

Ali:

Well today, I'm here with my colleague Chrystal Bell and the amazing Mollie West of the Liz Fosslien and Mollie West collaborative duo that many of us have probably or hopefully read with at least their latest book, *Big Feelings*. It'd be great if you could both introduce yourselves a little bit.

Chrystal:

Yeah. Well, I'll go first. Uh, I'm Chrystal Bell, Reboot Coach and Facilitator. And, Ali, I'm so excited to be here with you and with Mollie.

Mollie:

Hi, everyone, Mollie West Duffy here. As Ali mentioned, I'm the author of two books, *No Hard Feelings* and *Big Feelings* with my co-author, Liz Fosslien. And I'm also the head of Learning and Development at Lattice. I'm happy to be here.

Ali:

And we're so glad to be having this conversation with, with both of you. Today, we're gonna talk about anger, and we have quite a few points of departure. But it's such a loaded topic because when we experience it, it feels really loaded. And if we don't recognize it, it can be problematic.

And on the flip side, there's also having anger in your space are coming at you from, you know, other, other folks that you're working with or living with or whatever the situation is. So, anger's just one of those loaded emotions that can get us a little derailed. And, um, you know, our relationship with anger is obviously informed by what we grew up with. And heaven knows like the majority of our parents weren't, um, you know, fully emotionally literate.

So we're all... We're all carrying some of that baggage. So hopefully, by the end of this conversation, folks can walk away knowing a little bit more about how they orient to their own anger. And, um, um, maybe, there's also shared resonance too with what we're sharing. So here we go. Mollie, do you wanna take us?

Mollie:

Sure. So Liz and I write about anger in our book, *Big Feelings*, as one of the big feelings. (laughs) It's a, it's a pretty big one, I would say. And I will say that this was... This is an emotion that is very difficult for me to express and even to recognize in myself. And that's not uncommon. So often, when we are young, we are told that anger is not something that we should express, that we should suppress it, or we are around people who are expressing their anger in a way that doesn't make us feel safe. And so, we say, "I never wanna do that to someone else. So I'm not gonna express this emotion."

And so, there's this sort of binary approach towards anger which is like either you're experiencing it and you're yelling and screaming or you're not experiencing it at all. And we don't have a lot of good role models for the stuff in between, um, which is the, the healthier way. And, um, you know, I think when

we started writing the chapter, both Liz and I realized that we definitely suppressed a lot of anger to the point where we weren't always aware that we were even feeling it.

And I think that's different than a lot of other emotions. So you may, um, feel things like envy or sadness and be aware that you're sort of comparing yourself to someone else or that you're, you're feeling low. And you may decide to move on, but there's an awareness of it. And anger is, um, we, we are so quick to suppress anger that we are not always aware that we are even feeling it.

So we go straight from the trigger that caused the anger to suppression. And we're so afraid of that anger we just skip right over it. And when that happens, it can turn into resentment which is anger that's been sitting around for a (laughs) little while. Um, and it can also go into our bodies, um, in ways that are difficult to bring out of our bodies later and it can sit there, there for a while.

So I've been thinking a lot about, about that just awareness of anger. And that's sort of the first step. I'm early on this (laughs) journey. Um, but that's sort of the first step is like, "Oh, I'm feeling angry right now," and then deciding what I wanna do with it. But first, it's like, "Yeah. Like a boundary was crossed. And I am feeling angry about that." And that's okay. That's a healthy emotion that I'm allowed to feel. I'm curious for, for either of you, Chrystal and Ali, what your experiences around recognizing anger.

Chrystal:

Well, I'll, I'll start. And, um, that's such an excellent point about, uh, how we grew up with anger. And for me, um, in my own experience, it took me so long to recognize my own anger. And I had to go on a journey. I was a contributing author to the book, *Angry Women: 23 Essays About Hidden Truths, Big Feelings, and Unexpected Wisdom* that was, uh, published in 2022. And the process of coming together with 22 other women to write about anger actually allowed me to figure out when I was angry. (laughs) There were so many other things that would, um, that wanted to show up in the driver's seat or that I wanted to, um, say, "Oh, I'm not angry. I'm this. I'm not angry. I'm this."

