

.Episode 53 Employment and Mental Health

(Intro Music)

E: HI I'm Emily Ladau

K: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian

E: And you're listening to another episode of The Accessible Stall

K: Emily?

E: Yeah?

K: What are we gonna talk about today, Emily?

E: I think my mental state should be discussed.

K: Your mental state. Let's hear about it!

E: Well, remember how in the last episode...And this is assuming that everyone is going to listen to everything in order which would be great if they did and also if they listened to the end. So we said we were gonna do an episode on how employment or lack thereof pertains to your mental health.

K: Mhmm.

E: So that's cool and all but when you asked me if I wanted to podcast tonight, if I wanted to record this, I was literally in the middle of doing work. And it's 10pm on a Sunday. And we usually start recording around 10, but it's now forty-five minutes past our usual start time because I was busy working, and then I had indigestion, and then I had to whine a little bit, and that's my mental state.

K: I mean to be fair, Emily usually whines en or fifteen minutes past our given start time but this was exceptional because she had to work.

E: It's not (frustrated sigh)

K: Gotta give you credit where it's due!

E: What'd you say?

K: I said I gotta give you credit where it's due! It's not like the whining is an irregular activity

E: (*Laughs*) You can always count on me! But in all seriousness, I tried to make this an actual weekend...it's a Sunday night when we're recording this. And I made every effort not to do any substantive work this weekend until finally sitting at my computer tonight and I was successful but I really think we need to talk about dare I say, the very buzzwordy phrase of, "Work/ Life Balance"

K: Hell yeah, let's do it!

E: Where, where do we even start though? Because I think that work and maintaining your mental health is so important, but how do we do that?

K: I-I don't know. But I'll start with this little nugget that's sort of related, but not really. But sort of. So my parents come from a generation of people who believe in their heart of hearts that no matter you're allowed and how much you earned and accrued, that if you use it, you are slightly less. Like you are not the best employee because taking off is bad, even if it's allowed to you. And in fact, not using it when it's allowed to you is a skill- it shows restraint. And while I've never taken a true Mental Health Day, and while I've only used my days off for things that I've had to do, that idea to me is just absurd. I mean, except in the context of being sick. But that's only because New York State has paid sick leave.

E: So this makes me think of a couple of things, the first of which is that I work hourly and via contract. So for me a Mental Health Day means not getting paid. And so that means that every day I pretty much do some kind of work. And it's not even so much the getting paid, although that's important, but also the getting work done and juggling multiple jobs and multiple responsibilities. So it's not the ideal situation for my mental health. And then when I do get stressed out, I will confide in friends or my parents or something like that. And you know what my mother always says?

K: What does she say?

E: She goes, "Are you a doctor?" And I say, "No." And she says, "Is somebody going to die if you don't get your work done right now?" And I say, "No." And she says, "Take a break!"

K: She's right!

E: She is! But that mentality works on me for ten minutes until I jump back at it.

K: Well I mean ten minutes is optimal for a break. Anymore and you're lazy! Of course I'm totally kidding for anyone who can't tell. I mean look, I work a salary job and my butt is in a chair from 8:30-4:30 every day and I need to take breaks. You know, if only to reduce the eye strain on my eyes. But honestly, if I couldn't take breaks it wouldn't be good for my mental health. It's just not good when you get into this rote routine of doing work you kinda need to spice it up a bit for yourself so you don't fall into it. I don't know about you but when I get into a truly rote routine,

like the kind you could probably do if you were asleep, that kinda thing. Even if it's for work and even if you are being productive that always affects me negatively. Mental health wise. I do not like being- It's like, "Oh, I'm just a hamster on a wheel, like I'm not actually doing anything." Even if I am, it's just like a weird train of thought. But I feel that way. And so sometimes I have to do things like take a break or do something entirely different that's still conducive to my job.

E: I think that makes perfect sense. And for me what ends up happening is that my schedule will go from a chunk of time at home, since I work from home. So I'll be in my routine and leaving my house to be occasionally running errands, or I'll meet with a friend or something like that. But suddenly my routine will get this huge shakeup because I travel a lot.

K: Oh My God, yes.

E: So I go from the most routinized...That's how you say it, right? Routinized? Routine?

