

Episode 209: The Art of Managing Pressure with Hank Weisinger

Hank Weisinger: [00:00:00] If you see that pressure moment as an opportunity, if you'd be friended, in other words, Everything starts to change, including the reactions in your brain.

Debbie Sorensen: That was Dr. Hank Weisinger on psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal

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Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast, I'm Dr Yael Schonbrun a Boston- based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book of ACT Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: Thank you [00:01:00] for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock!

If you listen to this podcast, you probably know by now that we are partnered with Praxis continuing education, and there's a reason why it's because Praxis really can help you transform your client's lives by learning how to effectively promote lasting change with evidence-based approaches act, DBT, compassion, focused therapy.

And we love Praxis so much, especially because. Our very own Debbie Sorensen is going to be doing a workshop through Praxis. Tell us about it, Debbie.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes. I'm doing a webinar on acceptance commitment therapy for burnout. This is for therapists who are working with clients who are burnt out. And of course, as therapists, we are also occasionally may experience our own burnout. So hopefully it will be helpful for that too.

It starts August 25th and it's on Wednesday afternoons just for a few Wednesdays in a row. So you can check it out on the Praxis [00:02:00] website and learn more. I hope you can join me if you're a therapist, be great to have you there. And for all of the live online courses that Praxis offers, you can go to our website OFFTHECLOCKPSYCH.COM and get a discount code.

Yael Schonbrun: This is Yael here with Debbie to introduce an episode. Good on pressure. So I had the chance to talk with author Hank Weisinger, who's written a number of different

books, and we actually got to talk about two of his books, the first performing under pressure, the science of doing your best when it matters most.

And then his most recent book that just came out the unlikely art of parental pressure, a positive approach to pushing your child to be their best self. So I've become pretty interested in the field of research on stress. And it's a pretty controversial one, because if you think about it, even just from like the public lens, we talk about stress in pretty extreme ways.

We often talk about stress as being harmful, , it's going to, take you down. We, you shouldn't [00:03:00] be feeling so stressed out. We need to do everything we can to eradicate stress from our life. And then there's this growing body of research and books that are coming out to the most notable of which is Kelly.

McGonigal's the upside of stress, which is a really fascinating read. And in that word, We can think about stress in a pretty different way, stress as being pretty helpful advantageous. And there's really fascinating research in this area. And you'll hear me have a conversation with Hank where we kind of talk about both sides.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it was really interesting food for thought, in my opinion, I'm interested in stress too. I work a lot with burnout. And one of the things I'm interested in is like, you don't want zero stress, right? That's like disengagement and. Stress is normal and healthy, but at some point it becomes this thing where it's overwhelming people and they're kind of floundering a bit.

And I think that to me, I'm really big on helping people look at [00:04:00] their emotions with a microscope, you know, this idea of name it, to tame it. And I interviewed mark Brackett a while back on emotional intelligence and this idea of just like really. Honing in on what's going on emotionally. And in my mind, I have sort of merged like stress overwhelm pressure.

It's like, what's the difference? What is going on with these things? I think when you're feeling it, sometimes you just feel this burst of something, but it's really hard to dissect it. And so the conversation between the two of you was really interesting to help me break it down. Like when does stress become pressure? And what's the difference between the two I'd never really even thought about that before.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And I think Hank does such a terrific job of explaining how pressure can really be problematic , some stress researchers define what Hank calls pressure as the construct stress as threat. It's sort of like something imminently dangerous is going to happen to you. And.

, in our caveman days, stress is threat [00:05:00] and that experience was actually really helpful. It saved us, right. If we thought a predator was coming, we didn't want to sort of dilly dally. We needed to get the heck out of Dodge, but these days more likely we, even when we experience. What Frank calls pressure, this sort of do or die moment more often it's threat as challenged.

Like we're not going to die. It's just extremely uncomfortable. And there's power in naming it, as you're saying, and really dissecting and understanding what that experience is. Right. , reappraising it and understanding sort of its function and

the reality of how threatening the experience you're having really is. And by framing in that way, we can be guided towards these management strategies and Hank offers all sorts of really cool ideas for turning experiences of pressure, into a more functional kind of stress. That's experienced more as a challenge, as a positive talent.

Debbie Sorensen: as our cohost, Jill likes to say, if you're stressed about stress, then you're stressed.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah.

[00:06:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** So, so hopefully, people get some ideas for how to turn pressure to their advantage. From this episode, we would love to hear any experiences that you've had, about how some of these ideas have been put into action. Please reach out to.

Yael Schonbrun: I am here today with Hank Weisinger, who is a psychologist specializing in the field of pressure management.

He has consulted with and developed programs for dozens of fortune 500 companies and government agencies, and is taught at a variety of leading business schools. And he's also the author of several bestselling books, including the power of positive criticism and performing under pressure.

His latest book is also about pressure, but focuses more on pressure in the parenting sphere and offers a guide for how parents can move away from harmful pressure and into healthy pressure. Welcome Hank.

Hank Weisinger: I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, my pleasure. I wanted to start with a more general conversation about pressure. What is it, how it [00:07:00] interferes with our performance and then how to manage it. And then maybe as we move on in the conversation, get a little narrower and talking about your most recent book and, and talking about how some of your work applies in the parenting domain. So to that end, I wanted to start with, with talking a little bit about your book performing under pressure, and your book begins in a pretty interesting place, which is in a marriage laboratory in John Gottman laboratory.

