

# Lori Gottlieb Change Your Story Change Your Life

**Lori Gottlieb:** [00:00:00] as a therapist, really, I'm more of an editor in the room where people come in with a story and I'm there to help them edit that story, to help get them unstuck and to help them move forward and to have more flexibility around the way they move through the world.

**Debbie Sorensen:** That was Lori Gottlieb on psychologists off the clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** we are three 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.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

**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 [00:01:00] you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Jill Stoddard:** you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

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**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm here today with Debbie to introduce an episode that Jill did an interview with [00:02:00] Lori Gottlieb of the acclaimed. Maybe you should talk to someone. Laurie has actually come out with a workbook and accompanying workbook for her book.

Maybe you should talk to someone that is. Maybe you should talk to someone, the workbook, and this was just a terrific interview. She is one of these people that just has so many pearls of wisdom. I could probably listen to her talk forever. It's such an honor that she was able to come back on our show a second time.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And one of the themes that came out in this conversation between Jill and Lori was about self stories and how we get stories about ourselves and about our lives and that sometimes they're unwilling. And they can hold us back or constrain us, or, you know, there's some work that, that Lori recommends doing around yourself stories and around the narratives that you have about the world.

And it really reminded me of one of the six core processes of acceptance and commitment therapy, which is known as self as [00:03:00] context. But I think. user-friendly way to think about it is about perspective taking and how we can actually get out of our self related content that keeps us stuck and that in doing so, first of all, we're able to zoom out and have a different perspective on things to more directly contact our experience, but , also it sort of frees us up from that constraint and allows us to be more.

Flexible and effective in our lives. And to me, actually self as context I think is sort of the unsung hero of the act model, because I think sometimes people find out a little bit hard to grasp or a little bit hard to hold onto, but I think it's such an important part of, of therapeutic work to do, to help people.

Transcend this type of content. And that's really what I think was captured in this conversation.

**Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, the importance of storytelling really can't be highlighted enough. And in fact, it's one of the core elements of why therapy works. And there's a really interesting and pretty substantial [00:04:00] body of literature, exploring how storytelling. Really one of the core ingredients of therapeutic outcomes.

And I actually had a chance to dive into this literature and interview a narrative researcher for my own book. I have a chapter in this book about working parenthood. That's coming out this year, um, on the power of storytelling, an editing our stories, which of course is what Laurie Gottlieb's entire workbook is about.

And in my conversation with this researcher, whose name is Jonathan Adler, he talks about how. What the research shows is that therapy helps individuals deconstruct sort of dismantle their stories that are not helping them, and then reconstruct them to either emphasize what's meaningful in painful situations or to help motivate change.

And so by figuring out how to relate to our stories and how to edit them effectively, this is one of the reasons why therapy works. Also is cool is that you don't have to go to [00:05:00] therapy to engage this story, changing process again, either changing your story or changing your relationship to this story.

What we know from research too, is that journaling can help you do that. Working through workbooks can help you do that. Talking to good friends in particular ways can help you do that. And so we know. Changing the way that we relate to our stories and changing our stories is helpful. And in this conversation. between Jill and Lori Gottlieb, you'll actually learn some of the critical ways, some of the critical skills of how you can actually go about changing your stories.

You'll learn. Duck points in this process, you'll learn about common themes that come up in stories. You'll learn about how you can choose who to talk to about your stories. And so really check out this entire conversation because you'll learn a lot about what happens in therapy, that's effective, but you'll learn how to do that through the workbook and through the kind of tools that Lori Gottlieb teaches.

**Jill Stoddard:** Hey everybody. It's Jill here, and I am [00:06:00] thrilled to have a returning guest today. You may remember that Lori Gottlieb joined us for episode number 158, to talk about her best-selling book. And one of my favorites, maybe you should talk to someone. So I have her back today to talk about her new companion workbook that's called.

Maybe you should talk to someone, the workbook, a toolkit for editing your story and changing your life.

Lori Gottlieb is a psychotherapist in New York times bestselling author of maybe you should talk to someone which has sold over a million copies and is currently being adapted as a television series. In addition to her clinical practice, she is co-host of the popular dear therapist podcast produced by Katie curric and writes the Atlantic's weekly.

Dear therapist advice. She's a sought after expert in media, such as the today show. Good morning, America, CBS this morning, CNN and NPR is fresh air and her recent Ted talk was one of the top 10 most watched of the year. She's the creator of the new. Maybe you should talk to someone workbook, a tool kit for editing your story and change in your [00:07:00] life.

Laurie welcome. I'm so pleased to have you back on psychologists off the clock.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Oh, well, thanks so much. It's great to be here.

**Jill Stoddard:** Well, congratulations on the book and let me just start. So for anyone who hasn't read, maybe you should talk to someone which I don't think there are many of us who happened. , in the book you shared really powerful stories and transformation. Of a handful of your therapy clients. So you talked about in depth and then also of yourself while you were going through your own therapy.

So now you have this follow-up workbook and I'm not sure exactly what I was expecting, but you know, being a psychologist, I've read lots of workbooks and they tend to be really skilled. And your workbook is really different in this super cool way. So as it says in the subtitle, , this workbook is more about rewriting our stories and in your, you did a Ted talk, that's had well over 5 million views and we'll link to that in our show [00:08:00] notes.

