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S3:E3 – Elvin Turner - Be Less Zombie

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[00:00:00] **Beth Stallwood:** Welcome to the Work Joy Jam podcast. I'm Beth Stallwood, your host and founder of Create Work Joy. And this episode I am joined by the wonderful Elvin Turner who is an expert, speaker thinker writer on all things about innovation and business and thinking about the future and how do you make that change happen that you need to, to be able to survive and thrive in business.

We dive into the subject of innovation and innovation culture and the things that maybe can bring us some joy and bring some gloom. And that idea that we end up being so busy in doing the day-to-day that the space we're creating for innovation isn't big enough. And how the impact of what leaders do make such an impact on whether we can or can't or find it easy or difficult to create real innovation in our organizations.

I really hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. I'll pop on at the end to tell you a little bit more about what I'm taking away from this great conversation. Enjoy.

Hello, and welcome to the Work Joy Jam. In this episode, I am being joined by the fantastic Elvin Turner, and I am really excited [00:02:00] to dive into this conversation. So before we start Elvin over to you, we'd love to hear a bit about, more, more about you, who you are, what you've done and how you got to where you are today.

So tell us more about you.

[00:02:12] **Elvin Turner:** Okay. Well, it's a bit of a funny journey really when all over the place at the beginning, I came out of university and was ill and I couldn't work. And I was laying around all my friends were going to go off traveling and, be in this really terrible band that I was supposed to be in just as well it never worked because we were just awful. And, anyway, I couldn't go with them and I ended up falling into a job in, it was a PR company at the time. And, I thought, you know what, I'll stay for three or four months and then I'll go and catch up with my friends. 23 years later, I was still there. And, I kind of found what I thought was my vocation.

And anyway, long story short, this, this company that I worked for, were focused eventually on change and leadership and innovation. And in the last few years I was there, I headed up the innovation practice. So it was working with. Generally large companies who had lost their mojo really I guess you could say figuring out what, what comes next?



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Where do we, where do we go from here? And, I ended up working with lots of organizations, helping them figure out that journey and build, build an environment where the future can show up more successfully really. About five years ago I set up on my own and I've been doing that kind of stuff ever since.

I do quite a lot of teaching in business schools as well on entrepreneurship. Most recently wrote my first book, *Be Less Zombie*, which I'm still recovering from, even though I loved the experience, I'm a glutton for punishment and I'm just starting the second one early stages of that. So, yeah, that's a bit about me.

[00:03:46] **Beth Stallwood:** Amazing and what is so funny and I just, just giggling at myself is how many people come on the podcast and say that I didn't really know what I was going to do and ended up in a job and fell into something.

And that's where it all came from. And I talked to lots of people about this subject is [00:04:00] people think that. Really nicely structured that you know, what you're going to do. And if they don't have that answer in their head, it's, you know, a bad thing. And I'm like, most people don't know. I know I went to a temporary job that I stayed in for five years after university because I didn't know what I wanted to do. So I think that that is really lovely to hear people talk about that and see how you found your way through. Part of life and loving the *Be Less Zombie* book. And I'm sure we're going to dig into some of the things that are in there today and to talk about all things, innovation and leadership, and that idea that, you know, people are struggling and wanting all this innovation, but not knowing where to go. So let's talk about some of this stuff, and obviously I'm going to talk about it in the way of thinking about it from the work joy perspective and how innovation could be one of those things that can give us loads of work joy, but also a lack of innovation that kind of feeling stuck, or like things aren't moving can be a real source of work gloom, which is the opposite of work joy.

So tell me a little bit more and dig into this stuff. Obviously we can't get 20 something years of your experience into a 45 minute podcast, but I'd love to know some of the things that you were experiencing with the organizations you're working with and where people are at when they come and go, oh, we need some innovation here with that, you know, real entrepreneurship or whatever it is that you're working through.

[00:05:23] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah, the biggest problem that, so here's the typical scenario. I, I get, I get a call. Can you come and talk to us about innovation and I'll go in and meet the CEO or one of his direct reports. And the conversation normally goes something like this. Elvin at our big idea cupboard. Look how empty it is, and they're quite frustrated about it.

And we're telling people, come on, you have freedom to innovate. Come on, bring, bring me your big ideas. And no one does anything and the cupboard stays empty. And so you start to dig in and try to



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understand, well what's going on here. And usually there are three or four typical things going on that I'm [00:06:00] sure everyone listening will recognize the first is.

I just, I'd love to love to come up with some big ideas, but I'm already working at 120%. I haven't got time because I know that if I put forward an idea and you even like it, it becomes my new evening job and I've already got three, you know? So there's, there's a time and a motivation issue. There's also often the stakes are too high, you know, this big idea, cupboard big ideas. Crash land in a spectacular way when they fail often inside a corporate and you know, who, who wants to step into that opportunity as it will be framed. Not many people because there's too much to lose. The stakes are too high. And I'm very often, anyway, there's no metric, there's no motivation for anyone to even do innovation because the thing that I'm rewarded for, the thing that my boss is rewarded for is actually just to repeat what we did yesterday and deliver predictability, which is fine.

That's good. That's good business. That's how we stay in business, but it's not enough. When the speed and scope of change and the rate at which the future is coming with such degrees of unpredictability, that incremental innovation, which is all you get from a business as usual system is isn't enough. So, you know, that that angst, that the senior team have feel a feeling about, you know, The future, trying to find the future and recognizing that the half-life of what we launch is much shorter than it used to be.