K: Sure. "The most routinized routine. The most routine, routine.

E: I go from this very set in stone routine with the exception of times will change for phone calls or I'll have an event to go to, to all of a sudden I will be traveling for a week and everything is shaken up. And so on the one hand I think it's good because it keeps me from feeling like I'm in too much of a rut. On the other hand, I don't know if you would call that any sort of stability when it comes to my job. Jobs. Plural

K: Well I don't know stability in the traditional sense like career stability. But you know what though, I know the feeling because I have two days where I work from home per week that I'm allotted. And I said this on the last episode, it's not for ADA reasons, it's a privilege that all employees get, and I get two. And on those days I usually do things that I wouldn't normally be able to do. Like for example, I usually get a haircut once a month. I'll go there, I'll walk to my Barber and I'll get a haircut and I'll get a shave and it'll all be good. It'll be on a Monday morning when I ought to be doing work but it'll be part of my morning. And normally that's okay. But you know, as fate would have it what always happens is that I'll decide to do something in the morning so that I'm not totally slacking and then I'll budget myself like an hour. I'll be like, "Okay, no one ever calls me or emails me at noon, so I'll leave at noon. And then right when I do that, like I'll get halfway to the Barber shop and I'll get like fifteen emails from my boss and I haven't talked to him in like two weeks and he needs something done like five minutes ago and I'll be like, "Dude, really?" And it's fine cause I do it, I don't mind cause work is important, but it totally shakes up my routine it's like, this is a renish in my wheels now. I mean, it's not his fault but...

E: No, I experience that as well but in a different way because people often forget that I work by the hour

K: Mhmm

E: And so I could be doing anything else, and technically don't have to be working because I really don't have set hours, but the reality is that when other people have set hours, my hours are dictated by that. And so, I'll be at a doctor appointment or something and come back to like twenty-seven emails on my phone. Now granted, it's nothing like, "Emily where are you?!?" It's something like, "Oh hey, can you tell me about this, and get back to me on this?" I never let things sit, but I almost think...Is that a problem that we're a culture where everything has to be done now? Or everything had to be done yesterday? And I think that's a drain on everyone's mental health. And I know that things must get done, and that is what it means to have a job is to get things done. But it goes back to the thing my mom always says, "If you don't answer this email at ten o'clock on a Sunday night, is somebody not gonna get a heart transplant, you know?"

K: I mean, she's right, but I think the way you think. I have that work ethic that if someone needs something from me I want it done perfectly the first time before they even know they need it. So when somebody asks me for something I feel like I've already on some level I've feel like I've let them down, even though that's ridiculous I know. But you know...I mean *you* know, I try to stay ahead of the game! You that exact feeling, right?

E: Yeah

K: But like it doesn't bother me really to do that cause like you said, that's just work. But that's an interesting question. I don't know if it's a problem in and of itself so much as how we deal with the fact that we're an "Always On" culture now. But I will say that when it becomes a problem at least for me is when something needs to be done on a day off that either I didn't anticipate which is my fault, or my boss needs something from his boss, which is like neither of our faults. So for example: My dad got promoted recently...a couple months ago

E: Yeah he did!

K: And I had to take the day off because--Yeah he did man, he's awesome! And I had to be there for him, I didn't have to but my sister had to work and she can't just take a day off like I can so I was the designated kid

(Emily chuckles)

K: And so I went. ANd I told my boss, I'm like, "Hey look, I'm not gonna, like Social Media's done, everything's done. If you need anything I'll be on email but I'll be slow." I shouldn't have said that because it really was a vacation day and you know, I'm not actually gonna be there. But something needed to be done and like I was walking through the halls of One Police Plaza with my phone in my hand looking down all day except to pose for pictures! And it's like, that's a problem. I think that's a problem. It's like, I don't like working on a day that you're not supposed to work. And I get that work has to get done, I'm not saying that you shouldn't do your job because absolutely you should. But you know...And I understand that emergencies happen too,

sometimes you need to do things when you don't want to do the. But I think that there should be really clear lines of when you should and shouldn't work too. If only for your own sake, you know?

E: Well, isn't there legislation that's being considered in New York to make it illegal for employers to email you after a certain time...

K: Yes

E: ...Or expect a response from you?

