

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

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Heather: Welcome to That's a hard No: the podcast about learning to say no and set boundaries to live our best lives. I'm your host, Heather Drago. You may think, because of this podcast, that I'm a boundary setting expert, but I'm not. I'm an expert in struggling to set boundaries, but you know what I'm working on it and it is getting easier. Follow along with me, as I learned from fellow strugglers and experts, so that you too can start saying it out without feeling fear, guilt, or FOMO.

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Heather: So today I want to start by talking about Jonah Hill's documentary on Netflix called Stutz, Stars, Jonah and his psychiatrist Phil Stutz. It's this really honest and refreshing exploration into Stutz's life and Jonah's relationship with Stutz and the therapy process in general in Stutz's unique approach. If you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it, even if you don't agree with everything in it. It's fascinating, poignant, brave, it's a meditation on therapy and mental health, on life and death itself. But don't worry, it's funny too. It's really not dark and depressing. Stutz gives his clients homework, which is what makes his approach kind of unique. They're sort of these tangible techniques and concepts that their clients work on outside of session, and he illustrates them on these little note cards. And what's really sort poignant and touching about it is that he has Parkinson's disease. So he's he's drawing these diagrams and his hands are shaky and it's it's really difficult for him to do. It actually kind of makes these little, these little doodles kind of profound. Really, one of these illustrations and concepts has really stuck with me since watching it. He calls it string of pearls. So here's outgoes. Imagine a string of pearls. Every pearl on the string is the same size now. Imagine that every pearl represents an action in your life, no matter what that action is, no matter how important or stupid you may think it is, it's just a pearl on a string. Every action is given the same weight. He uses this concept to help people get themselves moving, to break free of the inertia that comes with depression and anxiety. He says: if you just add a pearl to the string, just do the thing you know, get out of bed, brush your teeth, make the phone call and a relationship, no matter what it is, you don't judge it, you just do it and move on to the next Pearl, and I love this part. Sometimes he draws a dark spot-on a pearl. He calls it a turd, and that represents where you might mess up one of those actions. Doesn't matter... The pearls still been added to the string and you're moving forward. So here's why I love this concept and how I think it connects to saying no and setting boundaries. I'll make this story short for those of you who've heard it before. Back at the beginning of 2019, I was burned-out and frustrated with my business and my life. I knew I'd made a lot of mistakes and taken on too much of the wrong things the year before and I knew why. I had said yes too many times when I should have said no. So I decided to challenge myself to say no to, or set boundaries around one thing every day, no matter how small I called it: finding the no. It could be anything. Not answering a text or email, replying with no, thank you, telling clients when it's convenient for me to meet with them, not the other way around. I look for each opportunity and when I found it it was like, instead of feeling scared or guilty, I felt like I'd won something. I kind of made a game out of it and, importantly, I kept track, making note of my planner, of what I said not to when I did it and how I felt I messed up a lot. It was awkward, sometimes hurt people's feelings. There were lots of thirds

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

that first year and sometimes honestly there still are. But making a point of finding a note every day has helped me to be mindful of it, to do it, to not be paralyzed by fear or guilt when faced with saying no, have I mastered the art of setting boundaries? Pearls on a string, my friend pearls on a string. It's a process. It takes time to learn and perfect new skills. Even now I look for daily opportunities to practice setting boundaries and each time it gets a little easier, it feels a little more natural. It helps me feel empowered and a little more in control of my life. So this is my challenge to you. Start now today. Find one thing to say no to every single day. Keep track, write it in your journal, use a tracker app. There's tons of download our nose scoresheet from our website. Whatever how you keep track, does it matter? Just track it and make note of how you feel. I promise that when you make this a priority in your life and you practice it every day, it gets easier, less awkward, and eventually it actually kind of starts to feel good. And hey, we're here for you, score a great no and want to share it. Flop. You know, leave a turd somewhere and want some support. Send us an email or or share it on your social media and Tag us. We'd love to be here to support you and help you put more pearls on your string. We'll be right back

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Heather: Toda,. we'll be talking with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett, owner of Mod Network LLC and host of the Can I offer you some feedback? podcast. She's a consultant and coach specializes, managing organizational change and leadership development. We'll be talking about no's in the workplace, all those situations that come up in our careers or just dealing with other humans in general. So Hi Sara.