Hank Weisinger: One of the interesting things we found in terms of relationships, is that how a couple handles pressure in the context of the conversations they have with each other and their own personal lives, uh, is a great predictor. In fact, one of the. Best predictors for whether the relationship is going to last for a long time in a happy and a happy way.

So that means when young people start to meet, one of the things that they might be [00:08:00] thinking in the back of their mind is how well does this person handle pressure?

Which unfortunately many times you do not know until you have been with the person for a, uh, you know, for a while. So we wanted to say it's, it's not only about performing under pressure in the work environment, you know, giving a presentation, making a sales call, but also it impacts our relationships to the point that he can either enhance a marriage, a relationship, or it can break it.

Yael Schonbrun: Right. . You talk about in, in many of your books, there's this evolutionary function that our response to pressure has, which is , get through whatever the, the dangerous threatening difficult situation is and what happens in the situation moves our attention narrow. And so it's very hard to make space for somebody else's experience.

Hank Weisinger: And one of the consequences of [00:09:00] this is that many people confuse even academics, pressure and stress.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah, that was actually going to be my next question. I know you get this all the time, but can you talk a little bit about how you distinguish between pressure and stress?

Hank Weisinger: There are two different psychological constructs and one of the differences is. When you experienced pressure under what kind of situation and when you experienced stress, for example, you will experience pressure when you are in a situation and the outcome is dependent on your performance. And it's really important.

Now the key here is the outcome. Is an unknown there's uncertainty. See if you were taking a test and you knew that you were guaranteed, you were going to get a hundred, there's no pressure. If you're watching a sporting event and your home team is up by in basketball, say, [00:10:00] uh, 30 points and there's 10 seconds left.

There is no pressure. It is only when it's a tie score and there's three seconds left. And the outcome is uncertain that you were actually sitting on the edge of your seat. So we've experienced pressure in a situation. Well, when the outcome is dependent on our performance, like taking a test, like taking the SATs.

That's a precious situation. People will. Now there are many definitions of stress, as you know, uh, I operate from the definition that people will experience stress when they feel overwhelmed by the demands of their environment. In other words, if it's a Saturday morning and you have to. Go to the beauty parlor, then you have to drive your kids somewhere.

Then you have to go shopping. Then you have to go to the cleaners. Then you have to make dinner for your friends that are coming over. You will start to [00:11:00] feel some stress because there are many minutes. Demands upon you. Now, there are multiple ways, a second way. So, so one is when you experienced it, you experienced pressure.

When you got to perform, you experienced stress when you tend to feel overwhelmed in the situation. And I like that definition better. Cause some people will say, well, be event is stressful. You know, like, like death of a spouse. I remember I had a patient once. Ah, doctor, my life is over my husband, Charlie.

We were married for 40 years. Uh, he was my best friend, my lover, my confident, we had three wonderful kids. My life will never be the same. And as you would imagine, she'd be depressed for six months or longer. Five minutes later, another lady comes in doctor, I got great news. My husband died. I can start to live same event, but a different interpretation of it.

So the problem of when people think or define stress as like the event, like moving a [00:12:00] speech, is that people react differently to be event it's all, as you know, that mediating variable of how we interpret it. So it's stress. The, you have a response, you have multiple responses. If you go through the day that I described to you, you know what, maybe you order the food to be delivered.

So you cut that out. , maybe you delegate some of the responsibilities. Maybe you blow some off, you can laugh about it. , you can do many things. You can take a 15 minute catnap with pressure. There was only one response and that is the effective response for the situation. So it's important for a pilot.

To be relaxed, but he still has to land the plane. The quarterback can tell a joke in the huddle and calm everybody, but he still has to throw that touchdown pass. So with stress, , differences, you have multiple ways of responding. And remember the [00:13:00] goal of stress management is reduction. Reducing it. The goal of pressure management is to be able to perform effectively.

And also the feelings that you associate when you are under pressure is another cue. I would tell people if they are feeling overwhelmed, tired, exhausted, burned out that stress emotions that tend to be associated with a pressure situation are anxiety fi. In many times embarrassment after the fact, if the person does not perform correctly.

And what I've noticed when happens is people take that stressful situation and they act as though it is pressure, meaning they have to perform or what you mean. If you get what happens, if you don't get to the, uh, cleaners, you probably have 20 other things minimum in your closet that you can still wear.

[00:14:00] It is not a do or die situation. And when people make every stressful situation, a do or die situation, they are using valuable psychological resources that could be used, , more effectively. And their life is on and having, because they're on high alert, 24 7, and I will tell you different sub west coast and east coast.

The the, or I should say in terms of age, when I was in my thirties and forties, I did that. I confuse stress with pressure and I was always on, on edge, you know, every talk was a do or die, you know, moment, everything that I did. And that's why I thought so much pressure. And once I started to give that up and it was able to distinguish, I've become a lot more content.

Yael Schonbrun: , I want to ask you to talk a little bit about some of the pressure traps that might cause us to believe it's a pressure [00:15:00] situation.

Hank Weisinger: What a pressure trap means is that we have conventional ways of how we think that we are going to motivate a person, but ironically, it actually increases the amount of pressure and the person will do worse. Reiterate the point that nobody does better under pressure. The idea of rising to the occasion is a myth, the edge.

