

**EPISODE 205**

## [INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:02.6] PF:** Welcome to episode 205 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. If you're having a little trouble with that whole work-life balance thing, you're in the right place. Today's guest is all about learning how to break the addiction of constant work and change your mind set for lasting results.

Dr. Bryan E. Robinson is a licensed psychotherapist, professor in Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and the author of more than 30 books. He's here today to talk to us about his latest book, *#Chill: Turn Off Your Job and Turn On Your Life*.

Let's find out how we can do that.

## [INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:41.5] PF:** Bryan, you have written a lot of books and I wanted to find out why you chose to use the topic of work for this one?

**[0:00:49.6] BR:** Well, because it's been a personal communion for me between my work and my personal life and having struggled with work addiction myself and I've actually done research at the University of North Carolina on the effects of workaholism on families, children and marriage and so I wrote a book called *Chained to the Desk for Workaholics* and in my private practice, I realized how many people who come to me have some of these same traits but they're not really workaholics but they're up to their eyeballs in work or busyness and they're doing.

They never have time or they say they never have time to relax and take it easy and in fact, some people even tell me they don't even know how. They can't sit and relax so I wrote this book called *#Chill*. For anybody who is dealing with the inability to turn it off, the inability to not react in a negative way when they get frustrated. *#Chill* is not just the passive action where you hang out and watch the football game or lounge by the pool.

I mean, those are great things to do, there's nothing wrong with that. That is part of it but it's more active, it's being intentional about, if someone pulls in front of you in traffic and you slam on breaks, you know, a lot of us might use the finger or the steering wheel or say things we regret later but it's really about how to stay in yourself and act, instead of react.

Or, if the baby's crying on the airplane behind you and you haven't slept in a day or so where your neighbor's using the weed eater outside, you're trying to concentrate, this is what's called life and one of the things I wanted to talk about in the book was how can we be more active and less reactive. Another part of the book is about, instead of reacting to everything that happens to us, learning to forgive people who get in our way and forgive ourselves when we get in other people's way.

Because the world is getting smaller and smaller and you know, all you have to do is turn on the news to see how often these kinds of things end up in tragedy. It's what's partly, the subtitle of the book is *Turn off Your Job and Turn on Your Life*. But your job can be anything that you're doing. You can be a student, stressed out, you could be a stay at home mom or dad, you could be in the workplace or you could be a retiree.

We're finding that people who volunteer and retirees nowadays are actually trying to overdo it and some of them are burning out, it's really interesting.

**[0:03:34.6] PF:** Let me ask you, before we get too far away from this, you know, you talk about how you see all these people that you were coming into your practice and they do have this work addiction, that's not something that we saw years ago and I know we've talked about this on Live Happy and we're not sure where this came from, when did we start becoming so chained to our desk as your previous book title said. When did this addiction to work begin and why?

**[0:04:04.0] BR:** Well, I think it's been under the radar for a long, long time. Just the puritan work ethic, you know? The more you do, the more worth you have. I think that's kind of embedded in messages we get from the time we're very young and now that more women are in the workforce and not at home and more women are in leadership positions.

As you see in congress and we're seeing that more and more in corporation, we're seeing it also applies to women and a lot of people believe that women have been workaholics at home before this even happens. It wasn't as visible, there's more under the radar but I will tell you, the main thing that is really brought it up to the surface is the technology which of course is a wonderful thing but it's erased all of the boundaries. We can see people on their cellphones or their laptops pretty much 24/7.

I have people ask me sometimes, how do I turn it off? I said, well you just turn it off.

**[0:05:09.2] PF:** You make it sound easy. I'm sure you get a lot of push back when you say, you just turn it off.

**[0:05:13.3] BR:** Yeah.

**[0:05:13.9] PF:** I'm sure there's a laundry list of why that can't happen.

**[0:05:17.6] BR:** Absolutely. It does sound easy but a lot of people don't stop and think that you know, this is affecting their intimate relationships, their parenting, their own health in some cases and so it's really about setting boundaries and that's different for everybody, you know?