It's awesome. Everybody should check that out. And in the. You point out and I'm, I'm paraphrasing here.

but basically that, you know, while situations may shape our stories, like really it's our stories who shape who we become and we're all unreliable narrators. So can you talk a little bit more about this, about our stories and how we're unreliable narrator.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah, absolutely. So in maybe you should talk to someone. One of the things that I think everybody comes to see as a reader, and I think identify with in themselves is this idea that. We have a story about the events in our

lives. We have a story about who we are. We have a story about the people that we're in relationship with, and those are very subjective stories.

And by that, I mean, they're true stories, but from our particular perspective and that there's always more to the story. There are other. Perspectives that we're [00:09:00] not seeing. , there are ways of focusing on certain aspects of the story and minimizing other aspects of the story that maybe need a little more fleshing out.

, there are ways that we get stuck in loops in the story. There are ways that we take themes from our stories and carry them around. I'm unlovable or, , you know, I can't trust anyone or, you know, or in John's case, in the book, I'm better than everyone else. Right. , often our story is the opposite.

It's, you know, I'm not good enough, whatever it is, but we, we don't, we're not always aware that we're carrying around these stories. And so they're just kind of there in the background, but they inform all of the ways that we relate throughout our days. And, and so, you know, I was saying in my Ted talk.

Then I feel like as a therapist, really, I'm more of an editor in the room where people come in with a story and I'm there to help them edit that story, to help get them unstuck and to help them move forward and to have more [00:10:00] flexibility around the way they move through the world. So. You know, this idea of being an unreliable narrator, , doesn't mean that we're trying to mislead.

It means that we just don't always have the full story there, or we haven't really processed the story. And it's an old story from childhood that we're still telling through the lens of the young.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. Yeah. And you also point out that how we feel distorts our stories. So if we're depressed or if we're anxious, you know, those feeling states. Kind of create a lens through which we view the world and that that can distort our stories or I love, , you include a quote in your Ted talk. I think it was a psychologist whose name was rule Brenner. , and it was to tell a story is inescapably to take a moral stance. And I loved that.

**Lori Gottlieb:** yeah, absolutely.

**Jill Stoddard:** so what is it that. You would want to be different. So like, let's say somebody reads this [00:11:00] workbook and I want to say I did this whole workbook myself. I learned so much. And I'll come back to that in a little bit.

But I was really struck by how much you were able to pack into, you know, it was just about a hundred pages.

It's, it's a fairly thin workbook. And there were so many things from psychology in there. I mean, , defense mechanisms, attachment, , Erickson, stages of development, self-compassion perspective taking, I mean, that's just a few and I mean, truly with everything we know in psychology, this. Workbook could have been a thousand pages.

, so I guess I have two questions here. So one is, what is it that you hope will happen? Like how do you hope a reader will change from working through these, you know, page 1, 2, 1 0 3, which is, you know, basically kind of the step-by-step for rewriting a story. So I'll, I'll ask that question first. How do you hope readers will change?

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah, well, first I just want to address that one thing that you said that was so right about how our feeling states affect the story that we're telling [00:12:00] ourselves. , you know, and maybe you should talk to someone. There are two quotes about that, and one of them is. We say when somebody is really in the, in the throws of, of depression, you are not the best person to talk to you about you right now, because when you're depressed, your, your way of looking at the world is so distorted and you can't see things.

, you can't see the big picture. At that at that time. , and the other thing that, you know, I start off the book saying, is that before diagnosing someone with depression, make sure they aren't surrounded by assholes. Right? So it's like, why are you depressed? Well, I'm surrounded by assholes. , you know, like sometimes.

Well, let's look at who's in your life and let's look at why, and let's look at those relationships and why are you choosing those people? you know, and, and then for those that you are choosing, how are you relating? And can you set some boundaries and can you relate in a different way? So I think that.

That's really important to take into consideration. You know, it's like, we always say like, feelings are like the weather [00:13:00] they blow in and they blow out. Right? So, so with our stories and you might tell one story when you're feeling a certain way and, and tell that same event very differently when you're feeling differently.

So I think

**Jill Stoddard:** it really throws that perspective. One of the things you talk about in the workbook is that shift in perspective taking. And so, you know, when we're anxious, we're focused on the perceived threat to the exclusion of all other things. And so, you know, I think when you talk about shifting perspective, it's really kind of like broadening.

Lens so that we're not only focused on the negative, if we're depressed or the threat, if we're anxious or, you know, something like that.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Right. And the workbook is also about going into the pain as opposed to going away from it. So it's not like don't focus on the negative. It's about, um, you know, how can we start to look at these things in a way that feels safe and a way that feels productive? And I think that a lot of people are afraid to do that and they don't know how to do that.

Like they, they want to, [00:14:00] because they want to free themselves up emotionally in certain ways, but they don't have the tools. And so going back to your question about what this workbook is, I wanted it to be really different. So I'm glad that you felt it was really different from what's out there. And it really came about because when maybe you should talk to someone came out, um, and still people.