And so, um, the process of writing this essay and like going deep into my background, my own history and being able to re-look at things in the past (laughs) actually, um, I don't know, brought some of my anger alive. It, it let it come to the surface more. And I'm so much more fluent about recognizing anger when it's there and then doing something from that place in ways that it doesn't come in or sit in my body in unhealthy ways.

Chrystal:

I'll add one more piece to that. Part of the work that I did with this group of women and we would come together on Zoom calls, and then we would, uh, go off and we would write on our own and then we would come back together, so it was a very collaborative. So we felt like we had space to explore this very, very touchy topic, and a topic that scared a lot of people who were actually writing about it because it required us to excavate things from the past or, um, name the things that were feeling that may have been hidden.

But one of the ways that we started was on our very first call, our very first prompt that we wrote about and we all, you know, grabbed our journals and the prompt was when I grew up, anger was dot, dot, dot.

And for me, that was such a potent call to go back and to look at my relationship with anger from, you know, from my earliest memories. And I could see really clearly, um, how those early lessons that I learned were still showing up in my life today. And some in really good ways and some in not so great ways.

Ali:

Oh, I love that. I wrote a newsletter on this. I'm pretty sure. But, um, I was having a conversation with my partner. And I, I started using descriptive words like, um, it just feels like shrapnel just like ripped through me or something. And he was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Shrapnel?" And I'm like, "Yeah. Like just..." And he was like, "Are you angry?" And, (laughs) and I was like, "No."

And he was (laughs) "You sound angry." I was like, "What do you mean?" And, and like, you know, uh, like it's like somebody sliced out the word anger from my dictionary. Like I didn't even have the word anger as like something in my, in my arsenal whether useful or not, right, to just say, "Whoa, I'm really pissed about that," and, and have that be okay.

And, and to relate that to my childhood, um, you know, my dad was kind of, uh, um, volatile in some ways, um, kind of a dry alcoholic. And, you know, I love him for so many reasons. And like wh- when you're living with someone who has kind of those tendencies, um, e- e- he would just kind of go off. And, and my mom and my sister and I would just kind of sit around and look at each other like, "Okay. There goes dad again." Right?

And then, we'd kind of watch and we'd just be there. And we'd look at him and be like, "Are you done? Like are you done? Can we get on with life now?" And, um... But it's from those moments. It's like from those moments, the kitchen table when he would come home from work that I internalized. Like I do not wanna be like that, right?

So like the, the resist- my resistance move was to like stuff it all down. And, um, and just kind of erase it from my, my parent dictionary of possibilities or named possibilities, definitely not felt possibilities.

Mollie:

That's such a good point around the fact that it that e- that even using that word feels so, um, untouchable. Like again, like can you imagine if you... if the word sadness had been erased out of your vocabulary and you were never able to (laughs) use that word? I mean it's, it's just as big of an emotion just as core and primal of an emotion. Um, but yes, you're so right. I, I was nodding along as you said that. And, and, and then, with your dad, it's like, "You don't want to do that to someone else because, you know, how hurtful it is to be on the other side of it." And so, it's like, "Okay. Well, to prevent me from doing this, I'm just never gonna experience this or admit to myself I'm experiencing this emotion."

Mollie:

Yeah. I wanted to come back, Chrystal, to you talking about whether anger was, um, something that was okay for you to feel as a child. And I, I know you mentioned that you're a mom. I'm curious how you think about that with your kids of encouraging them to express anger and giving them the space to express anger.

Chrystal:

Yeah. It's definitely on my mind as I have two daughters. And I want them to be, uh, intelligent about their anger. And by intelligent, it doesn't mean that I want them to filter their anger or check themselves. If they feel the thing, then, I want them to feel it. And so, I try very hard to, um, help them name their anger when that's what they're feeling, um, to see it to let it happen and to support them in moving through it in whichever ways they wanna move through it.

That feels really important to me. And it's very different than, uh, than how I approached anger as a child. And the lessons that I learned about it. I mean I was, I was terrified. And so, I feel like I try to be very intentional with my, with my kids about the messaging that I give them around anger.

