

Ep #346: The Cost of Emotional Outsourcing



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With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. Listen, what if I told you that the reason you feel exhausted by 2:00 PM every single day, maybe perhaps isn't because you're like weaker or lazier or no good, but actually, because you've been running a full-time job in addition to all the other jobs you're doing, and you didn't even realize you had this one. You didn't even know it was on the docket, but you're doing it all day.

Today, we're talking about emotional outsourcing and the hidden ways it's costing you a life of joy, ease, deep self-trust, and of course, it's costing you your exhaustion. So when we live in emotional outsourcing, my term for those habitual patterns of self-neglect and self-abandonment that so many of us learned through our codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits, the cost is massive. And it shows up everywhere.

And here's the thing that most people don't realize. The price you're paying isn't just stress or exhaustion, resentment, relationship problems. It's all of that, but it's also so much more subtle and in my experience, so much more devastating than whatever we realize on the surface. So let me paint you a picture. You walk into a room and within seconds, without even thinking about it, realizing it, noticing it, you're doing like a full 360-degree assessment. You're tracking. How's everyone's energy? Who looks stressed? Is that person's tone a little off? Did my comment earlier land wrong? Are they okay? Am I okay? Is somebody mad at me? Everyone's mad at me. Should I say something to lighten the mood? Is everyone okay? Does this sound familiar?

If you're new to the show, hi, I'm a Leo. I'm Argentine. I'm a New Yorker. I like to be a little dramatic. So I think for most of us, it's not like 2,000 layers of, oh my God, is everything doomed questions, but maybe like a slightly more subtle like, I made a joke and she didn't laugh. Oh my God, is she

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mad at me? That little something, right? It's what I call the scanning system. You're constantly tuning your nervous system to everyone else's frequency. Their microexpressions, their body language, their mood shifts, the comments they make, and definitely the ones they don't. You've become like a human barometric pressure reader for everyone around you.

And here's what you don't realize is happening. I didn't realize it for sure. You become fluent in everyone's emotional language except your own. Because that constant outward focus creates like this internal signal blindness where you lose track of your own inner GPS. You can tell when your coworker is having an off day from like three cubicles away, but you can't tell the difference between when your body is saying, I need rest versus I need movement versus I'm actually just thirsty.

And it gets even more basic than that. You become numb to your own biological impulses. Meaning you'll sit in a meeting with a full bladder for an hour because you don't want to interrupt or draw attention to yourself or you just got to finish this one thing and then you'll go pee. You'll ignore hunger pangs until you're shaky and irritable and hangry because asking to eat feels inconvenient to others. Or again, there's things to do that are more important than your human body. You'll suppress yawns, hold back sneezes, and override the most fundamental signals your body is sending you.

Think about that for a second. You've literally been trained to ignore the voice that tells you to pee when you need to pee. And my beauty, the logic holds then, right? If you can't trust yourself with something that basic, how can you trust yourself with the bigger things, like what you want in a relationship or what direction you want your life to go? So of course, you start second guessing your own instincts because you've become unconsciously trained that the safest route for your life is to defer to someone else's opinion. Their comfort becomes more reliable to you than your own inner knowing.

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And here's the kicker. This is happening all day, every day. It's like you're running a full-time emotional monitoring service that you never applied for, definitely never get paid for, and never actually get to clock out from. But the energy drain is just the beginning. What's happening to your nervous system is where it gets really costly. Your brain gets locked into what I call social threat detection overdrive. You're not just scanning for physical danger, you're constantly monitoring for social risk, relational rupture, the possibility, the mere whisper of someone being upset with you.

Your nervous system treats your mother-in-law's slightly critical tone with the same urgency as a smoke alarm or a basket of angry cobras. This means your vagus nerve and your amygdala, that emotion and fear center in your hindbrain are working overtime. You're living in a chronic state of hypervigilance that floods your system with cortisol and adrenaline all day long. Over months and years, this doesn't just make you tired. It deregulates your immune system, throws off your digestion, messes with your hormone balance, and fragments your sleep. Not to be that girl, but you're literally aging faster because you're treating everyday social interactions like survival scenarios, through no fault of your own, of course.

And here's what's particularly devastating for women. Research shows that up to 80% of people with autoimmune diseases are women, and studies have found that a high portion of patients report significant emotional stress before their disease onset. The chronic hypervigilance, the constant cortisol flooding, the suppressed emotions, that huge push to be the good girl, the good wife, the good mother. It's not just making you tired. It's all setting the stage for your immune system to potentially turn on itself.