Email me every day, are they DME or whatever? And they say, you know, I, I really like I highlighted, I underlined, I have like sticky notes all over from quotes from the book has been so helpful, but I don't quite know sort of what to do with. Like, I, I feel like they're just the start of something that's really important for me.

And they really resonate with me, but I'm wondering, you know, I wish I could be in therapy with you. Everybody says, I wish I could be in therapy with you. Right. And I don't really do anything that different from what most therapists do. Help people to understand what the therapeutic process really is and get rid of those misconceptions that people have about, [00:15:00] oh, you're going to come in and you're going to download the problem with a week.

And the therapist is going to say, aha, and you're going to leave. That's not what therapy is. It's this incredibly active process of really introspection and self-reflection and understanding patterns and dynamics and having the therapist guide you through that. And so. I, what I thought was, oh, you know, I did the Ted talk.

I did want to do a work book at first. And I thought all the workbooks out there that I had seen were not particularly, , I didn't think they were going to provide people with what they were asking for. And I didn't want to just do a workbook to do a workbook. I want it. If I was going to do one, it had to be something that.

Was really going to be something different and something new. And so I didn't, I didn't do anything about it. And then I did my Ted talk and it was that whole thing about how changing your story can change your life and resonated so strongly with people. And that's what happens in. Maybe you should talk to someone, every patient that comes in and me too, cause I'm the fifth patient in the book as I go through my own therapy.

Right. [00:16:00] So you have the five patients. , we come in with one story and we leave with another. And that's why I think it resonated with people because it really helped them to say, wait a minute, was there more to this story that I'm telling myself? So in the workbook, I take people through a step-by-step process, similar to what they would experience in therapy of how to really.

Untangle this story unraveled the story a little bit, and then how to really examine it and how to write something. That's more accurate, something that's more, up-to-date something that's not full of sort of projections or old childhood baggage that we're carrying around, but really reflects who you are today in the world.

And I think that's why it's been resonating so strongly as a workbook, because I think people really are saying, you know, this is really helpful that I can go through it at my own pace. I can stop when I want to. I can, and all the chapters are in conversation with each other, so they build on each other.

So chapter one starts to sort [00:17:00] of, if you just first came in for therapy and then you go through, it's almost like weekly therapy sessions, each chapter, and it builds on the chapter or the week before. And you can do it in, in any way that you feel comfortable. But I think at the end it will get you asking yourself important questions that therapists ask and, and a lot of therapists, like you said, you know, a lot of my colleagues have been doing the workbook and it's really, and I did the workbook myself before I, you know, it was, as I was writing it, part of what I was doing for sort of, you know, effectiveness was how am I responding to.

How do I feel about actually going through the process of doing this? , and I think it's really helpful for us as therapists as well, to, you know, kind of check

in with ourselves and ask ourselves these questions because they think it's just as effective for us as it is for anybody out there in terms of at different times in our life, we sometimes need to step back and look at these stories.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think in addition to, you know, you said it's who, who you are today. [00:18:00] And I think also it focuses on who do you want to be? Like, how are you stuck in your stories now? What would you like to be different? And then kind of gives a starting point for. How that change really can occur. ,

, so in terms of how you would hope a reader will change by working through it's really, you know, some of the highlights. I think that Jen, back to me, like you said, it kind of starts with the presenting problem. There's some look at, , What is your history that may have contributed to the development of these stories?

What is the function that these stories are serving you in your life? Because you know, these things do quote unquote help us in some way or, or we wouldn't hold on to them. , and then how are they keeping you stuck and what might be, what might you be able to do differently? So that's like a really kind of brief summary of what that is.

And I'm curious, , How did you decide, you know, there's so much that goes on in therapy, even short-term therapy is more than what you would [00:19:00] think you would put in a 100 page workbook. So I'm curious how you decided what was most important to include so that readers could really like dig into these stories and edit or rewrite them in the most beneficial ways in that, in that format where they're not coming to therapy.

**Lori Gottlieb:** I think what's really helpful is that you have examples from the book from maybe you should talk to someone. So people got very invested in the four patients that I was following. And then also in my story, and I think that when you can say, okay, I read that and. You know, these stories that touched me emotionally and made me think about the people in my own life as well and about myself, but then how do you apply that to making change?

And so it's not just giving them the tools it's connecting to. Giving examples from the book of, Hey, when this happened with Rita, she was [00:20:00] going through this and here's where she was stuck. Right. So I think that a lot of workbooks ask you to do things, but they don't give you examples from other people.

And here you have examples from other people where you've heard their entire story. You've gotten very invested in their stories and you've seen them change, but maybe you didn't really understand all of the psychological mechanisms. It was a different kind of book now in this workbook we're going through and here's what was going on behind the scenes.

Right. And so it gives them, it gives them, I think, a framework. I think it's so much easier to, , let down our defenses, if we can see someone else do something first and then realize, oh, and I can do that too. As opposed to feeling like we have. Feeling like, something's wrong with us feeling like we're alone in this, or, you know, we're broken in some way.

It's like, no, look at all these people in this book that you just read about who did something very similar and, , and you [00:21:00] felt so much empathy and, and love toward that.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. And who were very stuck?

