy Jam to do a song and it's just, I, I'm a, I'm a massive lover of music. And I often narrate my day by what song I'm thinking about. So is it amazing to hear that? And I'm going to be singing that all day. Thank you. I love it. Without going into....because we totally both believe that this is like doing the work and it's a long-term thing. And there is no magic bullet. I still think it's worth knowing what people's advice is around. Something that you could just go and do that might take you 1% further into feeling good or to giving you some joy. So I would love to know something from you. That's a practical bit of something as advice for our listeners that they could go and do, now tomorrow that might just give them a little bit more joy in that working life. Just a little bit more, not the full pay.

**Caroline Flanagan:** This won't be what you're expecting at all. Tidy your desk. It's a very tactical, very specific thing. And, the reason why I'm talking about that is because, and it's really important.

[00:50:11] It's an important thing for mood and a sense of also keeping, like, having order in your mind and feeling like you're in control and a lot of what you've said about what joy is that being like, actually you have more control than you think. So for me, when I feel that things like might be feeling a bit overwhelmed. I actually take 10 minutes to just clear and tidy. It's not very glamorous. It's not very exciting, but it's something you can do tomorrow, right? To just almost clear the decks, clean the slate and go, right. And it's almost like a reset button for me. So that would be, I mean, bizarrely that's what came to me.

[00:50:53] Sounds weird. Doesn't that go and clean your desk, but I've been doing that as a kind of clearing ritual almost at the beginning of the day recently, because things have been busy and I've found that really just gives me a bit of peace and a bit of a moment to just stop actually.

[00:51:09] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:51:09] I totally love it. I think that's the kind of advice that it's actually a really good reset. And although it seems small, I love the small things because you can go and do it. You can take five minutes, you can take 10 minutes, you can take 15 minutes, however deep you want to go with a clean and all kinds of other stuff.

[00:51:23] You could do that. But I, I, I'm sitting here thinking when I feel like that, if I'm procrastinating, Mm. And I know that my brain is not focusing on something clearing my desk is

something that I do as is like clearing up my desktop on my computer to make sure that there's not random files and stuff like that.

[00:51:41] It really helps to get my brain back into stuff. So I love that. I think it's a great bit of advice and having that tidy desk really. So I love it. So final question for me is it's been an amazing conversation. Thank you so much. Where can our listeners go and] find out more about you about your book?

[00:52:02] Where can they follow you? What's your pitch out there that we can go and find.

[00:52:08] **Caroline Flanagan:** [00:52:08] Thank you so much, Beth. And for, for the record, it's been great, amazing conversation. Thank you so much. I've loved talking to you. The listeners can find [carolineflanagan.com](http://carolineflanagan.com), super easy. So you can check out. I've actually revamped my website this year.

[00:52:23] So it was looking really fresh and clean and shiny, and you'll find everything there. My two books, podcasts I'm currently doing and also the one I'm planning for later in the year. And all my contact details on social. I'm basically Caroline Flanagan with the odd underscore thrown in here and there, but you'll find me if you just search my name.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:52:45] Brilliant. And we will put all the links, et cetera, to you and our Instagram ads or on our other social links as well in the show notes. Thank you so much for joining me today. Caroline I've loved the conversation. I do think that we can have another three or four hours worth of it is amazing. I am really excited for your book launch tomorrow.

I'm really excited to read it and to read through all those steps in to kind of hear your amazing advice and guidance. So thank you very much for joining us on the work joy tab. Thank you, Beth. It's been such a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

[00:53:23] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:53:23] Wow. What an interesting conversation that I had that with Caroline. So many things that are really going on in my mind right now about some of those key points and things that we might want to think about. And the ones that really are staying with me say my key takeaways here are those two things about what's going on in your brain and accepting things that are happening.

[00:53:49] And I wrote down these two things, is that number one, your imposter has no grounding in reality. Number two, somewhere in it, there is a grain of truth, and it's really interesting, isn't it? That those two things can be true at the same time. And that's a phrase I often use with people is two things that seem very different, can be true at the same time.

[00:54:09] And how do we take them and do something with it. And I also love that Caroline's alignment with the work to our way of thinking is that you have to do the work on it. It's not something that would just simply. Be there and disappear just because you want it to. So doing the work is really important.

[00:54:27] And then thinking about how do you get the courage and the confidence to move through it. And also I'm really thinking about where you all the positive color or the possible difference within a room. If you are somebody who doesn't fit the mold of what's, the normal looks



like I hate that word, but what the norm looks like in that particular culture, how much of that is really impulsive and how much of it is actually genuine that, you know, the feelings are there for a reason because you don't necessarily feel part of that.

[00:55:01] So , some really interesting takeaways from me and I'm loving also the higher you build your barriers, the taller I become, that's totally going to be the theme tune for this particular one in my head. So thank you all for listening to this episode with me, Beth Stallwood and Caroline Flanagan.

[00:55:25] I really enjoyed this conversation. I hope you've got something that you can take away from it too. We'd love you to. On social media, we are on all of the Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. You'll find us at Create Work Joy with work joy or one worse. If you're interested in finding out more about our other programs coming up.

[00:55:49] To the website, [www.createworkjoy.com](http://www.createworkjoy.com), where you can find out about things like the work joy way, which is my signature 16 week coaching program, enabling you to really cultivate some more joy in your working life, wherever you are, wherever you are, whatever you do. And also to hear more about club work joy, which is a way of getting more involved in a fantastic community of people who are all looking to create more joy in their working life as well.

[00:56:23] Thank you all for listening today.