K: That's what it is, it's to expect a response. And I hope it passes, I think that it can do nothing but good. I mean, I'm very fortunate to, I mean I'm not a contractor like you are so I don't always have to be on, but there have been occasions where my boss apologetically messages me on the weekend. And like, it's rare and when it does happen he's very sorry about it so I'm more than happy to help him assuming it's not huge but you know I've also worked for people who didn't are that it was Saturday evening and needed it done now and the fact that it was Saturday didn't mean anything

E: Yeah

K: And so I guess what I'm saying is it varies. The severity of that being a problem varies depending on who's employing you but I like that law, I think that it's a great idea, personally.

E: I've had it both ways where I've had people who expect things right now before they even emailed me to tell me they wanted the thing. But I have to say, I'm very lucky, and I sincerely mean this. Everyone I work with now is very, very good about respecting my time as much as possible. And I know that if I had waited and not answered emails tonight and waited until tomorrow morning, that it would have been okay, would have not have put anything in jeopardy for me job wise whatsoever because everybody knows that I answer and take care of things but that's where the Mental Health situation is on me because I can't get over this mentality of doing one more thing. "Just one more thing. One more thing, I need to get it done I need to do this, I need to do that, I need to have it done immediately, I can't go to bed until this is done." And that is, I think, unhealthy and it's funny because I've been thinking about what we've been talking about so far, and this is not even a Disability issue. We haven't even really talked about Disability yet.

K: No

E: I think here we're just having a conversation that is a problem for people in general. But is it worth at least bringing the Disability angle in to see how that doubly impacts this situation?

K: I mean, I can't really speak to it beyond you know, a general amount of social anxiety here and there that when I see an email on a weekend, it sort of rears its ugly head like, "Hello I'm still here!" Um, but I mean sure, we can throw a Disability angle on it! I remember once...Well, have you ever been in a situation where you're boss needed something done like right now.

E: Yes

K: And you were in a situation where like, there's nothing you can do to get it done right now? Because I have, and that, *that* is a bad situation. And I remember like a couple years ago I was with my family in Pennsylvania in the middle of the woods with like the weakest cell phone signal on Earth that could still work, and I was getting emails from my boss like, "You need to do this now!" And I was like, "Look, I'm with my family so I can't, I'm sorry, I'll do it as soon as I can, I promise." And she was like, "No you really need to!" And I'm like, "Look, I know, I recognize how important this is but I'm telling you like there is nothing I can do. I promise, this is not me trying to pull one over on you." And she was really upset. And I guess rightfully so from a boss's perspective but I told her where I would be. And so that made me anxious to a point like, that was really bad. That was like 11/10, like this ship's gonna sink if I don't do it, even though it was nothing. And I don't know I mean, we consider mental health issues part of the Disability spectrum on this show but that's where that would overlay for me...Where the necessity to get things done would spike my anxiety more than it maybe should.

E: So I don't know if this is a stretch here, but let me know if you follow my logic.

K: Okay

E: So, I think...I've never had insecurity that being disabled makes me unemployable. But I recognize that that is a privilege largely because I picked such a niche career path that I think having my disability is to my benefit. And so if I dig deep enough though, I wonder if anxieties almost stem from this feeling where I have a disability and it's not gonna be that easy for me to find other jobs, and so I better do everything I can to hold onto this one.'

K: I mean I said that on the last episode. I don't think that that stems from my having CP, but I think that of any job. Like I don't think I'm a bad employee. I work really hard and I think that I'm decent at what I do, but there's always that little voice in the back of my mind that's like, "No, you have to work harder than hard because you might lose this." Even if I have no reason to think that! And I don't think that that's really insecurity about me so much as you know, insecurity about the state of the world, you know so to speak. But I totally get that where it's like, "I'm part of a population that is unemployable largely due to reasons that are beyond their control, unfortunately. And so because I'm here, I better make damn sure I stay here."

E: Yeah, the unemployability comes from the social stigma surrounding Disability and I know we're preaching to the choir here but I just think about how when you have something like a job, you want to hold the heck onto it.

K: Yeah, I mean I don't think there's any shame in that. At all. No matter what you do. There's no shame in working. I think people who think that by the way, just tangentially, people who think that certain jobs are beneath them are like wrong about everything. Just so you know. So if you're one of those people, you're wrong, just FYI. But yeah, totally there's nothing wrong with that!