We have to get better at finding new things. And, and the thing that I find most often inside organization is there is a discovery deficit. We're not very good at discovering the future because we're not prepared to take risks. And that is always because we haven't built an environment in which we can do that well.

Well, our environment is designed for predictability and repeatability. It's running as the highest level of efficiency possible. There's no space. [00:08:00] And one of the biggest, I guess, pieces of advice that I'd give to leaders at a kind of a 30,000 foot level is make space. Make space for this to show up culturally with processes, with capabilities, with every, every dimension of organizational life needs to look a little bit different if you want big ideas to show up.

Yeah.

[00:08:25] **Beth Stallwood:** So interesting. I mean, I've got about 12 points to pick on now I'll probably pick out about two the first one is this idea. People would love to do it, but they are so busy in their day job that there isn't that space for it. And I don't know about you, but lots of things I'm hearing from organizations I'm working with from people I'm coaching is their day jobs are unbelievably full already, and there's just not, you need to talk about that space for it. There's not even the brain space to think about it, let alone process it or discover it or to research something or to consider it in a proper way. So it's almost just culturally built in that you wouldn't have space for it.



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[00:09:07] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah and there's also, I mean, it's interesting. The follow on from that also is not having enough time to think about an idea, but even if I did have time to think about it, there's no time to do anything with it anyway, because I know that my next three months are overwhelmed. And even if. I have the time.

I know that it hasn't got time to help me cause they just told me they've got a six month backlog and you know, it's not as simple as me having time. It's we need to have time because everything that you're going to do, that's going to make any significant difference demands collaboration. Because usually, you know, a problem that complex needs multiple brains and expertise on it.

So the whole system needs to be able to have more capacity if you're going to make this work. And usually we're not engineering or engineering our environments [00:10:00] to, have that breathing space. And, you know, I get a little bit frustrated about this often because I, I, if you look at people like Jeff Bezos, who, you know, when he was running Amazon claimed to have three days a week of unstructured time thinking about the future, chatting with customers, because he said, my job is to think about the future and strategy. That's what this company needs me to do. That's what I'm here to do. And the same is true. I think for every leader, but most leaders that I meet are so stuck in the weeds they don't make the time to think and dream and do this. And so my take on this is they're actually every time they choose to step into the world, they're robbing the future prosperity of the company, because you're the ones that are supposed to be thinking about that, or at least creating a context in which it can happen.

So there's, there's a powerful knock on effect, even if at a leadership level, we're not making the space because you know, you set the tone, you set the example. I was in a meeting once where it was leadership development program. And there were 12, you know, high potential people in this organization, really good people.

And they had, you know, you usually have like a CEO comes in of the business and talks about, you know, lessons learned. And one of his guys would, it was all about innovation, put his hand up and said, you know, I'd love to be doing more innovation, but just don't feel like I have the time. And, you know, so how do you make the time?

And the CEO turns and said, well, what makes you think I've got time. Can you imagine how busy I am as the CEO? And I just, I just, I thought now's not the time to make this point Elvin. I just said, well, we talked about it later, actually over dinner and, and, not in a, in a critical way, but just as an observation to say, this is the life of most leaders. And you have to make a deliberate choice to create space around you so that the future has a chance to show up. They just can't happen otherwise.

[00:11:58] **Beth Stallwood:** it's so interesting that, and [00:12:00] that conversation around whoever it is, I hear it all the time as well. If you think you're busy, how busy do you think I am? And then



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there's this like, busy-ness one-upmanship as to how, and it's like, okay, but you're all making choices, right?

You made those choices and I get it. Businesses are busy and strapped for time. And there's so many things that you could be doing, but every time you make a choice not to focus on the future or to block off that time to make it happen, or to see what you need to do. I love the way you were talking about it, there about really limiting the future prosperity of your organization, but you don't, people don't necessarily think that they're doing that at that time.

They think they're doing the best that they can.

[00:12:41] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah. Yeah. I, and we, I think we need to be careful as well because we all love a crisis. Cause then we roll up our sleeves and we can all have a little bit of a hero moment at the end. And of course we don't think that consciously. And if you are the victim of a fire on your desk, it doesn't feel like that at all.

But there is something in us that I think has happened with over the last 20 years or so, where you almost become addicted to activity. We love it. When something happens deep down that requires us to step up and solve a problem. And for me, this is the, the, the, the nub of it really, we do love solving problems. More and more as knowledge workers, we have to get better at solving problems, more and more complex problems because that's the nature of knowledge work.

And yet the irony is that's what innovation really is. It's solving problems. So if we, what we choose to do is to dedicate all of our energy, to the short-term things that land on our desks that often happens because we didn't make enough time to think something through properly before we launched something.

Or before we, you know, did something out in the field. It backfired because we launched when it wasn't ready because we didn't make enough space. So there's so much for me that comes down to a failure to make realistic choices about resourcing. I [00:14:00] I mean, I really I'm having a conversation at the moment with an organization.

I hope they do it. I will we'll see what happens. And the conversation is. If you want your people to do their best work so that this organization gets maximum benefit from them, perhaps they should only be resourced to 80% so that the remaining 20% can be focused on learning because the speed of change is such that if we're not all learning, much more than we currently are. We're going to be on the back foot all the time, time to innovate because there isn't tons of do it at the moment, time to recover. We're all knackered. We're all worn out than doing know all of the, all of the stuff that we've been doing in the, in, during COVID and locked down around wellbeing and good practice and all of that stuff that was actually brewing before that we kind of, is that true or isn't it?