That said, I also recognize that there are still ways in which I'm tangling with my own anger about things. And I may have tendencies that where suppress- suppress my own anger. And so, I also know that I have to be aware of what I'm modeling for them. So I, I, I can't say that like I've got it all wrapped up in the bag, and I'm teaching them perfectly.

Sometimes it's like moment by moment or like, "Oh, yeah. That didn't feel right. Maybe, we need to go back and have a conversation about that." Um, but, yeah. I, I really try to give my kids the space to be angry, to feel angry. And, um, helping support and provide guidance and how they respond to their anger.

Mollie:

In a way that you didn't have. So it sounds like intentionally different than your upbringing.

Chrystal:

Yeah. I'm pretty much trying to do the opposite. (laughing) I had my mother and my father, and I watched them. I watched what they were angry about and how they expressed it. And, um, I had my grandparents and, uh, the community that I lived in. And, you know, it was very easy for us to be angry about injustice. Um, my dad was a Black Panther and so, um, in Chicago, in the 1960s.

So, you know, that kind of anger was easy for me. Anger over injustice was easy. I mean I was like, uh, an activist, the total activist in college. And, um, I've always, uh, done that. And I've always seen the need for it. And it was so easy for me to be angry about the larger structural things that were out there.

But when it came to personal anger and individuals, I felt much less agency about that because I saw how anger worked within my own family and, um, the parts that didn't feel good to me and the parts that felt destructive.

So, my history was very much like, "Uh, I can be angry at these things out here. But I don't quite know how to deal with relational anger between individuals or when it's directed toward me or when I'm witnessing anger between maybe members of my family." That's when it felt really scary.

Mollie:

It's, it's a really good distinction of anger, how..., um, what types of anger trigger- What types of anger triggers and what types of violations take place? And which of those we feel like we can and can't experience anger around or we learn to experience anger around or not? Um, and they're... It's like... It's the same thing. But yes like a, a boundary or a trigger that's directed at a group in society very different than a boundary or a trigger that comes from you in relation with someone within your family or within your workplace.

We talk in the book about trying to, to identify your unique anger triggers. And it sounds like for you like you're, you're easily able to identify some of them that are more societal in nature and the ones that are more interpersonal or relational in nature are harder.

Chrystal:

Yeah. That was, that was definitely my experience. 'd be curious if you'd be willing to share anything about what you grew up learning about anger.

Mollie:

Yeah. My, my parents are divorced. And so, anger to me was, you know, between two adults who were having a hard time in a relationship. And because of how young... I was nine when it happened. Because I was so young, it felt unsafe because all you want as a kid is your family to love each other when they don't. That doesn't feel safe. And you wanna make sure that you're being taken care of.

So that's how it was modeled. And that sort of like overtook all of the other ways that anger was modeled. Um, and I, I think, you know, I have memories of my mom especially with my sister and I saying like, "Yeah. You're angry. Like good. You should be angry," you know, especially when you're like a little kid, and like, "Yeah. Like naming it."

But I think... And you spoke to this, Chrystal, of like there's the... What you're telling your kids (laughs) and then how you're modeling it. And so, if you're saying like, "Yeah. You should be angry," that's fine. That's good. But then, if you are modeling getting angry at someone else in the family in a way that doesn't feel safe, that's the thing that the kid's gonna remember. (laughs)

So I have this come up frequently in my relationship with my husband where he will get angry. And he will express it in a really healthy way. He's not yelling. He's just saying, "I'm frustrated about this thing, angry about this thing." And I will go into fight or flight because that is just like... Oh, we're talking about a relationship anger that's going on here. I know where this could lead. I don't like it.

I've noticed... I've started to notice that and notice my response and had to get comfortable being with his anger in a way that like I still feel safe. And sometimes, that's just pausing in the moment and closing my eyes being like, "Okay. It's okay for him to be angry. I'm still safe. We are still safe together in this relationship." Um, and let me hear him out other- because, otherwise, I would totally shut down.