And I used to think that was the edge, you know, because I'm a big sports fan, you know, the guy's a clutch player and can rise to the occasion. What I learned is that the edge is not doing worse under pressure. Not, not best. Nobody is rising to the occasion,

Yael Schonbrun: I want to actually interrupt and ask you as a more pointed question. So what do you think about the Yerkes Dodson curve? So for those of you who have taken psych 101, there's this arousal performance table, and it's a bell shaped curve. And the suggestion is that at very low levels of stress or pressure arousal, [00:16:00] we don't perform as well.

And at very, very high levels, we also don't perform as well. But there's this middle section that our performance is optimized. That a little bit of pressure, a little bit of arousal actually helps us perform better. So what are your thoughts?

Hank Weisinger: Well, the, what with that curve is really saying is the language that I would put it in is that there is a level where when you're regulating your emotions and you're regulating arousal, uh, that will help you perform more effectively. And in a big, another difference between stress and pressure is stress.

Sometimes can be motivational and I'll give an example. Like let's say I go into my kid's bedroom and he's, and I want him to be more productive.

Okay. I can do that by increasing the amount of stress I E by putting more demands upon him. So his arousal will come up and they'll start to be [00:17:00] more productive. However, if I put too many demands and get that and get him to arouse, that's where the curve starts to go down. So arousal can be used. Want to touch on what we call competitive arousal, which is a function of, of being under pressure is that arousal can be used, but it has to be regulated either individually by the person or whether it's a parent or it's a manager.

If you give person too many demands, too many things to do, uh, they will do worse and, and a good way of thinking of that for the listener to really bring it down is I always say, who would you rather be married to stress or pressure? Because if you're married to stress, your life is do this, do this, do this, do this, do this, do this.

And after you've done all that do this. Now there's many ways of doing that. The partner who is feeling all [00:18:00] of those demands can say, do it yourself, blow it off, laugh about it. I'll do it when I'm ready. And so on. If you're married to pressure, you're going to hear the same thing, but the tagline is you better not. Pressure is about getting it done, not about reducing the amount that you are under. And one of the great quotes you could you talk about the importance of framing it, that it's like elite athletes. They don't even think of it as

pressure Derek Jeter the Yankees. So that every time he goes up, what's going through his mind is this is fun.

This is what I wanted to do. Since I have been a kid, he is not seeing it as a threatening, as a threatening situation. When I used to start teaching at UCLA the business school, , I was so nervous the first time, because what's going through my mind.

I have to perform, uh, otherwise they'll never use me again. My career will [00:19:00] be over all these, what are called pressure, cognitive, distortions. , once I realized and change my perception, this is great. I love speaking and educating these people. This is a chance to promote myself. Then the pressure was, it went away completely.

So people have, if you see that pressure moment as an opportunity, if you'd be friended, in other words, Everything starts to change, including the reactions in your, in your brain.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it reminds me of the work out of Aaliyah Crumb's lab, which is really cool. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but she sort sets up these , instructional videos that, kind of inculcate people into different mindsets. So stress as debilitating is one set is one condition. And the second condition is stress as enhancing.

And when people are encouraged to drop into these different kinds of mindsets, they find that performance really changes. And also cardiovascular response really changes. They actually, they put people [00:20:00] through the tree or social stress test, where people do mental arithmetic in front of critical evaluators.

Evaluators are frowning and crossing their arms and disappear. And what they find is that when they have people watch these videos, that suggest that stress can be enhancing, that they see it as an opportunity. They see it as a challenge and not as a threat.

And I guess to me, that's how I read. What pressure in your definition is, is that it's like stress as threat. That if I don't succeed here, it's a do or die moment. And what the reframing is, is to more move the stressful experience into one that can be seen as a challenge.

Hank Weisinger: Correct. And you have to remember in early time, stress and pressure. Because every moment was a do survival was a, a hour to hour, , event, you know, finding water, finding food. And once agriculture started, and food became more prevalent. Well, that becomes a stressor that [00:21:00] is now God. And there's no more pressure, finding food. So they started out the same, but then they, then they sort of, , split and that's why there are different psychological, , constructs. And back to that pressure tracks, I wanted to give you an example. So one of the ways, one of the ways we typically try to motivate people at work, parents who is incentives.

So now you're the, you're the student, I'm the parent. So I say, okay, if you get an a on this test tomorrow on getting you a new iPhone, so you better study. So now I walk out and you're thinking, well, I don't know if I'm going to get an, a. But I really want that I phone, how can I increase the chances that I will get in a, Ooh, I'll make a little crib sheet.

So the incentive is now backfiring because the kid wants that iPhone. And this is why cheating [00:22:00] many times happens just like on wall street. People will cheat because of the incentives of making another, uh, you know, 5 million, \$6 million. So that's one. So we think that we're motivating, but we're really sabotaging the person,

Yael Schonbrun: before you go onto the next one. I just want to summarize that point, because I think in that, in that really great example, what the parent is unwittingly doing is creating a do or die

Hank Weisinger: That's right.

Yael Schonbrun: need to be a do or die situation. And it's not the intention, but that's sort of the concept.

Hank Weisinger: Exactly. And the, and the sad thing that I learned is many times that day, as much more important to the parent than it is to the kid. And another one is we think social support is, is going to help the person. So the parent who says, okay, you've got your school play and we'll be sitting right in the third row and so on and, uh, make us proud.