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Sara: Hi Heather, It's so nice to finally be here and today.

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Heather: Been talking about doing this for a while, so I'm glad, I'm glad we could make it happen and

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Sara: the stars have aligned.

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Heather: That's great. So one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is I've been reading a lot for the past several months about this. This this new I don't know thing, phrase whatever, called quiet quitting and and it seems to me like this, is just a passive, aggressive way of trying to set boundaries. And you know it seems to be a popular thing to you know, talk about. I don't know how prevalent it really is, but based on what I've read it just seems like you know, people do the bare minimum, they just see their job as a paycheck, they're not really emotionally or intellectually engaged with their jobs. But but to me it seems kind of like self sabotage and I think there could be some pitfalls and, like I said, I think it's kind of passive, whereas you know, by contrast, people could set healthy boundaries. So I just wonder what your take was on that.

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Sara: Yeah, you know, quiet quitting has been an interesting term. I mean the term is new, but the activity has been going on for a while and I have the benefit of being

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

able to see it both from the employers side, since some of the times I work on the organizations and then also the client side, the individuals who are, let's say, doing the quiet cutting organizationally, absolutely hearing the things that you're sharing. You know it seems like sounds like for some folks that you know, people don't want to put in the extra time. They're doing the bare minimum. They're not showing up in the way that they use to. Maybe loyalty is in question and I've heard a lot of employers and senior leaders kind of express concern about the workforce and the quality of the work force that they might be getting. What's interesting to me, and again, one of the reasons I'm grateful for both sides of the perspective is when I talk to individuals at all levels of the organization, you know mid management, senior leaders, those in between. It is a change, I'd say, definitely over the past three years, really focusing on what is the relationship I have with my employer and what do they owe me? What do I owe them? What is the actual agreement that we have with each other for the work that I'm doing, and I think that naturally one of the things that happens is their scope within a job, right one job and then over time it expands and it expands and it expands and the expectations increase without compensation increasing or recognition increasing for the extra labor that's being done. So it's an interesting kind of push back. I'd say on the employee side to say you know what you're paying me for these 10 skills, these 10 tasks, these 10 responsibilities, and I'm going to do the 10 right. That was the terms of our agreement, that was the terms of our negotiation and I think for a lot of individuals, in kind of the early months of COVID, when employers had to make business decisions about who they were keeping on board. Who were they furlong? Whether or not you're essential in your role? It changed a lot of folks framing around. Have employer views me perhaps as an asset, not as a person you know and view me as a budget line. So I think kind of all of these factors coming together at the same time. I can appreciate both perspectives, right organizational side of why aren't people putting in more work? Why aren't they extending more? Why aren't trusting in the process? And I also get the employee side of you know what, we don't have the same relationship, whether you're the manager or then you intern are the.

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Heather: It seems like, though, from what I can glean from all these articles and things I have read, is that people are having these internal dialogues with themselves, saying well, they're not paying me to do more than xyz, and so I'm not going to invest more time in that if they're not going to bother to pay me for it, but they're not actually having conversations with their employers saying if you want me to do more, then you will need to compensate me more. So I mean to me that's just that's just being assertive and setting boundaries and communicating. So that's what I was talking about, like. It just seems kind of like self sabotage, because the risk is if you're not communicating why you're not doing something, then you're going to be perceived as lazy or uninvested or some sort of gen Z or millennial slack or whatever you know. So what do you think about that?

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Sara: Yeah, I mean, I think that you know for some folks the choice not to bring it up or the choice not to, as you're saying, like self advocate or clear, like the expectation

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

right. I'm happy to do this. I think I see a lot of that, in, maybe the best word, is disenchantment with organizational culture and seeing your employees are actually being treated. And can you know we can look at textbooks, we can look at. You know popular management books all day long that talk about people are your most valuable resource. You need to invest this, this and this. But at the end of the day one of the first things that typically gets cut is a trading budget development. You know investment in the people that are doing the work, and so when I do hear folks not even bothering to ask for what they're looking for, they're already feeling my perception is, or you know their, their articulation is. This organization doesn't care about me. So why should I even bother asking? They don't mind my opinion about my work product. Why would they want my opinion on this? You know it's it's a-level of disengagement or dissatisfaction. That's like I'm going. I'm not going to work harder than they are right in this relationship, whatever the relationship is, and so when it does get to that point there might be an amount of sabotage but typically see the damage has already been done to the relationship. There's a lack of trust. There's a lack of belief that the employer has the best interests of the employer.