But here's what really gets me. We're raised up to think this is normal, to believe that everyone feels this wired and this tired. We come to think this is just what it means to be a thoughtful, caring person, to love your family, to want to care for them. But it's not. The physical cost is massive, but the emotional and existential cost, I don't know, that's where it gets extremely heartbreaking for me. Because you start to feel like a support character in

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your own life. Like you're written into someone else's story rather than being the protagonist of your own. You find yourself over-functioning in relationships. You become the fixer, the peacemaker, the one who smooths everything over.

And underneath it all, there's this growing resentment that you feel too guilty to acknowledge, let alone express, process, or move through. You say yes when you mean no. You apologize when you've done nothing wrong and you're not even Canadian. You avoid conflict even when it means betraying your own values. And here's the part that might make you want to cry. Because it's really tender. You do all of this thinking it's keeping you safe. I get it. Let's take a moment for love for that. But actually, it's keeping you small.

And over time, this erodes something precious, which is self-trust. And without self-trust, boundaries become almost impossible to hold. You can't set clear limits when you don't believe your needs matter or that you'll have your own back if someone pushes against them. And so, my darling, your nervous system learns that authenticity equals danger. So you keep shapeshifting, thinking it will protect you. But what it actually does is disconnect you from the very thing that could actually keep you safe, your own beautiful inner knowing.

And here is the deepest cost, the one that breaks my heart extra, extra every time I see it. You never get to feel the full safety of being you in the world. You don't get to know the version of you who is rooted in her own body, clear on their own desires, steady in his own boundaries, unshaken by someone else's disappointment. Instead, you live in constant negotiation with other people's comfort. You made other people's emotional state more important than your relationship with your own truth. You live from obligation instead of what you truly want.

Think about that for a second. You've learned and been trained up to trust everyone's opinion about you more than you trust your own experience of yourself. You've learned to trust everyone's needs more than your own

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needs. You've learned to trust everyone's comfort more than your own integrity, dignity. And the tragedy is that so many of us were trained to think that this is love, that this is what it means to be a good person, a good partner, a good friend, a good daughter.

But my beauty, oh, my darling, love doesn't require you to disappear. Love wants your presence, your wholeness. Love wants you to be in the room. Now, let me get specific about some of the ways this might be showing up that you maybe haven't connected to emotional outsourcing, especially if you're new around here. You feel inexplicably drained after social events, even ones you enjoyed. Perhaps that could be because you spent the whole time managing everyone else's experience instead of having your own.

Decision making becomes absolutely excruciating, or probably always has been. And I'm not just talking about big life decisions. I'm talking about choosing what to order at lunch or like what restaurant to take the family to, because if it goes poorly, you're going to beat yourself up, right? So you'll sit there scrolling through the menu, not asking yourself what sounds good, but instead thinking, what will the server think is a reasonable order? What if I pick something that takes too long and my friend gets impatient or what if I choose something expensive and they think I'm like fancy pants or being excessive or, right, like all these second guessing thoughts.

And so a simple decision that probably should take about 30 seconds turns into like a 5-minute internal negotiation with imaginary people and their imaginary judgments, right? And then you ruminate about it afterwards. Oh God, did I seem, did I seem indecisive? Should I have picked faster? Was my order annoying? Oh God, right? What if they didn't like the place? And this is what happens when you've outsourced your decision-making authority. You can't access your own preferences because you've trained yourself to prioritize everyone else's comfort over your own desires. Every choice becomes a complex calculation of how it might affect other people,

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instead of a simple check-in with you, with yourself, with your own wants, your own needs, because what even are those?

And my love, most of us feel really guilty for having needs, but also resentful when they're not met. Classic emotional outsourcing. You've outsourced the responsibility for meeting your needs, but you still have the needs. You find yourself editing your thoughts before you speak them, not because they're unkind. No, but because you're constantly calculating how they'll land with other people, because again, your life is outsourced. Their thoughts about you are the most important. You have trouble accessing your own preferences. Someone asks what you want to watch on TV and you like genuinely don't know, not because you don't care, but because over all these years, you've trained yourself to default to what everyone else wants. What if you pick a bad show? It's the same as the dinner thing, right?

You feel like you're performing your own personality. Like there's a real you hiding somewhere that you can't quite access when other people are around. Here's one that really gets people. You find yourself lying about small things that don't even matter without even realizing you're doing it. Like generally not malicious lies, but like automatic little edits to make yourself more palatable. So it sounds like, oh, I love that restaurant too when you've never been there or went and actually didn't like it. Oh, no, I'm not tired, when you're exhausted. These tiny betrayals of your own truth become so automatic, you don't even notice them anymore. You don't even hear them.

You have what I call preference paralysis when you're alone. So when there's no one else to please or consider, you literally don't know what you want. You'll stand in front of your closet for 10 minutes, not because you don't have the right clothes, but because without someone else's opinion to guide you, you've lost touch with your own taste. You don't even know what you think looks good on you anymore. You feel responsible for everyone else's emotional state. When someone's upset, even if it has absolutely

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nothing to do with you, your brain automatically starts brainstorming ways to fix it, to manage it, to make it better, to change it, to like gloss it over. You've become the unofficial emotional janitor for everyone around you and you never get to clock out.