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yes, and who were very stuck, but I was just going to say, I think that because you have so much compassion for the people in the book, it helps you to have a lot of compassion for yourself as you go through.

This is not one of these like new year's resolution books. Right. So a lot of these are like, you know, let's do all these and they're very kind of surface exercises. And by the way, I'm sure there are great workbooks out there. I'm not, I'm not saying that there aren't, I'm just saying that I didn't want to do one of those kind of surface-y Instagram, like where you can like stick it on Instagram and be like, here, here's a quote card.

It's more like, these are really going to ask you to ask yourself some important questions about yourself. And we're going to do it in a systematic way.

**Jill Stoddard:** There's more depth to it,

**Lori Gottlieb:** yeah. Yeah. and so I, I think when we, when we talk about change, right? Cause you were just talking about, you know, it was hard for these people to change in, in.

Maybe you [00:22:00] should talk to someone. I talk about how change and loss travel together that you can't have changed without loss. Because when we change, we give up something and what we give up is we give up the food. And

even if the familiar is something that is maladaptive or it's not making, you know, it's not making sense in our lives or it's keeping us stuck in a certain way.

it's still what we know. And if we make changes, we have to go into a place of uncertainty. We have to go into a place of what we don't know yet, even though we imagine it will be better and that can be really terrifying. And so there's a whole chapter about change and taking people through the process of really looking at what their resistance is to change and what their fear is.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah.

And I think one of the other things that worked in the original book with the four specific clients you chose, you know, not only were they really stuck, but these were hard cases, you know, you didn't pick the four easiest patients that have ever walked into your [00:23:00] office. I mean, these were really challenging.

And so I think for readers of the workbook, there can either be, well, gee, if the four of them can do it, I can certainly do it. I don't feel like I'm that stuck or the opposite, you know, I'm really stuck. How could this work for me? Well, if it worked for them, then maybe it can work for me too.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** And and I think I want to make a point real quick that, so for anyone who hasn't read the original book, you could certainly go through this workbook without having read the book.

It will still absolutely be helpful. But I do think having familiarity and a deeper familiarity with the four clients that you talk about in the book, , makes the experience of the workbook richer. And I read it a long time ago and I read a lot. So I had a lot of that like retroactive interference, where I wasn't remembering details.

And while I was doing the workbook, I was thinking, oh, I kind of want to go back and reread. Maybe you should talk to someone and then do the workbook again. I think, you know, there it's such a great companion for each other.

**Lori Gottlieb:** [00:24:00] Yeah. And I designed it that way that I think it adds another layer to it. If you have read the book, but you don't have to have read the book to do the workbook and to get something out of.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. What about, can you give an example, you know, for the, for the podcast and this will give folks a flavor, maybe. Read the books or read your column. So, so Laurie has the dear therapist column, and now you have the dear therapist podcasts. So basically people write in with a problem and you help them work through it.

So do you have maybe an example from one of those around these ideas of like editing a story to. A positive change. And the reason I'm asking about the column and the podcast rather than a client is, you know, as I was saying before, like in therapy, we have lots of time to go through things in great depth.

, and you know, the workbook isn't therapy, it's something we'd be doing on our own. And so is there an example you can think of that might kind of, ,

Inspire listeners like to have this hope that like you actually can get to know a story and start [00:25:00] making some positive changes, even if you're not ready or wanting, or have the resources to delve into, you know, weekly individual psychotherapy.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah. So on the dear therapist podcast, what we do is we, someone writes in a letter and then we do a session with them. I'm with guy winch. Who's my co-therapist. And we, , You know, they come in with a story, their story is their letter. And by the end of the podcast, they have a very different version of that story that they're leaving with.

But because we really wanted people to see the results of what happens when you change your story, we give them a homework assignment at the end that they have one week to complete. So it's like, okay, now that you're looking at the story in this way, and you've made these edits on the story, go do this.

And then come back and tell us how it was. Okay, because this is based on the new version of the story. And so you hear in one episode as the listener, you hear all of that. So you get to hear what happened when [00:26:00] they went and they did something new because of this new version of the story. And so pretty much every episode you're hearing.

How someone comes in with a story, they start to edit their story through the whole session. That's what we're doing. We're editing the story with them at the end, we say, okay, now that you have this new draft of the story, what are you going to do differently? You're the protagonist? What is the protagonist going to do?

And how is that going to change the next chapter? And then you get to hear how the next chapter changes. We also do. , we're going into season three right now. So in season two, we brought back some of our season one guests and heard how the story had changed. The course of a year, as opposed to a week.

And it was really remarkable and really rewarding, I think, to hear how much just that shift in perspective, or to see something that you hadn't seen in quite that way before can really galvanize you to take action in a different way. , I'm thinking of, you know, so many examples, but one example is [00:27:00] this guy who was a new father and he had a very.

Emotionally abusive father growing up. And he had this story about himself, , in terms of fatherhood, in terms of his marriage, in terms of his relationship to his father, as a grown adult and what success meant and what it meant to be worthy and, , and, and how to kind of be an adult in the world. , he was very, very accomplished and, and didn't get.

