

# Episode 76: High-Functioning Anxiety, with psychologist Dr Lalitaa Suglani. Masking sensitivity, ADHD, and strong emotions. Where HFA comes from, the signs, and what you need to know

**Mandy:** Do you have a hard time switching off? Maybe you even feel FOSO, the fear of switching off on weekends, evenings, and during vacations. Maybe you worry about disappointing others. It's so much easier to disappoint yourself. Conflict can make you really uncomfortable, so you do your best to avoid it. And you spend a lot of time in your head worrying about how situations will play out and what could go wrong.

If this resonates, I think you're going to find today's episode intriguing. I'm in conversation with Dr. Lalitaa Suglani, psychologist and author of High Functioning Anxiety. Before we dive in, welcome to Enough, the podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mandy Leto, ex investment banker turned executive coach. This is a show for high achievers, perfectionists, and folks in fast paced careers whose lives look shiny and successful on the outside, but inside you're secretly tired, wired, and never feel satisfied.

Satisfied or good enough, no matter what stellar things you've achieved. You want to say enough to the burnout, the constant hustling, but you're also scared to give it up. I'm glad you're here. So today we're diving into high functioning anxiety, what it is, where it comes from and what we can do about it.

We also get into some real life scenarios that I often see with the senior executives who I coach and Lalita drops in with some solid gold advice. So let's get to it. Lalita, what is high functioning anxiety?

**Lalitaa:** So the way that I always explain it is that there's two parts. So there's one part, which is the high performer, the high achiever, the part of us that wants to do go, go, go, go, go.

We want to do well in life, but we also have this other side. And this side is like the self doubt, the sensitivity. And often what will happen is in life, we've learned to disconnect the two. So this is the part that keeps showing up over and over and over again, where it's like, People will see us as the one that's got it together, the one that's showing up all the time, the one that is social, the one that never seems to need any support from anyone else.

But on the other side, actually, no, that's not the case. We worry excessively, we're constantly thinking about what other people might be thinking about us. We're a perfectionist, which then leads us to taking up so much time trying to manage everything. We're constantly fearful of disappointing others. So there's these two different parts of us that are playing out, but we're disconnected from the two.

Because we're just showing up in this one side. And the way that I'd also add to that is it's a bit like a swan. So the swans like gliding and you see the top of the swan and you think, Oh, look how elegantly and graceful it looks, but underneath it's like paddling away. And that's how it is that we're showing up day to day is we show up like this graceful swan.

Like I've got everything I'm doing this. And people think that, wow, this person's so calm, collected. They're so confident. And But underneath that's not really what's going on, but we've learned to suppress that part away.

**Mandy:** I'm curious what it looks like in the office day to day when high functioning anxiety is playing out. So what would you see in someone or what would you be noticing?

**Lalita:** You would see someone who, first of all, has it all together. They always meet all the deadlines. So you would see someone that's like, Oh, they've, they've, they've come to this meeting. They've got this organized. They've done this, they've done this.

But in the background, what someone would see that other people wouldn't see is. You're scattered, you feel like you're all over the place. You feel like you've, um, you've lost control. If an email has come in and you haven't been able to get to it. So you feel really dysregulated all the time. You're often thinking, Oh God, have I upset that person?

And you're hypervigilant. So you're watching out and you're noticing the little changes in people. So there's all these different things that. People can't see, but you know that it's happening. And often you're just like, I can't show this to people because they're going to think who is this person? Like, and they're not going to be able to hold the space that perhaps you may need.

So you just keep hiding that part and masking it and showing up as The high performance of people would actually see the high performer. They wouldn't see all of this other stuff that's going on, but you would acknowledge that this is what's happening.

**Mandy:** Fascinating. So as she's talking, I'm wondering whether or not HFA plays out in the same way for men and for women.

So Lalita, what are you seeing in this respect? Is it the same thing for both genders?

**Lalita:** It's really interesting because often people will say, Oh, this is just, I know loads of women and I, it's, it's. I see clients who, again, very, very similar traits that they present with. So they present as being the one who's the, the go, go, go in, in work side of things, they've successful businesses, they're successful professionals in their own right.

And in the background, it's like, well, what about me? No one really sees me. No one really acknowledges the real me. Everyone sees me as being this strong, this person who's managing all these different people. But. There's no one here looking after me or can see me and it's the same in women. It comes back to that little girl or that little boy within us who didn't or didn't receive the love that we perhaps needed, the nurturing that we needed.