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Heather: Sure, I mean, we've all heard these nightmare stories about Amazon employees and other other large employers and how they treat people, all the tech companies laying people off and sure they're seen as commodities. But I think there's an opportunity for employers to start the conversation and at least make people aware that they are valued, like I know personally, with my little company like regularly have conversations. People would like how. How are the hours? Are you? Are you working enough or you're working too much? Because I'm always worried. I want to make sure I'm not taking advantage of people and you know I'm giving them what they need. And but I think that's just because I come from a place of you know I too am a man, you know and have been there, and I think it's easier sometimes for smaller companies to do stuff like that, smaller work in the region. But but but yeah, I mean, I think I think if there isn't a culture where you can have those dialogues, then I guess people won't self advocate, as you mentioned.

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Sara: Right, it even happens in midsize companies, like talk to managers, folks who you know, a simple question of how often are you meeting individually, not as group, individually, with your team members, and they're like? No, we meet all the time and I'm like, okay, what do you talk about? And I'm like what is all the time. But what are you actually talking about? And all the time typically is a mix of you know daily to like once a week, maybe twice a week. But when I actually talk to inquire, what are you talking about? It's all operational, it's all task oriented, it's all project oriented and I really push these managers to say: when are you talking to this person about their career, about how they doing about their performance? Like? When are you actually giving feedback? Nonoperational feedback? Right, they're getting. That's clear. You're talking to them about that regularly. But when is all the other stuff happening? Because if you're only talking to them about their career once a year, because of your man's management form, it's a box. You have to check. Why would this person be invested in the relationship? You are only treating them as you know, something

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

that has an output, a product right, that operational, whatever the operations is, and I think that that's a switch for a manager to not only talk about operations but also, like you are a human. I'd like to engage with human. How are you doing?

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Heather: Are you satisfied with your trying exactly? Yeah, you know I actually know some one. I had a conversation today with someone who had their annual review recently and after their annual review they didn't what to make of it. They were kind of terrified. They were like, I don't think they like me. I don't know if I, and so then today we have this conversation and they're like I've got a raise and a bonus and and I was like: see, you are so worried, like you know, but I think that is just so telling that the employer wasn't communicative at all. Not even operationally like you are valuable. We appreciate the things you do like it was just I don't I don't even know what the conversation was. If the person walked out of it, I don't know if they like me. So I think there's definitely a lot to be learned on both sides about communicating.

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Sara: Right and and it it shouldn't be a surprise either way, like it shouldn't be a surprise that I'm not performing well and it shouldn't be. I'm performing well and I think there's a lot of stress and you know I can appreciate. As a manager who's had many direct reports, you know you need to get through all of them. You know in a short amount of else is going to find you like. You know there's you know, if you work in an entity that's large enough to have an, I get that pressure of like needing to just get through it, but like to that, you know person whom you were talking to, what was their experience like to walk a performance evaluation and not to know that you are a valued member of the team like right.

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Heather: I know it was like, but you do all these things and you're so smart and like. How could you not know if they value that? But they didn't when we come back, we'll talk more about setting boundaries in the workplace.

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Sara: And it's it's I'm I'm presuming. You know, this often happens a lot with high performers, and how most high performers that I talk to, the only feedback they get is great. Do more, please,

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Heather: yes, right, yeah, yeah, yeah, just more. I could also do this. This would be great, yeah, exactly.

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Sara: And that's not, you know, sustainable by any means.

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Heather: Right, so what would your advice be to employees who are, you know, younger folks embarking on their careers, of how to start these conversations said, you know assertively without being degrading, or you know, seen as demanding, you know, set boundaries, self advocate. I'm sure it's very scary for people to say: you know, listen, you hired me to do this and now you're asking for this and you know I

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

really need to stick to our agreement or need more compensation like how do you have? How? How would you advise younger people, people getting a new job or whatever, like, how to set boundaries without being seen as being a Prima donna?