E: I don't think anything's beneath me, but I just think there's things that I can't do. But that goes back to our physicality episode more than this one.

K: I said on our last episode that I can't work retail. It's not because I can't, it's just because standing around all day is literally hell on earth. Like it's just not something that I ever want to do so I hope I never have to do it. But as far as mental health like I can't stress enough that it also like depends on where you work. Having a terrible boss will make your life hell even if it's not physically damaging to you. It just will. It's a situation that I've been in, I don't know if you've been in that situation but....

E: Absolutely

K: Yeah, it's just if you ever find yourself waking up and like not wanting to do your job. Like not because of you, because of everything else but you, that's what I'm talking about. And I was there at one point in my life and it was just not a good time at all.

E: You know what I can't believe we haven't talked about yet?

K: What's that?

E: When you actively have mental health issues that have nothing to do with work and the interplay of that with work. So for example, anxiety and depression and when you're going through a particularly bad bout of depression, and you're also trying to keep up being a good worker.

K: True. I can fortunately say that I've never been hit with a bad bout of depression during work quite yet.

E: Yeah I feel like for you that came earlier on in your life.

K: My worst depression is long behind me, like way long behind me, like over ten years. And I'm saying that to like one up anybody, I'm just saying like the worst I've been is far behind me. Like I mean, everyone struggles with depression here and there but like when I was at my worst I was in college, I wasn't working yet. I mean I was working at college but it wasn't like a "real job"

E: See my worst bout with depression coincided directly with getting my first job out of college.

K: No kidding! Do tell!

E: And it was a disaster! It was awful. Because I was adjusting to having a job and I was trying to make sense of an emotional state unlike anything I've ever experienced before. I mean, I've struggled with depression and anxiety my whole life but that in particular just...And they were not initially correlated but what ended up happening was that the job was awful too. And so it didn't help my mental health and it led to a breaking point.

K: Right.

E: I would say that five months into the job or so, I just absolutely hit a breaking point and I only had that job for a short time after that but it's tough to be dealing with mental health issues and trying to balance the rest of the world around you. Especially performing to the rest of your abilities at a job.

K: I mean, yeah. Some people are people who find gratification in doing their job well. And of course like, everyone's like that but some people find that fulfillment that you're describing in the job, in the results that they achieve. I am not one of those people. I love doing good work, I mean I *love* doing good work. But it doesn't fulfill me in the same way as you know, a nice bowl of tacos!

E: That's the strangest thing I've ever heard you say but I don't disagree.

K: No, no because who eats tacos out of a bowl, right? But I mean like...

E: A burrito bowl!

K: But I mean to say look, I love my job and I'm good at it and I love my coworkers but I could be at a different job and be at the same level of happiness, assuming the job didn't suck. My job isn't what gives me happiness although...You know what I mean? Some people find happiness in their career and I...

E: Oh yeah, that's something in and of itself.

K: I do, but it's not the thing that drives me.

E: See I get a lot of fulfillment out of the work that I do, so much so that I think that's largely why I'm so quick to respond to everything and do this right this second and right now and get this done. I do find a lot of fulfillment in my work. And I actually think in some ways that my work, eventually, after I was in a better situation, helped remove me from some of the depression that I was experiencing, and I'm lucky about that because it gave me a feeling of...purpose I guess.

K: You know what actually? I take some of that back... I agree with everything you just said, and it sort of contradicts with what I said. Yeah like, I've been in some not so good states. Not like rock bottom, like I said, that was many, many, many years ago, but there is something to be said when the person above you gives you more responsibility because they believe in you, or tells you you did a fantastic job, or like recommends you to talk to someone higher up above them because you're so good. Like you know, achievements at your job can totally negate some of the anxiety and depression, Even parts of the anxiety and depression that were directly caused by that job. It's like, "Oh look, I am making a difference that's great!" And like, that's a wonderful feeling by the way.

