

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #122 of Conjuring Up Courage. Nicole Steward is today's guest and after two decades in the social work field, she has come to believe that radical self-care is a must for anyone who works in human services. In this episode, Nicole defines radical self-care and explains her pillars for practicing it. We also discuss why helpers, healers, and change makers in particular need to adopt this radical tendency in order to sustain themselves and help prevent repeated burnout.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/122. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/122.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves so they can be more of who they are and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to "shoulds" and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let's grow together.

[Music fades]

Conjuring Up Courage #122

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Hi Nicole! It is such a pleasure to have you on the show today. How is your 2022 starting off?

Nicole Steward: Hi Shohreh, it's wonderful to be here. 2022 is starting off overwhelming. [Laughter] As a social worker in public schools right now, it's been a dance to get back to where we were in 2021. But I'm excited for this year. I'm optimistic about 2022.

Shohreh: So for those who are unfamiliar with you and your work, could you share just a little bit about who you are and what lights you up these days?

Nicole: Absolutely. I am Nicole Steward. I am a social worker. I've been a social worker for about 20 years now, currently in the education space but formerly in the domestic violence/rape crisis space. I am a former foster parent. I still have connection with my kiddos. I fostered teenagers in my late twenties and early thirties, [laughs lightly] and now they are in their twenties but we're still connected as family, which is really beautiful.

What lights me up truly is radical self-care. So I am a proselytizer [laughter]. Radical self-care specifically for helpers, healers, and change makers. For me, I identify that as folks who do work with other human beings in the realm of helping, healing, or change making, whether that's, you know, as a nurse, as a social worker, as an educator, maybe even as a foster parent, or as a prosecutor or someone who does criminal justice work and is kind of connected to that world. And first responders certainly are included in that.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Just really recognizing the need for us to be protected in the work that we do. So that's what lights me up. And making sure that I am sharing that with my fellow first responders and essential workers, especially during this pandemic.

Shohreh:

Oh my gosh, yes. As someone who counts myself in that category of folks who really needs radical self-care, I was so excited to come upon your work and to see the lens that you're coming at it from. And for me, I'm a huge language nerd, so I would love to start with just that phrase itself, of radical self-care, and what you mean when you say self-care—because, of course, that can mean different things to different people—and then also, what the role of the word radical is in this context.

Nicole:

Absolutely. Yeah. The challenge for me has been the wording because I've been using the term radical self-care for about ten years now, and every few years it kind of feels like it's played out, whether it's the word radical or the word [Shohreh laughs lightly] self-care, right [laughs lightly]?

You know, for me, again, the word radical specifically means getting at the root of something or to change the very nature of something, specifically changing something away from the status quo. And I use that word very intentionally. Maybe this is in conjunction with the word self-care, but when we just talk about self-care, a lot of that feels very—whether it's super basic, like super basic hygiene, like eating, sleeping, drinking. Or, it sometimes can feel very self-centered or self-centering. As it should be. I don't have any problem with that [Shohreh laughs lightly].

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

But when I'm talking about radical self-care, what I'm talking about when I use the word self, and I was trying to articulate this recently to a friend, and what I said was, radical self-care does not mean solo. The self piece simply means it's self-directed because who better to know what you need in any moment to care for yourself than you, right? The locus of control and the agency sits with you.

And that's something that I really wanna drive home, especially for helpers, healers, and change makers. It's a responsibility that we have if we are going to do that work in the world and help other folks, whether it's holding space for them, helping guide them, helping facilitate—we cannot show up any other way but fully grounded in our radical self-care practices so that when we show up and sit across from another, what we need and all of our needs are kind of on the backburner, right? Like, when we do our radical self-care, we take care of ourselves to the point where we are no longer in the equation of the helping, healing, and change making for the other. Because I think that's where we get a lot of the burnout.

You know, it's beyond burnout, really. Our essential workers, our first responders, like, it can cause death, whether it's a health-related death or suicide. So for me, the word radical, I mean every single definition of radical. Like, we cannot continue to support the helping, healing, and change making of others to the detriment of ourselves, and I think that happens a lot.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Shohreh: And I love how you said self does not mean solo, and I'm gonna take that from you, with credit [laughs lightly]. Because that's a conversation I'm always having as well when I'm discussing and trying to explain self-trust to folks, where it's like, it doesn't mean that this is work that you have to do alone or that, you know, it's selfish in the sense that it only is gonna affect you.

Like, what I've really learned is that one, we deserve to take care of ourselves just being as humans that we are. Like, we are worthy of that. And the effect of taking care of ourselves is always gonna reach out further beyond ourselves to the other people in our lives, to our relationships, and into our work. So for folks who worry that like, oh, but if I do this, it's gonna negatively affect my work, I've usually found the exact opposite of that, where it has a much more positive effect on the work that we're doing in the world.

Nicole: Absolutely. That's why I'm not gonna let it go, right? 'Cause I get a lot of pushback, whether it's about the self-care piece or the word radical or just the focus in general. But, you know, having been a social worker for 20 years, I've burnt out three times, twice with serious health issues, including the last one where I got shingles [laughs lightly].

Shohreh: I have shingles right now, so we have that in common.

Nicole: [Laughter] Oh, sister! Ugh, yeah, it's no joke. And, you know, the first thing my doctor asked me was, is there stress in your life? And my husband and I both just started laughing, like, uncontrollably.

Shohreh: Oh god, yeah [laughs].

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Nicole: Yeah, 'cause, you know, we're not supposed to be getting shingles at our ages.

Shohreh: Right.

Nicole: So, you know, I'm not even old enough to get the shingles vaccine, so. For me, those were wake-up calls. And the first two, I didn't really know what was going on. I just knew I loved the work I was doing, and also, it was very overwhelming. You know, my first burnout was when I was a new baby social worker doing rape crisis work, and I did not connect at that time—and this is part of my radical self-care kind of sharing, is that those of us who do helping, healing, and change making work come to this work because of either we had an experience that was negative, whether it was in childhood or, you know, in our development years and we want to make sure no one else has that experience, or, we had a phenomenal experience in childhood and our developmental years and we want to make sure everyone has that experience.

But no matter how we come to this work, there's an underlying subconscious, unconscious reason why. And it usually is connected to our own childhoods. That's the piece that a lot of us do not want to think about because once we're in the space of a helper, healer, or change maker, we feel like we're not allowed to have vulnerabilities. The challenge with that, though, is I see where the hero mentality can shift very easily into a martyr mentality when we are being triggered by past events but not fully conscious of it because we feel like, oh, well that doesn't happen to me. I'm the social worker, I can't be having

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

triggering events. You know, I'm the psychologist, I can't be thinking about, you know, my past traumas when I'm working with this person.