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Are we going to allow ourselves to work like living, breathing human beings, or are we going to be, you know, hero mentality and work crazy hours and then whine about it? It's like, what? So I really hope this organized and all of the evidence shows that if you do that, if you work in a sensible way, you are actually more productive.

Yeah. So, yeah, I just, it's a little bit crazy making when you, when you talk to leaders who just won't accept the reality of what a human being is capable of. Now, come on. And they said, it's a stretch opportunity no they are already....it's a breaking point.

[00:15:22] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. It's so funny. You say this because I'm sitting here nodding along.

If we, if we were on video, you would see my head, like up and down, like a nodding dog. And a few years ago I was at a conference and one of the breakout sessions was around wellbeing. And the question they posted to the groups was, you know, how can we really look after what are some of the things we can do to look after the wellbeing of our people?

And I said, that's a really, really, really easy answer to this question and it's resource your teams properly. And that was it. That was my aunt. And everyone looked at me like, what do you mean? It's like, don't we just need to put yoga classes or something for them. And I was like, I was like, seriously, if you want [00:16:00] to look after wellbeing, we need to give people some brain space.

Some space to be able to do that, learning to feel like they're not always firefighting. So whether it's for innovation or wellbeing, which actually, I always think of these things, they're all connected, right? If you're not, if you're not feeling well, mentally, physically, emotionally, if you are totally drained your space in your head for that creative thinking, probably isn't there.

So everything in these things links together. And I love that you've working with that organization. I really hope they do it is 80% is enough. Most people are working at like 120% level of that job. And it's just creating a real negative. And this is where I find so many people come to me about their workload.

And they're like, I want more work joy. I'm just dealing with all of this stuff. And there is no space for doing it better. And I know, I know the 10 things that we could change in our department to make it better. I know what they are. I just don't have time to do them, but we're just fire... and those create more issues and more issues.

So I think it is an issue that is across many different industries.

[00:17:04] **Elvin Turner:** I did some work. One of the big gaming companies a few years ago. And it was really interesting. It was out in Hollywood where all their studios are. And while I was there, I got chatting and it was like a leadership development program.



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And one of the guys was chatting to me after one of the sessions. And he said, you know, we, we did this really interesting experiment once, we, we, we have this thing called the crunch and the crunch is the game has been decided, and now we're going to build it. And it has to be done by a certain. Everybody just lives in the office is absolutely crazy.

Everyone is dead at the end of it, you know, three month crunch period or something. And he said, so we decided to do an experiment because we were reading all this research that was saying, if you only work eight hours a day and do X and do Y they're naturally more productive. And we were looking at 16 hour day minimums thinking, maybe we're less productive than we think we are.

So they ran on their next game. They run an experiment and they gave people the option to only work eight hour days. But if [00:18:00] they really felt they just couldn't do it because it just was so alien to their way of working. Then they could come in or most people chose the eight hour thing and they got to the end of the game.

They finished ahead of schedule. Everyone was feeling excited, energized, much more productive. So I said, brilliant. So is that how you work now? He said, no, we just went back to normal after that, what are you talking about? Why did you do that? And he said, well, the leaders didn't really believe in it because they thought, well, if only the data was work, what would have happened if they'd done 10, it would have been amazing wouldn't it it's like diminishing returns starts to kick in. And that was the whole point of the exercise. And I think that is part of it. It's because we're so used to people at desks and presenteeism and, you know, paying for time and all of these, these crazy dynamics, which make much less sense these days with, with knowledge work.

It's hard for leaders to let go of that way of thinking. And, and I, I think that the way forward and a lot of this is choose to be experimental, run loads of experiments and see what works, what doesn't. Set some spectrums more of, less of, you know, if we're a five, what would it take to be an eight or just keep running experiments to find out what are the things, what are the needles that you can move that suddenly supercharge performance? And some of them might be really counter-intuitive.

[00:19:24] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah, I love it. And I I've often been spouting on to as many people who will listen to me as possible with the idea that working hours and increasing them is an old fashioned way of working. It is about, because it's based in that idea of like the industrial type work, where you're producing something physical, where within that time you can produce this many things.

Well, that's not how humans and brains work when you're in the knowledge economy. That's not how we do good thinking. And you're so right, that diminishing returns thing. [00:20:00] And I love it, that this is the thing, isn't it experiment. But then you have to keep the stuff that works, not just experiment with it and then go, oh yeah, that really worked but because some of the top bods up there don't really understand why we're just not going to do it anymore.



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[00:20:16] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah, I know. Absolutely. I love that.

[00:20:20] **Beth Stallwood:** Okay. So you had all this evidence, you did all this research, you looked up why to do it. You did it, it worked, and then you're not doing it. And I feel very much I mean, we're at the, when we're recording this at the time of recording, it is in the stage. Things are starting to open up from COVID and people are talking about this big debate. Should we be in the office? Should we not be in the office? And I'm hearing organizations say, no, everyone needs to be back in the office all the time, because it's much better that way yet they've had 18 months almost of proof that it still works in a different way, not to say that you have to be all or nothing, but the proof almost like just disappears because somebody wants it a different way because they don't know. But maybe it's because people don't know how, how do we manage in a different way? How do we lead in a different way? How do we structure our organization in different way? It's almost too hard to think about some of those things.