They think they're being supportive, but they're [00:23:00] really making the kid, do worse because the, the performer will start to think of all my parents are watching me and they become preoccupied with how their parents are judging them. I would tell parents that when your kid's doing an event, that you sit in the, the furthest back, not upfront, you want, you do not want to be distracting to them.

Some people will say, well, social support. Now, this might be a way of how you can use pressure to work for you. It's like when I say to my friends, , I'm Brian, I need to have this book outline done in three weeks. So I'm, I'm going on record. So now I've socially committed to that. And I taught my friends every time I call you, the first thing you say to me is, have you written 15 pages today?

And if I say, no, I want you to say, then get back to it. And you can, I will only talk to you when you've written that 15 pages, I've taught my friends to [00:24:00] pressure me into getting the work done. So that might be one way of how you would use pressure.

Yael Schonbrun: But even in that sort of increasing pressure, it's not do or die it's it's and it's not outcome focused it's process focused, like sit down and do the work

Hank Weisinger: One of the things that I've learned over the years is that people like me are not in do or die situations,

Yael Schonbrun: Hmm.

Hank Weisinger: giving it, giving a presentation to a YPO young presidents organization is not a do or die situation. I see people doing these Ted talks and they talk about how nervous they are and that I'll tell you why that's because they they're giving a performance. See, when you, when you, when you have the mindset and I will share with you the mindset I developed or not developed, discovered, uh, reduces pressure.

Yeah. Is is once you set it up as a performance, of course you under pressure because now you're being evaluated. So my [00:25:00] mindset was I'm educating people. If anybody's going to do the evaluation, it's me evaluating you because I know this, I know this stuff. So those would be for the incentive and the social support are really things that we commonly do because we think we're helping the person.

But in reality, many times it makes the situation worse for the person.

Yael Schonbrun: Right. , your mindset is one that reconnects to the value of why you're doing something. And again, not the outcome, but more like the process of educating people who might benefit from this information. And by focusing on that, rather than on how people might be evaluating you, it reduces the pressure that you experience and enhances the likelihood of you performing better.

Hank Weisinger: Over the years I started seeing what is the mindset to have that allows you to perform closest to your capability? So we've already [00:26:00] talked about some, one is preferred friend. The moment, rather than seeing as, as threatening to very importantly, is to realize multiple opportunities.

There you missed the bus. There's another one. So , because this leads into a common pressure distortion chance of a lifetime thinking when a person says, this is the only chance I'm ever going to have. So the agent who says, listen, Spielberg's in the audience, listening, watching you. This is the only chance you're ever going to get is making the situation worse rather than the agent who says, don't worry about it.

There'll be multiple, opportunities. So always think are taught my kids. There's always another opportunity. And that helps. And the third thing to do, which people have trouble with is shrink the importance of the event. The more important you make, something, the more pressure you experience.

See it goes [00:27:00] against conventional wisdom to say to your kids, the SATs are not a big deal, and people will say. That's unrealistic to say that, but I say it's unrealistic to think, is this the most important event of your life? See we over exaggerate. So psychologically, you know, as a clinician, you can appreciate this.

You have to get the person to under exaggerate. It's like taking something the other way to absurdity where you make it. So ridiculous puts it in perspective. So when people say it's the most important, I want them to minimize it. I also liked Steve Nash, famous basketball player said every time he would shoot a foul shot, he'd bounce the ball three times.

It'd be saying to himself, I've done this 10,000 times. So it's very important when people go into a situation, be the presentation, um, be it a conversation, performing a specific task to flash back in and just right in the moment, [00:28:00] all the successes that they have had in the. In the past, and that is very important.

And also the last thing is to people to remember, this is so important for parents is to recognize there are so many people in the work world, their whole identity is based on their job. Like the financial advisor, who only thinks he's a good person, or she's a good person. If

they're a million dollar producer, it's very important to know, and to remember, to reaffirm your self worth and to recognize that you are a worthy and valuable person, regardless of the outcome.

If you merge too much, if you fail at work, you're a failure in life. If you're successful at work, you're successful in life, you and I have both met many successful people that are not successful in their personal, you know, in their personal, relationships. So those are some of the mental [00:29:00] actions that I would want people to, uh,

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And I actually talked about this a little bit with cm Beilock in my episode on choke. , but I think it would be worth revisiting why are these solutions so helpful? And, and

why don't we perform at our best when we're under pressure?

Hank Weisinger: Well, there are many theories and one of the things, one of the things that I have noticed in psychology in the last 15 years, 20 years, it has moved into a very, a biological basis. And you have to that if I'm a psychiatrist or a neurologist, and I'm going to study emotions, I'm going to study the brain.

If I'm an evolutionary psychologist and I'm studying emotion, I am studying the face because the face is the premier signaler of emotions. Now I am one of those people that when I hear people [00:30:00] talking about the brain and so on, I'm saying, yeah, yeah, arrived already. I don't want to hear it. People have to get that the brain is going to do what it is told via how you perceive things.