And here's where it gets expensive, literally. At work, you say yes to projects you don't have bandwidth for because you cannot bear the thought of disappointing your boss. Ask for a promotion? Come on now. You volunteer for the extra committee, the weekend work, the quick favor that turns into hours of unpaid labor. You're the one who stays late to fix everyone else's mistakes because asking them to redo it feels way too confrontational and you are not up for that. You undercharge for your services if you're self-employed because asking for what your time is worth feels too aggressive or just like, I don't know, I just don't know how to do it. I don't know. I'm just really bad at it.

You won't negotiate salary because you don't want to seem difficult. You accept the first offer instead of countering because you're so grateful someone wants to hire you at all. You do unpaid emotional labor that should be someone else's job, mediating conflicts between coworkers, managing your boss's moods, smoothing over team tensions. You've essentially taken on a second invisible job that you are definitely not getting paid for. My beauty, you apologize for taking up space. Sorry I'm being too loud. Sorry for talking so much. Sorry for having an opinion. Oh, sorry. I have a brain. So sorry I used it. You're constantly apologizing for the basic act of being human.

Here's a big one. You make yourself smaller in the presence of strong personalities, not just quieter, but like literally smaller. You'll notice you start speaking more softly, taking up less physical space, making yourself less noticeable, like shrinking in a way. It's like you're trying to minimize your impact on the world or you make yourself big, right? And you step out of self into the character that is big to take up the most space, but not as your true self. You have trouble celebrating your own wins because you're

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immediately thinking about how it might make other people feel. Got a promotion? Your first thought isn't, I'm proud of myself, but I hope Louisa doesn't feel bad since she didn't get it.

Does any of this sound familiar? I mean, I could go on for hours about these like quirks and habits we don't even realize are emotional outsourcing. My beauty, you developed these patterns because at some point in your life, they served you. They were brilliant. They helped you navigate relationships where your authentic self wasn't safe or welcome. And here's what I want you to understand. If this is resonating, it's not because you're broken or weak or too sensitive or too much or too little or anything like that. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, my beauty. Not at all.

Maybe you learned that love was conditional on being easy, agreeable, low maintenance. Maybe you discovered that the people around you could only handle a watered down version of you. Or maybe you had to be enormous and take up so much space to ever get seen. Maybe you figured out that keeping the peace was more important than keeping your integrity. For a while, these strategies probably worked. They kept you connected to the people you needed, especially caregivers. They helped you avoid conflict, criticism, or abandonment. But here's the thing about survival strategies, which is all our codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits, our emotional outsourcing is, they're all survival skills.

The thing is they're designed to get you through crisis, not to actually help you thrive in relationship with yourself and others. So what used to protect you is now limiting you. What used to keep you safe is now keeping you small and out of your authenticity. What used to help you survive is now preventing you from truly living. The real tragedy of emotional outsourcing isn't just that you lose touch with yourself, though that's devastating enough. It's also that you rob other people of the chance to know and love the real you. Because when you're constantly shapeshifting, chameleoning, people pleasing, the connections you create aren't actually with you. They're with your performance of you, which means you never get to

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experience the deep satisfaction of being truly seen and accepted for who you are.

And so, of course, you end up feeling lonely even when you're surrounded by people because on some level, you know they don't really know you. I mean, how could they? You haven't let them and you haven't let them because it never felt safe. But my beauty, I'll remind you, the people in your life who love you would probably prefer the real you, messy and imperfect and authentic over this polished agreeable version you think they want. But you'll never know that until you're brave enough to stop outsourcing your emotional experience and start trusting your own inner compass. And to do that, we get to build a robust sense of our inner self based in safety and regulation.

This is why this work matters. Because the real cost of emotional outsourcing isn't just stress or exhaustion. It's the slow, quiet loss of self. And my beauty, you deserve to come home to you. You deserve to know what it feels like to move through the world rooted in your own body, clear on your own desires, steady in your boundaries, unshaken by someone else's disappointment. You deserve to stop running that exhausting full-time job of managing everyone else's emotions and start investing that energy in creating the life that actually lights you up. You deserve to discover who you are when you're not trying to be who you think everyone else needs you to be. And you deserve relationships where you can show up as yourself, all of you, and be met with love, not just tolerance.

The path back to yourself isn't always easy, but it's always worth it. Because on the other side of this work is a life where you don't have to choose between being loved and being yourself. You, my beauty, get to have both. Thank you for joining me. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. Ciao. Talk to you soon.

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