[00:21:09] **Elvin Turner:** And I, I think one of the other dimensions in this is sort of the elephant in the room is a leaders often undeclared need for control. And I, again, I had a bit of a crazy making situation a few years ago where I was working for, it was one of the big drinks companies.

And we're working with the board on all sorts of cultural recommendations around innovation and a lot of what was working really well. And there was one thing that kept coming up and it was people saying, we need more flexibility. And there wasn't a lot of flexibility in this, in this particular context and people were saying, you know, if I could just do this, it would make you know, work from home even two hours on this day would make, it'd be a game changer in my performance because of X, Y, and Z, that you couldn't argue against the logic of it.

And so it came up in this board meeting [00:22:00] that I happened to be sitting in. And there were, it was really interesting just observing what happened, the almost all of them or the board, there was a real mix of different types, kind of rolled their eyes. Oh, I got to talk about this again, as if it really wasn't an issue to them.

And we went around the houses of explaining and talking through why it mattered. And this, this person came in, did a really great job at representing the idea. And after she'd left, one of the directors just lost it and said, what a bloody hell are we talking about this for, we all know that if we can't see people, we can't trust them.

And I thought, finally, someone said it that's really what it's about. It's it's the whole presenteeism culture. And it's, it's not a new thing. But I think one of my concerns is that even though we have had this working from home thing for so long. I sense there's a lot of managers can't wait to get people back in the office so they can really see the people again.



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And you hear these horror stories of so many companies that have put software on computers so they can tell whether they're at their desk or not, and say, come on this is so the opposite to the culture of trust that unlocks speed and creativity and productivity in ways that we all know it's all documented.

The shift needs to come in, leaders and managers, not in every case, but in many cases letting go and focusing much more on the things that matter most and designing brilliant questions for people to solve, creating the context in which people can be safe. Not demanding reports and demanding presenteeism and all the other things, which feel like they are important and productive because that's my job as a manager, rather than I'm here to create an explosion of knowledge transfer and ingenuity and productivity, it's just driving the opposite.

[00:23:54] **Beth Stallwood:** And I always had this opinion and I worked in HR for many years and I've always had a [00:24:00] slight issue about HR policies and it links into the, go with me for a second on this one.

My personal belief is that probably upwards of 99% of people who go to work, go to work and want to do the best job they can because work when it's good, is fulfilling and satisfying and amazing and it makes you feel joyful and it's humans need work. It's part of what we need to be able to feel good about ourselves and what we end up doing, I think, in the world of HR or in the world of culture, whatever it is you talk about is you design ways of working based on the 1% of people who aren't going to act like that who are going to take the mickey in the hours that they work, who are going and all of these things. And I sit there and think often when you're writing HR policies and things like that is that. This policy is written for the 1% of people, whether we write this or not, that 1% of people isn't going to care what's in the policy, because if they did, they wouldn't act like that in the first place. And it's a very different type of management. It's this type of management of, I need everyone to be able to do this because I can't trust everybody.

You have to give out trust to get trustful work back at you. It's a two-way street, not a one way street. You're not waiting for them to be trustworthy that you have to trust in them to make it happen. And I think it's just a really different way of leading and people aren't ready for that. There is that control thing.

There is a lack of trust. Not being trusted in your work is massively gloomy. It's not a good thing. It doesn't make you feel like you want to do your best work. It doesn't make you feel like you want to stay an extra hour to get stuff done. yeah, it's a really interesting cultural thing that I think in many organizations needs a massive shake up and shift.

[00:25:50] **Elvin Turner:** It's interesting because this shows up a lot in innovation where. You want, you're saying to your people come up with new ideas and then when they do you shut them down because [00:26:00] you then think ahead of the consequences of who you now need to go and talk



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to. And now you've got to go and get budget and you think, oh, I kind of wish I hadn't opened this whole can of worms now.

And so, you know, one of the things I talk about in the book is. Your job really, as a leader, whether it's innovation or not, it's, it doesn't really matter I don't think. Your job as a leader is to build as much trust as possible so that you can let go as much as possible and therefore delegate and then create the space for you to do this strategic thinking that you're saying that you want to do, but also create, the motivation in people to do this stuff, because now finally I'm trusted, but it doesn't necessarily switch on and off. And I, what I encourage in the book is for people to, to look at every situation and just have an open conversation where we talk about safety. Okay. Says the boss. Here's what I want you to do let's now talk about what. I need from you to make me feel safe and what you need from me to make you feel safe. So let's say in a months' time, we'll have a check-in you'll show me what you've done. You won't make any big decisions, but you can do these kinds of this. You know, you're getting down into the detail of what user experience you need from each other so that you've got something for trust to sit on and you, and over time, you're learning ways of working, thinking, talking, communicating, where you kind of have a shorthand and a shortcut. I always one of these, we need to work like this rather than. All pieces of work are the same because they're not.

And on some things people want absolute autonomy on other things where they're less certain, they want the manager looking over their shoulder a little bit, kind of giving them a steer. So again, it's not either, or. Again, I think it's one of these things where we're in such a rush all of the time.

There's no space to have the conversations that would allow that stuff to grow because we're we're on today. We have back-to-back calls. Yeah. We'll catch up on that later. It's an email in the end. Actually it was a text message at 10:30 at night and yeah. Where's the humanity that builds the trust to unlocks the speed and the [00:28:00] productivity and the creativity that we can't have it both ways.