And then for myself as I mentioned at the beginning, it's... Like I for the first many years in our relationship never expressed anger to him because I wasn't even aware that I was feeling angry. (laughs) I think similar things happen in, in workplace dynamics. Um, for me, I think, um, I'm very much somebody who is a peacemaker. And when anger comes up in the workplace, I view it is my job to make sure that the conflict gets resolved which can be a helpful thing. Um, but I also have had to work on recognizing when I am experience anger in the workplace and a boundary has been crossed so that I can protect myself or my team.

Ali:

I think it's important to kind of like, um, underline and, and highlight here that anger is, anger is when something you love or value is being threatened. Like that, that is like the prime emotion that comes up. So it could be a boundary. It could be, you know, watching your kids like run out into traffic. you're still as a parent going to have like (laughs) some sort of angry response even though you love the child. But as you're running to get them, you're gonna be yelling his name, like, "Get the hell out of the street." Right?"

it's a really loaded thing. And it's, it's just so primal and the way it's wired in our brains is ultimately for safety.

Mollie:

Yes. And yeah. The, the... Like the fact that anger is information, I think, was very new to me. When we were writing this (laughs) chapter, I was like, "Wait. What?" Telling me that this is... Telling me something that I might find helpful like, "Oh, okay." Um, and yeah. It is... It's... It is, it is telling you that a violation has taken place, a boundary has been crossed.

And what that means is that you care about that thing. Like whatever it is that happened that's being violated or bo- the boundaries being crossed, you care about that thing which maybe you didn't know that you cared so much about that thing. And so, it's like, "Oh, that's like actually a helpful reminder."

And it doesn't mean that in the moment, we can get to that like, "Oh, thank you, anger." Like we need to just feel the anger. But coming back to it and saying what was that telling me, like what... Why did I have such a strong reaction to that, oh, because I care so much about this thing.

Chrystal:

I love that. I love that because it, um, it really address- addresses how important it is for us to be curious about our own anger. Um, the question of what is this telling me, what do I really care about here, what's at stake? And even taking it like into the body like where am I feeling this in my body?

And again, uh, you won't necessarily be able to do it in the moment. (laughs) I know that, you know, with certain types of anger, like, I'm not real interested in being curious at that moment and dissecting it. But, (laughs) but coming back to it and knowing that part of my relationship with anger is also, um, being curious about it has been profoundly helpful to me. Um, when I see anger as information like you so beautifully said, Mollie.

Ali:

I'm, I'm forgetting like when and where and how I really got fluent with the anger, the word anger. And I've noticed over time that there are certain people, it's really hard to be angry at. And, sometimes, I can cloud like the feeling I'm having or I'll be like, "I'm like so pissed off." But at who or why or what? What's like... What's underneath this?

I feel like garnered some facility with my anger which I'm, I'm kind of quick to realize, "Oh, I'm really pissed right now." Okay. What just happened? Where was... Where was the assumed or perceived transgression? Like where do I need to like, you know, dive in a little deeper and explore something? And how do I... Like what do I wanna take away from this?

How do I distill this down into what's important and what where I'm sensing the threat? Do I need to do anything? If not, okay. And if I do need to do something, what do I need to do? What do I need to say? Who do I need to take it to?

And when those like distillations are so clear, it... It's such a gift to be able to sift through to find the information in the anger. Um, and I'm fully cognizant of the fact that there are situations where it's really hard, um, to know what it is, you know, how, how do I articulate maybe what's going on?

Mollie:

It sounds like you... looking back that you have seen that you had a journey with anger. And there was a time when you were less comfortable with it. And now, you're more comfortable with it. But there wasn't like a moment in time. It's just been like a slow growth. Okay.

Ali:

Yeah. Yeah. It's like learning... I think one of the keys for me was learning, um, maybe just starting with like the five core emotions or, or assuming there's just only five, right? But just, just working with that, right? Is it joy? Is it, um, anger? Is it sadness? Is it, um, sexual feelings? I'm probably forgetting the fifth one. I don't know what it is. But it's... If you just look at like those... that handful and started working with them in your day-to-day life, like, where do they live in your body? What happens? And what's the information there if you can sit with that sensation?

That was a big tool for me to, to really help me start unpacking all the information, you know, in, in, in the... in the full emotional range. Um, and I'm still learning, I feel like, more and more about my own emotional vocabulary in terms of, you know, what is it? If I was to get more precise about what I'm feeling, what is the word I would use here?

