



Digital Wellbeing – Season 4 – Episode 4 - Alex La Via – The WorkJoy Jam

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**Beth Stallwood:** Hello, and welcome to the WORKjoy Jam Podcast. I'm your host, Beth Stallwood, and I'm really excited to share this episode with you. Today, I'm talking with Alex La Via, who is a Digital Well-being Consultant, and she's the founder of Live More Offline, and there are some really interesting parts of this conversation focusing on three different areas of our own digital well-being. I'm not going to tell you now what all of those things are. Do have a listen. It's some interesting stuff and some really easy, actually things that you can do to help you with your own digital well-being and, maybe, to think about how you might help the people around you and create the right environment for your team to be able to have a world where we're able to balance the online stuff with the offline stuff, where the online stuff is more productive. Yes, I think a subject that is really, really relevant to us all. Anybody who's working at all remotely, anyone who's working in a hybrid fashion, anybody who is spending a lot of time online, this one is for you. I really hope you enjoy this episode.

Welcome to the WORKjoy Jam Podcast. I am very excited today to be joined by Alex La Via, who is a Digital Well-being Consultant, and she's the founder of a really cool organisation called Live More Offline. When I got introduced to Alex, I was, like, 'Ooh, I need to talk to her.' The work you're doing is amazing, and I'm really interested in-, some people might be going here and listening now, Alex, saying, 'What is a digital well-being consultant? I don't know what that is?' So, I'm going to hand over to you to do a little intro and, maybe, tell us a little about what you're doing and your career journey, your story so far that has got you to this place of being the founder of Live More online, sorry Live More Offline. Why am I saying, 'Live More Online,' that's the wrong way round? Live More Offline, so Alex, over to you.

Alex La Via: Fabulous. Oh, well, it's so wonderful to be here with you, Beth, and you're right. I mean, gosh, digital well-being is such a new and current challenge for many of us that we have this challenge, that a lot of the language that we're using or defining as we go. I'd be absolutely delighted to talk through more about, you know, what this actually means in practice, but the, kind of, things that I help organisations with are very much around video call exhaustion, always-on working, feelings of isolation whilst working digitally and distractions impacting our capacity to focus, so it's all of these ways where digital technology meets human thriving, human well-being and human potential.

**Beth Stallwood:** Amazing, and, like, all of those things you just talked about, I'm, like, 'Yes, I want to talk about all of those things,' because I think they are things that I have not had a single conversation in the last eighteen months that hasn't involved at least one of those challenges.

Alex La Via: They're conversations that bring us all together because I think so many people have experienced these challenges that everyone has got a story and a perspective and a real-life experience that it can, you know, touch into.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, so tell us a little bit, Alex, about your journey to get to this and then we're going to dig into let's talk more about what this digital well-being stuff is and how you might be able to help us all to get that thriving back in our lives.**

Alex La Via: Absolutely, so I started Live More Offline after noticing the impact of digital habits within my own life, and this started back in my career as a corporate tax accountant. I started with a large accountancy firm and then moved out into industry, and on the outside, you know, it looked like I had a very successful career, but on the inside, I was actually really struggling with insomnia, stress, and a lot of this came from my constant connection to technology. Back then, it was a BlackBerry phone with that red light flashing, so working in, kind of, multinational organisations I'd be e-mailing one time zone in the evening, another time zone in the morning, and I didn't realise the impact that digital technology was having at that point. I found myself with a gap between roles, and I decided to do something really purposeful with that time, so I jumped on a plane, flew to Spain and spent 34 days walking 500 miles on the Camino de Santiago, and it was on that trail where suddenly all this mental space opened up. I was able to reflect and look back, and I realised, or I became curious rather about the impact that digital technology had had both in my personal and in my work life and that then sparked me, when I came back, kind of, re-energised to start a masters degree with the University of Aberdeen looking at the impact of technology on well-being and how we can create a healthier balance. I've spent the last three years working with organisations around creating healthier digital cultures and, yes, it was really niche before the pandemic.