And this is why I find some of the most excellent leaders that I meet are not in a rush. They have lots of time in their diary. And they might have very busy people around them who are not making the same choices, you know, that their peers, their co-leaders, but they're the people who have poise. They, they spend their time on the right things.

I mean, there's a guy I'm working with at the moment. He's the CEO. Whenever I want to speak to. He just says, call me, I'll be available. And he is, is unbelievable. He's one of the few leaders that I ever really have that opportunity to talk to because he knows he's got the Jeff Bezos mentality. Really it's my job here is to be thinking about the stuff that nobody else has time to.

I'm really here to think about strategy and what's best for the future, as well as the present. That means I can't be in tons of meetings and calls. I mean, he is, he does get involved obviously, but. He's making space and the people absolutely love him because he's got time for people as well. He slows



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down, he stops, he talks in eye contact. All of the things we know that we can't fit into a back-to-back culture where there's no time for people.

[00:29:20] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. And it's like that, that rehumanizing the workplace and remembering that we are all humans trying to do stuff and get stuff done and do a good job. And I love the use of the word poised there.

I think it's a - just really reflecting on that, about that. That person there. Isn't doing the busy-ness. We're not Manship are they? They're going, I'm here for you. I've got space for you. I've got, I've got space for a conversation and see where that leads to and to do the thinking and to be able to, so then I'm going right what's the step back from that to enable that CEO not to, to get in that zone, there must be trust in their leadership team to be able to make stuff happen. And I always talk about it. [00:30:00] I won't swear here, but stuff rolls downhill, right? Just because sometimes there are some under eighteens listening here, stuff rolls downhill, right? A CEO with poise and with the ability to have those conversations with space, to talk to people with space, to think will automatically role model that as the way of doing things to the next team that are down in the hill, you know, that that will go real role, a CEO that is not interested or not able to find the time to do that who is rushing around and doing the busy-ness one-upmanship and thinking that they have to work till nine o'clock at night and never have any space for anything that is the attitude and the style that people will take on because people take on what their role models do.

[00:30:47] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah, I, you know, and as we all know what leaders value is actually what determines culture. And if you see your boss acting in certain ways, you will recognize this is important here. This is important to this person. It has a ripple effect. That is just what you've said. Really.

[00:31:05] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. Ripple effects is the much more polite way the way I was going to say it.

I love it by all. I'll say kind of really reflecting on this thing. That that basis of trust with you and your manager and how do you make that work and how over time that might change. And you've got a language for it is one of the things that I've often got, got to when I was employed into the place with managers and it doesn't happen straight away is one of my mental mottos is it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission.

And, but I know that you can't do that straight. Yeah, that doesn't exist automatically. You have to understand where people's, you know, you talk about the spectrum on the spectrum of, is this going to get me into massive loads of trouble or is this something that they're waiting for me to just go and have the innovation go and make it happen?



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So you get to understand that, but only if you invest time in the relationship, otherwise you can't have that kind of motto.

[00:31:59] **Elvin Turner:** [00:32:00] Yeah, no, no, no, absolutely. And that, that motto is very cheaply thrown around, I think. And sometimes, I think the asking forgiveness afterwards, it's so huge. The amount of forgiveness that you have to ask for in many cases, it just doesn't feel worth it.

And again, it's, the stakes are too high. I was just going to say I did some work for an organization where that was the leaders motto. and he was frustrated that people weren't stepping forward. And then when we kind of dug into, well, why it was all the things we've talked about, no time, no motivation. I'm being measured on different things. If I do, my boss is just going to squash it anyway and it's a systemic thing, but it does start at the top. Thankfully this guy, this leader, and this particular organization understood. He was a former HR director and became the CEO and he got the people thing and they went on a big cultural change journey and it transformed the performance of the company.

[00:33:00] **Beth Stallwood:** And I think it's so interesting that there are all these things, but all of them, I think, exist on spectrums. It's there in the right moment, at the right time with the right people in the right way. All of those things can be the right thing to do, but they can also be massively the wrong thing to do, because if you're in a culture where, you know, maybe that person said it's better to ask forgiveness than permission, but never forgave anybody.

You know, if you, if you combine that, we want loads of innovation with a blame culture, then you're never going to have the innovation you want. Are you?

[00:33:30] **Elvin Turner:** No it's as you say, it is on a spectrum. And it's one of the things that I try and help an organization look at very deeply, very early on, which is there is no one size fits all culture for innovation because on one end of the spectrum you've got incremental innovation, which doesn't really require much risk is known cause and effect it's stuff we've been doing for years.

We're just tweaking around the edges. Most of what we do will work the other far end. You've got working with bleeding edge concepts and technology. [00:34:00] And we all know from research that over 90% of what we do in that space fails. Now, if you're trying to do all of everything, you're on that spectrum with the same culture, the same metrics, the same leadership, the same, everything.

What will happen is they level of ambition around innovation will shrink back down to what the, the status quo values. And it puts a really low ceiling on innovation. So you have to be deliberate about what shows up where and create a calibrated context for that innovation to show up. So if you, if you really need more innovation, which I believe most organizations do, more transformational space you have, you either have to give people really dedicated time, or you give it different, you



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know, give it a separate team at different metrics with what we value from them is learning quickly and exploration rather than proving things. It's a very different mindset. And one of the frustrations I see amongst leaders is shouting for more big ideas. And yet not really understanding that you need different contexts for these things to really show up.