So what we learned to do was show up and give the world and make sure that everyone else around us is okay. So we learned to really be over responsible to others needs and ignore our own. So it shows up as being this high performer in some ways, the high achiever. Yeah. But inside of us, it's just that little child who is still craving and yearning for this love, but we've locked that child away because no one gave the nurturing support that this child needed.

**Mandy:** Think back to some of the messaging you received as a kid. I remember being praised for being so mature for my age and never making a fuss. You never give me any trouble. I remember hearing that. Or, you're the smart, sensible one. In my house, expressing a strong emotion or not agreeing was simply not tolerated.

I remember being spanked or having my hair pulled or my mouth washed out with soap if I was being sassy. What about you? What do you remember about being at home growing up? What was praised? What wasn't tolerated? What was downright punished? None of this is a judgment on our parents or caregivers by the way.

It's about noticing and understanding where some patterns may have been laid down. Lalita, tell us more about how those patterns start to get planted in our early years. And if you're up for it, give us your experience of this. Growing up.

**Lalita:** It's like even the idea of like being the good girl or being the good boy like well done you're really good you um always listen to me you always follow the rules so you get these this praise but it's also there's other things where you're being too much now so from that you learn that okay me sharing this emotion I get shut down so this emotion is not okay for me to share so you either you're craving the which way am I meant to go in order to be enough And then I do I get the validation that I need.

So if you keep getting praised for being good, um, based on like what your attachments or your caregivers are telling you is good, and that's what you're receiving the messages you're receiving. Those are the things that you're going to keep trying to like, I'll do more of this, I'll do more of this. And you become that caregiver, the nurturer, the one who's looking after everyone else, the empath, the sensitive one, and that continues and continues and continues in our adulthood.

So it's like, when we're going back, we're looking at, hang on, my childhood was fine. I did everything, I had everything. But when you really break down the beliefs, like you've just shared, Mandi, is like, there's, hang on. But mom used to always say to me, like, you're a good girl. Like you, you've always done well at school.

There was never any complaints. Everyone said that you were a really good child. And that's where it's like, Oh, hang on a minute. What's really happening there? Is that where the disconnect starts? Where we learn, okay, I need to keep performing in this way and not allowing yourself to be who you actually are.

Because that's that part of you is like, we don't like that part. This is the part we need more of.

So if I go back to my upbringing, I'm one of five and I'm the second oldest. So second oldest naturally meant, right, I need to grow up quickly because there's younger siblings that need looking after and need nurturing. So there wasn't space. There was never space for me to be, to be me. So I learned very early on to be the caregiver, to be, make sure that I just stay quiet.

And I was very, very quiet. So I was always the, the good girl. I grew up being the one that was like making sure everyone was okay. I'd always know when something wasn't okay. And I was very sensitive, but I always ignored that sense. I was like, I'm not sensitive. I'm the strong person. I'm not saying I'd never ever, ever let people know that I was sensitive or that I was emotional.

Yeah. Um, and I really struggled with that. So as I continued through life, I became a people pleaser. So I was so focused on what do people need from me and not just a people pleaser. The traits of also this perfectionist. I had these very high standards for myself. And if I'd ever, if I, if I never got to this high standard, I'd always beat myself up.

My inner critic would be very loud in my head. Um, just say that you're not good enough. You should have tried harder. Now what people are going to be thinking. And that's really exhausting to have this bully in your head. Every single day, like no matter what direction you take, something is constantly screaming at you and shouting at you, but that inner critic as you progress through life and the more inner work that I've done, I've understood that's been a protective mechanism that's been there to try and protect me from going down a space to make sure that I'm avoiding rejection or abandonment because I didn't want to feel these emotions.

I didn't know how to sit in these emotions. Um, because that's not something I was nurtured to do. Um, my, my dad was born in India. He came to England, um, when he was 17. So for him, his norms and he was in survival mode in, in his own generation. So he's come here in survival mode. Emotions aren't a thing that he talks about.

Mom, emotions aren't the things that she talks about. So you're here growing up as a second generation where we don't really talk about emotions. So you learn to suppress your emotions because these aren't things that people talk about. Just sweep it under the rug, sweep it under the rug. Don't talk about it.

Put your head in the sand. And that's what you grow up doing. But if you're a sensitive individual and you're wanting to feel, and you are feeling things, it gets to a point where it no longer works. The rules of pleasing. It doesn't work. And you hit that space of this no longer works for me. Growing up, I was, I was always a very creative person.