**Beth Stallwood: And, now, so just part of everyday life, right?**

Alex La Via: That's it. It's right at the heart of the future of work conversations.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, amazing. It's so funny because when you were just sitting there, sometimes a song starts playing in my head, and you were talking about walking about 500 miles, and I was just thinking about the Proclaimers, and I Would Walk 500 Miles, and I would walk 500 more and sitting there thinking, 'Oh, what an amazing thing to do,' and to allow yourself that space to, kind of, really open up your mind and think about what is it what you're recognising in yourself and how you might be able to change some of that.**

Alex La Via: That mental space is something we do lose in the digitally distracted age, so it's quite, yes, it ties in with the theme as well, to have that experience of really noticing what happens to your clarity of thinking in a space like that.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and in that hole, I don't think it's on any, kind of, standard career path guidance is it? That you go from being a corporate tax accountant to being a digital well-being consultant? I've not heard of that transition myself before?**

Alex La Via: No, me neither.

**Beth Stallwood: Paving a way for a whole new way of thinking about doing things. There are so many things I want to, kind of, go into. The first one is, this idea around, you know, mental space and what's happening in our world and I just wonder if you could give us a little bit of an overview as to some of the challenges? You've said a few of them already but a bit more detail, some of the challenges that the, you know, some of these things are great aren't they? Some of the digital world, how it's opened up**

**things, how it gives more flexibility and all kinds of things, but what is the other side of that? What's the negative side? What's the stuff that people are finding really difficult?**

Alex La Via: Absolutely, and that's a great question and really points to the fact that it's not black and white, so digital technology is a real force for good, and actually, it's the organisations that harness technology in the best ways, you know, they've undergone this digital transformation that will be set up to succeed in a digital future. The challenge comes when we're not then intentional with the ways that we're using technology from a human perspective, and at Live More Offline, all our work is based around three pillars because the conversation is bigger than well-being, so it's digital productivity, digital well-being and virtual connection. In terms of what are the unintended downsides, if we're not intentional, then from a productivity perspective, you know, working in the digitally distracted environments where we've got contact pings, notifications, reduced focus time has an impact on our productivity, focus, accuracy, creativity.

Then, well-being perspective, we're having real challenges at the moment with burnout, and there was a survey by Buffer about looking into the struggles of remote workers and what they've found was that the number one challenge for remote workers since the pandemic has been not being able to switch off and so that's another key aspect of creating balance with technology. The third pillar is around virtual connections, so in this time where we're having to connect over digital platforms, if we're not intentional about allowing (ph 09.48) in human connection touchpoints, then we end up feeling that sense of disconnection and remote isolation, but there is (TC 00:10:00) a lot that we can do in that space to feel more connect whilst working digitally, so they're the three areas really that we look at, at Live More Offline.

**Beth Stallwood: I'm going to dig into each of them because I think each of them have their own place in are really interesting for what we can do, and one of the things I often talk about when it comes to WORKjoy and thinking about, like, how do you get more joy in your working life and in your life in general, is the bit about personal accountability, the personal responsibility stuff. I'm really interested about this because what you're talking about is about how we do this intentionally rather than just, I think, get stuck into a pattern that isn't very helpful for us or gets stuck thinking that we have to do things. It would be really interesting as we talk through this stuff to think about actually, as an individual, what are we empowered, what can we do for ourselves to help us in this world because we can't always rely on our organisations to have the answer. I also think that organisations, when they create an answer often create, like, a policy-based answer or a, 'Here's one size fits all,' when the world I don't think really works like that, and I think we all have a slightly different tolerance to stuff and a different resilience to some of these things as well.**

Alex La Via: I think there's so much truth to that, so really connecting into, you know, what it is that you want to make happen in your life and then having that intention. So much of our behaviour is habitual, and actually, we just do a particular behaviour in response to a trigger, so it could be an e-mail pops in, a notification comes up, we check the e-mail. We don't necessarily think-, well, we don't think at that point once it's become a habit, and we don't notice whether actually there was something better we could have experienced which might have been the capacity to focus, but at the same time, there's so much to be said about teams being accountable to and creating those conditions. Live More Offline, we really make sure that through all of our programs, we're working at both of those levels, the team level and the individual level, as you say, making sure that individual is accountable, but from an organisational level, doing what it is that you can do to create the conditions that actually enable that individual to be able to make the choices that they want to make.

**Beth Stallwood: Let's dig in. Let's go deep for a minute. Let's get in here. Let's talk about the distraction stuff. Let's talk about this, how easy it is to not be able to get that focus, that flow because of how digital technology, when it's not set up in an optimal way, works for us? What are you seeing and observing and, maybe, even what are some of the things that we can do about those things?**

Alex La Via: Yes, sure, so it's really interesting how, when we look ahead into the skills that are needed in the digital future of work, actually, as technology automates, more the routine work that we do, then the skills that we need are more of the higher-level cognitive skills like focus, creativity. The World Economic Forum have said that 50% of our people need to be reskilled by 2025 in order to take this into consideration, but at the same time that those skills are becoming more important, they're actually harder to do.