Inhabit himself as, as the person he was now, he, he could regress a lot and it's incredibly emotional session. And at the end, we came up with a sort of metaphor in the story of the wars over, like, he still thought he was. In the war with his dad and he's not, the war is over and, you know, peace has come.

Like he found everything. He's [00:28:00] got this fabulous, you know, marriage and these kids, and he's, you know, he's doing the work that he loves it. Like his, the war is over, but the war wasn't over internally. And so to see him go through that process, it was so transformative for him and for so many listeners, another example, Somebody came in, , with, , a story about infidelity and the story.

, , was very much about other people's perceptions and how they viewed this person. And part of it was, he couldn't understand what he was doing, , , how his actions were contributing to, to the story that other people were writing about him.

**Jill Stoddard:** And

he was the one who wasn't faithful or someone was being unfaithful to

him. He was being unfaithful.

**Lori Gottlieb:** yeah.

Yeah. He had left, he had left his, he had cheated on his wife and left her for somebody else. And there was this story of he's a monster. Right. And he basically wanted us to be like, no, you're not a monster. Like it was, it was, as guy said, it's like, you know, tell me I'm not an [00:29:00] asshole. You know, it was like, that's what he was wanting from us.

And it wasn't really, I, it wasn't our job to do that. It was more about, you need to understand who you are and you need to understand why. Are telling the story about you and what you're doing right now that is preventing them from seeing your full humanity that is preventing them from seeing the rest of the story.

That you're actually only showing them one side of the story, because you feel so much shame. Right? And so how can you deal with your shame in a different way? And it was his inability to, he felt so much shame that he couldn't empathize with the pain that he had caused his ex-wife. And so we had him tell the story from her.

We said, we're going to get out of your store. We're going to go into her story. And when he was able to tell the story completely from her perspective, without defending himself, without saying why he did what he did, because we'd heard his story. Right. And he knows his story. That's, that's the story he keeps using.

Like, [00:30:00] as if he's in a court of law. And we said, we just want you to tell her story. And when he did, he was crying, he was, felt so much. Empathy for her and could relate to her differently. And that helped him relate to her as a co-parent to relate to the pain that he had caused and continues to cause to think about how he might not cause so much pain, , and to really take ownership of what he had done.

So he could have a relationship with himself and maybe find a way to forgive him. Because if he, wasn't going to tell that if he wasn't going to go to that place of understanding the full story, he was never going to be able to come to a place of integrating what he had done with the person. At this moment.

So it was, it was a really, really emotional, a lot of our podcasts are really emotional. , but a lot of people started off as a listener to how the story changes is they started off really hating this guy. Cause it was really hard for him to have any [00:31:00] empathy for his ex-wife. , and he really was the victim in the story, like I'm the victim?

Like, should I just have been unhappy for the rest of my life or my choices are I get to be a dad? Really unhappy or I get to be with the right person and they get to be a good debt. Can I do that? But nobody's letting me do that. Everybody thinks that I'm. Right. And so when you take yourself out of that victim position and you start to see, well, wait a minute, let's look at the fullness of this story.

Um, so people went from really hating him at the beginning to really feeling like, oh, wow. I, I really feel his humanity here. I really feel the pickle that he was in. Did he handle it? Well, absolutely not. Did he learn from it? Is he learning from it? Yeah, we can see that he's, he's learning.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, And the same happens when you re , with John in the original book too. I think people started out. Being a big fan of his and come around by the end. And I think this is such a great example and I think what's really. [00:32:00] Important here is that changing your story? Doesn't just mean you're not doing cognitive restructuring to take an unhelpful negative thought and think more positively about yourself.

You know, again, there's so much more depth here and I think there is a lot of in the workbook. Is it, is this piece about taking responsibility? It's understanding that. , whether your story is about yourself or about other people, which there's a large focus on that. On our, interacting inside relationships are stories inside interpersonal relationships, , that it's really like taking ownership of the role that you play in your own stuckness.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah, absolutely. , you know, there's this great moment in, maybe you should talk to someone where my therapist says, you know, you remind me of this cartoon and it's of a prisoner shaking the bars desperately trying to get out, but on the right and the left, the bars are. Right. There's no, there's no bars.

I mean, there's nothing there. Right. And so, you know what, and I think that, that that's [00:33:00] so many of us where we feel trapped, but we're not actually trapped that maybe we're the ones who are keeping ourselves trapped. And by the way, I want to be clear that. There are many circumstances in the world that we live in today that do keep us trapped that do keep us stuck.

But then what is our response? How can we respond to that? And what I'm talking about mostly in the workbook is this idea of how do we keep ourselves stuck, where we aren't really stuck? How do we, why are we the ones shaking the bars? And trying to get out of jail, but really we're not in jail. And the reason that we don't just walk around the bars is because with freedom comes

responsibility, and many of us don't necessarily want to take responsibility for our lives.

And this is not necessarily in our awareness, but when we take responsibility for our lives now, Our choices, if they don't go well, you know, it's, it's on us. It's we can't blame our childhood or our partner [00:34:00] or, you know, our sibling or, you know, whatever it is. , even though all of those things may be problematic, but we do have choices and we need to take ownership of our lives because if we don't take ownership of our lives, we're basically a perpetual child.