But the reality is, we are human beings, [laughs lightly] and no matter how deep you're into your own healing, things are going to mirror your own past experiences and that will create an emotion [laughs lightly].

That doesn't stop; it's how you handle that emotion when it comes up, right? Are you projecting, then, that onto the person you're serving?

Or, are you able to notice it when it comes up and put it in its place so that you can fully be there and be present with the person you're serving?

And that was part of my first burnout was I did not fully, consciously recognize that I went into rape crisis work because of my own childhood trauma. That would seem obvious, but it really wasn't. It was something that I really kept on the periphery of my consciousness until it really just came in and said, hey girl, we need to talk [laughs lightly].

Shohreh:

It's this really beautiful thing that those of us in the human services fields can take these reasons that we come to the work and often find it easier and more intuitive to help and care for other people than to help and care for ourselves. And it's like, it's, again, great for the work, great for those who we get to be a part of their lives, but leads to, like you said, burnout, other health issues, trauma that's just, like, stewing and is maybe going to ultimately hurt your work without you realizing it because you haven't been able to address that and handle it.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

And, like you said, this martyr mentality I think is really common, where we love our clients and our patients and the people that we work with and we really want to see them do well. And we tend to put that above ourselves. And often there's a lot of pressure, I think, in these different industries too to do that and to be very selfless and, like, only really selfless people can do this. And I think that ultimately hurts us.

Nicole: Yeah. Selfless is garbage to me.

Shohreh: Yes.

Nicole: Like, you should never be selfless [laughs lightly]. Self-directed, those kinds of things, make sense. But that's the challenge, is that we get this message of being selfless, selfless, selfless. And again, for many of us, that comes during childhood. And it doesn't always have to be related to trauma, necessarily. You know, you could have a really wonderful upbringing. You know, I was just listening to your episode with Jamie Finch, I believe it was.

Shohreh: Yes.

Nicole: And you know, she talked a little bit about her evangelical upbringing. And for me, I had a similar upbringing where everything was beautiful and wonderful and great and you know, I had a wonderful childhood. And I have one ACE—one adverse childhood experience. But for me, also, that experience of growing up in a church was very much about how you always give, give, give, and you're not concerned about yourself, you just give selflessly. And if it takes you down, then that means you weren't doing it right. Or you weren't praying hard enough.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Or you weren't—right? Like, it should be something that you do, and then anything bad that happens to you from that is something that you have to deal with on your own.

Instead of recognizing that asking someone to be selfless is ridiculous 'cause it's simply not possible, unless you really want to harm that other person. So I kind of shifted and think we have to show up with our whole selves, but we just have to show up fully aware of what we bring as our full self. And then have places to put that so that when we are serving someone, you know, if a triggering comes up, we can acknowledge it and not project that onto that other person or into that other space.

And it's sometimes super, super insidious or super, super, like, subtle. But, you know, even if a client that you're working with pushes back in a certain way or makes a comment that maybe someone made to you in the past and you didn't even connect it but you just have this feeling wash over you, like, oh, I'm so annoyed by this person. Or, I can't wait until this appointment is over. Or, I'm going to hesitate to call that person because every time I talk to them they remind me of this thing. And what I find for a lot of us is we can't directly connect that, so we just kind of feel bad in general. That malaise eventually leads to burnout.

I mean, that's partly why I created my radical self-care process because I love being a social worker. I want to be a social worker for the rest of my life. And I know that the only way for me to do that is to protect

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

myself energetically, spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. And I do that through my radical self-care practice.

Shohreh:

I think that's such an important point because we lose so many people in these professions due to burnout, due to these high levels of stress, these really intense workloads, and lower pay, in many cases. And we know how important these professions are; there's a reason that we are in them in the first place. And they can just start to feel so burdensome.

So from a practical perspective, for folks who are like, yeah, that's me, I'm in that space, like, where do we go from here? 'Cause I'm sure most people would be like, yeah, you know, I do some self-care, it's fine. But you're drawing a distinction between this more, like, courageous, radical self-care and the sort of standardized self-care that we hear about more often.

Nicole:

Absolutely. Self-care is great for everybody. When I'm speaking about radical self-care, I'm specifically speaking to people whose livelihood depends on you engaging with other beings who may be dealing with oppression or any other kind of suffering and how do you hold that?

So, you know, for me, the big piece is not waiting until you burn out. And that, I think, is a fallacy in our culture where, you know, we only talk about self-care in connection to burnout, which it basically means the only time you have permission to take care of yourself is when you are, like, on the edge of death [light laughter].

Shohreh:

Right, the gas tank's already empty.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Nicole: Right, and even then, maybe you have to talk a phone call while you're in the hospital, or, you know [laughs lightly].

Shohreh: Ugh, so true.

Nicole: I mean, I wish that were a joke, but it happens more often than you'd think. So, you know, for me, like when I got shingles, I had to take two weeks off, and I got so much flack because I had to reschedule, like, a family engagement event. And, you know, it wasn't a big deal for the families, but it was—my administrator at the time was just a pain in the butt about it. And I was like, do you understand that I had shingles? You know? So we have this weird tie-in with self-care and burnout.

So for me, radical self-care is these practices that we put in place to keep ourselves kind of buoyed when a situation with burnout happens. And for me, you know, there's layers to burnout. Burnout can happen to anyone, and it's usually when your personal values are misaligned with the values of the organization that you're joined to. Whether it's, you're being asked to do things that are against your ethics or beliefs, or your skillset isn't being matched, or your workload isn't appropriate, the pay isn't appropriate, those kinds of things.

And yes, those things happen for helpers, healers, and change makers, but on a deeper level, even if all those things are fabulous, right? If you work in an organization that adores you and that thanks you every day for the work you do and pays you well and gives you bonuses and lets you go on as much vacation as you want, even with all of those things, say you had them—and if anyone out there can find a job like that,

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

please let me know [laughter]—but, you know, even when those things are not a challenge, the reality is still, you know, some of us are going into jails to do our work. Some of us are going into homeless shelters to do our work. Some of us are going into dysfunctional homes to help support the children in those homes. Some of us are in education spaces that are not doing what's right for kids, right?

So it's one of those things where I spoke recently to a group of educators who work within a jail. And just reminding them, I was like, you guys come to work every day and you're in jail. Like, you're not in a cage, but you are in a locked facility. You have to walk through those prison doors, and you are here on prison grounds for six to eight hours a day, seven days a week. That is going to have an impact on your body, on your well-being, even if all those other things are in line and are wonderful.