I was always in my head. And now I look back, there was a lot of rumination that I, I understand that that's what the rumination was. So it'd always be in my head. I'd be very, very quiet and I'd be very introverted. So then I started university. And when I started university, I got through my undergrad. Um, and I scraped through that, but I'd always find different ways to get through.

learning. So I'd have to sit with the words and play with the words to remember the words. So there was a way of me learning to understand. And at that point, I didn't know it was dyslexia. And then I started my master's and, um, I had to do this essay and the essay was a completely different structure to what's expected from your undergrad.

And I remember the lecturer, she called me in and she was like, I need to speak to you. And I was like, I'm in trouble. I've never been in trouble in my life. Like, this is like, what's going to happen? And I went in and I just burst into tears. She didn't even say anything. And I was just there in tears. And she was like, right, okay, is everything okay?

And I was like, um, I just don't know what you're going to say. And I've never been called into a situation like this. And she was like, okay, I've been reading through your essay, and it doesn't flow in the way that perhaps it can flow. And I'm wondering if you've ever been Told about, um, or heard about something called dyslexia.

That was it. I was like, there's shame. There's something wrong with me there. I knew there was something wrong with me. And that moment was so pivotal for me because for someone to sit there and not to shame me, but for someone to come in with like unconditional love and can see that I'm distressed, but also to hold a space, I'll never forget that moment where she held this space for me and she was like, okay, let's talk about this. Let's understand this. And after that, it just opened up the doors for me to start. Unravelling more of these things I'd shut away and I'd hidden and I learned to mask in so many different ways. So after dyslexia, um, I carried on through, um, my journey, my, I did my doctorate. And during my doctorate, I started getting more interested.

It was really interesting. I, I started going down. The rabbit hole of ADHD. And I was like, Oh, this is really interesting. This is really fascinating. So I started doing more and more work with other people who had ADHD. And then a psychiatrist was sitting with me and he was like, have you ever, he had, he was under the impression that I had ADHD, so we were talking about something and he was like, have you ever thought about a medication and what are your views of that?

And I was like, medication for what? And he was like, for your ADHD. And I was like, what? Like, what? What do you mean by that? And then he was like, Oh, I'm so sorry. I thought you were diagnosed. And I was like, that's really interesting because. He had seen something in me and I was like, I always thought there was something, but I just didn't know what.

And then when, um, after that, um, I went down the direction of going to have a diagnosis after I gained another rabbit hole experience where I wanted to learn more about it and everything just made sense. I get it. I get this and this makes sense. And this makes sense. And then. My work with high functioning anxiety came after that.

So with the high functioning anxiety, I'm like, why do some people have ADHD, but they show up in different ways. And actually all my client experiences where I'm working with different people, high functioning anxiety, it's like, this is high functioning anxiety, where you're showing up one way we're disconnected.

There's this anxiety and this, all this sensitivity that we've suppressed away in the background. And that's the part of us that we want to bring back in to really Connect together to show up authentically. That's what we're trying to do. But why is it that so many of us are just left disconnected in the world around us?

**Mandy:** I want to dig into this neurodiversity point a little bit more. Lalita, as a psychologist, what are you seeing, even purely from your own experience and in your practice, in terms of neurodiversity? And how it might intersect with HFA. Let's go a little deeper here.

**Lalita:** I am seeing more and more people that are coming in and they're being diagnosed with, with ADHD, especially with women.

It shows up in a different way compared to how it can show up in men. Um, and I'm, what I am seeing is if they aren't diagnosed, and again, it depends on the psychiatrist that you go to and what process they use. If they aren't diagnosed, people are still understand like, why, why does my brain think in this way?

Like what, what is going on? And this is where I think with, um, HFA, there's this preventative thing. So if you don't have a diagnosis, you can fall into HFA, but even if you do have a diagnosis, you can fall into. Okay. The way that I've learned to mask in the world is through high functioning anxiety. So I've learned to show up by splitting, disconnecting, and I'm showing up as this side.

And that's where like the rejection sensitivity comes in because you don't want to be rejected. You don't want to feel these strong emotions. So you keep showing up as this side, but the more we just keep disconnecting, disconnecting, the lonelier we feel. And that the loneliness and the impact on that on our physical body, it's like there's research in that, which is like having 15 cigarettes in a day, and I'm seeing more and more people coming through that it's an epidemic of loneliness from this high functioning anxiety where we're so disconnected from ourselves, that we're struggling to connect with people in the world around us.