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Sara: I mean, I think that most of the time most people like knowing what they can do better right as long as it's structured in a positive, in a constructive, in an actually meaningful way. For me to like actually do better. Most people are open to that feedback. I think the challenge that you know whether you're new grad, new into an organization, learning that culture, is what's an appropriate frequency to either ask for feedback or to receive feedback. And the organizations that have a high amount of influx have that kind of down. They know cadences, they have that frequency said. But I think for new people, regardless of your level, to have an initial conversation with your direct supervisor, your manager, whatever their title is to ask, you know what can I expect as far as feedback and what that timing might be. I'm I'm eager to hear. It would love to know when it is and what's the best way for me to ask for feedback. I have a couple of people with whom I work who they love feedback, but they drive it right. They show up to the meeting and ask, I'd love, if, in our next conversation you can provide me feedback on this, this and this or I'd you know they are the ones directing when they're getting that feedback and that shows you know accountability, ownership of process and also puts that person in control rather than having the other person in waiting. You know to get that and of course they have to the chase it right right. I think that again, clarity on what the organizational cadence is, understanding whether I'm you know I have to ask for it or you will freely give it what that looks like and also understand what happens to that feedback right. Most organizations I see either don't document it well, the feedback that's being given or documented just because they're supposed to right it goes.

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Heather: Some file somewhere. There's no plan. You know. If, if these things aren't done right, then this will happen or if you meet these goals, then you will get these benefits or what? There is no plan.

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Sara: Yeah, right, we filled this out because it told us to. Yeah, not. This is a helpful tool and me to be able to engage with you about your career. Right, because perhaps there's no career pathing right. Perhaps it's not clear to anyone what job is after this one right, and without that information I could appreciate that the conversation is kind of weird for a manager to have of like to do with the now, don't want to use them. I don't have extra work to give them. I don't have new, cool assignments to support them with. So I really think it's about clarifying when and where you're going to get that feedback and then being clear how you want to get it. I'm someone who like wants an initial of like. Hey, we're going to have a talk, or here's something I'd like you to look at. Let's meet tomorrow. I need a little bit of time to like sit with it and then I can just be more prepared. That's me. An ideal scenario doesn't always work that way and I can handle a feedback ambush if it occurs. But.

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

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Heather: Everyone stuff, yeah, right, yeah, you know my little companies were very small and you know I didn't go to business school, an article drop out like there was no plan. I don't have an HR department, all the stuff. So you know, and I've sort of kind of organically grown our team, and so I've never done like annual reviews or anything. So I have this young developer who I love, and she's great, Bale, and she joined our team and about a year and she was like so. Like. Is there like an annual review process? Or and I was like, oh, I've never done that before. Great. So then we talked about like, well, what do you want to discuss this? And so we did. And we talked about her goals and and you know I've actually invested in some training for her. So she's developing as a developer, she's getting even better, and and then another friend of mine who runs an organization mentioned like having open office hours. And so now I have this thing a couple of days a week where my team can book 15 minute check INS and like they can talk about whatever. So it's something I'm learning how to do. Have these conversations, but so I'm finding I'm having a lot more of like. So, how you doing? How is it going? What would you like to do? What are you happy with what? Don't you like? You know? So yeah, it's it's a lot. I mean, as I also have people on my team who don't meet their commitments, who have to harangue to get their work done, and there's a lot of really difficult conversations, and I think managers probably put those off sometimes until they absolutely have to, especially in smaller organizations. But I feel like these conversations are just critical.

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Sara: It happens in big organizations too. Really. Yeah, oh yeah, I mean. I've I've heard of entities that instead of providing critical feedback to an employee, they'll just move them to another area. Give me that, someone else, and you're like. That's not true.

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Heather: Can you imagine being the person who absorbs that person?

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Sara: Can you imagine the experience for the employee right who's getting no feedback right right? Who has no idea? Year after year they're not being told. You know you don't actually deliver your work and everyone else on your team compensates lit right to never hear that. And then the poor manager who actually does say it right is met with the amount of resistance of I've never heard that before.

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Heather: I've been here for so many years. No one ever complained about my performance right, right right. So it's important, important to have these conversations early on. And yeah, yeah.

