

Ep #57: Reshaping Guilt and Self-Blame After Loss



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sandy Linda

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There's a silent hacker in your grief journey, costing you more than peace of mind. Join us to identify and conquer this unexpected enemy. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *Overcoming Grief*, a show for women experiencing profound grief and looking for support in healing and transforming their lives. If you are ready to heal after loss, create a new self-identity, take responsibility to do the hard things, and get massive results in your life, this show is for you. Now, here's your host, Master Grief and Life Coach, Sandy Linda.

Hello, creative humans. How are you all doing? If this is your first time, welcome to the show. It's so good to have you with us today. A special thanks to those who continue to support and listen to it. I understand the hardship and loneliness of the grief journey, but you are not alone. I'm sending you all my deepest empathy and wishes for healing as you navigate this challenging path.

Are you eager about Halloween and all those chilling movies appearing on your Netflix queue? You know it's that special time of year when we freely scare ourselves silly and call it entertainment. Do you enjoy watching scary movies with popcorn or reading horror novels to scare yourself? Personally, I am team hide behind the couch and pretend I am brave. There's nothing quite like peeking through your fingers at a scary movie, convinced that if you can't see the monster, it can't see you, right?

But here's a fun twist. Have you ever noticed how we scare ourselves even though it makes us check under our beds for weeks? It's like we're hoping that by confronting imaginary fears, our real fears will seem less overwhelming, which believe it or not brings me to today's topic.

I am going to be talking about something that can be scarier than any horror movie. The genuine experience of self-blame and guilt in grief. But don't worry, unlike those Netflix thrillers, I promise there won't be any jump scares in our discussion today. Instead, I'll be exploring some powerful ways to face these feelings head on and come out stronger on the other side.

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So grab your pumpkin spice latte or your witch's brew. No judgment here. Get cozy and let's dive in.

In our last episode, "Dark Days of Grief", I peeled back the layers of anger to reveal the bitterness and resentment beneath that anger. I explored how life's unfairness, especially in the face of untimely loss, and how it can leave us with a bitter pill that's hard to swallow. I shared my journey. For three years, I clung to bitterness, feeling lost and unclear. I wore masks of happiness while harboring pain at work, lashing out at colleagues and misplacing blame. It was a rollercoaster of emotions that many of you resonate with.

Today, we're taking another bold step in the dark days of grief. We're focusing on two of grief's most sneaky companions, guilt and self-blame. But here's the twist. We're not just rehashing the basics. This episode is for those who have already been through bereavement counseling and are looking for new ways to release emotional burdens.

I'm going to explore the guilt trap and its common triggers in grief. I will break down the chains of self-blame, learning to recognize its manifestations, and I'm diving into cutting edge strategies for overcoming guilt and self-blame, tapping into the power of your compassionate observer, a skillset that can reshape your healing journey. I will discuss how to maintain grief resilience while leading with authority for all you high achieving leaders out there.

Your grief doesn't define you, but how you navigate it can redefine your relationship. This isn't your typical grief talk. We're about to jump on a transformative exploration of guilt and self-blame, arming you with innovative tools to not just cope, but thrive.

Are you ready to turn your guilt into growth and your self-blame into self-empowerment? Let's dive in.

As you stand in a dimly lit room, the walls are lined with mirrors, each reflecting a different version of you as you step into the shadow fields of guilt and self-blame. In one mirror, you see yourself hunched over a desk, drowning in work, while a faint image of your mother fades in the background. In another, you're standing on a podium, accepting an award, but your eyes are fixed on the

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empty chairs where your family should be. And in yet another mirror, you're frozen in a hospital hallway, holding a clipboard, feeling overwhelmed by a life-changing decision.

These aren't just reflections. They are the manifestations of guilt that haunt you in the wake of loss. They are the "what ifs" and "if onlys" that echo in the silent moments of your grief.