Mollie:

Getting more granular. Yeah.

Ali:

Yeah.

Mollie:

The other thing you said was that it's, it's not always easy to figure out why it's happening and where it's coming from. And I think that's especially the case when it is a mix of interpersonal and systemic issues where it could be something that on face value is, is a comment that a colleague makes that is, um, biased or, um, you know, some sort of, um, active exclusion. But it calls back to a history of suppression against certain groups, um, and figuring out the interplay of this is really tough and, and work that it's hard to put that on an individual to say like, "Okay. You have to figure out why you're angry in the moment." And it's, it's asking someone to do emotional labor to figure out like why they're feeling so angry around something that's, um, systemic and deeply, um, hard to disentangle.

Ali:

Yeah. And I just... I think systemic is so great. And so often, I think we think of that as like the large society at, you know, society at large kind of zone. But I think even within our organizations, there are systemic stuff that goes on whether it's bizarre family systems things that show up, and like the unspoken code or, or the code of things we talk about and don't talk about.

I mean there's, there's a whole, um, uh, rage just, just in terms of how we kind of sense those systemic things.

Chrystal:

I'm so glad that you brought this up, um, because there are larger systemic forces that come into play whether it's in our society or, um, even that get played out within our organizations. And I'll just go direct

and name a couple of things. Um, one and, and I say this from, um, experience and also being part of the group.

But so much has been said about like the idea of like the Angry Black Woman. And so, that is something that is also carried and can, um, like you said, Mollie, get in the way of like real anger and, (laughs) and trying to disentangle like how much of this is bigger structural stuff and how much of this is individual?

And I think the same can be said about women's anger, um, and, uh, which, you know, the three of us on this call all identify as women. Um, and even going back to the book that I contributed on, uh, which was a group of women and we were talking about, um, how specifically our experience as women or, um, informed by our identities as women play into, uh, the way we see, feel experience anger. So I think it's important to just name that that is out there and that it shows up in our world. It shows up in our organizations. And that is like yet another influence and another factor.

Ali:

Yeah.

Mollie:

I wanna add to that too that we are not reliable judges of who is angry and who is not angry, um, and that, that can cloud our judgment especially when we're in a workplace situation where there's been research done around racial stereotypes, around, um, anger expression. Um, and this is just pernicious. I mean it's... Though it's a stereotype. But it, it is, um, one that I think we don't think of that often on a team level or an individual level or like in your workplace level if we think about it more in the media.

But it's still very live and happening in your team in your organization. Um, and then on the other hand, there's the stereotype around Asian Americans being less angry, um, feeling less emotions. Um, and that comes up as well.

And I mean there's a lot more I could (laughs) say on this topic. But I, I just think the takeaway here is we don't know...None of us know when anyone else is angry until that other person chooses to share that emotion with us. And we cannot make that exception. (laughs)

Chrystal:

Yeah. I love that. That is... That is so important. Um, I think one of the other things as I think about... as I think about anger and, you know, folks who are down power and how that might be experienced, like there's nothing worse than, um, feeling like your anger isn't valid or it's being trivial- trivialized or someone's naming you as angry when it's like, "No. I'm not angry here." (laughs) I'm asking for clarity or, or whatever the case may be.

And, you know, another thing that, that comes to mind is around tone policing. And when someone perceives that someone else is angry regardless of whether there's an- whether they're angry or not, um, the, the piece about like, "I can't hear you when you're angry." Like "I am unwilling to listen because I think that you're angry right now." And that can be really, um, devastating and silencing and discrediting and dismissive.

And there are, you know, expressions of emotion and allowing people to have a full range of emotions. That is the way that we allow people to be in their full humanity. So, you know, when I think about things around, "Oh, um, Black women are always really angry. Uh, women are always hysterical. Uh, Asian



Americans are really passive"or whatever that language may be, it is dismissing and not allowing folks to be in their full humanity.