**Beth Stallwood: It's, like, 'I know we need this, and we haven't actually got that long to make this happen if we need it by 2025,' but it's getting harder every day.**

Alex La Via: That's it, like, the number of team's chat messages increased, I think, 148% during the lockdown, so if we're constantly being pinged and dinged and we don't have structures in place around how we're communicating within teams, then we'll never be able to step back to actually be able to focus. Our brain is like a muscle, what we practice, we get stronger at, so the more that we practice distraction, the more destructible we become as well, so it's absolutely vital. I've been doing work with early careers teams, and that's another great place, kind of, starting right at the beginning of peoples careers with those sustainable habits that really help performance.

**Beth Stallwood: In this world of the, kind of, pings and dings and things, what are some of the practical things? I love it too. There's going to definitely be some, kind of, pings and dings thing going on here. What are some of the practical things that we could do as individuals or, you know, within our teams that might help us to stop those things getting in our way of productivity, in our way of being great and focused in the things that we need to get done?**

Alex La Via: Yes, so many of our technology applications have settings that we can change to set them up in the way in which we want them to be. We don't have to accept those defaults, and if you're ever finding yourself thinking, 'Gosh, I wish that I didn't have so many e-mail notifications, you know, popping up?' There will be a way within the settings that you can change that, so there are some things that are universally quite helpful which are removing that pop up box in the bottom right-hand corner of your screen on Outlook, so you can change that. You can remove the sound of messages as they come in. One thing that I have is that my incoming e-mails make no sound, but if it's an urgent e-mail, it does make a sound, so people know that actually, I'm more likely to pick it up if it is actually urgent, and I quite like that as a bit of a nuanced approach. Then, working in batches is key, so allowing yourself a 45 minute, you know, focused period of time and then going to your e-mails or your other shorter tasks and what I quite like to do there is gamifying it, so setting a timer for 25 minutes and then seeing how much you can get through in those 25 minutes of the more routine tasks and then go back to something that requires focus. And, I think when you're keeping it rewarding you're more likely to do it.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, it's really interesting isn't it, because I'm thinking here about that first thing you said about actually if it's marked as an urgent email it pings for me, is this not all emails are created equal, right. They're not all as important as each other, but when you have that constant ping or the**

**constant, like, looking on your screen you can see it, it makes it feel like they are all something you have to go and deal with right away.**

Alex La Via: Absolutely, and there's one question that I ask to a lot of people, of every 30 emails you receive how many of them are actually urgent and require responses within 30 minutes? And, if the answer there is two, three or more, then chances are that you will check every email of those 30 just to make sure they're not the urgent ones. So, what can we do there to, you know, in two areas. One, reducing the volume of unnecessary email in the first place, but secondly reducing the number of urgent emails through changing the ways we work.

**Beth Stallwood: Yeah, so interesting, and like simple things but it's that, kind of, thing to change the settings on your emails or on your notifications for whatever it is probably one of those activities that would take, like, ten minutes. But, actually sitting down and doing it is harder than the ten minutes it would take, right, because it doesn't take that long. It's the, kind of, knowledge that you need to go and do this and the action to really make it happen to help yourself, that often doesn't get down.**

Alex La Via: Indeed, yes I mean there's so many things in life where it would just take us a little bit of time upfront and saves so much time in the future. And, I try to make things as easy as possible for people attending my talks or training, and providing straight after a summary of those steps you can do straight away showing you where in Outlook you can go to make I happen.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and actually I've done some of this and it's not that difficult. It really isn't. You do not need to be a computer programmer. It's just-, I think this is an interesting one maybe for the digital industry, is the default settings are the distraction ones, like, on everything. It's almost like you always have to go and turn the distraction things off, and I wonder, and again maybe there's a campaign in this, Alex, (mw 18.35), is there something about actually campaigning for the distractions to be off to start with and you turn them on if you want them?**