To me, it is irrelevant about the chemical changes in the brain and so on because they are all triggered by how you appraise animals. And now this is a philosopher said that back thousand years ago, man is not troubled by events, but rather what he or she tells himself those events, meaning I E Albert Dallas, a thousand years later, his ABC principle, AEs, the events he is the consequence and the B event does not cause the consequence.

so like when you had a Sienna, she is much more knowledgeable about the brain than I am.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, but I think that a lot of what you talk about in your book is similar in terms of like, when we appraise something as being a pressure do or die [00:31:00] situation, our scratch pad or working memory gets used up leaving less available resources for some of the cognitive heavy load tasks that we might need to engage.

For example, if we're having a thoughtful conversation with somebody who's interviewing us,

Hank Weisinger: Taking a math test and she's sitting down and she's taking it. She has an hour to do the test, like the rest of their class. And all of a sudden her mind wanders to be fight that she heard her parents having before she went to school and she in there talking about divorce. So now she starts to think about the divorce and she starts to get anxious about the divorce.

It has nothing to do with the test. Pretty soon time is over and so on. Now, some people will say, well, what was going on? Okay. So she goes, those worry thoughts came on to her, a

working memory, iPad, and a bumped off. The other information I like to explain it is she's anxious [00:32:00] about something else and the anxiety interfere to help that person.

I don't have to even mention the word. And, and that's why this is again, w we had talked about this once before, is that when I was in graduate school,

it used to be the best classes with theories of personality and theories of psychotherapy and so on. And now it's all this neuro neuroscience stuff. I just read a study by a young gun as I would call him. That's I would refer to you, uh, Jeremy Rifkin. I think his name was university of Rochester.

Yael Schonbrun: Jeremy, Jamie.

Hank Weisinger: Jerry Jerry started and he did this study where, you know, it's a test.

And if you tell the students big decisions are going to be based on it. And he did the MRIs, uh, versus it's an opportunity for the teachers to know you better. Uh, they always did better with that second definition. So he concludes how you [00:33:00] think about the situation, decides how your brain reacts and your reaction.

Well, I knew that I was taught that 50 years ago. And, but it's because he did an MRI that, oh yeah, this is a new thing. It's like, it's like, do you need any more research to say that humor is impaired?

Yael Schonbrun: I mean, I'm not a brain researcher by any stretch but I do. I do think it's really so affirming to understand that, like, what we see from a behavioral perspective matches up to what we see at a neurological perspective. And it just kind of bolsters this power in how we can respond and help people.

Um, so I don't know, you know, I actually am a huge. Jeremy Jameson's work. And he's not a clinical psychologist, but a lot of the interventions that he does are more, you know, intervening at the appraisal level, not at the, you know, not medicating people, for example. So you had been talking about a number of the solutions to pressure traps. You already [00:34:00] mentioned downsizing importance, affirming yourself worth re calling yourself at your best. I wanted to also ask you to talk a little bit about ranking versus excellence mindset.

And I thought that was kind of a cool way to reframe how you think about your performance.

Hank Weisinger: There's two types of pressure that people experience. One is in the moment when you have to perform a particular task. Now, as I look at my friends, none of my friends who are lawyers, for example, feel pressure when they walk into a courtroom or have to give a deliberation, their pressure is how much is my daughter's wedding gonna cost?

How much longer do I have to put my son through a medical school or my daughter through school and pay for the apartment and whatever. And these are daily feelings are carrying a , a Boulder on your shoulder. And so on. Now, one of the [00:35:00] ways that I find that many people who experience pressure, the feeling of pressure like it's burdened every single day is because of their mindset, which is what we'll call a ranting mindset, which means that you

compare yourself to others versus a mindset of excellence, where you are just focused on doing your best.

The problem of having a ranking mindset is. When do you stop? You never do. There's always somebody better. I told my kids at a very early age, there's somebody is going to be somebody prettier, smarter, richer, yada, yada, yada don't

Yael Schonbrun: And were they like, you're supposed to think I'm the best.

Hank Weisinger: I do think that, but there might be other people that you find are better and so on, and it is a terrible [00:36:00] way to live your life. When you are always basing your own self worth on what other people do, you know, a good friend. And I used to do that in terms of, you know, books, this person's book is solving more and so on.

Drive me nuts. And one of my friends who was 10 years older at the time said to me, somebody else's success doesn't take away from your success.

Yael Schonbrun: Oh, I love that as a mantra.

Hank Weisinger: that was very especially living in that way. Now I'm happy for other people's, , you know, successes.

It's not, it's not competitive. And that's what a ranking mindset does. So somebody says, well, I have to be the best golfer. Really. You're going to be better than tiger woods was. I said, forget it. Just enjoy the sport and found that when you are always comparing yourself to others, you're always feeling pressure because you're always competing.

It's more than, keeping up with the Joneses. It's beating the Joneses, whereas [00:37:00] a mindset of excellence. You're just focusing on doing your best. I would tell every parent and every. Manage your, almost that the best thing to say is just do your best if you do your best, which is almost always good enough.

, good things will happen. Your work will be rewarded if you believe that hard work pays off, which is a positive psychology concept that the world is, is just, you will be rewarded. Don't worry. My father always used to say, don't worry about the other guy. You can't control a student.

I can't control how much you study that. If you want to study 15 hours a day, well, that's up to you. I'm not going to compare myself to you because I have no interest in studying 15 hours, , you know, a day. So that's what that means between those two different, mindsets, comparing yourself to others.