And that was one of the realities that I had to come to. I had a phenomenal job, but the work I was doing was so heavy, and I didn't have any outlet for it. I didn't have anywhere to put the heaviness of the work. And then, you know, when I would ask about that, the pushback I got was like, oh, you should be grateful that you have a job. Or, oh, you should be thankful that you have a good boss. Or, oh, don't you get paid well? Those things are factors in our burnout, but even those aside, right, even independent of those, the work we do can be harmful to us. And it does have a toll on our physical well-being, our emotional well-being, our spiritual well-being.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

So for me, I have kind of a few pillars of radical self-care. The first is the reality check. Being very honest about the work you do in the world, how you do it, why you do it, and the circumstances under which you do it, right? So right now, I'm currently working in education and a lot of my work is around our homeless youth in schools. Now, I can do phenomenal work. You know, there have been days where I jokingly, I'll come home and tell me husband, like, oh man, I social worked the shit out of that day [laughter].

Shohreh: I love that.

Nicole: [Laughs] I made all the connections, I made the referrals, I got this family the food they needed, I got this other family into the hotel, right? Like, I did it today. And still, my heart will hurt because I know I can't end poverty.

Shohreh: Mm yes.

Nicole: I can't end homelessness, right? Like, there's still this sense of, like, I did what I could do. And for me, that's something I literally have to say out loud: Nicole, you've done what you could do today. And I have to remind myself that's it because my worry around where this family is gonna go after this or what are they going to do when the kid graduates? And you know, that worry can become overwhelming.

And I'm also contending in the work I'm doing, even though I love it, I do good work, I'm also contending with, you know, I just saw an article about Tucker Carlson on Fox News talking about what he thinks we should do with homeless people. You know, there are always these,

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

like, societal inputs about, like, eff those people, we don't need them. We can just put 'em all on an island and burn it, you know? So there's also this, like, when you want to yell to the world, hey, do you know how many kids are homeless? And the world shouts back to you, we don't give a fuck! [Laughs lightly] That can be really harmful to us.

So within that full context, we have to be very honest about the work we do, where we do the work, again, be honest about the fact that you work in a prison or you work in a shelter or you work in a space that is maybe not physically safe or maybe not energetically safe. And part of that reality check then is also asking yourself kind of why this work? If you have skills to do any other work, why this specific work?

Then the next pillar is what I call remembering and reconnecting. And this is more of the why. What drew me to it? Because again, some of it is very unconscious, but if you ask someone and then they kind of tell you their life story, you're like, of course that's why you're a firefighter.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Nicole: Right? [Shohreh laughs lightly] Or of course that's why you're a nurse. Or of course that's why you decided to be a teacher. But for many of us, what we do, it's just our life path, so we don't notice it as obviously as someone else might. And that's part of your coaching, right, is you're reminding people of the things they don't really even see or hear about themselves that are obvious to others, but when it's yourself, you just don't pay attention to those details.

Shohreh: Absolutely.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Nicole:

So, really, why? And there's no good or bad or, you know, right or wrong way. Just, why? And again, for me, it was, oh, I became a rape crisis counselor because of my own ACE. And full disclosure, I was molested as a child, but I was able to tell my parents, they believed me, they got me the support I needed. And what I realized as I got older, later in high school I was like, that's not the case for a lot of kids who get molested or sexually abused. Sometimes they can't even tell anyone. Sometimes they're not believed if they do or they're not kept safe. And that really lit a fire in me to want to advocate for young people and I found social work as the vehicle.

I could not have articulated this to you my first five years as a social worker, and that, I think, is why my burnout was so profound. You know, I was eight hours a day sitting with survivors [laughs lightly], whether it was in a group or at a political rally or one-on-one or on a hotline or a hospital call. That was my every day. And it felt good to be doing good work in that space, but it accumulated. The triggering for me really accumulated and then kind of landed me in some health issues where I was being tested for Lupus and autoimmune diseases, my hair was falling out, I was getting rashes all over my body. All these things that I didn't pay attention to. My body was clearly trying to tell me, like, hey girl, this isn't working for us [light laughter]. And I was like, shh, it's okay, we got it. You know?

And the only way that that burnout really subsided for me was that I moved and I shifted from rape crisis to education. So for me, again, that was really remembering who I was and why I got into this work, and

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

then reconnecting to that in a very direct way. And saying okay, if this is why I came into this work and this is what drives me, what protections do I need? And how do I reconnect with myself and my, you know, we talk about our pure essence and who we were before we were messed with is kind of how I frame it. But I am empathetic. I am a giver. I am a helper. And I am a healer. And I wanna make sure that I'm doing those things because that is coming from me, not that I feel like it's expected to be a good girl or to get into heaven or to have people like me, right? Really untangling those tendencies.

A disclaimer too is, like, you can be a helper, healer, and change maker without having experienced trauma. I always wanna say that because those people in this space who are like, I didn't really have any trauma, so am I allowed to be here [laughter]? Of course you are. And you also need radical self-care [laughs].

Shohreh: Right.

Nicole: Again, remembering who we are, why we do this work, and reconnecting back to that reality. And then the next step is regulating and rebalancing.

You know, in order to be empathetic, you really do have to be somewhat attached to those you serve, right? In a way of, like, getting to know them, pulling into their life story. Not attached in, like, you're BFFs, but, like, you really do have to pull into that person's situation in order to provide the right support for them. In doing that, it impacts our regulation if we are not currently regulating ourselves.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

So what I mean by that is, you know, sometimes I'll work with a young—a student who's having a panic attack, and either I'll be called to the classroom or they'll be brought into my office. And if I'm not in a grounded state in that moment and a regulated state in that moment, I'm not gonna be able to help regulate that student. If I've come in that day and, you know, something's happened in the morning, maybe with my husband and I getting in an argument, then I'm, you know, driving and traffic is heavy, then I get into my office space and this kid comes in and I'm just not there yet, I'm not going to be able to do the work I need to do.

And co-regulation is so important in the work of helpers, healers, and change makers, but the only way we co-regulate is if we are regulated ourselves, otherwise we risk getting dysregulated to their dysregulation. And I think it's really important for us individually just to recognize, have we become regulated to dysregulation? And specifically in the work we do in our organizations. Because, again, as helpers, healers, and change makers, we have to attach to our organization. And some of our organizations will do things like, oh, we're all family, or it's a culture of "we," or, you know, those kinds of things, but then they're really a dysfunctional family.

So how can we be in those spaces and be engaged, but maintain our own regulation? Some of that comes from our, you know, really basic stuff, like breathwork. Radical self-care isn't big or heavy or even that obvious. Some of it is as simple as really focusing on our breath when we are in a space of dysregulation, whether it's our dysregulation or

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

others' dysregulation. And I've actually found this super simple, but when a student sits across from me, me just taking a slow, deep breath I notice gets them to do the same and then settle in, right? It's that mirroring. But I can't do that if I'm not regulated myself.

So it is about noticing where the dysregulation is and then being able to find tools ourselves, whether it's breathwork or physically moving our bodies or finding a different way—for me, sometimes it's shaking out. You know, after a student gets out of my space, I have to maybe shake out that experience to be able to regulate and then rebalance.