Alex La Via: I really like that, I think certainly trying to make a step there when you first use an application that really gets you to think about what it is that you want those settings to be. But, I mean you're absolutely right, there's so much evidence around I think organ donation, you know, with those countries that have an automatic opt-in, you know, have a much higher level of adoption than countries where you have to opt in for organ donations. So, those default settings make a significant difference.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and it's really interesting because we have Club WorkJoy which is a, kind of, platform and it's a digital platform where we share stuff and we have a great community of people on there and we do events and things. And, one of the first things my first video that people get when they join is 'here's how to turn all of your notifications off otherwise it will bombard you and it'll be really annoying and you won't enjoy it'. So, there is something here about-, I can't think of a single programme, app I use that I haven't had to go and do something with to not be bombarded with information from them.**

Alex La Via: That is absolutely brilliant, and it can actually be quite nuanced as well. So, for instance in (TC 00:20:00) WhatsApp if you've just got particular groups that are really noisy you can just mute those particular groups as well. And, so also, kind of, looking within these applications and it's not all or nothing as well so.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, I love it, so that's a, kind of, really great thing around the distraction side of things, around the productivity, how do we make it work. Let's go into this one which I think is big right now, right. There's a lot of people who are at that stage of obviously what we call burn out, or feeling really, just generally knackered from the world of digital. Thinking about this side of the well-being stuff. Tell me more about this and how we might be able to tackle some of this lack of energy and the, kind of, depletion of our energy that's been happening.**

Alex La Via: Yes, I think it's so important right now. There's a recent survey that showed 82% of leaders were at burnout risk, which I thought was quite incredible. But, we're hearing more and more within, you know, and speaking with my clients, what's coming out of their pulse surveys is around burnout and exhaustion as well. And, you know, it makes sense when we look at, for instance, the number of video messages. So, video calls that we are having, they really jumped up at the start of lockdown, but they haven't dropped. Microsoft data showed they've just continued to trend upwards. So, when you have one of those days where you're in your sixth back-to-back video call, you know, it is cognitively draining. And, you know, video calls are more exhausting mentally than phone calls, so again, it's taking that nuanced approach. How can you and as a team, you know, pick the right tool for the right job? So, not every call has to be a video call. But, the other big one is this blurred boundaries and difficulties to disconnect, and I think that's where the future of remote work really needs us to pull together, to be able to create healthy conditions for our employees to be able to thrive at work. Because, if we can't psychologically disconnect then it is a one way trip towards exhaustion, stress, anxiety and burnout.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and I'm going to take the first one, you know, is there a reason why-, I'd love it if you know this because, like, into the psychological, why the video calls are much more exhausting than either a phone call or even a real, in person human to human meeting? What is it that drives that?**

Alex La Via: Indeed, I think it's because it's a really strange environment for our brains. So, there's a bit of cognitive dissonance almost where there's a bit of a time lag at time between the movement we're seeing and the sound that we're hearing. We're seeing people in a really strange environment where we're just seeing them neck upwards, but our human brain is expecting to see a whole person and the body language, all the cues that comes with that. So, instead, you know, having a lot of this information that we take in quite naturally in terms of body language and cadence, what we instead get is a bit of a hyper focus onto the bits that we can see which is, you know kind of, the visuals on a screen but our brain is also trying to figure out why does this look a little bit odd, at the same time.

**Beth Stallwood: I always find it strange seeing people's faces but I'm not making eye contact. That for me is one of the weirdest things, I think, about online video calls. But, you know, it's a really interesting one because people say, 'Swap to a phone call' but I personally, and you know there are many people with lots of different preferences and needs aren't there, but for me personally I find it really hard to hear and understand people on a phone call, versus seeing people. So, there's that whole balance of individual needs and what's working, what's not working. And, I think one of the challenges is, it's not necessarily that we're doing digital things, it's how many things we're doing in a day right. It's the back to back, no rest for our brain thing that has an extra impact.**

Alex La Via: Absolutely, and that back-to-back nature I think Microsoft released some research that just showed the benefit of five-minute breaks between calls and they had participants' brain scans and it showed the reduction in stress if you just have that five-minute break between calls. But, so you're absolutely right,  
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it's that number of calls that are just filling up our diaries. And, sometimes they're just there because we feel like that's what we're supposed to do in order to show that we're working. You know, if we hold this video call and we have a conversation and we end the call then we have done half an hour of work. But, if you haven't structured it, taken actions and, you know, held an effective meeting then you're not being as productive. So, there are a lot of ways that you can use asynchronous working to actually be more effective, efficient and shorten meetings at the same time.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, it's that digital presentee-ism, isn't it? It's like, 'I'm here on this call but is it purposeful?' And, it's the same thing that's been going on actually isn't it, for years around should I be in this meeting or not? The same question keeps coming round, it's just that we've added in extra stress for ourselves and our brains by making it an online thing versus an in person thing.**

Alex La Via: Absolutely, yes.