**Mandy:** Okay, so you know, I love to get practical on the show. What steps can you start taking if you suspect that high functioning anxiety is a thing for you?

**Lalita:** So the first two stages for me is about unlearning. So to unlearn, we have to go back to the beginning. And this is where we deep dive and we understand, hang on, I'm presenting in this way in the here and now, but where has this come from?

And why is it that I present in this way? And for me, it's so important to go back into the, into the past to try and understand. And it's also to make sense of, we're not here to blame anyone. We're not here to point fingers and to say it's because of your parents, you're like this or because of your care.

It's like, no, we're here to understand what your younger version went through and why her narrative now is that she has learned or he has learned. It's not okay to show up in, the way that I would like to because I'm afraid or whatever reasons it might be, we need to go back and understand that. So in order to go back and understand that it's doing a lot of inner child work and understanding the beliefs that we have learned from our child self that still plays out now in our adult self.

And that might be, um, say if you didn't get the a child who was emotionally neglected, maybe you learned it wasn't okay to take up space. That was one of my beliefs. It's not okay to take up space. Don't be a burden to others because my emotional, my emotions weren't nurtured in the way that I needed at the time.

So for me, it's about going back and starting to reconnect back to that inner child. And essentially the inner child is this side, the sensitivity side, the side that we try and suppress away that we ignore. It's like, that's a part of us. And it's time for us to face this side. And in the book, I relate to it calling the shadow self because it's, it's like, there's a shadow there.

We know it's there. And we're like, we're not ready to look at it, but we are ready to look at it when we know it's there because it's not as bad as we think it is in our head. We're like, Oh, but it's not bad. You've got this. You can deal with it. And often it's not about going back and revisiting a story.

It's going back and revisiting how to regulate your emotions, which is something you never learned to do. So the unlearning happens, facing your shadows, starting to understand every day in your life. You might walk into a coffee shop and when you walk into the coffee shop, you've asked for a coffee and you've got the wrong coffee.

And now you're like, I don't want to ask the other person like that. The coffee is wrong because. They, they seem really off and they don't like me, but that's not what they've said. That's a story we've come, come up with. And where has that story come from? Where's that narrative? And it might be that you're more sensitive, so you notice things in people.

So this is something you've learned to do and it's become that hypervigilance and you're now aware that this person's not okay. But we then make a choice based on our belief, I better not say anything because I'm going to upset her because she doesn't like me. But that's not what's going on. So unlearning is the number one thing.

And then we go into learning, which is, okay, how, how do I now tune inwards? And people will often say that often, um, the perfectionist will say, well, what do I do? What do I do? Tell me what the rules are. And I'm like, no, I'm not telling you what the rules are. That's part of you learning self trust and you learning to go inwards.

I'm like, you've got your wings. I'm not telling you. how you should be flying. This is part of the experience now. And of course, it's scary. Of course, it's like, Oh, what if I do it wrong? And that's what we have to learn to do. We have to learn to, to fly in our own way.

**Mandy:** So what I'm hearing you say starting to pay attention to when we become, for example, sensitive, or when we, Contort ourselves in some way.

So the example that you gave about the coffee shop, another example that I hear all the time with clients is struggling to deal with. what they perceive as confrontation, so that they'll go immediately bunny in the headlights, like this person could be a badass 50 something year old executive, but all of a sudden they feel eight years old again, when someone addresses them in front of other people, and they'll immediately go into that behavior.

So help me to understand we're noticing, we're simply noticing that this is happening, probably in hindsight, and maybe, you know, journaling about it, or What, what would someone do with this information as they start to notice these things showing up?

**Lalita:** So I would always tell someone to keep a journal or even on your phone, just keep in your notes section and just write down, okay, what is it that's coming up for you?

So say like, okay, there's someone that's just messaged you saying, Hey, can we talk about this report that you've just given me? And instantly you're like, ah, and you've now gone into that. Fear, heart rates gone up, what are they going to do? And your brain has literally gone into all of these, catastrophizing into all these different experiences that haven't happened and may not happen.

So you've gone into all these spaces, but your brain is trying to keep you safe. Now, if you're not aware that this is what's happening, you're now panicked and you're all over the place and you're scattered and you're like, Oh my God, what am I going to do? I need to quickly get back to So we're coming from this energy that's like quite scattered energy because we're feeling scattered, we're feeling dysregulated.