I think last year was supposed to be, but maybe this year, the year of no [light laughter]. And that's a big one too. I think as helpers, healers, and change makers, we are yes people. We want to help, so when we are asked to help we wanna say yes. And it's very, very hard for us to say no. And everything I'm speaking of is very personal to me, but I've also heard these things echoed to me by my colleagues over the last 20 years. The risk of saying no, to us, we assume, might mean that person doesn't get the support they need, that person doesn't get the housing they need, that person doesn't get the hearing they need, right? So oftentimes we take a lot of that on ourselves.

But with rebalancing, I really talk about this concept of, we can care for people without carrying for them or carrying them. And that's a piece for me I literally have to say out loud sometimes, is I can care for someone without carrying them. And what that means is I will provide the resources within my scope of service,, and then I have to let it be. I have to really leave that where it is and know that I've done the best.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

And sometimes what that looks like is me doing that and then driving home and crying myself home and simply repeating the mantra: I can care, but I can't carry this.

And that's a big part of rebalancing our energy, of being able to say, when I'm at work, I'm at work and I'm fully present and grounded and regulated, and then I leave work at work. And that has been my biggest challenge as a social worker. And I do think that's the case for a lot of folks. It's hard to leave work and not have a student, a family, a child, a coworker, someone you're working with on your heart, and that's simply because we're empathetic humans that do this work. And we have to have psychic boundaries around our empathetic energy or we will get sucked dry.

So the next pillar is ritual and rhythm, and it's simply to recognize that there are rhythms in our bodies whether we're at work or in other spaces. And for me, it's really been about noticing how different the rhythms are depending on where I am. So, for example, when I have to go to court with a family, I can feel a certain vibration in my body. And then once I'm done with court, that vibration subsides.

I used to not be aware of what that was and I just would feel crappy after a court date, or really horrible after a certain meeting, or, you know, engaging with certain people on certain topics. And for me, it took investigating that, really, to say, okay, I'm feeling kind of weird right now. Where is that coming from? Oh, I was just in a meeting where this woman said something that was something to the effect of, oh, well, you know, there's two sides to every story, and that kind of

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

triggered me and that's why I'm feeling this way. Or, oh, I was just sitting in court and while the case that I had to handle wasn't a big deal, the case before us, you know, the attorney reacted in a very abrupt way and that kinda triggered me and that's why I'm feeling this way.

Because we can't do anything until we understand where it's coming from, and that's part of that rooted piece of radical, right? That we have to be able to really get to the root of what is dysregulating to us or what is discomforting to us before we can do anything about it. And that's where that rhythm comes in.

And with ritual, you know, that's how we create a container for this work. And when you talk about ritual in general, people talk about morning ritual or evening ritual routines. And for me, a morning routine and an evening routine or ritual are very important, but for me, it's more about separating my psychic space. So when I go to work in the morning, when I park in the lot, I take a few deep breaths with my car turned off. I think in my brain about the two to three things I absolutely need to get done that day. Of course, like many of your listeners, I have a 20 million item to-do list.

Shohreh: [Laughs lightly] Yep.

Nicole: But what are the three things, right [laughs lightly], and then I take a few deep breaths, and then I go into my office. Then I have a few rituals in my office as far as, like, making my coffee with the coffee maker, or like sitting down and looking through a certain email first before I do this thing, blah, blah, blah.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Um, but then also having that same ritual when I leave work. So when I leave work and I park at home, before I leave my car and come into my home, I take a few deep breaths. I think about a highlight of my day, whether it's related to my to-do list or not. And then I also think about okay, what didn't work so great today or what do I need to continue tomorrow, right? So, like, oh, I didn't get to make that one phone call, but I'll do that tomorrow. And then I take a few deep breaths and I leave it in my car and I walk into my home. And then when I'm at home, my concentration is on my family.

That's an ongoing practice for me, and that took a long time because it felt more self-important to be on all the time for work. I'm dependable. I'm the person you can call at 7pm and I'll answer. I'm the person you can call on a Sunday and I'll answer. Not anymore. I have a very clear boundary around my time. You don't have to be rude about those things, but for me, my ritual and my kind of rebalancing of that is I tell the people I work with, you can call me anytime. You can call or text me anytime, but I will only respond between the hours of 8am and 6pm during the week.

And people appreciate that. They know, like, if it's on their mind and they want to call me on a Saturday and leave a message 'cause there's something they don't want to forget for Monday, great. But they know I'll respond Monday after 8am. And that's been really helpful for me, to create that space, but also, I think, helpful for my clients to recognize that I'm not available all the time and there will be times when they have to think of a solution for themselves, right? It almost forces that

Conjuring Up Courage #122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

agency for them. But it gives me the space. And part of that ritual has been to really create that space.

And then finally, it's rest and reclaim. And these are, again—rest is a thing that a lot of helpers and healers and change makers do not believe we deserve or we don't believe there's time for it. And the older I get, [laughs lightly] the more I realize that that is complete BS and that is purely ingested capitalism. That hustle, the go, to constantly be on, the feeling that you might be missing something if you're not on, the saying no and being able to rest and reclaim your time, and really reclaim how you show up for your work is really important for helpers, healers, and change makers. Because we can be kind of sucked dry of our help and of our support.

And I also know this about us, is that many of us who do this work for a day job, for a living, also end up doing this work in our own families of origin, right? Like, I am the social worker in my family. [Light laughter] I'm sure you are the healer or the coach in your family as well. That's another piece that kind of erases separation for us. But we do have to be very aware of that as well.

Well, it's funny with my family 'cause sometimes, you know, they'll come to me and ask me for things, but if I ever initiate, hey, have you thought about this? I get the pushback of, don't social work me. [Shohreh laughs lightly] And I'm like, oh, okay. But really being able to separate and delineate, like, personal time, family time, from my work availability time.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

So, you know, I know that's a lot, but ultimately it's about the reality check of what is currently happening, how is it working or not for you, why this specific work. And then the remembering who we are, why we come to this work, and reconnecting back to our true essence. Staying as regulated as we are able to and rebalancing some of that energy, whether it's physical energy, emotional energy, psychic energy. Pulling into rituals and rhythms.

And this part is also where, for me, like, sound healing has been a huge part of my healing process, of, you know, recognizing how to work with vibrations and shift them, really. 'Cause there was just a lot that I had been holding on. And your body will vibrate at a rate and you don't notice until it stops. And I realized this when I was doing rape crisis work. Once I stopped and literally gave my two weeks' notice, all my health issues cleared up. Like, my doctor was like, wait, what did you do? I'm like, oh, I quit my job [light laughter].

Shohreh: Funny how that works.