**Beth Stallwood: And, so thinking about this, some of the things that I've heard people do and which I think are really great ideas is to, kind of, if you would normally have done an half of an hour meeting, do a 25 minute meeting so you've got five minutes between them. You know, the 50 minutes versus an hour and I think a lot of people are getting into that zone, but then the other thing is, a lot of people aren't in control of their own diary. Like, people are inviting them to things where it's someone else who maybe doesn't have the same idea about good digital practise. And, that's a hard one, isn't it?**

Alex La Via: Yes, absolutely, and I think that's where you really have to have the team culture brought into these balanced working practices. And, it's two sides, so it's the awareness raising across a team as a whole, but then working, in particular, with people managers, really making them catalysts for change. Because, they often do own, you know, the culture and the dynamics and the norms within a team and, kind of, having them lead by example is great. And, the mindful business charter is a great document to check out if you're wanting to get an idea of the types of principles you could sign up to. So, that's something that's set up by Pinsent Masons, Addleshaw Goddard and Barclays bank, and it sets out principles of ways that teams will work together to humanise the workplace.

**Beth Stallwood: Amazing, what we'll do is we'll pop a link in the show notes to that as well because it'll be interesting for people to go and have a read and explore some of the great stuff that's out there, and that's interesting isn't it? There are lots of resources that are coming to the fore now about all of these different things. But, the challenge again, I think, is that people are so busy doing the work or being on the calls that the time to be mindful and really think about some of this stuff just disappears sometimes. And, the thing I'm thinking about in my head is obviously you've had this amazing experience where you went and walked for 500 miles, well done, you must have had very sore feet after that, to go and do it, but you don't need to take three weeks and walk 500 miles to give yourself a bit of a space to do it, do you? It can be smaller than that.**

Alex La Via: It can be much smaller than that, absolutely. And, you're right as well about the fact that it's hard to keep up to date with these changing times as well. I mean, I work in this area full time and i'm still, kind of, learning something new everyday. So, I think our leaders have got their hands full already trying to do a day job, looking after and really caring for the well-being of their people which I think is becoming, you know, an even greater proportion of their time that knowing the strategy around how to do hybrid well is not something we can really expect them to just pick up. We actually need to support them as well.

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**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and as you say, you know, if you're working in this full time and it's hard to keep up imagine how hard that is for people who are doing different jobs and trying to do it well as well. One of the things I find really fascinating, and I've had a bit of a rant about this before on things like LinkedIn, around hybrid is there's loads of people saying, 'We know how to do hybrid, we're going hybrid.' And, hardly anyone can actually tell me what that really means for them. What does it really mean? How is it going to work really well? My advice to people has been don't set out things in too strict a way, like, experiment with some stuff, see what works. Because, hybrid often then gets translated into well we'll be in the office three days a week or out of the office three days a week or whichever. It becomes about where you are versus how you do it, and how you-, the conversation I think needs to be more around how do we do this stuff well. And, you talk about it's really well intentioned and having the right focus and what you're noticing about stuff and all of that stuff doesn't necessarily come into the conversation that often.**

Alex La Via: I love that and there's I think a really interesting article, maybe about a year ago, by I think it was David D'Souza from CIPD (TC 00:30:00) and he used the expression that you said there and it being a time for experiments, not decisions. And, so many people feel in a time of uncertainty they have to nail their, kind of, flag to the mast and say 'this is what we're doing', and then that's bold leadership. But, actually we were feeling our way into this and so it's actually maybe setting that as a clear intention to our teams, that we're working together as an experiment. We try something, we then gather the feedback from our organisation as to whether that's working and then we iterate and we do another tweak and we're always learning from the feedback that we're receiving. And, I think that's a really positive way of approaching this rather than feeling that pressure to say at the outset a definitive policy of how we're going to work.