Like we all have emotions, and we all have the right to have them. Now, obviously we don't want anyone to cause harm, (laughs) you know, through behaving inappropriately. But, uh, like recognizing that we are all humans and that we all have these really vast and varied emotional landscapes is how we belong to each other. It's, it's really important for us to recognize that.

Ali:

For me, it's so hard to have anger as a woman. I feel like I have to, um, I have to be very clear and calm when I deliver it. And even then, it can still be dismissed. And then, of course, I get more mad (laughs) as you can imagine. But I can remember growing up where, you know, I don't... If we were mad, it was like go take... Like go take care of yourself or don't worry about it, or I mean like it was a problem. Some part of that like being angry was a problem as a kid.

There are plenty of times in my adult life where I have had skills around this and still spoken, you know, with those skills. And it's still been dismissed. And, and that is...it's beyond infuriating. (laughing) It's just like flames everything else, you know. So, yeah.

Mollie:

There's interesting research around, um, you were saying, Ali, around on being a, a kid, um, that boys... And, and again, I don't know whether this is true now. I'm not a parent. Hopefully, things have changed. But, um, I think in the past, boys were socialized to express their anger either by talking about it, you know, expressing it or dealing with it competitively. And girls were encouraged to understand the other person's perspective. (laughing) [inaudible] Like exactly what you're saying like, "Okay. Skip over the anger part." Like what's the other person feeling?

So it's no surprise then as adults, women are far, far more likely to suppress their anger, um, or to feel like they don't have that like anger competence which I think is what you're saying a little bit where you're like, "Okay. I feel like I know how to do this." But for some reason, it's not being perceived in the same way. My expression of anger in a professional way is not being perceived in the same way as my male colleagues.

At the other thing is like, like anger can come out in different ways. So, um, there's research that shows that for women, um, crying is a sign of anger.

Chrystal:

Yup.

Mollie:

Because we are not socialized to express anger by frust- getting frustrated or yelling the way that, that really intense emotion comes out is through tears. And so, you know, I've been in the situation before where it's like you're crying and the other person's like, "Oh, you're feeling sad." No, not feeling sad. Feeling really angry right now. (laughs) But that's how it's coming out because that's an acceptable way for it to come out.

And again, it's like I'm crying because this boundary has been violated. And I care deeply about this thing that has been violated. And it's coming out in tears. Interestingly, for men, depression can often manifest

as anger because the flip side of it is, is men are often socialized to avoid of hearing sad. And so, that can come out in, in anger. Um, yeah. So it's... (laughs) There's a whole spectrum of how it shows up.

Ali:

There's so much just in this one emotion.

Mollie:

I wanna go back to something that said a little bit earlier around, um, like expressing anger through the body and then also like really keying into how angry you are. And this happened to me last week.

I was on a, a call. And, um, the person on the, the other end was, um, telling me about how I should have reacted to something. And in the future, how I should react to that same thing if it were to happen?

And I was really angry about the assumption of the thing happening again, and then the advice around how I should or shouldn't react to it, um, because I felt like I had a totally normal reaction to it.

And I got off the phone call... I ended the phone call. I got off the phone call, and I went into my bedroom (laughs) our bedroom. And I like was standing there. And I was physically moving my body to try to get the anger out. Like I was like shaking my fist and kicking my legs. And, um, you know, saying some things out loud like, "Don't say that to me, you know. I'm okay. Don't say that to me."

And it really helped. And then, the next day I sat down. And I wrote out like what I would say to this person if I chose to engage with them again of like this is the boundary that you crossed. This is why I was frustrated. You know, don't do this again.

And I also allowed myself to do a little bit of like writing separately from the letter like around just at a base level what I was feeling like almost as if like a child was writing it. (laughs) Like I'm so effing angry right now. Like I can't... But like, "Are you kidding me? I am so frustrated that you did this to me, and really letting that inner child come out of like..." And, and that helps me because I think when I don't force myself to sit down, I don't always know how angry I am.

And it sounds like, Ali, you're, you're maybe like further along the journey of this. But like forcing myself to be like, "If I was like five years old, wa- how would I be feeling?" Like what are those core emotions? Like I would be so, you know, feel like so frustrated and just amazing the act of writing. I'm always surprised by what comes out.