Nicole: Yeah, right? A prescription for that. But it was my body was vibrating in a certain way, and then when I stopped, that vibration ceased. And it was a really beautiful thing and I hadn't noticed that welling up in my body until I released it. But what I really need to do now is recognize it in the moment and not get to a point of burnout, right? So I'm resourcing myself this whole time.

Now, it doesn't mean burnout won't come, and if it does, it doesn't mean we're a failure. We just simply have to realign and rebalance

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

again, and kind of go back to that framework and say, wait a minute, something's off again, how do I get back? And that's a challenge. The reality check alone is a challenge [Shohreh laughs lightly]. 'Cause we don't want to admit we need help, right? It's a challenge.

Shohreh:

Right. And thank you so much for walking through those pillars because they're really beautiful. I'm a fan of pillars [Nicole laughs lightly]. I have pillars of self-trust for how I explain my work as well. And there's plenty of parallels between yours and mine, particularly that, you know, my first pillar of self-trust is this area of consciousness practices. It's the awareness piece of, we can't do anything until we are willing to sit with what is actually going on in our minds and in our bodies and our lives. And that piece is really hard. Just doing that, without making any changes, is extremely difficult for folks to get into that work. And so I do think it's helpful to have kind of an organizational structure that's like, yes, there's different options here and things that you can focus on and it's not just one way to do this.

And you also mentioned the employment situation. And I wanted to say too, as someone who is self-employed, I also see this all the time with folks who work for themselves and the ways that we put these restrictions and requirements on ourselves even though we're in charge. Technically, we can do whatever we want, but we still have all of these pressures of the industries that we're in, the clients that we work with, and just the capitalism that we have all taken on throughout our lives that push on us.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

I think the one advantage is that, you know, for me over the years, is I have realized a lot of the things you were talking about, I have the power to make those changes. I don't have to go through an employer or my boss or colleagues to make those changes. It's really my own internal work that I have to push through to say, alright, I'm gonna make this change in my life. So that is one of the nice advantages. But I think regardless of employment situation, if you're in these spaces, like you said, helpers, healers, change makers, you're gonna experience this stuff.

I also love what you said about—your mantra of, like, you can care for people without carrying them. Because I think so often in this work, if you get too invested in the ultimate outcome, if you hold that as being your responsibility, like, you're just gonna constantly be sad and frustrated and disappointed because there's only so much that we can control in this. Like, we can do our very best and show up, and like you said, social work the shit out of it, coach the crap out of it, and still, because of that person or their circumstances or a million other things, it may not go what we think is the ideal outcome for that individual or that family. And that can take a really long time to come to terms with, in my experience. It took me years to really be able to let go of the outcome is not in my control; all I can control is how I show up.

Nicole:

A million percent yes. And that's a challenge for those of us in the social services because we are measured by our outcomes. And, you know, ask any teacher, they are measured by their outcomes. Now, for me, you know, I love data, I'm a data nerd. I think it's really important to

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

understand what data tells us and what it doesn't. But one of the pieces for me is really just recognizing, like, we are responsible for the outcomes in—you know, we need to be prepared to say, this is what I'm working towards for this person, right? But also recognizing that there are a million other factors.

So one of the things I share with my colleagues is you didn't create the trauma that this person is bringing, and it is not your job to fix it all. And just remembering, too, that, and I think you've mentioned this in a few of your podcasts, this concept of really active listening and really deep listening. You know, reminding people that we *are* the intervention. Simply being in the presence of someone else and listening to them share what their challenges are, that alone, I've found, can be a huge intervention and can be really helpful because people just hear themselves as they speak. Whether you say a word or not, right? Just for them to be able to unload and have someone hold that space for them, that's a huge intervention. And that's one—again, this radical stuff doesn't have to be a big, fancy, loud thing. Oftentimes, it's the very subtle, quiet, small things, but it's a lot of those things.

So showing up regulated, grounded, centered. Being a person who is doing active and deep listening for that person. Really even asking them how they wanna solve that problem. Because oftentimes, people come with the answers, they've just, you know, it's hidden under crap. It's hidden under expectations. It's hidden under titles or boxes that we put people in.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

But I find this a lot with teenagers. When I ask them for the solution, you know, certainly assuming it's not like straight-up poverty or violence [Shohreh laughs lightly] or something big, other than, like, I'll quit school and go get a job. No, not a solution [light laughter]. But when it is truly, like, an interpersonal issue or a mental health challenge, oftentimes they will say, like, I need this, or I need to be able to do this, or it would be great if I got some of this. So really giving the space for that.

And the only way we can give the space for that is if we recognize, you know, kind of, again, we are fully aware of everything we are bringing to the table, which means then that we don't have to worry about it and it's not gonna creep in unconsciously. So we just show up and become that intervention without it being overwhelming and it being a super simple thing to come into.

But I think the challenge for a lot of folks is the work that we do feels very important, and it is, and it feels like we can't stop or things will move backward, right? And I'm sure as an entrepreneur and as self-employed you feel that constantly, right? If you're not on, it's not just that things stop, but it's like things slide backward. And we get that a lot in these fields as well, of, like, if you take a day off, what's gonna happen to all the people that you're serving? Well, they'll just have to wait 24 hours for me to get back to them, right? [Shohreh laughs lightly] But we're constantly kind of put under this pressure of, like, no, you have to be on all the time 'cause you're needed. And it's sometimes accurate, but pulling back a little bit from that and recognizing, like,

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

where we're most effective, how we can show up in that way, I think that's super, super important.

But recognizing too, that like, our workplaces dictate a lot of that. You know, you talked about being kind of a solo entrepreneur. But for some people, that can be really empowering and helpful and for other people that can be really overwhelming and they want to be connected to say, a school district. They feel as like, okay, I don't have to worry about the employment piece or the money coming in, I can really focus on the agency with the people I serve. But then that can become a stress.

So this does apply to people who are doing their own thing in the world as well, of really being able to show up and notice what's going on for you and then give yourself the care that you know you need. Without it shifting into, like, woe is me. That's why I'm keeping the radical in this, because it's really easy to push this aside and say, no, no, no, I have to be available all the time and I have to give everything to this thing. Really being able to put it in its place and recognize it.

If we, to your point initially, is that there are people who leave these professions because it gets overwhelming. And that's a detriment to all of us. Like, when there are fewer nurses and fewer teachers, as we are going to see a shortage of social workers, nurses, and educators in the next 20 to 50 years. And I would even say in the next five to ten years, quite frankly, given the way this pandemic is shaking people out.