**Beth Stallwood: And, I think there's also a need for us all to be really mindful that everybody's worlds are different and the idea that we're all in the same situation and that we can all do things in a certain way is just not really how human beings work. Everyone has different home lives, different things they need to do, different priorities, different levels of resilience and ability to do things in a certain way at a certain time, and yes. I think your world and the things you're working on are going to become more and more needed as, you know, even if these organisations have made bold statements before (ph 31.32) it's going to be, like, 'Okay, well now we've said what we're going to do how are we actually going to make that work for everyone? How is this really going to be our culture? What does that look like in this new world?' So, so many things to think about, and then the third thing we were talking about there on your wonderful list of things to focus on was all around this, kind of, the human connection stuff. And, I'd love to hear more about actually, how do we make that side of things work as well.**

Alex La Via: Yes, sure so at Live More Offline we frame this around there being four principles of meaningful human connection online, but the ethos behind it is that when we're working virtually what we need is lots of little touch points. We will never get the same feeling of connection as we do in one big go as we would if we're sat face to face, you know, next to somebody else. But actually, if we've got that cadence, that regularity and we've got those small touchpoints, then it does build up and we can develop some deep sense of belonging and connection. So yes, that in the four principles around and it's kind of from an evidence base, one to ones, that really impact how connected people feel within their organisations. Making your socials more meaningful and centring them around a sense of purpose instead of say, just a Zoom happy hour, but actually, rather, you know, could it be things like walking challenges, say, which I've heard of teams using to great effect. You know, really kind of pulling together and having a lot of banter around them say, who can walk from-, which

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team could walk from the London to the Sydney office the fastest? Yes, and then kind of strengthening networks is absolutely vital, and making sure that people gain the feedback that is so easy to lose in the digital environment as well. When we're sat at home, we send off a report and then we're just sat there in the void of our of our room and we don't know whether what we've produced is good enough. Yes, it's absolutely vital from especially early careers to try to humanise that and to intentionally put those touchpoints of feedback and connection and discussion within there.

**Beth Stallwood:** It's really interesting. You talk about the, kind of, those smaller moments and being able to have some regularity and some consistency to those. Because when I talk to organisations quite a lot on, you know, different subjects, but we've talked quite a lot about culture change, and how are you going to create the culture that you're looking for? And one of the things I always say to organisations is, 'Before it becomes part of your culture, you almost have to make it quite a formal thing. You have to actually book these things in.' Like, if you want people to have more feedback conversations, just saying we want you to have more feedback conversations probably isn't going to do it. Have a booking in three ten minutes one to ones a week that gives you that opportunity to do what you would have done just going up to someone's desk and saying, 'Can I just grab you for five minutes?' will help make that happen until it just becomes part of your normal regular rhythm and cadence of what you're doing. I always think digitally, it probably won't happen unless you're scheduling it and making it a formal part of what you do.

Alex La Via: I think that's absolutely brilliant. yes, definitely scheduling into the diary makes makes all the difference. You know, you've made that commitment.

**Beth Stallwood:** Yes. And it's weird, isn't it? Because it's all of the human bits of life that you would never really schedule we're now having to think about scheduling so that, you know, turning around to your boss's desk and saying, 'Can I just check with you, am I doing this in the right way?' Or the kind of coffee jump into a conversation when you're at the water machine or the walking down the corridor just saying hi to someone and checking in on how their real-life is versus how their work is. I think, for me, that's the thing that got really lost in the digital world. And it's very hard to replicate the situation. But what we could do is to find a space to have the same conversation.

Alex La Via: And I think it's so important because with this talk of this great resignation at the moment but when I'm speaking with organisations, what I'm hearing is that their staff turnover is actually much higher in the people that have been with their organisations for only a year. And that's the people that have onboarded remotely and worked remotely and in the feedback is, 'well, I don't feel that connected with my team. And then this other company has offered me a higher salary, so why wouldn't I move?' And these remote workers, you know, well, in remote working were so much more mobile now.

**Beth Stallwood:** Definitely. And I can imagine that, you know, it's a really hard thing to onboard remotely, right? That's a difficult thing to do. There were people who have been working in organisations for, you know, a year, a year and a half, who have never met any of their teammates in person, and I kind of get that. That's not a completely unique thing, because teams who've worked globally have often been in that situation. But it's a really hard one, isn't it? And it takes longer, I believe, and I guess I have no evidence for this, I think it does take longer for you to build those really good relationships when you're doing it online versus when you have that in-person human connection.