So what we want to do is start to learn, okay, I'm noticing I'm feeling very scattered right now, but we're not doing anything with that scattered energy. We're learning to sit in this dysregulated state to allow ourselves the regulation. And in that moment, you may think, I don't want to write down anything because if you're being chased by a lion, the last thing that you want is someone to say, so how are you feeling right now?

It's not something that someone is able to say, yeah, yeah, I'm actually feeling a bit dysregulated and maybe this. And it's like, no, that's not going to work. So afterwards, yeah, we'll reflect on that. But in the moment, I think it's about. Right. If you're feeling anxious, do you need to go for a walk? Do you need to just get some space?

And maybe if you're feeling quite claustrophobic in that space, do you need to get out somewhere? Do you need to go and do some yoga or deep breathing? Like what works for you when you're feeling that way? And everyone's different. So don't compare yourself and think, Oh, that person just breathing and they're absolutely fine.

Like what, why can't I do it that way? It's like, no, come back. Focus on what's going on. And then afterwards, I would always say reflect on it. So what happens? Someone sent you an email and it's trying to say, okay, what's the shadow that's coming up with that email? It's not the email itself. It's the shadow, the messaging behind that.

So someone's coming up. I feel like I haven't got control. I might feel like I, um, I don't know what's going to happen. It's going to be unexpected again. I don't feel like I'm in control. I feel like they're angry with me. I feel like they're going to shout at me. I've done something wrong. So I'm feeling like, what have I done?

What have I done? So you have to sit with all these different triggers that might be coming up for you or these parts of you that are playing out, because these parts are going to come up in all aspects of your life, where a friend might text you after ages saying, Hey, can we chat? And instantly your brain's gone to 10 worst case scenarios, but there's a reason why your brain does that.

And when you start to become aware, then you understand that's another key point. Having awareness is, is one, one key element, but we also now need to Okay, I'm noticing this, but why is this happening? So we're going deeper into that and you may not know the why straight away. But it's okay to sit with the why in your journal and to ponder on that.

And then we move into conscious change. And the conscious change is the more that you practice, the more that you become aware of these things that are happening and why they're happening. You might be in a situation where someone's messaged you and said, Hey, have you got time to talk? And you're like, okay, I feel my heart rate.

I feel my stomach. I feel all of these things. And what you're doing is you're learning to connect with your body. That's something, remember, bear in mind, high function anxiety is something you've learned to disconnect from. So, naturally, it's going to feel very overwhelming at the beginning, because you're like, oh my god, there's feelings, and I don't like these feelings, because you've not known how to deal with them.

But when you're learning to consciously change, you're like, okay, I'm sitting in these emotions. But as soon as you step out, you're teaching your body, I can't do it. I can't do it. These are too big. I'm not able to do it. So it's, we're doing it. We're doing it. We're doing it slow and steady. And the hard thing is the perfectionist within us is going to not like it because it's like, this is not right.

We're not doing it properly. We feel out of control. And that's what we want to sit with is learning to sit with the discomfort of it.

**Mandy:** So we've got an unlearning to do in this process, meaning you might start paying attention and reflecting on situations as they arise and getting curious about the shadow coming up.

That might look like slowing down and really noticing how you're reacting to say a, we need to talk email from your boss. The mind can so easily flash to, am I in trouble? Maybe I'm going to get fired. Uh, I'm going to need a cardboard box. It's going to be awkward. I'm sweating. We have never learned to sit in the discomfort. We hear a lot about that phrase these days, and it's not really clear what that means. So let's find out more.

**Mandy:** Does your perfectionist have a name? Well, my inner critic has a name. She's called Judgey Janet. Yeah. Judgy Janet uh, I suspect that she's probably slip sliding into my perfectionist. So Judgy Janet in that moment is like, get yourself together, like, look at you, you're a mess. No wonder they want to fire you.

**Lalita:** You know, I'm putting myself into that scenario now. So in that moment, my inner critic has historically gone extremely vocal. And what does that do, like, to us when you're hearing that part of you just screaming at you, you're gonna be homeless now, you should have done it this way, you should have done it that way, it should have been like this, we need to get that cardboard box, maybe we can, like, you've gone into, you've gone into how many different directions in your head.

And it's like, hang on, someone's just sent you an email. Can we just come back to this email? Like where, where are we going with this? Like where, but again, it's safety where, where that, um, perfectionist within us and the inner critic and the catastrophizing, it's all there to keep us safe because maybe once upon a time we were at home and dad was going to come home and we weren't sure what state he was going to be in.