Shohreh:

Right. Yeah, absolutely.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Nicole:

And part of that, again, to go back to your original piece is about the outcomes. We are held accountable to outcomes that are not within our control. Educators are held to test scores. You know, anyone in their right mind knows that a kid taking a test is not just about that kid and what that teacher has taught them. It's about, did they even eat breakfast that morning? Did they get a good night's sleep? Are their parents encouraging them or are their parents like, oh, you're so stupid, you're gonna fail that test? Right? Like, there's so many factors to those outcomes and yet we are—some of us, our jobs are dependent on those outcomes.

And I just remind people that not only are we the intervention, but when we show up grounded, centered, regulated, and present for those we serve, the time that we spend with them is a—I always say we're kinda like putting a little deposit in their bank, right? Like, it's not lost, it's not a nothing. It still is adding to their well-being and their support. And that's something that's really challenging because we feel like we have to come in and save the day.

I'm not going to find a family that I'm working with a house that they can afford in the Bay Area. That's just something that's not within my control. What I can do is make sure that family knows that they're not alone in their challenge of finding housing. I can provide emergency support for a hotel stay or a voucher. There are things I can do to mitigate. But, like, if I'm being judged by the outcome of getting this family permanent housing, I'm gonna fail every time.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

So it's just really remembering that. We are supposed to be focused on the outcomes and we are responsible for doing the work towards them, but I think you're absolutely right. We have to recognize that there are so many other factors for that person or for that group or for whoever we are serving. It's like an attachment to the work and to making sure we're doing it well, but a secured detachment from the outcomes.

And I see that very clearly in schools. You know, I work with kids who, if I was just judged on their well-being for one school year, I would fail. But if you really look at, oh, I worked with that kid when they were a ninth grader and now they're graduating with honors. Like, this is a kid that was living in an RV and was skipping school because they felt they needed to work, and I was able to support that family enough that four years later that kid is graduating on time and with honors, right? Like, nobody is asking me about that outcome. They just are focused on the fact that in his ninth grade year he got all F's, right?

So we have to be able to expand that view of our outcomes. Again, just our little drops in that ripple is kind of the way I think of it. I'm throwin' some drops in that ripple for that person and that's really all I can do. I can't do everything. I can't be everything.

Shohreh:

I talk about seeds a lot, about how a lot of my work and the work of healers in general is that we are planting seeds. And sometimes, we get the privilege of watching those grow and bloom, like, right in front of our eyes. And that's such a magical feeling and it really helps bolster the work that we're doing. Sometimes, we never see the outcome of those seeds. We don't know if they're gonna grow and bloom later.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

But a lot of times, they do. And it can be years later. And if you've been doing the work long enough, you've probably had people who have come back to you later to say, hey, by the way, I was not in the place for what you were trying to teach me at the time I was with you, but now four years later, I've found it so impactful and it's been really helpful and it's changed my life.

Like, every time I have those moments, those are even more special to me than the ones I see in front of my eyes because it just shows the impact you can have on people over time. And that some of this stuff is really complex, and there's all these other factors at play, and it just takes time, you know? You may only get to work with someone for a year, or you know, for the school year. If you get someone as a ninth grader, maybe you're gonna get them for that full four years, but that impact could be felt when they're in college or late into their thirties.

For me, I work with people usually six months to a year at a time, and so a lot of times I see a lot of wonderful growth in that time, and many, many of those things they're gonna be mulling over and thinking about years into the future and may have the most impact then. And so, you know, I used to be way more hard on myself about, like, ugh, it feels like I didn't really take this person from the point A to point B that they wanted. But I did plant seeds. And I'm confident that, you know, it's in there somewhere and if they need it or want it, they'll be able to cultivate that at a later time.

Nicole:

Absolutely. And that is so important for us to remember, is that we are planting those seeds even when it feels like they're not being planted.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

And, you know, especially as someone who works with young people, I love teenagers, but, you know, sometimes they will literally just roll their eyes or deep sigh and you're like, ugh. But then years later, you hear them giving the same advice to a friend, or, you know [light laughter], and you're like, wait a minute, you mean you heard me?

Shohreh: Where did you hear that? [Laughter]

Nicole: And you didn't tell me that I was brilliant! No. But, you know, kind of all joking aside, it's not a Lifetime movie. Like, things don't get wrapped up very nicely in, you know, I jokingly say Law & Order SVU, I used to watch a lot of that when I was a rape crisis counselor and part of it was because everything got wrapped up within an hour [laughter]. I mean, you got justice and the person got what they needed, and I never saw that in my work.

That was actually one of the things that I used to do for self-care was watch a lot of those kinds of shows because that was the cathartic release for me of like, wow, that perpetrator actually got, you know, sentenced to jail, because in real life that doesn't happen. But I also had to realize in using that as self-care that it was actually harming me. Like, absorbing all of that trauma all the time, even if it was, you know, good acting and a good outcome. And I still have to do that, you know. Netflix murder docs are, like, my thing [light laughter], and also I have to recognize, like, sometimes that's not what I need to be putting into my body after working in doing similar work. So the tools we use for radical self-care can change.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

So, you know, sometimes, it used to be for me doing a lot of knitting as a way of kind of releasing some of that stress. And I don't knit anymore, but I know people who do, and that, for them, is a really wonderful, radical self-care tool. And actually, I will say, I wanna share with your listeners, knitting was one of the ways I came into fully understanding radical self-care, specifically the rhythm piece.

When I was a rape crisis counselor, we had to attend conferences every year, and it was usually a federal SAMSA or Violence Against Women Act conference. You had to pick different sessions to go to for a three-day conference, and every session was related to sexual assault, rape, or domestic violence, understandably so.

There was one session—and you know, they'd have the breakout sessions and then they'd have the big group session with everyone in the big hall—and there was one time when I was in the big hall, it was a conversation, actually, ironically, about, it was prosecutors who had worked on the Kobe Bryant case in Colorado who were sharing with us basically how the victims were treated, which wasn't wonderful, in a way of letting us know, as advocates, how to advocate for, you know, our victims, survivors, when we do the work. So it was a really, really heavy session.

And I remember looking into the back of the conference room and seeing, like, a row of, like, five or six older women, all older—and, you know, I was in my twenties, so they were probably in their late forties [laughter]. As someone who is in my forties now, I'm like, oh yeah, they weren't old [laughter].

Conjuring Up Courage #122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

Shohreh: I think about that all the time now.

Nicole: Right? Yeah, like, when I said old. So older women for me, at the time, and they were all in the back row knitting. And I remember thinking, you know, my 20-something-year-old self, oh my gosh, that is so rude. They're in the back of this big conference room just knitting and not even paying attention to the speaker. These people have put in so much time and effort and they're being so disrespectful.

And then I remember asking one of the women who I realized was from my state, I asked her later, I was like, oh, what are you making? And it was a quilt of some kind. And I said, you know, I noticed you guys were knitting in the back of the room while this general session was happening. What was that about? And basically, she told me—and this was a woman who had been in rape crisis work for about 15 years at that time, which is a long time—and she said, "The only way for me to digest this traumatic content is to be doing something active with my hands. Like, so, for me, right now, it's knitting, and I can knit without paying attention to my purling and my knitting, so I can listen to what's being said without fully absorbing it, and it's sort of like a protection for my body."