It's like being on a treadmill, you just going on, but you're going nowhere. [00:38:00] Fast. And I would tell people, and I never used to do this cause I thought it was too hokey. But since I have, it really makes a difference that when you're feeling a lot of pressure get work, feel even overwhelmed, five minutes of gratitude.

I've taught my daughter every time she starts complaining about something, feeling sorry for herself. Think of all the things that you have going for you. So I would sit back in a chair and

I'd say, I've got great friends, great kids. I got a book coming out class. I got a great partner and all of a sudden I'm feeling. So that's a very important thing for a person. You know, it's the, it's the idea of that code of balm or confidence, optimism, tenacity, enthusiasm. And here we're talking about optimism is that if people do not understand the benefits of optimism, unless they've read the research because it sounds so ridiculous.

When you are optimistic, Everything, becomes easier and you [00:39:00] make your life much more pleasant. It's like optimists have better health because they, because they believe that if they go to their doctor, it makes a difference. The pessimists doesn't go because they think it doesn't matter not going to do anything.

So they don't take their medical appointments. Optimists who have surgery recover faster than pessimists teams that are measured for optimism do better because they try harder because they believe we try harder. It'll it'll pay off. So people should ask do they wake up on the sunny side of the bed and they should start thinking, how can they put themselves in an optimistic mood for the day?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I love that. And I will say that that's a strategy that I use when I've had a rough day at the end of the day. And my mind can only think about the things that went very badly, all really, you know, with the benefit of this science at my disposal, I'll, I'll press myself to pause it. Yeah. Reflect on, on what did go well, and sometimes it's just that, you know, I tried my [00:40:00] best.

It didn't go well, but I learned something even if it wasn't uncomfortable lesson to help. Um, it's actually a nice segue into diving a little deeper into the parenting. And one question that is a pretty specific question that I just wanted to ask is coming back to your suggestion to focus on, are you doing your best?

The fear that a lot of parents have is that if they say to their kid, like, was that your best? And the kid says, yes, it might really have been a lazy effort. And so what do we, as parents do.

Hank Weisinger: Well, I, I want to tell you a story and then I will. I'll give you some strategies in the sec.

So my son says to me, dad, this was, he was maybe in, um, seventh or eight grade and he did a project on tornadoes. You know, a white piece of cardboard and so on. So he says to me, dad, if you were my teacher, what would you give me now? I'm thinking sweet. Because when my daughter would say that, if I said a B, how do I get to B?

Plus [00:41:00] if I said an eight minus, how do I get her? Then if I said a C how do I get a C plus? So I figured, you know, he's going to have the same thing. So I walk around, then I study it and I said, Danny, be very honest with you. If I was your teacher, I would give you a B minus. So he pauses for a second. He says, I can look,

Yael Schonbrun: Take it.

Hank Weisinger: I did not know what to say now, two weeks later, same situation. And imagine now that I'm telling this story you know, in a seminar and I, and I was say, okay, so your kid comes up and they say, what would you give me? And if you say, uh, Whatever you say, you know what advance he's going to say. I can live with that.

So one person would say, I would say, you can do better. And then I'd role play that you always think I can do better. Whatever I do. It's never, it's never good enough. And some other parent would say something and so on. [00:42:00] So I realized they were falling into the trap that I was, and I said, what do you want from your kids?

And he's, and it would take them a few seconds. And then somebody would finally say, you want them to do your best? I said, right. So all I said to my son was, I said, well, Danny, I said, is this your best? Cause if this is your best you're finished. I said, if it's not your best only show it to me when it's your best and own.

This was the mind only, you know, if this is your best and he thought about it and he said, it's not my best. And I said, well, then don't show it to me. I only want to see when it's your best. Now the irony now. Is that when he asked me to edit something, if I really do a quickly and so on. Cause I really don't want to say to me, you can do better.

This isn't good.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Yeah. And, and I think recognizing that different kids want different things like their, their best might be different than my [00:43:00] best. And it gets into this, this question of what is healthy pressure versus harmful pressure and your book, , the unlikely art of parental pressure that is coming out in July.

You provide parents with like a lot of different strategies to, to try out, right. That not every kid is going to need the same thing. Not every parent child is. Not every kid is capable of doing the same thing, but what I think is actually quite interesting is that you actually suggest there is a healthy kind of pressure.

There's a message right now in, in the ether that we shouldn't pressure our kids. We should really not be pressure parents at all. And so , what, what is your argument for why it's wrong to say that we simply shouldn't apply any pressure to our kids?

Hank Weisinger: well, a it's inherent in every parent child relationship because of its evolutionary utility, which is to guide the child into the life path that will help him [00:44:00] succeed from an evolutionary, uh, perspective, perpetuate the parents, the Paris genes. Now you have to remember that pressure in its physical form is a force. And that's how I want parents to think of, of psychological pressure and physical world was here before the psychological world. So we have that pressure is really no more than a force. And it is up to the parent now to harness that force through different modalities, which I will label to convert just like physical pressure.

You have gas pressure, you have water pressure, there's all different types of pressure. , and it's the same thing with psychological pressure. There was singular pressure. There was

relationship pressure. There is peer pressure. There is parental pressure. There is social pressure. All of these have a different.

Function. And when a parent is able to use that [00:45:00] force in a healthy way, then the student or the child team experiences that force not as I have to, not as you stepping on them with high heels, you know, where, , on their foot and, you know, pressing, pressing down, but rather the other way, lifting them up, they will experience it as guidance, support, , inspiration and wisdom.