Otherwise we're back to the same old situation. Stakes are too high in the status quo to do anything other than what we did yesterday. Yeah.

[00:35:14] **Beth Stallwood:** I'm also really interested in this idea that, and I often hear people say, this is, we need new, like big ideas or new ideas or the big game changer that people use that language.

And. I wonder if that, and I, I don't know if you discover any of this through your work, does that very thing that it's a big idea or game-changing put people off suggesting the small things that could be game changes because there, they think it's like, oh, well they don't want my stupid little idea, but actually surely innovation is lots of small ideas coming together and creating something bigger.

[00:35:48] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah. I mean, it's all of the above. I mean, quite often I meet people in, if I do innovation training and people say, oh, I'm not a negative. I'm not creative. It's like, yes, you are. Let me explain [00:36:00] why for an idea to be spa. Needs insight needs a question. That idea then needs to be refined and would turn into the thing that's actually going to work. There's going to be some experimentation, then it needs to be scaled and all the way through that journey, very different skill sets show up and we need them all. And we, we tend to stereotype great innovation and creativity around that moment where an idea is born and, you know, being really honest, not everybody is great at that.

Depends on all sorts of different profiles within you, but, that's just one type of idea and, and more and more people are recognizing, and the research is showing, that the biggest, most complex problems for them to be. It's not by the lone genius. It's just tomorrow Brian Eno's phrase, it's a scenius. It's, it's a scene. It's a, it's a, a collaboration of people in different spaces with different expertise coming together to solve problems, possibly over an extended period of time. So, you know, I'm not saying we all need to be Einsteins, but some of Einstein's problems were solved over a 20 to 30 year period because they were really big problems.

Other, other problems only take 30 seconds to solve because instinctively we know what they're like. And so, again, as you said earlier, it's, it's not either, or it's a spectrum and we need to get better at creating deliberate environments where the right problems can be solved by the right people at the right time.

But I just think ultimately we can boil this down to something really simple it's problem solving.



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[00:37:36] **Beth Stallwood:** And I do think the word innovation puts people off who think they're not creative or they, they don't have those, the small ideas. And I love the way that you're thinking about it. And it's about the collaboration of different people at different times, and coming together and working through big problems yet the language we use about innovation, like where's our big box in the cupboard.

Where's the cupboard with the ideas in. We're still [00:38:00] thinking about the idea being the one idea that comes up by some genius. So although we might want a culture that has all those other things, there's something around how we present it and we don't necessarily plan for it. And we're waiting for someone to go.

Here's the big idea and isn't it wonderful. And it's all fixed.

[00:38:15] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah. And, and it's a recipe for disaster, and I think it's one of the things inside organizations that is getting better, but it's still got a long way to go. And that is someone has an idea. And then we spend a ton of money and then we launch. And it fails to meet the expectations at best. And this, you know, that there's been so much work done in the last 10, 15 years around the idea of lean experimentation, lean startup methodology, which is we have an idea and yes, it might be the idea, but if it's a bolder idea, more transformational idea, we need to recognize that we are probably wrong because most big ideas turn out to be wrong.

To some extent. You know that the serial innovators like Google and Amazon, you look, you look at their stats behind the scenes. That's the failure rates they're dealing with with those more transformational ideas, but what they do instead of backing away from the challenge, they step into it and say, okay, well, our choice then is to become really good at finding out which ones of these are assume they're all, they're all wrong, assume that they're failure, 3 or 4% will be the good ones. So let's get as good as we can at chucking out all the wrong ideas as fast as possible in order to find the right the right ones and the way they do that is through rapid, tiny experiments. Take your idea. The idea will only work if all of these assumptions are true, which assumptions matter.

Let's test those first, let's spend five grand testing that assumption rather than 50 or 500 grand building the whole thing only to learn exactly the same lesson. Come on. It's and this stuff has been out there quite a while now. And yet it's still that, that mindset of, of rapid [00:40:00] experimentation about anything that we're not a hundred percent certain on, which is most things these days, teach people to run great experiments so that we then have data upon which we can make that, use that to make our decisions that are going to be much more likely to take us in the right direction rather than yeah. Jim's smart. He came up with that idea. It's probably gonna work.

[00:40:21] **Beth Stallwood:** Let's chuck a load of money on it. Let's chuck a little bit of money at it.



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Try it out, see where it works and see what we can learn through it. Instead. I love it. I honestly, I could talk about this all day. but our listeners might not want to continue listening to us. Talk about it all day. So what I'm going to see now, it's all right with you is I'm going to move on to some quick fire questions, right?

Question number one for you personally, what's always guaranteed to bring you a little bit of work joy?

[00:40:54] **Elvin Turner:** Battenberg cake with whatever I'm doing. Definitely. It's gotta be up there. I think, I think for me, this I'm a big fan of people doing what they're wired for. And it's taken a while for me to realize that the thing that I'm wired for is thinking and dreaming, which sounds a bit poncy, if I'm allowed to use that word, but I love, I love, I love looking at research, looking at problems and trying to design something in the middle, all towards helping people have breakthroughs in their working environment so that what we do around here is much more full of joy if you like. but also in specific contexts around problem solving.

So I I've, I've learned too late in life. We're not too late, but I wish I'd learnt it sooner. That research thinking dreaming, designing unto something really profitable for another organization is I love that. That's what I love.