And I don't think that we want to go through. As a child where other people are making choices for us.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. We all want to grow, but that, that can be very hard work. And I love what Paul Gilbert says. It's not your fault. You know, we all arrive at these places for many reasons, evolution and learning history and all of it. It's not your fault, but it is your responsibility. You know, we're the only ones who can change our current situation, irrespective of, you know, what has happened in our past and things like that.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Right. And I think you see that with Charlotte in the book where there's so much of her reenacting things from her past, like choosing partners that are similar to her parents without realizing [00:35:00] it, , you know, Really wanting to find a parental figure in me and in other people and abdicating responsibility for her life as a young adult, she's in her twenties.

And it's really interesting when, you know, when at one point I say to her that you're going to have to give up the hope for having had a better childhood so that you can have a better adult. And that to this day, you know, still sticks with her. That's something that was such a touchstone for her giving up the hope for a better childhood.

So you can have a better adulthood so that we can't change what happened. We can work with where we are now at. That's what the workbook is about. It's about taking you to that place of really doing and there's grief work in the workbook too, where you're doing some grief work around what you didn't have, what you didn't get, what you wished had gone differently so that you can, you can start to work with the both [00:36:00] and have it, the, the grieving, the loss and the moving forward at the same time.

**Jill Stoddard:** And it's so relatable to so many of us. I mean, even if we don't have the same story or circumstances as Charlotte, I think so many of us can relate to that letting go of The hope that you'll have a better childhood or the example you gave from the podcast where, you know, my history may be very different from his, but when you say, you know, the, I don't remember your words exactly, but the battle is no longer ongoing.

**Lori Gottlieb:** The war is over.

**Jill Stoddard:** The war is over.

that's it w you know, how many of us can relate to that idea of the war is over. Even if our very specific circumstances are different. And I think that's what works so well in the column and in the podcast in the books is, you know, the, the specifics of the stories may be different, but the themes and the patterns are so relatable and recognizable.

, and, you know, I want to say, so I'm a therapist obviously, and I've done a lot of my own therapy. And I like to think that, you know, [00:37:00] Grown and changed a lot as a result and doing the workbook made me realize I was still stuck in some of my old stories and patterns. Sneaky little suckers and it made me wonder, you know, you said you went through and did the workbook kind of as a, you know, like data gathering mission.

So, you know, and you, you talk of course, and maybe you should talk to someone about how helpful your own therapy with Wendell was. So did you find yourself learning new things about yourself and your own stories and patterns from going through and creating the workbook or doing the workbook? Like things that maybe surprised.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah, absolutely. So one of the things I say, and maybe you should talk to someone is that our patients force us to ask ourselves the questions that they're asking themselves. So anytime we ask them a question or they're asking themselves a question, we better be able to ask ourselves that question. And so I was really thinking when I was doing the workbook and going through, you know, all of the questions that [00:38:00] the four patients that I follow.

Ask themselves, or I had asked them, or that my own therapist had asked me, , that I found challenging to really sit with and, and reflect on. , I really wanted to make sure that those were in the workbook because I think that sometimes we think it's sort of like, you don't know what you don't know.

Right. And so, and so I think that a lot of the questions in the workbook are designed to show us what we don't know. , what we don't think to ask ourselves. I think as therapists, we, we think we know what the questions are, but sometimes, maybe there's a different way of asking that question that makes us think about it differently.

It makes us think about ourselves differently. So I think they're questions that are. You know, that are hard to answer. And I don't mean hard in a painful way. I mean, that, they're hard in the sense that they ask you to sit with something that you might not immediately have the answer. [00:39:00] And that's why I give space in the workbook for certain things.

And I loop back. I don't know if you noticed, and maybe I did it in a subtle way, or maybe I didn't, but, , but it's what we do is therapist where you loop back. So I ask you'll get the same questions in different ways, through a different lens throughout the chapter so that you can circle back to them and maybe look at them a little bit differently.

It's kind of. If you go to therapy in your twenties, and then you go to therapy again in your thirties or in your fifties, or whenever you go at another time, , you're going to look at questions differently. You're going to consider things differently. And so I'm asking people to do that at different points.

In the, like, in fact, I ask them to play with time a little bit. There's this thing where I ask them to go through different decades and answer questions from those perspectives.

**Jill Stoddard:** Um,

**Lori Gottlieb:** And see how things have changed over the, that those time periods order or to project into the future. If they aren't.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. And I found my own sort of stories or insights. [00:40:00] They were, they evolved over the course of doing the workbook sort of organically. So for example, I found this just to be really fascinating. So in the very beginning of the workbook, you ask the readers to identify their presenting problem, which is what we would do in therapy.

Kind of start out with this presenting problem. , and so for me, what I thought was my presenting problem turned out to not actually be the real problem at all. So, you know, I thought it was about these like specific, challenging situations that I've, that I'm dealing with right now. But what I realized over the course of

the next, however, many pages and exercises is that it was actually about loneliness and feeling like I'm dealing with these problems on my own.