Alex La Via: I think, yes, I think so. But then at times, I've been really surprised. And I think it might be the difference between the one-to-one and the group dynamics. I think the group dynamics online, it's really hard to form a connection to a series of kind of boxes on a screen. But I've had some people that I started working with during the pandemic and other partners, and I had been so surprised. You know, I then met them in real life twelve months later and it felt like we'd known each other forever. We had managed to create that sense of connection. So it's all about what does work and what doesn't work in the online environment. And I think you're right, that for organisations, it is a real challenge. It's hard, but it just takes intentionality. It takes, kind of, factoring all these aspects into the onboarding process and having those intentional ways that you're embedding human connection into digital work.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes. And I love how much we talked about that intent. It's actually that, 'Let's spend a little bit of time thinking about this rather than just doing everything as we've always done it.' Because if we are struggling with anything like burnout or exhaustion or disconnection or any of the things we've talked about today, they're not going to suddenly miraculously fix themselves. There is no magic wand cure for this stuff. We're actually going to have to do some work. And think about it and talk about it and notice things and change some of our own or some of our team behaviours if we want that to change. It's not just going to magically fix itself.**

Alex La Via: Absolutely. And change is hard. It takes a lot of momentum to initially shift direction. But once you've made that change then, you know, it takes on a momentum of its own.

**Beth Stallwood: Amazing. I am going to move us on now because we're going to need to go on to our quick-fire questions. Thank you so much for talking through those three really important areas. And I'm sure people can get in touch with you and talk more about the stuff but let me crack on if you're okay to go through some questions. So talking about work joy, let's bring it back to that and, kind of, the joy of work. What for you, personally, is always guaranteed to bring you a little bit of work joy?**

Alex La Via: So for me, it's definitely time outside. Whether that is a walking meeting or actually, you know, kind of a walk and think, definitely having-, Or even a break. Time outside makes all the difference.

**Beth Stallwood: It's like asking the kid like, 'What's your favourite bit of school?' It's, like, 'break time'. And it's like, yes. I personally love it when kids say like, 'What's your favourite lesson?' It's like 'break time or lunchtime'. It's like 'yes, because that's where you get all the fun bits of (inaudible 39.53) '. But there is something about actually, and I know I did it, I've been trying to religiously do it, it's so easy to get stuck in a room and online for the entire day. (TC 00:40:00) And now that we're coming-, well when this comes out, yes, we'll be in it will still be in winter. Now that it's dark in the mornings and dark and evenings trying to get out during the day when there's actually still some daylight versus being dark and dingy and then in the house in front of a computer all day is definitely something I've been trying to do more and more. yes, amazing one. What book are you currently reading?**

Alex La Via: So I've gone back to digital productivity again recently. So I'm looking at Cal Newport's A World Without Email, which is absolutely brilliant. It's his latest book and looking actually at how we can do some really innovative things with the way in which we're working to just reduce the volume of these digital distractions at the outset, you know, through smarter working. And I think it's a fascinating book actually.

**Beth Stallwood:** It's really interesting as well. When I think about people I've worked with, is some of the people who I've worked through who had got really, what I would call, good balance between how they focus their time and how they don't get distracted, some of those people grew up in a world where email wasn't the main source of communication. And they're able to say, 'Well, I'll look at my emails here,' because they weren't in the world of 'Well, you always have to be looking at your emails.' And that hole, do we really need them? It's almost like email is one of, like, the best and the worst inventions of all time, right? It's so brilliant in some ways and so terrible in others but, oh, sounds great. I'm going to have to get on and order that one and give that a little read. Next question, what is the best or most useful bit of advice that someone has given you in your life that you always find yourself coming back to?

Alex La Via: So this was at the point where I was doing soul searching around my corporate career, and I was just chatting to someone actually, at a meditation retreat. And they said to me, 'It doesn't have to be that way.' And there was just something about those words that just hit right into the heart of me. And it's like a kind of a realisation of, 'Oh gosh, it doesn't have to be that way.' And that really guides everything that I do throughout my business now, you know, with all of these things and the amount of email we're receiving and all the back-to-back video calls. Because, you know, it doesn't have to be that way. We've got opportunities. We've got power to be able to make change. And I think just starting with those words, suddenly you feel so much more empowered. And the question just becomes, well, 'How?' You know, 'How do I find the other way?'