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Sara: People are adults. You know most of us work with adults and they want to be treated with respect. Right. I mean it's tell me what you would like me to work on. Tell me in a way that's polite and professional and relevant to my work and I'll work on it right. We may disagree on form and function and how it actually gets done, but you know, I think, with feedback I have some managers that I talk to, we do coaching with

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

and they're like, well, I just don't like the way that he's doing it. It was like, but is it getting done? Like? Is the task getting done and you just don't like the? How like? Let's be real clear right. Are you giving feedback for your benefit or for their benefit?

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Heather: Are you a control freak?

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Sara: You know, control feels different for different people. Right like this. Is the process like we have to do it because like it helps us deliver this or it's the safest way, or whatever that thing is, but again, like really interrogate for yourself. Does this make sense like? Is it that I have a problem with the way they're doing it? Or is there something actually wrong with the outcome cause? If they're getting to outcome which meets all the criteria, then what's what's really the issue here? And that is an uncomfortable question to be asked and to think about.

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Heather: So you seem like a very knowledgeable, well adjusted person and you have all this experience working with organizations. But do you struggle with boundaries too, like everyone else I know?

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Sara: Oh my gosh, I m. I m terrible at boundaries. It's it's one of those things that those that can't do teach.

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Heather: Absolute. This is why I have a podcast.

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Sara: I think that you know there's something about when you are in work that is of service and whenever, however you define of service, right could be preparing material, I could be doing consulting projects, could be coaching one on one, and I'm someone who wants to help others so much that I will do it at the expense of myself. Yeah, I hear you and everyone who is a colleague of mine knows that and will ask like: how are you taking care of yourself? And I will say I am not at this stage. I'm not in denial.

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Heather: Actively letting you have a problem as the step right.

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Sara: And I had a real humorous interaction with my therapist the other day. I kept telling her that I was trying to do self-care I was trying to like work on, like coloring pencil, coloring paper, was trying to read a book and I just kept falling asleep. And she's like Sara, perhaps your self-care asleep, and I was like no, no, that can't possibly be, and I like went to find another activity and she's like but Sarah, you have two young children under five and you are running your own business and you're like also running a household and you're also doing this. This and this you're allowed to sleep, and I'm like no, that can't be the answer. That's that's pure denial right and like she and I were joking a little bit in the context of our therapeutic relationship. But it's

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

very true right for me. I'm just like no, that can't be the boundary, that can't be this. I have to, I want to do this and.

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Heather: I read a while ago some, you know, instagram graphic quote thing that basically said: just remember, you know you don't have to earn rest. Rest is required because you are a human being. I mean they said it more eloquently than that, but that was like a light ball moment for me, like I don't have to earn it.

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Sara: And if, when you do finally feel that you've earned it, you can't enjoy it, then what's the? What's the point right? And, like my brain knows that you know, I understand that's a concept. I think that, like its years of you, know, for my family, where my parents are from, my culture of origin, it is about being of service, being of value, providing for others, and there's an intensity to that that is just very consuming. And so the idea of rest and the idea of waiting and care is not something I was necessarily brought up with now. Did we have fun and did we enjoy each other's company absolutely, but it was just a different way about going about it.

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Heather: Yeah, I mean I have this whole thing about broadcast, about boundaries, and I'm always evangelizing about it. But I mean I struggle with the same things. I mean, you know it's just it's very hard to. I'm the same as you people pleaser. I love making things. I want to help people. It's very hard to say no.

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Sara: Well, maybe maybe the hope in talking to people, other people, on the broadcast, is maybe someone will have a secret and then you and I can both do it. Oh yeah, there you go the holy grail. There must be a right answer out there. I mean, I think it's as you were saying with that quote, like that: permission like you can give yourself permission to enjoy rest.

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Heather: Exactly so, Sarah, tell us a little bit about your broadcast and your business and what you do and how people can find you and all that good stuff.