And I'm like, "Oh, you're that angry. Interesting." Like I didn't... You didn't know that you were that angry. Um, so both of those things. And, and, you know, I haven't even had a conversation yet with the person. I think that I will. But I needed some time to cool down. But I think in the past, I would have skipped over all of that and not even tried to figure it out.

And I am just trying to give myself more avenues and space for like allowing that expression to come out and then to go back to the person and talk about it in a more, um, um, in a way that they can hear more.

Chrystal:

You know, I'm also thinking about like how, uh, useful that can be especially in relationships that we really care about. Like in work relationships, it might be really important. Even if I can't deal with this in the moment, it might be important for me to step away and actually engage with the anger. Um, and, and I mentioned this a little bit earlier about being curious about it.

It can be really important to do that work when we do need to preserve (laughs) a relationship. And we can like figure out our own stuff. Uh, like, like you said, you didn't know how angry you really were. But

getting close enough to it and, you know, doing some journaling or really sitting with the situation, sometimes, it's difficult to sit with a discomfort. But it's actually... Um, it can be a really appropriate and adult way to navigate challenging situations especially when we are in such a relational culture.

And within our organizations, with people, with those that we care about, um, it's really important to be able to do the work and to be able to pause when necessary, um, which absolutely doesn't mean that there won't be times and cases and scenarios where we immediately need to us to respond to a threat or harm that is caused in the moment. But just knowing that we have a pathway to be with our anger so that we can come back and show up in the way that we want. I love that. I love that. Thanks for sharing it.

Mollie:

A phrase that I really like that we heard from, um, someone when we were doing the book research was if you are experiencing a really strong emotion in the moment whether it's anger or something else, a nice phrase that you can use as I'm having a strong reaction right now. I'm gonna step aside and take some time. And that is like you don't need to identify what the reaction is. You don't need to say, "I'm feeling angry or sad or whatever." It's just having a strong reaction right now, I need to get some space. It lets everyone else know what's going on, but, um, gives you that space.

Ali:

Yeah. And to double underscore, um, so much of this, um, you know, part of the, you know, the work here for individuals is how do you take care of your side of the aisle in those relational spaces? And this is a perfect phrase to like keep in your back pocket to give yourself some space to be able to sort through what's going on for you right now, and to be able to come back with, um, you know, clarity.

Mollie:

We wanted to talk about what happens when you are on the receiving end of anger in the workplace. And I'm curious if either of you have thoughts around how to manage that.

Chrystal:

Yeah. Well, in terms of being on the receiving end, I think that one of the most important things, uh, for me and what I might suggest to anyone is to know where do you go when someone gets angry with you. Do you go into amygdala hijack? Um, do you go into a place where you're open to hear (laughs) what the anger is? Like where are you? What are your tendencies? And what is... And, and sometimes, that can change depending on the person and what your relationship is with the person. But it really starts with like knowing where do I go when someone is angry... or when someone is angry with me?

And so, I think that is the first piece of it. I've been able to work with my own stuff around going into vapor lock when someone is angry so I can really hear them. Um, and I think going from that place and having some awareness about how we manage anger when it is directed at us can be incredibly helpful. If we don't know that and we're not aware of it, we will show up in the way that we've always shown up. And that may not be great for us.

We may actually be contributing to, um, to more conflict between two individuals if we are not particularly skilled in the person who's expressing the anger and how we might be receiving it. So I, I think that's what I would say about, um, about receiving it. It's really important to just do that internal

inventory and check with yourself. Where do I usually go? Where do I usually feel it? Can I pause to hear what's being said for long enough, or am I someone who's immediately gonna lash out? I think it really starts there.

Ali:

I think it depends too on, on what's being delivered your way, right? Is it coming at you from a place of, um, honesty? And like there's a, there's a... There's something worth, uh, listening to, right, um, putting kind of your feelings away for a second to really hear what's going on or is it coming at you aggressively?

And in some, you know... In the latter, you know, you might actually have to, um, manage yourself differently or be able to pause the conversation and say, "Let's maybe come back to this later."