The boundaries have been erased and so we can be on our devices 24/7 anywhere in the world, in the middle of the jungle, in the Sahara Desert, pretty much anywhere. A lot of people don't think that they can set a boundary or turn it off.

There's some people who are chained to the corporations, the big corporations now, often give out devices for free and some people take that as a message that I have to stay online with my company.

**[0:06:04.1] PF:** Sometimes the company gives us that message; you know? I'm sure that you have people that come in and say I would like to disengage but I have a boss who feels, if they text me, it doesn't matter what time it is, it doesn't what I'm doing, I need to respond.

**[0:06:20.0] BR:** That's basically true. It's especially true if you're say – on the East Coast and your boss is on the West Coast or there's a time difference that sometimes in the middle of the

night, there are people that I know who have to be available to deal with things overseas or in a different time zone.

Even if it's not a different time zone, that's an issue and I've had people tell me, they're afraid to even take a vacation because they'll be perceived as not a team player and so more and more people are not taking vacations anymore because of – they want to climb the career ladder and be seen as a player.

I've even had people tell me they won't take a break or even take lunch unless it's at their desk because they want to be perceived as contributing to the common good of the organization. There are all those unspoken beliefs and sometimes spoken beliefs about – especially if you're working, if you're gainfully employed and working for an organization. There's also talk among corporate leaders of getting rid of the whole idea of work-life balance and Basos is one of the ones who doesn't believe in it and they're calling it the dinosaur of the 90's. They're using the term work-life integration.

**[0:07:41.8] PF:** Yeah.

**[0:07:44.9] BR:** Because, what that means is you can be at your daughter's soccer game and be returning emails. Well, that sounds from a business perspective, that sounds doable but your daughter knows that you're not really participating physically or emotionally, that you're physically there but not emotionally there. That causes problems of another kind.

The whole idea of integration, especially for people who don't have boundaries is very troubling concept because that means that more people could end up being workaholics and up to their eyeballs and more than they can handle.

We know what happens, not only to marriage but people are 40% more likely to get a divorce if they're in a workaholic marriage. The kids end up being affected, I did a seminar on 2020, talking about this research I did the first study ever and children of workaholics have higher anxiety, they have greater depression, they have what we call an external locus of control which means they don't have inner confidence and self-worth.

Not to mention the physical issues of people who are overworking.

**[0:08:52.8] PF:** You talk about things that happen at the cellular level when we have this and when we keep ourselves busy all the time. Can you talk about what happens to us?

**[0:09:02.6] BR:** Right, well, when we're busy all the time, basically, what happens on a neurological level is we don't have the breaks, we've got gas, if you think of a car, we have to have gas and brakes both to be effective and to end up where we're going alive and well.

When you're working a lot and you're chained to the desk or you're under the gun. What happens is, your adrenaline and our cortisol is plumping a cocktail into your system and it increases your heartrate and it clogs your arteries and it lowers your immune system and so it creates all kinds of physiological imbalance.

So that many people have gastrointestinal problems, heart problems, I mean, the correlation between workaholism and heart is just, it's unbelievable how high that is. Then of course, you're more susceptible when you're stressed out to anything crossing your immune system and catching it.

**[0:10:08.5] PF:** I've worked in environments where you have the bosses like the total hard charging workaholic, they're sick all the time because they feel they need to be there, they come in, everyone else gets sick and you know, it's this miserable environment.

**[0:10:25.2] BR:** Right. The workaholic doesn't think about other people getting sick, all the workaholics thinking about is getting whatever the project is done. You're right, there is a narcissism about it, I don't mean that workaholics are narcissists necessarily but there's an aspect to it where they're not looking through the wide angle lens, they're only looking at, focusing on getting the job done. Not on how it's affecting other people, physically, emotionally or psychologically.