So we learned to be like, Oh my God, what do we need to do? Do we have to be like this, be like this, be like this. And that hypervigilance is the way that you'll. brain now form. So you're, you're learning to be like, Oh my God, I know it's this and I know it's this and I know it's this. So you're seeing all these things and you don't even realize sometimes that you're noticing these things.

Like I thought everyone did that. Um, and not realizing actually, no, it's because of perhaps the way you've learned, um, to be in, in your, um, world. But I'm coming back to your question. And your question about how do we sit in so I know I've been in experiences where I've had this dread and this anxiety in my stomach and I'm like, Oh, this is it's such a horrible feeling.

It doesn't go. And I know that I may have upset someone or I've sent an email. I've done something. And it's like, Oh, and I know that my self trust is within me. And it's like, No, we've done the right thing here. But the dread is just there. And it's screaming at you. But it's like it's having that reminder.

But also then, it's having like a state change. So maybe it's like, okay, I know that I've got this dread and I'm meeting my friends later, but that will be nice. But the dread is still with me, but that doesn't mean that I have to get rid of the dread by having some alcohol, trying to get rid of it, trying to remove it or do something completely different.

It's learning that this dread is a part of me. It's here right now. I'm acknowledging that it's here. I'm not trying to get rid of it, but I know why it's here. Sometimes just acknowledging it in that way. And the more you do this, the more you realize that dread gets smaller and smaller and smaller. Because you realize the self trust within you gets bigger and bigger and bigger and you know, things will always be okay. You know that you will be okay.

**Mandy:** So having done so much of this work, having written the book, having gone through these steps repeatedly. Do you feel like you're done and you've got this all figured out?

**Lalita:** No, in short, no. I think we're all work in progress. I feel we are all work in progress. We are always learning. I don't feel like my anxiety and this disconnection is there the way that it once was. I feel like I'm, I'm together in this and we're working together. So there's parts of me that are, have come together.

And there's self compassion, there's self trust, um, as big as it's, it's ever been, and that's a beautiful space to be. But that doesn't mean that my growth doesn't stop, my transforming days don't continue to happen because there's moments where every day you're walking around and things come up, shadow parts of you are constantly there, but you've got the tools to be able to deal with them.

So when they do come up, it's like, okay, what is this about? What's going on here? What's the lesson here? What, what's the learning from this? What am I taking away? But it's no longer that scattered energy that comes in. It's almost like, right, I'm going to pause with this. I understand what this is. And you, you allow yourself to pause.

Like you allow yourself to slow down. There's a really, it's a really beautiful energy. And, and for those of them, individuals who do yoga and are aware of yoga, like before you start on your mat, you're in your, um, Tadasana state where you're, you're focused. Feet are firmly on the ground. You feel the soles of your feet, but your hands are by your side and you just feel that strength.

Your chest is up and you just feel that strength in you. And that's how I envision like where you come out of and how you carry on everyday life is you're in that Tadasana energy, that strong strength within your, within the soles of your feet.

**Mandy:** I love that visual of standing in that pose with your arms at your sides and your feet rooting like a solid oak tree into the earth and there you are ready for whatever life is going to throw at you.

It's a great visual for this kind of energetic blueprint that you can come back to when life starts to feel turbulent or when confrontation comes at you or when you start going into that usual behavior that you're trying to shake. This is the way that we can have our own back. Having this bookmarked, ready to go in the heat of the moment.

Okay. It is time to get even more practical. Are you ready to play with some real live coaching questions and see where we go with them? Yay. Okay. So question number one is about people pleasing. That is the flavor of the day. I've been a people pleaser my whole life. And I know that in my willingness to say yes to additional projects, I suspect that I'm being taken advantage of.



It irritates me and I'm exhausted, but I don't know what to do. I'm afraid of upsetting people. What would you say?

**Lalita:** Okay. So I would say on this side, we have like the irritation, the resentment that's building up and that's probably getting stronger and stronger. And then on this side, it's like, okay, I know someone's taking advantage of me.

So I want to sit with both sides here. I want to sit on first of all, what makes you feel like they're taking advantage of you and where else have you felt this way? So it's really starting to understand, hang on, what's really happening here. And then you're also listening to this resentment and this frustration that's building up because it's like, hang on, someone's coming into my house.

But why are they coming into my house? Because this is my house. They've got their own house. They shouldn't be in this space, but we're not saying anything. We're not communicating with them. So we have learned to just watch people and observe people, but your resentment is getting stronger because you're getting ready to overcome this people pleasing.