Mollie:

And I had a boss, a previous boss who similarly like we, we met on... We had like a one-on-one on the same day of the week every week. And I noticed that like whatever happened in that day before our meeting that he was angry about, he brought into that meeting and just sort of like vented for a while to me. I mean not like that I was the cause of it. But I was just sitting there as the recipient of that venting.

And after those meetings, I would always feel terrible. And I'd have to go take a walk and just sort of like... It felt like I was a receptacle for his anger. And then, I had to go chip that anger out of me. And, um, I never had a conversation about it. But I kind of wish that I had because I, I don't think... I think in some instances, the person is doing it consciously. But I think in most instances, they're doing it unconsciously. And they haven't figured out their own anger expression style and how to pause and, um, do all the things that we've talked about before.

And so, then, it just comes out at like the next human target that they happen to be an amazing with. Um, so yeah. I think that... I, I would be curious to hear your thought on, on venting and how that comes up in the workplace and when you are listening to other people vent what's happening.

Ali:

In the work situation, what can happen, and what I hear happen often is there's usually someone in the office that becomes that receptacle preventing. Um, and that person (laughs) may be a good listener. They may be... They might have people-pleasing tendencies. They might something.

But they become the receptacle. And if they are that empathic or they become that, um... or if the emotions kind of like get stuck to them versus then go back with the person that they came from, um, you know, it's, it's not a helpful role to be in.

So if you are one... a receptacle to many venters, um, ask yourself why, and how can I make this conversation more constructive for the person who is talking to me? Um, how can I help them? How can I maybe limit the time? Like I'm available for five minutes. Do some house cleaning. I've got my timer going. Like let yourself go for the full five. I'm here for it.

After that, I gotta get my work done. Um, you know, you can draw boundaries around your own ability to listen and to help someone process their anger, um, depending on whatever your own needs are, right? Just because somebody is angry doesn't mean that your needs are annihilated, right?

Chrystal:

Yeah. I'll, I'll just add to that. Like I really love the permission to vent. The other thing that I'll just add is that, sometimes, venting can be really useful and it can work. (laughs) But there are certainly other times

that I've seen even in my work in coaching where venting actually activates a person even more in unhelpful ways. And they feel worse about it. They feel, um, more activated, less in control. And it can actually feel really yucky.

So, the competence and intelligence around knowing what venting does for you can be helpful as well. Like what am I trying to accomplish here? Um, am I venting to the right person? Am I, am I venting in the right direction, or is this something that I actually need to be talking to the individual about?

Like when venting becomes the route for, um, having the conversation and there's no conversation with the person with whom the individual is angry, that can be really, really destructive and not very useful for the person who's venting. I mean I see that as like unmetabolized anger still.

Mollie:

Yeah. I- It brings it back to this idea that like anger is fuel that can be burned which we talk (laughs) about in the book. If you are feeling angry (laughs) about someone else and you go and talk to a neutral third party, you are releasing some of that fuel. (laughs) But you are not fixing the original problem.

I really like the way you said that, Chrystal. I'm thinking about, um, is this... Is me verbalizing this to a neutral third party the best way for me to be verbalizing this right now, or should I save that for the actual conversation where I'm asking for something to change?

Ali

Is there anything else like lingering that we wanna pop in about with anger?

Mollie:

We covered what I wanted to cover.

Ali:

I hope all the listeners really dive into Big Feelings and, and explore the Anger chapter, I mean all the chapters, of course. But the Anger chapter, I think, is so handy. And the way you guys laid it out was, um, exquisite. So thank you. Mollie.

Mollie:

I do just want to reference... I mean it's in the book. But I wanna reference that this work stands on top of a lot of work that was done before we wrote this. A couple of names I wanna mention, all of Audre Lorde's work on anger. Soraya Chemaly wrote a great book on anger, women in anger. Um, Nedra Glover Tawwab wrote a great book on boundaries that has been life-changing for me called Set Boundaries, Find Peace. Um, and Augusten Burroughs has written a lot around, um, anger and, and gives great metaphors a- about anger. So we relied a lot on those when writing the chapter.

Ali:

Yeah. Thank you for that. Thank you both for joining me for this. I hope, um, I hope it was handy for our listeners no matter how they identify.