And that is the transformation. And then it becomes healthy pressure. Very sadly, I met a kid in my building the other day who graduated from Stanford, you know, six, four, good looking guys from Greenwich, Connecticut. He told me that his father put tremendous amount of pressure on him to succeed. He said he understood why, but the consequence he doesn't speak to his father.

Right. That is really sad. , I remember pressure is defined from the kid's point of view. So a parent can say, I don't pressure my kids, but [00:46:00] if the kid says you do, then they are a pressure parent. It's like parental warmth. If you're, you can think you're the warmest mother or father in the world, but if your kid experiences you the opposite, then that's what you, that's what you are.

And what I have found in the parenting world is most parents will tend to attribute situations of blame to their, to their kids. He's a difficult child. But nobody ever thinks I'm a difficult parent. When a parent says, make me proud of you. I would say, how would you like it? If your kid came home and said, dad, I got to talk to him.

I said, you were dropping me off at school in a bauble. Every other kid gets dropped off in a Mercedes or BMW. Can't you work harder and make, get a, get a better car and make, make me proud of you dad. So that becomes a very different scenario. So the, the three ways that I have [00:47:00] found that parents exert pressure is through communication involvement. And then. Acceptance or rejection of the child. Um, I can have very high expectations of you and that, and they might be unrealistic. You know, you're going to be first in your class or first on the soccer team and whatever

and that's how parental pressure is defined when the child or teen experiences expectations, demands upon them, that they feel are impossible to, meet. So the, the parent now , has many times unrealistic expectations, , it's very hard for parents to accept the fact that your kid's not going to an Ivy league school.

For them. That's the unrealistic expectation. Not everybody can. So, you know, I wish parents in a room when Tom, how many kids, how many of you think your kid's going to an Ivy league school? Almost every parent raises their hand, somebody [00:48:00] being unrealistic because it's not going to happen.

So when you think of it, when you say. To transform it is to transform it. And so they feel that force is supporting them and pushing them in an uplifting way, rather than pushing them in a downward way and suppressing their interest in their feelings, pressure parents, for example,

defined success in very narrow ways, like getting into Harvard or getting into, you know, Yale or something.

Every parent says you can be whatever you want and I will support you. Oh yeah. The kid says I don't want to be a forest ranger. Let's see how supportive the parents are when the kid says that you can marry anybody. but I'm not paying for the wedding unless I like the girl, oh, I'll help you buy a house.

But it has to be the house that I approve of. So that becomes a big difference. And I met and I found the majority of [00:49:00] parents are like that. Not the minority, the majority. It's a global pandemic.

Yael Schonbrun: right. And I think it is. And I want to talk about how to change that, but I do want to just emphasize this point and I think it's a good one. It's threaded throughout your book, you and your coauthor, Chris Thurber, right? That your approach isn't about getting our kids to change. It's about getting parents to change and I, in a way it can come across as like, you know, now we're blaming the parents again, you know, and, and I don't think that's what it's about.

It's about, , finding a more effective mindset, we're not doing anything wrong other than loving our kids and doing the best we can with what we know, but there's some really helpful science that can guide us in doing a better, more effective job.

And the second thing is, it's kind of nice that it's in our wheelhouse, right? We can't really get other people to change. I can't get my 11 year old to eat his dinner, but what I can do is work on myself. That's in my power to do.

Hank Weisinger: One of the things that has been a big question ever since. Um, I think her name was Amy Chan. Who [00:50:00] did that? Tiger parenting.

Yeah. Okay.

Yael Schonbrun: Okay.

Hank Weisinger: So it's, she got people into thinking of the, the how much pressure and put more pressure on what Chris and I discovered is that's the wrong question. It's not how much or how little it's, how you apply pressure.

There is nothing wrong. You were applying pressure anyway. So you might as well do it in a way that is going to help your child. Uh, the way that a parent has questions. For example, some parents will ask questions. Like it's an interrogation. That's what there, what did you do? And so on other parents, what did you get on the test?

What did you do today? They want facts. Whereas other parents will use questions to help the child, articulate their interests and express their feelings. So that became a big, a [00:51:00] big difference that I would say every parent, the next time you ask your son or daughter a question, think about how you are phrasing it.

In many times, you're looking for a specific response. You want them to say a certain thing? By the way, the question is, is structured. You're really not using the question to discover what they are all about. Criticism is another difference. Parents will use criticism for floor finding maybe inadvertently, but that's how it comes across. They'll focus on once the, what the kid did wrong. Verse is support parents who use criticism to instruct and to guide, , the, the. Parent who is a sports father might say, I can't believe you blew that brown ball that was hit to you.

You lost the game. Whereas the other parent will say, Hey, next time, there was a ground [00:52:00] ball hit to you, just bend down and block it. And next time becomes an important phrase to say to kids, because next time implies, you're going to get another opportunity. And when a person realizes that they're going to get the next opportunity, they feel less pressure.

So in involvement, you know, the rule that we found is that if it's the right amount of involvement, your kids will say you are supportive. . If it's too much involvement, you are intrusive. And one of the things that pressure parents do is they do not respect the boundaries of their kids there. They will just barge into the room. They'll actually pick up their phone and say, who are you texting?