[00:41:52] **Beth Stallwood:** As long as it's accompanied by some nice cake.

[00:41:55] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah, it's all about the Battenberg.

[00:41:58] **Beth Stallwood:** It wouldn't be my favourite [00:42:00] cake, but I totally appreciate that idea that cake makes work more enjoyable

[00:42:04] **Elvin Turner:** There must be a book in there somewhere.

[00:42:06] **Beth Stallwood:** "The Joy Of Cake". Maybe we should like co-author it. The joy of cake takes the different things. Question number two, I'm just thinking about cake now getting really hungry. Question number two. What book are you currently reading?

[00:42:21] **Elvin Turner:** Well, I've learned that most people on your podcasts I've got four or five on the go, but we got four or 500. If I'm on honest, partly read lots of books. The thing that I'm trying to read in a most focused way at the moment is Walt Disney's biography, which I've been wanting to read for years. And it finally turned up as a very late Christmas present the other day.

So I've, I've promised myself, I'm going to read that it's a real treat.



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[00:42:44] **Beth Stallwood:** I love a bit of Disney, so yeah, I mean, Great. I'm sure you'll love it. I also read, I don't know if you're interested in this one, the biography by the, just the CEO that just left and Bob Iger. And that was a really interesting one.

If you want to continue or ordinary of how they innovated and what they did, it was really, really interesting. Next question, question three. 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?

[00:43:17] **Elvin Turner:** This is funny. Way back at the beginning of my career, there was a guy who used to work with called Alister Barber. He's still around. He's just a really funny guy. And, I remember once we're sitting in a meeting and someone said something that turned out to be wrong, Blurted out to assume makes an ass out of you and me. I don't know whether I ever heard that before, but I'd never heard it at the time. And I wet myself laughing and, anyway, for some reason it just stuck in my head and actually it became a lens that I ended up looking at lots of things through assumptions. We make them all the time and we're often wrong about many, many things, [00:44:00] and it leads to all kinds of unintended consequences. I actually think there's a really good book in there somewhere when you start to think about every aspect of life, where assumptions get in the way and create friction but it's particularly pertinent to me now when I'm working with organizations around innovation, because. Most of the time, as we've just said, we have ideas that we don't do a good enough job at testing the assumptions before we build them. And we just go ahead blindly without really testing some of the underlying things that have to be true.

So I think for me, the piece of advice that I stick to is how am I wrong? Because I am wrong here to some extent.

[00:44:41] **Beth Stallwood:** Love that. Yeah, I do like the, I often say the assumption one, the ass of you and me and it's so true because our brains have got so much information in them. We are often creating the shortcut and the shortcut is the easiest option.

And actually that question of asking yourself, how am I wrong is probably a good one for us to explore ourselves a bit more. Yeah. Right next question. And I think this is going to be a great one. So I'm really excited to hear what you say about this one. What is your one super practical bit of advice to our listeners?

It's something they could go and do today. Tomorrow the next day, that might help them be a bit more innovative, get a bit more work joy, you know, push the boundaries a little bit. Tell us your advice.

[00:45:29] **Elvin Turner:** I'm going to have to, I'm not even going to ask permission. I'm going to ask for forgiveness afterwards.



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[00:45:33] **Beth Stallwood:** Can I see you don't even need forgiveness?

I am not. I'm not a massive rule follower. So when I say one or three, I'm like, just go for what you really feel.

[00:45:40] **Elvin Turner:** I, the first one, I, you know, if you categorize it as say, this is a knowledge and growth one swap Facebook just for books. I mean, I've learned this more recently because I've written a book and realized that lots of people have bought it.

And then I say, oh, how'd you find it? [00:46:00] haven't quite read it yet. I haven't even opened it. Cause I'm too busy. I'm most people are too busy to read. I know from so many people in my own experience, the more you read, the more helpful you can be in the work context, if you're prepared to do the interpretation piece from some of that, some of the books, but it's just pulls your brain, your heart in different directions.

And I think we're so worryingly drawn to our phones when there's nothing going on, we just pick up our phone because we need some input. I just think there's better input than a lot of what we look at. So it sounds a bit boring, but if we want more joy, if we want bigger ideas, if you want to build a dream better, if we wanted to show up and do better work, there's so much great stuff out there in so many books.

Anyway, that's, that's kind of a fairly obvious one. I think. I was thinking about this a lot. You know, there's all sorts of tools and tricks and techniques you can do for innovation. But one of the things, and this is really the, the, the topic of my next book is you there's, there's no mystery around some, you know, the tools that people use to, to do great innovation. It's all in books. It's just, you just got to learn it and do it. What's less in books is the culture and climate in which people, are drawn into wanting to do more discovery. And I think you, you now earlier, when you said, you know, we need to rehumanize the workplace.

I think one of the most powerful things we can do. in our team context, you know, in our work context to rehumanize is actually to prioritize kindness and making a choice, just choose I'm going to be the kindest person I know, even with people that I struggle with, I think that would have a massive, well, I've seen it have a transformational impact on the world around you. And it's like a, I dunno, a virus is the wrong word, something to spread particularly now, especially right now, [00:48:00] but it's, you know, if people are desperate, I think for kindness because they particularly with COVID. And I'm not saying it's anybody's fault, but we've often failed to treat people with dignity and kindness and care.