And then later, you know, imagine my surprise. I discovered later in the book, you talked about how so many of our problems actually boil down to this, that, that so many of our stories are ultimately about longing for connection. And that was something that really kind [00:41:00] of evolved for me over time. And, you know, as a therapist and a person who thinks about these things quite a lot and reads a lot of, you know, self-help books, psychology books, et cetera.

I really surprised myself that I thought, oh, you know, you, you still have a lot to learn about yourself here. And it, and it really helped me to do that. And that have you heard that kind of feedback from other people? My presenting problem, wasn't really my presenting problem.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yes with almost everybody, but I think that's just, that's just been the nature of this process, which is that, you know, it's sort of getting out of the content and into the process. And this is a real process workbook. And I'm glad that you mentioned loneliness because in the workbook ideal so much with themes, , as opposed to sort of concrete issues, because again, the concrete issues stem from the different themes and the different stories.

And the story of loneliness is a very common story. Whether you're with a partner or not with a partner, whatever your situation is, there's so much disconnection. [00:42:00] Going on. And so many people have felt that kind of disconnection, this sort of malaise that they don't really know sort of, you know, what is it?

And, , and then, you know, there's a whole section in the workbook about connection and, and what role that plays in our lives and, and what role we can play in creating those kinds of connections and really prioritizing them. We talk so much in our culture about them. Right. And I, I talk about this in the workbook a lot that, you know, and I talk about it.

There's a chapter I'm also in, maybe you should talk to someone about this, where we're so focused on this idea of, I need to find myself in me and it's about me and you know, all of that. And it's about you in connection with.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah.

**Lori Gottlieb:** And I really want people to include supporting characters in their story. , you know, it's not just like this lone protagonist out in the world.

, and I use terms like that in the book, but you know, it's like, [00:43:00] who are the supporting characters? Who are the major characters? Who are the minor characters? What role do they play? And, and what role do they play in your story? They're integral parts of your story.

**Jill Stoddard:** Absolutely. And, and I think sometimes as mental health professionals therapists, we're trained to focus on the individual that we forget about the individual in context in relationship. , I just did an interview with Dominic packer. Who's a social psychologist about his book, the power of us, which related to some of these things.

And I think, you know, in the U S especially Western cultures, we're so individualistic then layer this pandemic. You know, and political divisiveness, it's really created this, these like silos. , and then I think social media to kind of amplifies that, Mimi, what am I going to post about me today? So there are these multilayers that I think.

Maybe amplified this problem of loneliness that many of us are experiencing it. And what really [00:44:00] surprised me when I came to that conclusion is I have a partner and I have kids and I have lots of friends and amazing colleagues. If you just asked me, are you lonely? I would say, no. Not at all. I have loads of amazing people and I feel deeply connected to them.

, but you know, in working through some of these things, I realized like, oh, that's not entirely accurate. You know, there is something going on underneath here. And it really made me wonder how many other people who have people in their lives and maybe wouldn't use the word lonely if that, if that undercurrent is, is present for more of us than we realize.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah, that's why, I'm glad you brought that up. And because I think that a lot of people feel shame around that either they don't recognize it as lonely. So they, they, it's kind of like this feeling of something's missing, right? , a feeling of lack of connection in some way, but they might not use the word loneliness.

And so I think [00:45:00] what the workbook helps people to do is to identify those themes that maybe they wouldn't have otherwise, but also then to kind of reflect on what can I do about this? How can I, how can I change? The story a little bit here. So there's a lot of not just let me identify these things, but it's also very active on, , you know, w w now that I've discovered this, what does that mean?

And what can I do?

**Jill Stoddard:** Hey listeners. If you've loved learning about acceptance and commitment therapy on the podcast, and you're a clinician who wants to incorporate more act into your clinical work, I have just the training for you. I'm offering my breakthrough act techniques and experiential exercises, a clinical roadmap to help clients overcome psychological distress through PESI.

This is an on-demand training that you can access at my website. Jill starter.com/. Learn. This is an interactive way to really bring your clinical work, especially your work with act to the next level.[00:46:00] You will get six CES and I hope to see you there.

So, let me ask a really specific question about that, because one of the things you do suggest is to practice vulnerability, you know, to let people in, to let our guard down. And I think generally that is an excellent suggestion for most people in most situations, but how, how can we know when that could be counterproductive?

So like when really boundaries or what's needed or. How do we know when our stories about another person not being safe or trustworthy are actually accurate and protecting us from harm? Not just protecting us from feeling vulnerable, like it feels like it could be a fine line and that it might, if our stories are distorted, then we might not be the best person to figure out whether we need boundaries or to let people. So you know what I'm saying?

**Lori Gottlieb:** Yeah. So there's a, when I talk about that, I don't, I, I'm not one of these people who believes that you [00:47:00] should just, , you know, share your most tender parts with people and that's going to make you feel better. , I'm very much talking about, and I, I say this explicitly, choose your audience. Well, And what I mean by that is that you have to know what the purpose of sharing this part of you is with this particular person at this particular time.

, so a lot of people think, oh, let me be vulnerable. I'm just going to post on Instagram, you know, or I'm going to go to this person who I know is, is not going to receive what I'm saying and the way that will be, that will feel connected. That will, that will deepen our relationship. In fact, it will make me feel, you know, it, it will actually make me not want to open up or it will make me feel misunderstood or it will make me feel unsafe.