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Sara: Absolutely, the podcast I have is: can I offer you some feedback and in there I have short conversations somewhere in the 10 to 15 minute range with individuals all around. Feedback, giving, receiving and thinking about what are some of those elements, about how we can better construct meaningful feedback, also sprinkle in some business bites. So some business terminology management concepts, typically in about five minutes or less for folks to be able to think of and kind of do a little bit of digger deeping on the work that I do in my practice network's consultancy, as you mentioned in the front, and I do a mix of training, 11 coaching, team coaching and then or organizational development consulting projects. So wide-ranging and I get to do a lot of very different kind of work in my day and get to work with a lot of different clients. So this morning I was working with a municipality, midday I was working with a nonprofit. This afternoon I'll be working with a foundation and then connecting with some civic leaders in the evening. So it's it's just I feel very fortunate and blessed that

TAHN S3, Ep 26 Setting Boundaries at Work: Why "Quiet Quitting" Isn't the Answer with Sara Ismail-Beigi Bartlett

I get to do this as my full-time job. And yeah, it's been a very interesting journey being in this.

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Heather: Well, sir, I thank you so much. This has been a great conversation. I love talking with you about the stuff and I hope we can have another conversation sometime soon. Thank you so much.

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Sara: There it was a pleasure as well.

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Heather: Switching gears now, I want to take a few minutes for some housekeeping notes and to let you in on what we've got planned the season and how things are changing. Returned listeners will have noticed that our beloved Sarah Saunders, my co-host for the past two years, isn't on today. Sarah, if you don't know, is a mom of four boys, all under the age of five or maybe six now, as well as a practicing therapist and business owner. Her practice, purposeful growth and wellness, is growing, Sara, and she's got her hands full, like seriously, you can only imagine. So. She decided to say no to the podcast, at least for a while, in order to make room for her family and her thriving business. Knowing when to say when is what we're all about here, and we completely support and applaud her decision. Sarah will always be a part of our hard family and who knows, she may chime in on social media now and then, or maybe we'll have her on as a guest some time. Maybe she'll answer a mail back question, whatever works for her in the meantime, she's here with us in spirit. I don't think we'll ever lose sight of the city committee or the positive post or any of the other pearls of wisdom she's taught us along the way. If you're new to the broadcast, be sure to go back and check out episodes from our first two seasons. You'll immediately understand why we love Sarah so much this season. We're going to switch up our format a little, try some new kinds of content and, of course will continue to bring on more great guests. We'll be publishing every week without long breaks, I promise, and our episodes will be a little shorter. You can watch for us every Tuesday morning when our episodes drop. Here's a new thing. We're trying a book club. I know I know who am I right, like opera, who's got time to read anyway? Well, you do if you start setting some dam boundaries and I write, but I get it. We'll make this easy and fun, though. Okay. So for our first book we're going to read how to stop saying yes when you can't you shouldn't or you just don't want to. By Sarah Knight. She is also known for the life changing magic of not giving a f--- and other which stands for no given guide books. It's a hilarious but also inciteful and pragmatic book. It's small and chapters are bite-sized so at least for this overscheduled girl it's doable. We'll put a link to the book on our website, but you might also be able to find at your local library or local independent bookstore in a few weeks. We'll announce when we'll discuss the book and we're hoping to have a fun panel of guests to share their feedback. I hope you'll join, got questions or boundary setting, success story or flop. It's easy to get in touch with us. Send an email through our website at podcast.Dotcom on Social Were at Hart Podcast or leave a message at 2163731 will be featuring some of our favorite questions and messages in future mailbag episode. So get in touch. You can find show notes and a transcript today's episode on our

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website. Pardo, podcast, dotcom, make sure to like and subscribe on your favorite listing platform. So you don't miss any new episode and if you like what you heard, please give us a rating and review, especially on Apple, so others can find us too. That's a Hard Knot is a production of Clever Marketing, my Strategic marketing agency based here in beautiful Cleveland Ohio. You can learn all about us from Clever girl Marketing.com. It's written by me whether Drago and our amazing marketing and production coordinator Maura Rosario, production support, Evergreen podcast, Noah Foutz, producer and editor, Extraordinaire Awesome, new rock anthem, was written by Noah and performed by his band the Big Leagues. I love so much they. We've added some new focus to the team. Shout out to Ink Factory the incredibly talented team of artists who've partnered with us to produce our anime video clips. You could find them as InkFactoryStudio.com and, last but not least, Jake Donal, the videographer and photographer, who can create a force behind you two videos. If you demand Jake, you could find him and Donald until next time. Thanks for listening and remember saying no isn't just saying no is the key to it in an authentic, fulfilling life. So do we find your no? Then say it unapologetically.