And you're, you're a number at the end of a computer. That's probably too harsh, but people I think are aching to be, I think this is one of the reasons people want to get back in the office because they miss the relational connection. And a part of that is someone being kind because that automatically



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creates a magnetism in you to want to connect with that person more deeply as a whole section in the book that I call kindred connections, which is, I think is the heart of a really healthy culture.

And for me, a lot of that is be kind, be nice to people. And it sounds like, and a lot of people listening to me going, yeah. Fingers down the throat sounds too soft. Yeah. Well, I, I strongly disagree because I think that's what most people want more of right now is just be nice and kind to people.

It's not to say, let people off the hook for things that, you know, need to be held to account for, but it's, let's be more human.

[00:49:09] **Beth Stallwood:** I am going to give that one a massive thumbs up. I think kindness is the best way to get things done actually. And it's that choice to be kind. And I also think that people misinterpret kindness as being like you can't be tough, but I think you can be sometimes having a tough conversation with someone is being kind to them because it's helping them understand what's going on.

And I think if you consider it kindness as the approach versus the outcome, it's like, what do you do here? You take the kind of stuff. Loveliest possible way of thinking about another human being and what their situation might be and have empathy for them. And then everything can stem from that in a really good way.

And the other thing I was going to say to you, you're talking about kind of like it being it's spreading, spreading it around and we don't want it to be called like a virus. It's the other day I was talking about how. Similar thing when I think about work joy is if you are able to work on yourself [00:50:00] and get some work joy in your life, you will be better able to spread it.

And I was calling it. I was trying to think of it as a bit like osmosis, as it just happens, you don't necessarily even think about doing it, but when you are feeling the joy, other people feel it too, because you come at it with a positive anger, all those kinds of things. So I decided to call it joymosis.

Yeah. So that's, that's what I've decided to call it now. So, and I think that the kindness has the same kind of thing. If you, it passes on throughout the day, right? If you have a kind conversation with somebody, they will probably pay it forward because there'll be because they'll be in a better mood because of it.

[00:50:33] **Elvin Turner:** It's catching. I'm sure of it. And it's transforming.

[00:50:36] **Beth Stallwood:** Love it. Right. Amazing. Thank you so much. Where can people find out more about you and your work and all the amazing things that you think and talk and do and write about?



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[00:50:47] **Elvin Turner:** Well, thankfully there aren't many Elvin Turners in the world, so you can just Google me. You'll probably end up on my website or on LinkedIn. So yeah, just stick me into Google.

[00:50:58] **Beth Stallwood:** Thanks man. On Google and obviously look at the book as well. So. Be less story. Be more opposite. I'm out there right now. And excited to hear that there's a second book in the works as well. Elvin, it's been fantastic talking to you.

Thank you so much. Coming on to the Work Joy Jam. And perhaps when you have written that second book, we can get you back on to talk more about the cultural side of things.

[00:51:27] **Elvin Turner:** Yeah. I'd love to. That'd be great.

[00:51:29] **Beth Stallwood:** Amazing. Thank you very much.

[00:51:30] **Elvin Turner:** Well, thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:51:34] **Beth Stallwood:** Well, a huge thank you to Elvin for joining me there.

I honestly could have carried on the conversation for another couple of hours. So many things that also relevant to many of us in business today in our organizations, whether you're somebody who wants to be more innovative or a leader, who's trying to encourage that in your business. I think there are a lot of, a lot of learnings. I think this big thing [00:52:00] around. How do we create a space for it is one of those massive questions and one that I'm going to sit on as well, because I know that even in my small business of Create Work Joy, I really wants to innovate and to keep things fresh and to think about. What is the future of the business yet I find it difficult and I run my own thing and I can plan my own time to really find that space to make it happen. And I think this idea of, you know, how do we get that 80% of time on our normal, everyday working life versus 120% of time in that zone? You can be really, really interesting as to how we do it.

I also think the idea of let's choose and try some. Let's see how we can work these things out. Let's see if we can try a different way of working to make it actually happen and make it stick. And I love this one and I highlighted this one about three times a month piece of paper, which is why I'm going to say it here is this idea that the most excellent leaders have the space and time for people and they make that happen and they value that thinking time. And I really liked using the word poised to describes those kind of leaders. And if you already to, how might you become, and this isn't a word but I'm going to go for it, more poised in the way that you get things done. Huge. Thank you to Elvin. What a great way to sit, listen, and to consider all things to do with innovation.

I would love to hear your thoughts and feedback on this episode questions that you have. They do pop them to me. You can email hello@createworkjoy.com You can comment on the socials on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. What's the other, Instagram, that's the fourth one Instagram.



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And we also put these episodes on YouTube as well. If you are interested that [00:54:00] if you want to find out more about Create Work Joy, join what we do do follow us on the socials. But also we have the Work Joy Way coaching program that is a 16 week program where you have one-to-one coaching with me, four group coaching sessions at a number of experiments, and we definitely believe in the experiment. So to try to consider how to create and cultivate more joy in your working life. We also have our amazing community, the Club Work Joy, and it's a brilliant and growing community of people who all want to do more about creating, cultivating joy in their work with the people they work with in the organizations.

And we have a number of guest speakers. We have a great networking opportunity from people from different organizations, different backgrounds. Lots of time and conversation with great people to be able to help you do what it is that you want to do in your working life to feel the joy more often. Thank you for listening to the Work Joy Jam.

I do hope you enjoyed this episode and that you go and listen to some of our others. I'll speak to you soon.