Let me introduce you to Lacey, a high power marketing executive that I got a chance to work with, who lost her mother to breast cancer last year.

Lacey's story might sound familiar to many of you. She sits in her office staring at the skyline she once dreamed of conquering, but now that view is hurt by a constant whisper. "I should have been there more."

Lacey's mind races back to those final moments. She remembers the smell of disinfectant in the hospital, the beeping of the machines, and the weight of her laptop bag as she rushed from bedside to boardroom. "Just one more meeting," she promised herself. "One more deal, and then I'll take time off."

But time, as we know it, waits for no one. Now, in the aftermath, Lacey's success feels hollow. Each achievement is overshadowed by a nagging question. "Why do I get to succeed when my mom is gone?" It's as if her triumphs are a betrayal of her loss.

And then we need to decide, oh, the decisions. Lacey replays that fateful day in her mind. The doctors with their clinical tones and complex jargon presented options. At that moment, Lacey became not just a daughter, but an enforcer of her mother's fate. Now, she second-guesses every choice. Was comfort care the right option?

Should they have tried that experimental treatment? These are the traps of guilt that wrap around our hearts in grief. They squeeze tighter with each passing day, threatening to suffocate our ability to move forward, to lead, to live.

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But here's the truth, my fellow grief warriors. Guilt is a liar. It distorts our memories, magnifies our known failings, and minimizes the love and effort we pour into our relationships. It's a thief that steals our peace, our self-compassion, and our ability to honor our loved ones by living to the fullest. Let's talk about the double nature of guilt and grief. Guilt can be a healthy response. A way for us to process our emotions and honor our loved ones. But when guilt turns into excessive self-blame, it comes a ghost face that gobbles down our peace.

Take Lacey's story. The sudden stage four breast cancer diagnosis for her mother came as a complete shock. Lacey's mind became a broken record. Playing the same haunting tune, "I should have done more." She couldn't reconcile the image of her vibrant retirement-loving mother with the cruel reality of her illness. As Lacey transferred her mother to hospice care, guilt overwhelmed her. She felt she had failed as a daughter. That she had not been present or nurturing enough. The fact that her mother passed away just 24 hours after the move only intensifies Lacey's self-blame.

But here's the truth bomb. Lacey's mother's death was not her fault. Cancer was the culprit, not Lacey's choices or actions. Recognizing this truth is the first step in breaking free from the shackles of excessive guilt.

Now, let's zoom out and look at the bigger picture. Research has uncovered a fascinating and somewhat troubling trend. Habitual guilt is higher in women across all age groups. Why? One theory points to the tendency of women to engage in relentless self-blame. This isn't just about feeling bad, it's about how we view and internalize events.

For high-achieving women like Lacey, and perhaps many of you listening, this self-blame can be a roadblock to healing and success. It's like running a race with lead weights strapped to your ankles. You might still move forward, but at what cost?

Self-blame doesn't just affect our emotions, it impacts every aspect of our lives. Like Lacey, it can create a paralyzing conflict. On one hand, there's the drive to succeed that always pushes them forward. On the flip side, people now think they don't deserve success because of guilt.

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Studies have linked self-blame to more severe issues like eating disorders and self-loathing. It's a silent time waster, undermining our ability to adapt and flourish.

Remember, self-blame doesn't just affect how you feel, it affects how you act, and the choices you make.

So how do we break free from this guilt trap? It starts with recognition. We need to see guilt for what it is. Not a truth teller, but often a twister of reality. It starts with a radical idea. Changing the way you think changes the way you feel.

I know it sounds simple, maybe even a bit cliché, but bear with me.

Now that I've explored the tangled web of guilt and self-blame in grief, and how it affects us as leaders, let's shift our focus to action. How can you use your leadership skills to navigate through this emotional pitfall?

I'm going to share three powerful exercises that not only help you overcome guilt and self-blame, but also strengthen your leadership during this challenging time.