And may, will. They will look at it. Now we know there was a psychological theory called psychological reactance. When you get too close in a person's face, they automatically become defensive and they push back. Parents have to remember that, that there are boundaries, just like they want their kids [00:53:00] to knock on the door.

When they come into the parent's bedroom, parents need to knock on their kid's door. They need to respect the boundaries and what the smart parents do. Or I should say the supportive parents do is they widen the boundaries as the child becomes more and more responsible. , , it's like setting limits that once the person who the kid has a curfew and they say, okay, I've met my curfew for a year.

I think I'm ready now. Instead of 10 o'clock to come home 11 o'clock. There's no reason. Okay. You've proved it. Versus the kid who is never listening to curfew. That's the kid where the parents would want to say, well, you haven't earned it yet. And you know, having shown that you respect, you know, our

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So we're, we're totally running over time, but I did want to ask you for your thoughts, lots on this one question, one thing I think that we know about just generally healthy parenting, and I think this [00:54:00] applies to healthy pressure is that healthy parenting involves high respect, high standards, like high expectations for that child and high warmth.

And I think that the high expectations and high respect are a little bit more obvious about how we manifest that the high warmth is a little bit harder, but I think it's the most important. And you spend a lot of time in your book talking about warmth, and I, I think this is critically important. So I wonder if you have some tips for upping parental work.

Hank Weisinger: One of the ways that parents can do that is to show their kids, ask them to do things with them as a way of being very, accepting, to be able to give a very clear message that how you do in school has nothing to do with me.

Loving you. A great example is in the film, searching for Bobby Fisher, have you ever seen that?

Yael Schonbrun: Oh, it's one of my son, my 11 year old, the picky eater is chess obsessed. We've watched that movie

Hank Weisinger: Okay. So there was a scene for [00:55:00] those who haven't seen it, where this 11 year old kid, he loses in a chess match to somebody he easily should have beat. And the next scene is you're outside and it's raining. And the father is saying, how could you lose to this guy? And he's, he's basically really angry and so on.

And all of a sudden the kid says his name is Josh. He says, dad, why are you standing so far away from me? And it was like punching the other in the face. He realized what he was doing. So what does he do? He says, come near and he gives him a big hug and he says, it's okay. You, you made an important point about high standards.

We are not asking people to have low standards. It's important to have high standards and it's important maybe to have high expectations. And it's okay. If those expectations are unrealistic, you are a warm parent because when, if the child doesn't meet those expectations, you're still warm and accepting.

[00:56:00] It's the parents who are on the other side of the continuum, setting up conditional, love that in order for me to be warm and love to you, you have to be a success that is a nightmare. And that will impact that child for the rest of his or her life. So asking the touching tack, you know, I am amazed at how many parents, when they drop their kids off, whether it's a boarding school or college, especially, you know, father to son, they shake his hand. It's like, okay, have a good summit. And they shake hands. What about the hug? What about the kiss? So people can up their warm by using more tactile communication, whether that is a arm, a pat on the back, uh, an arm around the shoulder, after a mini type of a setback, that becomes a good way. And asking your child to do things [00:57:00] with you that are non performance oriented, watching TV, together, I wrote an article for TV guy tutored by television, using TV to raise the emotional intelligence of your kids.

So watching a show on TV together, that the kid likes, not that you like showing you. Reactions showing your own feelings is a great way to show a warmth to your child because too many, especially young boys feel that they have to bottle things up, letting your kid know any type of problem. Come to me.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. It's like you create a system where they can come close to you and that stage for more warmth to happen. just getting back to this idea of like there's many pathways to warmth. It can be physical, it can be shared interests. It can be, communication. It can be, , just relaxing with a hobby together or watching TV together.

Hank Weisinger: Just letting, except that, [00:58:00] not setting up that conditional type of, of, of then, I mean, if you really want to do your kid, for example, if they're applying to college and then you wanted them to get into a school and they did, and it was their first choice and they get disappointed. I tell parents it's important to hide your own disappointment.

Be

empathic to them. And, and hide your all because then the kid feels that they're disappointing the parents and when a child feels or teen, especially feels they are disappointing, their parents, many of them will try to cover that up by hiding things because they don't want their parents to know. Not because they're bad kids, but because they will feel that I will lose the love of my parents.

And that's why a lot of kids do things, whether it's changing grades on their report card, you know, or cheating, they are afraid that they will lose the love of their past.

[00:59:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Hank. I mean, your, your books are full of tons, more tips that you can put into action starting today. So you can find out more by picking up the unlikely art of parental pressure, a positive approach to pushing your child to be their best

Hank Weisinger: And, and one of the things I want your listeners to now for visions is we are having a contest. An essay contest. First reward is \$2,500 for a teen who writes the best essay that the essays entitled, parental pressure, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and whoever writes the best essay will win \$2,500. We'll be releasing, B contest rules.

The way to enroll. The only enrollment is you have to have a, get a copy of the book and have the, Amazon, receipt certified on the application, but I'll let you know. And, we're expecting a lot of, responses.

[01:00:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** no,

that'll be fun reads.

Hank Weisinger: to read them.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. You're D you're putting on the pressure through incentives, Hank.

Hank Weisinger: Well, I will know if they wrote it themselves. Believe me.

Yael Schonbrun: That's right. So folks can also access other offerings through your website, Hank Weisinger phd.com.

Hank Weisinger: Thank you for having me. I really enjoyed it. It's great.

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