**[0:10:55.6] PF:** On the flip side of that, you talk about the chill life. Can you explain what a chill life is?

**[0:11:02.0] BR:** Yeah, well a chill life is not a 100% of the time but chill life is bringing balance to what we call the sympathetic nervous system. So for those of us who are up to their eyeballs in

work and we are rushing and hurrying, our neurological is coming from our sympathetic nervous system. That's the gas, so a chill life is bringing in the brakes and that can be a lot of things that could be meditating for five minutes a day that's all, and overtime, if you think that's what I do.

That when I meditate five minutes a day, it puts on the brakes and we call that the parasympathetic nervous system. The rest and digest response. If you do that five minutes a day or more, but a lot of you will say, "I don't have time to meditate" so that's why I say five minutes. Everybody has five minutes between sunrise and sunset to just sit and go inside and what that does, you immediately – if I were to ask everybody listening right now, this is for one minute to just sit wherever you are and listen to every sound.

Identify as many sounds as you can. It could be the heating system, traffic, it could be your gurgling stomach, for one minute just do that and here is what happens: You will notice that your heart rate slows down. You will notice that your muscles loosen a little bit and your respiratory rate slows down because you brought yourself into the present moment. So you have activated your parasympathetic nervous system just in one minute.

So if you do that for five minutes a day overtime you start to notice that you are more chill that when somebody pulls in front of you or your spouse goes out and spends a thousand dollars without consulting you are not as reactive. That doesn't mean that you are smiling and happy but it means you are able to handle in a more constructive mature way.

**[0:12:51.7] PF:** I love that you brought up that you could do it in a minute or you could do it in five minutes because when people hear meditation they think, "Oh my gosh I don't have 20 minutes to sit in the lotus position and meditate."

**[0:13:03.7] BR:** That's right. That is exactly what people say to me and you don't have to sit in lotus position. You don't have to burn incense; you don't have to do this in a particular place although it is nice that you do. You can do it in your office, in your car if you are not driving, at home. It is affordable, it costs free and it really makes a difference in your life and this notion that you have to spend 20 to 30 minutes meditating is just not true and it does turn people off.

It makes it sound too burdensome. So that is why in the book I talk about five-minute meditation or one-minute meditations because we know from the science that it improves your health, it

improves your emotional wellbeing and people actually live longer when they meditate. It changes the neuro pathways in your brain. That is a scientific fact. We can actually see it in MRIs. New research shows that people who approach a project and work from a calmer more chill place actually are more productive. It is counterintuitive and the quality of what they produce is better or more sophisticated.

**[0:14:11.6] PF:** I think that is one interesting thing that research has shown us in recent years that employers should take note of, one is the idea that taking a breath, taking a moment really does reset you and then also taking breaks. Walking away from a project is better than powering through it.

**[0:14:28.5] BR:** Oh absolutely.

**[0:14:29.2] PF:** And can you say why that from a creative standpoint, how does it help us when we take that break walk away and come back?

**[0:14:36.2] BR:** If you are frustrated and pounding your desk and I have done this, trying to find a solution to something whatever your work is it really activates your stress response and basically your system is responding as if this is a threat and so it blocks your creativity. If you take a break and go weed the garden, take a walk, what happens for me in the shower is when I had those moments when it comes to me when I am not trying to force it.

The creative ideas, the way to solve a problem often comes and again, I know it is counter intuitive but it often comes whenever we are not trying so hard. It's the striving that it actually gets in the way and blocks the creativity.

**[0:15:20.8] PF:** And what allows that to happen? I think we all have that experience. I joke that I am going to put a whiteboard on my shower because that is where I get my best ideas. What mechanism is going on in our brain that is making that happen?

**[0:15:32.6] BR:** Well, I will see if I can explain it in a brief amount of time. If I am frustrated or I am anxious or I am striving too hard, we call these parts in psychology we call them sub-personalities then they are blocking eight C words and those eight C words are clarity, my creativity, my compassion, my confidence, my curiosity, my connectedness to people. So we

don't even realize it but when we are in the stress response, we call that also the lizard brain or survival.