As high-achieving women leaders, you're used to being tough on yourselves, but building inner strength is needed when facing grief. Let's explore how to do that.

In channeling your guilt into positive action, use your leadership position to implement or improve grief support policies in your organization. Advocate for grief-friendly workplace policies. Review and enhance bereavement leave policies. Implement flexible work arrangements for grieving employees. Provide grief counseling as part of employee benefit programs. And launch a grief awareness month initiative in your company.

This strategy empowers you to transform your personal experience into impactful change, which can benefit many people.

The next tip is the compassionate letter writing exercise. We often treat others with more kindness than ourselves. Now, I want you to write a letter to yourself as if addressing a close friend experiencing the same guilt and self-blame. Offer comfort and wisdom with the same kindness you extend to them. What would

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you say to comfort them? What wisdom would you offer? Then read it to yourself, allowing the words to sink in.

Be as kind and understanding in this letter as you would be to your friend. Remember, listeners, self-compassion is not about denying your feelings or avoiding responsibility. It's about approaching your pain with kindness and understanding, which can make you more resilient and effective as a leader.

And the last tip is cognitive reframing techniques. Lacey needed to recognize that her mother's illness wasn't her fault. She needed to understand that continuing to live and succeed doesn't dishonor her mother's memory. In fact, it might be the best way to honor it.

So for all you leaders out there, change your narrative. Instead of, "I should have been there more," you can say, "I was there and that mattered." Instead of, "Why do I get to succeed while my family is gone?" You can ask yourself, "How can I use my success to make a difference?"

This shift in perspective can be transformative. It allows us to channel our energy into positive actions rather than self-destructive thoughts. By reframing your thoughts, you can move from a place of blame to one of growth and healing.

Regularly practice these techniques if at all possible. As you become less guilty and develop better coping skills, you'll turn your pain into a purposeful journey. You're not just helping yourself, you're setting an example for others facing related struggles.

Healing isn't linear. There'll be ups and downs, but each step forward honors your loved ones and reclaims your strength. Embrace your journey, acknowledge the progress, and recognize that processing grief is making you a more compassionate and effective leader.

Now let's recap the essential insights as I wrap up our exploration of guilt and self-blame in grief.

Guilt is a common but often misplaced emotion in grief. While it's natural to feel some guilt, excessive self-blaming can hinder your healing.

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As leaders, we feel guilt, especially when balancing professional responsibilities with personal loss. Determining between healthy reflection and destructive self-blame is key.

Strategies like advocating for grief-friendly workplace policies, practicing self-compassion through letter writing, and using cognitive reframing techniques can help you navigate guilt.

Transforming guilt into positive action aids our healing and creates meaningful change for others experiencing grief.

Overcoming guilt and self-blame isn't about forgetting our loved ones or dismissing our emotions. It's about honoring their memory by embracing life and using your experiences to grow personally and professionally.

Confronting guilt and self-blame can unlock resilience, compassion, and leadership. Your grief doesn't define you, but how you navigate it can redefine your impact.

Keep moving forward one compassionate step at a time.

If today's discussion helped you or gave you any insights, please share this episode with someone you know who might go through something similar. Each share brings support and understanding to our listener community.

If you find value in today's episode, or if any of our past episodes have resonated with you, we'd love for you to take a moment to leave us a rating or a minute to leave a review and share one thing you're taking away from this episode.

Your reviews not only help us reach more people who may benefit from our conversation, but they also provide us with the motivation and guidance to continue delivering content that supports and inspires you.

Thank you for joining me on this remarkable journey of healing and growth as we make changes and overcome grief together.

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Until next time, remember to grieve with grace, nurture your inner strength, and lead with a courageous heart. Take care of yourself and keep making gradual progress. Have a great week, everyone. Bye.

Thanks for listening to today's episode of *Overcoming Grief*. If you're ready to move into a new, rewarding life experience, and want more information about how to work with Sandy, visit www.sandy linda.com.