Shohreh: Wow.

Nicole: And I was just like, oh, wow. And, you know, that is, healthy disassociation and really conscious disassociation is a way of balancing our energy when we do this work. Of recognizing when we need to be

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

able to pull away a little bit and protect ourselves and kind of put a little buffer there.

And that's something that I've taken away from them, and whenever I'm sitting in a space where I'm absorbing traumatic content, I try to do something with my hands, whether it's doodling, or knitting, or, you know, sometimes it'll just be using a fidget. There's real science to that and it really does help. I can hear more and absorb more without my body becoming dysregulated.

And that was something that, again, I hadn't noticed for years, where I was going to these conferences and then I would come home and my partner and I would get into all these petty little arguments, and I'd realize, oh, that's because I'm bringing the energy of this conference and all of the dysregulation that it brought up in me, I'm bringing it home. Like, I didn't even pay attention to what was happening, and now it's just, my partner is having to deal with it.

Shohreh:

I'm literally playing with a fidget toy right now, so, um [laughs], I'm a big fan of them [Nicole laughs lightly]. I have ADHD as well, so I always need to be doing something with my hands in order to really fully absorb things. And it makes sense that when taking in traumatic information, in particular, that anyone, regardless of, you know, neurodiverse or neurotypical, that would be a helpful thing to be able to do that.

'Cause, yeah, like you said, something like doodling or if you have been knitting for a long time so it's second nature to you, it's like, it's a thing

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

that your hands can do without you having to really actively pay attention to it. So even though that initial reaction from someone might be like, oh, that's so rude, you're not paying attention, the reality is for a lot of people, it helps them pay more attention.

Nicole:

Absolutely. Again, I was very naïve when I started my social work journey. And, you know, when you're in your twenties you think you know everything [Shohreh laughs], so I was like oh my gosh, they're so rude. You know, I got schooled. And these were older women, some of them Indigenous or women of color, who, they knew what they were doing. And they knew the only way to be in this work long-term. And it is necessary for some of us.

You know, a lot of agencies right now, their seniority is only like, five years. And the challenge for us in making real change in the world is that when there's turnover and people leaving the profession, the knowledge is not held. And I see this all the time in education; we get into a three-year cycle and things are moving phenomenally, and then the superintendent or the assistant superintendent or someone at a high level leaves, and then a new person comes in and we start all over again. Because that person who left held everything themselves. You know, there was no systematizing of it, so that person leaves and all that knowledge leaves.

That's less in education, you know, there are people who have been teaching for 20, 30 years, but that's starting to become a thing in education where people are leaving after five, six, seven years. And in the social service world, it's even lower. I mean, I work kind of closely

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

with our Department of Children and Family Services, and, you know, at one point, they had a 70% turnover rate where they would hire someone, train them, they would work for six months and get burnt out and leave. And they were saying, like, their seniority used to be, like, 12 years or more, and now it's at four years. Someone with four years' experience is a senior social worker. And that's just crazy.

And the challenge is change cannot be made if we are constantly, like, recreating the wheel, and oof, we do that so often in the helping, healing, and change making world.

Shohreh:

Yes, that is very true. We lose out on so much of the wisdom and experience from folks who are just like, I have to get the fuck out, you know, I can't be here. I don't want to engage with this anymore. And so radical self-care, making sure that that's something that we're prioritizing can be a way of having more of that longevity.

And just what you said too, even just practically speaking, the systematizing—like, we need more of that. And I think that goes with that martyr mentality, too, of, like, I have to hold everything and do it on my own. And it's like, no, if we collaborate and we share and we save things in Google Drive or wherever, all of those little things are very helpful over time so that that information isn't lost and it doesn't die with you. Or, not die with you, hopefully you're not dying, but when you leave your profession, you know, retire [Nicole laughs].

Nicole:

Well, unfortunately, that's, again, why I will not back off of radical because our work is radical. Our work—those of us who are doing this

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

serious work is to make radical change, otherwise why are we doing it? And the challenge is many of us are not only burning out, but we are dying, we are taking ourselves out.

And that was one of the impetuses for me. I am writing a book on radical self-care for 2023, and the reason that I just sat down and wrote my kind of book proposal was because in the summer of 2019, the NYPD, New York Police Department, they saw ten suicides over a three-month period. And those suicides were of, you know, rookie police officers and also veterans and retired folks. And for many of them, their family members pushed back to say they've been asking for help and they've been told, like, they're weak for asking for help. Or, you know, one of the wives of one of the NYPD officers was like, you know, my husband has witnessed so many horrible things; he never had anywhere to put 'em. He has gotten to a point in his life where he is so overwhelmed by the evil in the world, because that's all you see as an officer, right, he had to escape.

And while there aren't good statistics for educators or social workers, we do have anecdotal evidence that suicide rates are going up for them as well. But we know first responders, police and fire, have very high suicide rates, and it's partly because of what they witness in their work. And then the other part of it is how they're held in society, right? When you are doing work that no one else wants to do, like, you're the one showing up with the dead bodies, and you're also getting from society, like, you suck, you're a pig, right?

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

I will be very clear on my politics: I am very much a defund the police person because we do need to invest in social services. And, I also recognize that police officers are human beings who go into policing, most of them, with good intentions to help support their communities. But what they are exposed to, they are not prepared for. They're being exposed to things that most of us would never even imagine. And maybe we see it on TV, but being there in person is very different. And then they're also not getting the societal support.

This happens with teachers, right, in different periods, especially right now. Teachers are kind of being shit on, quite frankly, but they are the ones in the classroom with your kids all day every day, with 30 kids, taking it all from the parents, from other teachers, from the administrators, right, doing good work, and then coming out into the public and people saying, teachers don't know anything! Or, don't teach this thing! Or, you're stupid, you can't do this! Or, we don't care about your health, get the kids back in school!

The challenge is being able to do our work in a way that doesn't kill us. That is not a small thing, and that's why I stay with the radical. If our work is radical enough to push us to that brink, then our self-care practices have to be just as radical to help that.

And I will just straight up speak to anyone who is feeling overwhelmed in their work: quitting and doing something completely different is also radical self-care. So I don't want to send the message that people just need to suck it up and do better self-care to stay in work they really don't want to be in.

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

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It's funny when I'm asked to come in and do self-care presentations in agencies, and one of the things I do say is like, if this agency is not supporting your well-being, you know, it is radical self-care to quit and do something else. And you can see the managers' eyes get really big [Shohreh laughs]. You don't want people to be working for you who aren't there 100%. And if you can't be there 100%, it is not a failure on your part. It simply means, this work is too much for me. And I don't mean too much in a judgmental way, but simply, it is. It's too much for me. I'm gonna use my skills in a different way. And that's beautiful.