That resentment is going to turn into like, I'm fed up of this and it's getting stronger and stronger and stronger, but we don't want it to get to a place before it explodes and come out in different ways. Okay. We want to start using this and start to become more curious with hang on, what's living beneath the resentment, what's living beneath the frustration.

So your needs now are starting to appear like, this is not okay that someone is coming into my space. So let's like break down them, um, the, the beliefs that you're, you're starting to notice. But on this side, you've got the belief of, but it's okay. People need your help. Don't upset other people. So let's listen to these beliefs as well.

And then really tune in with where does your heart space? Where does, where is your heart space connected to? Do you want to continue giving work and just saying yes to everyone else and letting them come into your space? Well, do you feel like actually, no, I don't want to, but perhaps we don't know how to use our voice because that's not something we've done.

We've never been assertive with our needs. And maybe that's the work that needs to happen is actually, how do I become assertive? Do I need to do some practice work? Do I need to sit with, okay, what can I do here? What Rather than throwing everything at them and say, I'm never going to do this. I don't want to work for you.

You're taking advantage of me. How do we find the right words to be able to communicate, um, what's going on for us and how I might be feeling.

**Mandy:** Which segues beautifully into the next question, which is something I see in my coaching practice all the time. all the time. A fear around confrontation. And I know you said that the basis of high functioning anxiety, all the spaghetti trail of it always traces back down to fear.

So this ability to be okay, and stay in that yoga position to stay open and grounded, Even when there might be, it doesn't, we could might catastrophize it into hostility, but it's not necessarily hostility, but there could be some degree of pushback and building the emotional robustness to be able to not buckle to old style behavior, where then it builds up the passive aggressiveness and the resentment starts building up little by little bit.

There's a pattern happening there. So for somebody that is trying to use their voice, So many say like, even very powerful middle aged people. I never learned how to use my voice. What would you say to them?

**Lalita:** Yeah, yeah. Really powerful. Really, really powerful. That is. I've never learned how to use my voice.

Wow. Even that is just, it's powerful. Really, really powerful. How do people learn to speak out? Because it's about going inwards and understanding what your needs are. So if you've never understood what your needs are. How do you know how to communicate to someone else? But there's also that fear. If I say something, if I say to them, you've upset me when you've done this, this, this, they might turn around and say, what do you mean?

How dare you say that? So actually, is it about the fear of you speaking out or is it the fear of the reaction you might get from someone else? And that takes you back to your self trust because it's like, okay, if someone comes in and, and is upset because we've just shared how we're feeling. That can make us feel like, ah, but actually we need to trust ourselves because we know why we've just shared what we've shared.

So say for example, you've gone back to this coffee, um, uh, the barrister there, and you've said, um, I'm really sorry, but, um, you've given me a cappuccino, but I ordered a latte. And she's like, no, I didn't. You ordered a latte. Like, no, I didn't. Okay, how are you going to respond? How are you going to continue that?

Because you're not just going to say something and then that's it. It's all done. There's going to be a conversation that's going to happen, but how do you stand proud? And even just doing that is really feeling connected to your feet, your soles of your feet on the floor and noticing your body language, standing strong within yourself, even physically, if you're changing that, but noticing that there's a self trust side that you're developing and you're working with that you haven't been able, that you've ignored, or you haven't been able to delve into.

And that's a big part of this growth journey when you're overcoming high functioning anxiety, because you're learning to trust yourself. So no matter what happens, I know I will be okay, because I will find a way and figure it out rather than like the, the, the rabbit in headlights, um, is I expect something to come back.

If somebody

**Mandy:** wanted to practice this muscle, I like that practicality of what you said about still staying in that grounded position, because that's something that we can do. Even during coaching sessions, I often do that. I'll feel my feet. where they meet the floor. And it just reminds me that I, I am not just a head.

I am also a body and just such a one using the body as a tool to be grounded and to remind oneself that we have all of these physical resources. at the ready as well, which could be connected to the breath, it could be connected to staying open, taking up space, all of that. How else could someone grow that muscle?

Because I may be wrong and correct me if I am, but there's almost like two stages to this. There's the triage phase of this in the moment. Barista said barista is snapping back at you. So there's maintaining your state in that moment. And then there's the continuing to grow the muscle of this because as you said, you haven't arrived.