E: I don't know if I've ever mentioned this before on the podcast, but one little thing that I like to do for the sake of my mental health is keep something on my computer called the "Smile File." And it sounds so silly but all it is is screenshots of nice things that people have written in response to something I have done, or a kind compliment someone has given me, or something that made me smile. Because having those kind words is a really good pick me up for when perhaps something that you did for work didn't quite go as planned, or you're feeling like you're in a bit of a pickle for some reason, or you're just having an off day for any particular reason. I don't go through my Smile File, as silly as it sounds, on a regular basis I just like knowing that it's there. And every once in awhile, I'd say like two or three times a year max I'll go through the file and read some of the nice things that people have said either in private message or in a comment somewhere in Social Media or in some kind of email or something and I'll be reminded that just because I'm not doing my tip top work right now doesn't mean that it was like that yesterday or a few months ago or something like that. So that would be my little life hack, if you will.

K: Oh, we're talking life hacks? Because I think that's a good idea.

E: Well I don't think it's fair for us to have a conversation about all of the ways that work can take a toll on your mental health...And no, fair is not the right word. I don't think we can have this conversation without trying to at least talk about some possibilities for some things that you can do.

K: I agree. And I don't know about you, but I am a person who becomes very overwhelmed very quickly if I have too many things to do at once. And you might say well of course, who doesn't? I'm telling you that the way I do it is fast, and it's not good for anybody. And so how I deal with that...And this is gonna sound so stupid because it's like so obvious but like, a To-Do List, like a real To-Do list that you either write dw or have the App, is such a lifesaver. And I don't mean a crappy To-Do list, I mean like a real agenda that you say, "This is what I need to do, this is when I need to have it done by, this is how important it is. And if you do that, it's just amazing how quickly it all melts away. And I realize that when I do that, my stress doesn't come from the amount of tasks I have to do so much as it comes from like, the amount of space that it's taking up in my brain. Like for example, I have a huge project that I'm one third of the way through of that if I didn't keep a log...I mean you know, it's nothing fancy, but if I didn't note how much I did

that day, it would just drive me crazy. It would, it would just not be good, I wouldn't be able to focus on anything else. Oh and another thing I do is I email myself if I think of something off hours

E: Me too!

K: I totally...yeah! Because if it's a good idea, even if it's not. But I email myself my idea and I'm like, "Oh tell so and so this at this time because that's when he checks his emails, you know see what he thinks and if he agrees then we'll do it!" And just those two little things are so important to me. It makes me so much better at everything.

E: Yeah it's funny you mention that cause I just found a tool the other day and I cannot say that I'm recommending it yet cause I honestly don't know, I'm gonna try it out. It's a tool called "Follow Up Then" It's just FollowUpThen.com and it's an email reminder that you schedule to yourself.

K: Nice!

E: Yeah , so for example, if you want to send something in two weeks. You literally email Two Weeks @ FollowUpThen.com. If you want a reminder of something on October 15th, you email October15th@ FollowUpThen.com

K: Aw that's really cool

E: Yeah I just found out about this because I read this website it's "Gmail Genius." And I like it because it's not only a website that not only compiles Gmail hacks but also interviews people who are influencers in different spaces about their email habits. And so you always pick up little tidbits. So one person suggested a specific way of organizing your inbox and I had never thought about it like that before, and all it was was changing some Gmail settings so I changed my Gmail settings and it's so far been really helpful. So next thing I'm gonna do is try Follow Up Then. So I'm all about the hacks. And then when I'm not trying to hack my life over here, I'm also all about writing things down. I use a paper calendar, I have multiple notebooks going at all times, I have a Post-It with a To-Do list on it, I'm all about things down.

K: Do you use Boomerang?

E: I would, except Outlook has a client for scheduling emails to go out, so I just use it on Outlook. But I've been meaning to use Boomerang for my Gmail accounts. We should explain what it is...

K: Yeah so we use GSuite at work. And so Boomerang is a really cool little applet for Gmail. And what it does, it does two things. One is, it lets you schedule emails into the future which is what I use it for. It's great! Because if I do something...If I need someone who I know only

checks his email at six in the morning, I can write an email right when I get home and he'll see it at six in the morning when it'll be sent. It also lets you Boomerang emails which is sort of an automatic circle back...A reply to a reply. Like a, "Remind me in two weeks!" And then in two weeks it will send the same email that you sent so the person you want to see it sees it!

E: I think there's also a feature where you can pause your Inbox...