But the only way to do that is, again, if we are doing that radical self-care to be able to say, oh, okay, this isn't working for me anymore. I still want to do this work. I still want to connect with young people. Or, I still wanna, like you, I still wanna help facilitate wellness for people, but I can't do it as a nurse. So maybe I will do it as a coach. Or maybe I will go into something completely different where I can still use my skills. I do want to just put that out there for all my fellow helpers, healers, and change makers.

And also pivoting to a different way of doing work. You know, I'm always going to be a social worker, but I couldn't always do rape crisis. I had eight solid years of rape crisis, now I'm in education. I don't know if I'll stay in education for the rest of my social work career; maybe I'll go into hospital social work. Or maybe I'll become a coach for other social workers, right? Like, there's so many options. It's important just to remember quitting and doing something completely different can be radical self-care [laughs lightly].

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

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Shohreh: Yeah, I mean, I left my career as a lawyer to do what I'm doing now, so I am a huge advocate for that. And I also know how difficult it can feel when you've invested education and time and money and, you know, prestige, all these things that are factors that were weighing on me when I was trying to decide whether I wanted to leave that career. And ultimately, thankfully, had the awareness to be like, I am not happy. I can't envision being happy anywhere in this career. You know, 'cause a lot of people were like, oh, why don't you just switch to a different firm or a different kind of law? And, like, I knew myself well enough to know that that wasn't the right choice for me, even though I've had a lot of friends do that and that ultimately made them want to stay in the law.

I was like, turns out, even though I've invested a lot into this, sunk costs! It doesn't matter. I don't want to do this. And the sooner that I realized that and switch to doing something else, the better off I will be, the better off my mental health will be. And kind of like you were saying with the body frequency, like, mine changed completely when I left that job as well. Where I was like, yes, my body was telling me what it needed, and I followed it even though it was hard, and ultimately, like, ended up in a better place.

And, of course, running my own business has had plenty of its own challenges and overwhelming and, like, who knows if I will do this for the rest of my life either, I could do something totally different. But I think so many of us have skills and abilities that can be wonderful in different areas, and we box ourselves in and think just because we

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

chose this and put time into it we have to keep doing it, and that could not be further from the truth.

Nicole: Absolutely, and thank you for sharing that. Because yeah, I don't doubt for a minute that you use your legal skills in the work that you do now.

Shohreh: Constantly.

Nicole: Yeah. You know, so it's not necessarily about the location that you're doing it in or who you're serving, it's more of the skills that you gain. And, you know, as a social worker, it's about listening skills, it's about observation skills, it's about connection skills, like really being able to connect—understand what someone is needing and connect them with that resource. That can be done in any occupation.

So I do really encourage my fellow helpers, healers, and change makers to take stock of their own skills and their gifts, quite frankly, and just recognize the best space for you to be in. For me, I have had to quit jobs that were killing me. Because one of my school district jobs, there was so much racial tension in the city and in the town, you know, anything I did, they would write an expose in the local paper about it [laughs lightly]. Yeah, it was really weird. And I loved that work, I loved the students I got to work with, but I recognized, like, if I stay here, I will get sick to the point of having a stroke or heart attack. That's a very real risk with some of the folks that we work with.

So, you know, and I even know nurses who have strokes and heart attacks because they're so overwhelmed, and that's ridiculous. You're in a healthcare field that does not care about your health? That's obscene

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

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to me. We have to be able to do that work for ourselves. It has to be self-directed. If we wait for a system, an organization, a corporation to prioritize our well-being, we're gonna be waiting for a while. And that's sometimes the pushback I get is like, no, self-care, that's not the answer, that's blaming individuals for their stuff. We need to do the systems change.

Let me just tell you, the only way systems change is when individuals change those systems because systems are just groups of people doing the same things that have been done forever. The only way to change systems is if individuals stay in the work long enough to make that change. And that's what I'm trying to affect with radical self-care. I see too much turnover and burnout and death among helpers, healers, and change makers, and I see the impact to the change we want to make. What I recognize is the more we can stay in and do this work in a way that we're not just surviving it, but truly thriving, that is the only way that we are going to both hold ourselves in that space but also actually change systems.

Because systems are inertia. Even if, like, we throw a rock in it, the rock is eventually going to come out and the system is going to go right back to what it was. We need to throw so many rocks into that system that it simply just cannot work the same way again. And the challenge is the rock throwers are burning out [laughs lightly].

Shohreh:

Well, I think that is the perfect note to end on, Nicole. Thank you so much for being here and for sharing your expertise on this. This is such an important topic, especially right now with the pandemic and

Conjuring Up Courage

#122

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Nicole Steward

everything that's been going on. I think more than ever, we all need to be adopting these radical self-care practices. So thank you again.

Nicole: Yes. Thank you so much for the work that you've put out into the world as well and for this wonderful conversation. I really appreciate it.

Shohreh: Thank you. And how can people find you? And how can my listeners best support you at this time?

Nicole: Oh, I love that question. Folks can find me on Instagram @love_ethic_yoga, love ethic yoga, or they can just look up Nicole Steward. I have a podcast, but I will tell you, I have not recorded in two years [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Actually, my last episode was April of 2020 [laughs].

Shohreh: Well, that says something right there.

Nicole: Right? Yeah, it's a point in time. But I will be reviving that. But one of my most listened to episodes is the one specifically on caring versus carrying. So the Steward Project Podcast on any—wherever you find your podcasts, and I will be re-recording and adding back to that after my hiatus. And then certainly people can find me on my website at www.radical-tendencies.org. And I would love to hear from any of your listeners if they are interested in more information or have more insights as well. 'Cause your listeners are probably a lot of helpers, healers, and change makers among them, so very excited about this.

Shohreh: Yes, so many. And I will put links to all of that in the show notes to make it easy for people to find, and I know you also gave me your

Conjuring Up Courage #122

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Venmo as well so I will include that in the show notes for folks. If you got something out of this, you want to pay it back to Nicole, that will be available to you to do that.

Nicole: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Shohreh: Wonderful. Thank you.

[Music plays]

And that's our show for today. If you're enjoying Conjuring Up Courage, don't forget to subscribe through your podcast provider of choice so you never miss an episode. Additionally, if you haven't left a rating and review in the Apple Podcasts app yet, you can do so from any Apple device to help more people find and benefit from the show. I also love hearing from listeners, so feel free to take a screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. My username is @ShohrehDavoodi on all platforms. Finally, you can sign up for my email newsletter, The Sunday Share, and get more details about how to work with me by going to ShohrehDavoodi.com. Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]