None of us will ever arrive at this because we'll still fall into old patterns and behaviors. It's just, we get better at noticing it more quickly. We're not done this work ever. So is there anything else? If we go to the kind of, is that a use useful? to break it into sort of triage and then the ongoing work.

**Lalita:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I would say like, if we think of the triage side, yes, there's a bit in the moment. So the moment by moment is like, okay, I have, and it's just that even that pause in that moment is okay. I've ordered something. It has, it's not the right thing. I can see there's a long queue. But also it's okay for me to take up this space.

It's okay for me to go back and ask for something that I didn't actually ask for. And I, I've paid for it as well. Like you've got, you've, you've got your own needs and you've been able to express that. That I would say is yes, you're in the moment, but afterwards as well, like say, if you decided to walk away, um, and you decide that you're not going to, um, go back in and say to the lady that you've given me the wrong, um, coffee is like, what was that about?

So that's where you reflect back and you journal and you think of, okay, what was that about? What stopped me from doing that? Because that's also growth. Just because you're not showing up in the way that you would have liked in your head doesn't mean that you're not growing. Even if you're reflecting and you're thinking back to actually, why did I do that?

Or I could have done this maybe, or maybe this way it could have worked out as well if I was in that space. So you're not beating yourself up. It's not your inner critic that's out, you've got your reflective space that's

um, and your, your reflective thinking that's playing out where you're starting to look at the different paths like oh okay this and this and you're curious with that.

Rather than thinking, I should have done this and I should have just, just sucked it up and just carried on and just had the coffee. I upset her and everyone in the queue was tutting and they were all saying that, Oh, why are you doing this? It's like, no, I am entitled to this and I can speak out and not fearing and worrying about what other people might be thinking.

Cause that's the thing that stops us from showing up in that way with the strength that we carry is, but what are people going to think? And we hide away instead. A lot

**Mandy:** of that goes back to the good girl conditioning, right? Like don't make a fuss, be easy to please, don't have any needs. So I think it's noticing that and then going back to the root of that.

Okay. One more question. Okay. I have ridiculously high standards for myself and others, often to my own detriment, but lowering my standards and expectations feels like a cop out. Like I can't hack it. Like it's weak. Any thoughts on this?

**Lalita:** Who is saying that it's weak? Who's saying that you can't hack it?

What part of you is that that's screaming at you? Um, because you know what you're capable of. You know that when you're high functioning you can, there's so much that you're uh, that you're brilliant at. But imagine if that came from a place of intention rather than anxiety. Rather than anxiety sitting in your driver's seat, driving you around everywhere, scattered all over the place.

Imagine if intention was sitting in your driving seat and was like, right, your anxiety is still there. Anxiety is in the back passenger seat with the seatbelt on. So you're just like, right, okay, anxiety, how are you feeling? What's this part? What's this part? But your intention is the one who's taking the direction and taking the route forward because you don't want anxiety to be there.

So I would really listen out. Who's saying that it's not good enough or who's saying that, um, you're, you're not doing enough as you should be. What part of you is that? I'd be curious to understand a little bit more behind that.

**Mandy:** I ask every guest to leave a brick of wisdom, a parting gift that they want to leave with you.

Lalita.

**Lalita:** My gift would be don't compare yourself with others. You are who you are, and if you're a yellow and someone else is an orange, like, that's okay, but really just stay in your lane. Stay focused on what you're doing. And when you do notice yourself, like, oh, look at them, they've got this and they've got that.

It's like, bring yourself back to your values, to the things that you have around you, the gratitudes that you can think of that are around you in your life. Not thinking everyone else has it better. It's like, no, look at the things that you have in your life and stay in your lane and not get distracted by everyone else.

**Mandy:** Did you know that there are show notes to each episode in case you like to read and highlight and print out and marinate on things. You can head over to my website, [mandyleto.com](http://mandyleto.com) and click on the listen tab. Where you'll find all the show notes and transcripts for each episode. You will find all of Lalita Suglani's details there and do pick up her book on High Functioning Anxiety, which is out now.

What's your big takeaway from this conversation? I'm really taking in the reflection point. How important it is to view the shadow parts with curiosity and compassion and how to actively reflect. For example, if you didn't speak up in that situation today. Why not? What was going on for you? And not to do that from a place of criticism and self judgment.

It's that ability to observe the situation that can give so many insights on how we might do things differently next time. So who came to mind as you were listening to the episode? This podcast grows because of the generous shares and recommendations of brilliant humans like you. So thank you in advance for sharing.

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