K: Oh that's another one! That's a different one. I love that too because if I'm super busy I hate getting emails and I know I'm not going to be able to read them anyway. And because I'm busy doing whatever it is I'm doing, pausing my inbox is the greatest thing. Of course then they all come at once and it's like, "Oh, well this is just a problem I put off for an hour!"

E: Every little bit helps though! I realized this turned from a Mental Health Discussion to a hack discussion, but honestly I wanna hear what other people do to manage their mental health at work, and I know as minor as some of this stuff may seem, this is how you do it in some ways. I understand, and I don't wanna anyone to think that I'm oversimplifying and saying that mental health disabilities aren't something that require medication or therapy or years and years of hard work. But I am saying that there are certain small things that you can do to alleviate stressors that are contributing in some way.

K: Definitely, 100% agree. Before we go to Final Takeaways I actually just want your opinion on something, Emily.

E: I'm listening...

K: How do you feel in an email thread with people who are above you who are copying you because they're discussing something that will be your job? To do at a given point, you know? Like I had a thing where it's like, "Okay we're gonna send out this thing on Wednesday, and then Wednesday came and nobody said anything! I hate being the guy, although I will always be that person who doesn't mind speaking up, but it gives me anxiety. I'll just be like, "Hey? Hello? Hello. Remember this? I do. Where are we at?" I hate writing that email to my bosses but I do it because the consequences of not doing it are far worse. But that act gives me so much anxiety where it's like, "Dear Sirs.." You know? "Do you remember last seven days ago when we spoke?"

(Emily laughs)

K: And then they'll email back like, "Hey!"

E: Oh my God, this is me all the time. I am that guy who's following up to be like, "Where are we on this?" Or, "Did we get a response on this?" Or, "Can you please update me on this?" And I feel like such a pain in the booty, but I'll never forget that one of my coworkers said to me at one point that I should not worry about reminding her about things or following up on things. And so I

realize that even though I feel annoying it also is a good thing because it means that everything that needs to get done will get done one way or the other.

K: That's exactly what I say to myself to justify what I'm doing.

E: But it is anxiety producing and we could probably do a whole other episode on this...I know I always do this like right before we're about to finish up. But the tone of how I write things? I am constantly trying to soften everything.

K: Every single thing! I know, like my bosses curse in emails! Like it will be a cold day in Hell before I ever, *ever* swear in a work email! I will never do it, I don't even like doing it in inter-office chat! And like obviously it's fine, they're not gonna care but I care! And I don't care of they do it but I really care if I do it!

E: I've cursed in front of coworkers 100% I've cursed in front of them! I don't know, I guess it's a level of comfort with a person.

K: No in conversation it's fine, although really I don't love it but I'll do it if they do it. Like if my big boss says the word Sh*t or something I'll make sure to throw it in to something I say...

(Emily laughs)

E: "Well he did it so I should do it!"

K: But I'll *never* do it in an email! No, exactly, exactly. I would never do it in an email. Like if you put a gun to my head I would never do it. I can't do it! "We're professionals here!"

E: Yeah I mean obviously I'm professional as possible But also sometimes I clearly let my guard down, but also some of my coworkers are kind of more my friends so I guess I'm lucky in that sense. But anyway! All of this to say that you should take care of your brain at work. You should take care of your body, you should take care of your mind, you should take care of your spirit. I'm not trying to get all spiritual over here but you should take care of yourself!

K: Why not? Do it! Yeah man, you gotta be the best you you can be before you can be the best employee that you know you can be. And that includes in your mind too. You know?

E: Are these our final takeaways?

K: It's mine! It can be yours too.

E: Well what I said what I my takeaway.

K: I'm gonna just quote my idol, Jerry Springer.

E: Great, excellent.

K: "Take care of yourself and each other!"

(Both chuckling)

K: He's not really my idol, just in case anyone had any doubts. But yeah, that's about it for me.

E: I'm gonna quote my hero Oprah, because I like a superior television talk show host

K: Says you

E: "Live your best life"

K: Yup! And on that note, this has been another episode of *The Accessible Stall*, I'm Emily, she's Kyle, and we'll see you next time.

E: That's me!

K: Goodnight everybody

E: Bye!

K: Bye!

E: Thanks for listening