**Beth Stallwood:** Yes, and even if it's 10% better, right? It doesn't have to be perfect, and those little steps can really make a big difference. I love that question. It doesn't have to be that way. How else could it be? Like, what would be better than the way we're doing it right now? It opens up that real opportunity to change. I love it.

Alex La Via: I completely agree with you that small change is much more lasting as well.

**Beth Stallwood:** It's like the whole New Year's resolution versus actually doing something. Like, do something small and easy to do until it becomes a habit and then build and build from there. I love that way of making change happen. Right here we go. This is a big one. What is one super practical bit of advice to our listeners, which is something that they can actually physically go and do now or do tomorrow or the next day and, kind of, keep it working that would help them in their world, in their digital world, and to help them get some more work joy?

Alex La Via: Okay, so, I am a strong believer that everything is personalised and all our challenges are different. As a catch-all, I'd want to say check your notifications and disable any ones that are not actually helping you. That they're just a distraction. But from an individualised perspective, I think I would say step back and just think 'where is the one place in my life that I am out of digital balance? Like, where is it?' And we often have that gut feel. And then at that point, look at, well, using that guiding question, does it have to be that way? So what change could you make that would make that 10% better?

**Beth Stallwood:** Yes, love that. So actually, it's almost just like taking stock, isn't it? And stopping and kind of going, 'Right.' Maybe it's going outside, going for a walk and then give putting that question in your head. Like, 'where is it out of balance? What is not quite right here? And what can I do about that?'

Alex La Via: Yes, often we don't stop to think and then weeks and months fly by and we're continuing with habits that actually we do know would make a big difference if we could change them. So just that very act of stopping and thinking can make a big difference.

**Beth Stallwood: Love it. So, final question for me is where can people find out more about you, Alex, and about your amazing work and about Live More Offline?**

Alex La Via: Oh, brilliant. Well, then you can connect with me on LinkedIn, which is actually Alessandra La Via with a double S. Or on our website, [www.livemoreoffline.com](http://www.livemoreoffline.com), and we list out there the work that we do around awareness, raising talks, workshops, and also our signature eight-week 'Leadership in a Digital Age' course. So I'd be delighted to discuss further.

**Beth Stallwood: And we'll pop those links into the show notes as well so that people can click on straight through. Alex, thanks so much for joining me today. For sharing some of your really great thinking and practical advice around some of these areas. I think it's going to be a continuing challenge for everybody. And I love the idea that we can all, kind of, take a little bit of responsibility for our own and to think about, as a team, how do we create that right environment to make these things better for everybody in a way that works for individuals? Because you're right, we don't all fit into exactly the same nice neat boxes around oh, if we do this everything will be fine. Because this doesn't work like that, because this is real life we're talking about. So thank you so much for being a guest on the WORKjoy Jam.**

Alex La Via: Thanks so much for having me, Beth. It's an absolute pleasure to have been here.

**Beth Stallwood: Well, a huge thank you to Alex for coming on the WORKjoy Jam podcast. So many great little bits and nuggets of things that we can do. I think for me, this making sure we spend some time considering where things are balanced, where they're out of balance, when is that out of kilter thing and you think, 'Yes, I'm exhausted, maybe from back to back calls or the notifications are distracting me with my focus time to really actually stop and think and consider what's the small action I can take to make that 10% better?' That to me would be my real takeaway, is not to get stuck in the habits that aren't helping us but just to stop and consider what else we can do. I really love talking to Alex. So thank you so much, Alex, for joining us. And we will put all of those bits and pieces about how you can get in contact with Alex, her website and some of the things she mentioned into the show notes. So do go and have a look at those and click on those if you would like more information. If you are loving what we're talking about our WORKjoy, remember that we have Club WORKjoy, which is a community of people who are all working towards creating and cultivating more joy in their working life. We have monthly guest speakers. We have an app where I tell everyone to turn the notifications off straight away. So don't worry, we're doing hopefully a good digital world out there, where we support each other on questions and people ask me questions every week. General videos for their answers. We have networking sessions and all kinds of great things to be part of. So if you're interested to hear more, you can find out more at [Clubworkjoy.com](http://Clubworkjoy.com) and sign up to come and be part of our wonderful community of brilliant people. Thank you so much for listening to the WORKjoy Jam. We have a number of episodes. This is season four we're working on now. So do go and have a listen to other things that you might find really interesting. Thanks so much and have and have a great week.**