You can't be creative if you are feeling threatened. So it activates another whole part of your brain and you get flooded and it eclipses these other more chill ways of being in the world and those are those eight C words and I talk about this in the book.

**[0:16:30.0] PF:** We're going to tell the listeners a little bit about *#Chill* on our website but one thing I love about this book is it breaks it down by month and I wanted to ask you because you could start in January and go through each month and it really is a great way to walk through the year. So obviously we've already gotten into the year, is this something that readers can pick up at any time and start?

**[0:16:55.1] BR:** Yeah, you can start in April, you can start in May, you know whenever you pick it up or you can start at the beginning. It is flexible that way and each month has a theme based on that month like April is about being open because it is the word April came from I think it was Latin of pray, which means to open and April is a time of year, at least in the northern hemisphere and here where I am, the redbuds are incredibly beautiful.

They are blooming, birds are hatching, so life is opening up all around us and that's what the chapter is about. It is about open awareness and how to create that in your life, which helps you stay in that place of chill. These different things also parallel the 12 steps by the way and the last reading in each chapter, you will see it the parallels with the 12 steps. So step four is being open and doing an inventory of yourself without judgment so –

**[0:18:00.0] PF:** That is interesting because I read the takeaways – yeah you got great takeaways and I did not think in any way equate that with the 12 steps.

**[0:18:07.6] BR:** Yeah, each step is mentioned in the very last reading of each month and then there are the takeaways that you are mentioning. So it is a nice little – each month is a nice little package and then at the very end of the book, there's 366 chillers and those are one for each day of the year that you can just for one line, one sentence and you can file that away in your head and as you go through your day, if you get stressed or if you have obstacles, it will remind you of how you can get through whatever it is that you are dealing with.

**[0:18:40.0] PF:** You know it's something that I really enjoyed about it because with those little – it is like a centering thought for every day and it all –

**[0:18:48.2] BR:** Yeah, it is full of micro fillers.

**[0:18:50.0] PF:** Oh nice, yeah and it all ties into the chapter that you are reading and again, the chapter the way that it is broken up it's not like you have to sit down and read an entire chapter. You've got these short little readings that you can do every day. You can take all month if you'd like to get through that chapter.

**[0:19:05.5] BR:** That's right.

**[0:19:07.1] PF:** It's wonderful. It is a great book. I think whether you are working too much or parenting too much or whatever it is you are doing too much, there really is a great application for it so.

**[0:19:18.4] BR:** One of the things that I talk about in the book is what are your tall comings and there is no such thing as tall comings. I made the word up but the way our brain is wired is that we are so quick to think of our short comings, which can create stress but if you think about your tall comings, what are your attributes? What are your creative abilities? What are the qualities that we sometimes overlook and focus on our short comings?

And again that brings the balance to you got your tall comings and your short comings. It brings you a more realistic view of who you are in the world. So it shapes your perspective as you go through the book as you do these activities.

**[0:19:58.0] PF:** Yeah, it is a wonderful way to go through the year. A great companion to have as you walk through this daily journey on life and I appreciate you, first of all, appreciate you writing it but secondly, thank you for coming on the show and talking to us about it.

**[0:20:12.5] BR:** Well thank you for having me Paula, it's my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:20:20.0] PF:** That was Dr. Bryan E. Robinson talking about how we can all learn to chill and quite cheating on our lives with that mistress called work. Visit us at [livehappynow.com](http://livehappynow.com) to learn more about Bryan and where you can find his book or how you can follow him on social media to learn more about leading a chill life. We hope you are already a subscriber to Live Happy Now but if you're not, you can find us on Pandora Podcast Network, Spotify, SoundCloud, Stitcher, iTunes and Google Play. Just find us on your favorite platform then hit subscribe so you'll never miss an episode.

That is all we have time for this week but we'll meet you back here again next week for an all new episode and until then, this is Paula Felps reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]