Right. So people keep going back to those people and saying, see, I tried being vulnerable and look what happened. This person either tried [00:48:00] to talk

me out of my feelings, told me that it wasn't accurate. , didn't really empathize. What I was saying, , felt profoundly uncomfortable and was not a good audience for this.

Not because they couldn't empathize, but maybe because it touches them too closely and they don't realize that. And they're not, they, they're not ready to hear these kinds of things. Right. , so what I was saying was find the people in your life. With whom you can forge deeper relationships. And it doesn't have to be a huge number of people, either.

I'm talking about find one or two people in your life where you have that relationship where it's very reciprocal. It's not just you, , you know, sharing a part of yourself with them, but it's them being able to share parts of themselves with you. And to know that it's safe and to know that it deepens your relationship to self and to us.

So that's what I'm talking about with vulnerability, but I, I very explicitly state choose your audience. Well, and I have people write [00:49:00] down who should be in their audience. In the workbook and to really think who should not, who should you not invite into those parts of your life? And it doesn't mean you have to cut them off or be a strange for them.

It just means I might not share this kind of thing with them, but I can have a different relationship with them. We can have a relationship that adds to my life in a certain way. Like I like going to movies with that person, or, you know, I have this kind of relationship with them, but they're not the person I'm going to talk to about this kind of thing, because I have this other person that I do that.

I think we have this idea that when we choose friends or partners or whatever, that they have to, you know, kind of meet every need that we have. And I think that you can have different needs met by different people in different ways. And I think in some ways that makes all of those connections deeper in their own way.

**Jill Stoddard:** Absolutely. And I think to have realistic expectations that this isn't always kind of clear and black and white right up front, that [00:50:00] you may get to know somebody who feels really safe, who you do over time, divulge more of yourself to an ultimately. They may weaponize that against you. It may end up being a bad situation.

And I think that can make people gun shy or uncertain that they know how to determine, you know, who is safe and who isn't safe. And I think to have some

patience and grace and self-compassion that human beings are very complicated and, you know, to kind of like that, it's sort of a process of trial and adjustment, trial and adjust.

You know, to, to get a feel for who those people are and are not. And maybe even looking for patterns, if you're consistently finding yourself in relationship with someone who seems safe and ultimately ends up being toxic to sort of look at what the role of, like you said, if you're the only one in the bar, if that if

every time you go to a bar, there's always a fight maybe, or the problem is

**Lori Gottlieb:** Right. If a, if a, if a fight breaks out in every bar you're going to maybe it's [00:51:00] you. And, and that's the thing where you see people like Charlotte, and maybe you should talk to someone who was always choosing these people who would disappoint her because unconsciously. She had radar for those people, even though she thought she was choosing people who were very different from the parents she grew up with.

, and so I think, you know, part of what this workbook does is it helps people to really examine what you know, who are the characters that we're carrying around still from an earlier draft of the story. And are we, are we clear on what their role is now in our lives? And are we clear about, , you know, once we get clear on that, we can have more clarity around the kinds of people that we're choosing to invite into our lives.

**Jill Stoddard:** Absolutely. Well, Lori, this has been such a wonderful conversation. , you know, I hope people do. Check this out. I will admit that when I read the book and the workbook and saw the [00:52:00] tech, I also had the thought, I wish she could be my therapist. I think other people will feel that. And when you do the workbook, you, you sort of do you feel like you're getting a little bit of that, you know, like this is what I would be doing if I were in, in therapy with, with Lori.

So I, I do really recommend it. I, I so enjoyed. Going through it. , and I think I might go through it again. It feels like something I could do a couple of different times in the story will continue to evolve, you know, the insights and the action plan. Where else can people find you if they want to learn more?

**Lori Gottlieb:** Well, you know, first of all, one of the things that I'm really trying to do is to democratize therapy, to make it accessible to as many people as possible. So while of course, workbook isn't therapy or a podcast isn't therapy

or a column isn't therapy or book isn't therapy is therapeutic. And it helps them to see what we actually do as therapists.

So, , people can read my book. Maybe you should talk to someone. They can try the [00:53:00] workbook. Maybe you should talk to someone, but workbook. And by the way, there are a lot of sort of unofficial. , maybe you should talk to someone workbooks out there that are not the one that I did because people just make them up and post them on Amazon.

, so make sure you get the official workbook. , and, , they can listen to the dear therapist podcast if they want to hear sessions. And then what happens after the session in those followups, they can read my column in the Atlantic, which is. What I like to call a therapeutic advice column, meaning I don't necessarily give prescriptive advice, but I help people to kind of rewrite their story, to think about their problem in a different way than they've been thinking about it.

, they can watch my Ted talk, which is called how changing your story can change your life. And, , they can go to my website, which is Lori Gottlieb.

**Jill Stoddard:** Wonderful. And we will link to all of those in the show notes. , and again, thank you so much for, for coming on. I'm so glad. Not once, but twice really appreciate having you here.

**Lori Gottlieb:** Well, thank you so much for having me [00:54:00] back. I always love having these conversations.

**Jill Stoddard:** Me too.

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