

EP124

Elaine Lou Cartas: Hi. I'm a recovering high achiever. Addicted to chaos work stress. I used to work whether as a kid, as homework or as an adult work, work to just avoid doing things. Yeah, I'm being honest. 'cause growing up in an household, ugh. I hate to admit it, I didn't wanna do chores, so I told my parents I need to do homework and I always got away with it.

A way to escape. And when there are problems, issues in my life, I would nose dive straight into work. So I also didn't have to deal with it because it was the one thing I could escape to, could control. 'cause I can't control other people and I. It's ironic 'cause I started this business and I left working for somebody else 'cause I wanted to finally rest.

But then what happened when, deal with your inner demons, AK go to therapy and heal? Well, I created this monster of a business back in 2017, but it wasn't until 2021 when I woke up and I just, I couldn't anymore. I couldn't just continue to hustle and work. And it's sad because. That year, 2021, it took both my grandmothers who passed away to realize life is more than just work.

And my identity was based off of that success, straight A's awards, all this stuff. Oh, Elaine, you're such a good worker, hard worker. Oh, loved all of that. That was like reward systems. And I had to redefine happiness and success. Honor what enough is, and a week ago I just came back. I know I'm going all personal.

It's Elaine, this is a deep intro. It's look, you read the tunnel of this episode, you knew what you were gonna get yourself into, so blame yourself. Anyways, a week ago, I just came back from Philippines celebrating my niece's wedding. And my anniversary with my partner for eight years went back to my favorite island.

Highly recommend Alito in Pala and Philippines. Last time I was there, I was with my family for four days, and that was back in 2014. So coming back there the second time, 2025, I knew coming back I needed to go longer, seven days, and it was enough. Compared to the four days, I felt like for the four days I went there with my family.

The first time in 2014, it was rushed and observing. And yes, I'm an American, Filipino American. It was interesting seeing fellow American tourists versus European tourists 'cause. Oh, what do you think? Seeing American tourists, they tried to put all the excursions and activities together within four days, like all packed.

The Europeans I'm gonna do an excursion and I'm just gonna hang out by the pool on the beach all day. And it was weird because. That's how we planned it. But my American I need to hustle, do things like, why don't we have a packed agenda? It was just like one activity we would do and then just chill and relax and I'm so glad we did that.

My nervous system needed that. And coming back from that trip, I just came back a little over a week ago and when we came back, that's when the World Series started. I'm from la. I'm a Dodgers fan of course, because from here. And I felt like I haven't rested, but I came in this mindset of how can I take away from my vacation, continue it on.

So coming back at Q4, the busiest quarter, usually for my business, I was supposed to go to a conference in Miami, decided not to, 'cause I'm already going to Dubai for a speaking engagement. Then there was all these other events I planned to go to paid, decided, do I really need to go? Why am I just going because.

I'm just being busy and I realize it's an addiction, that I'm still unlearning and my time and energy is so much more important than money. I feel like I'm blabbing, but I feel like just even sharing the self-awareness I've had from my past to this vacation, to unlearning things from my business to learning to embrace enough and.

You could see how like I have learned my relationship with chaos and to embrace peace and being boring. I know that's weird. So maybe this, if you're resonating with everything I'm saying, 'cause I'm all over the place this episode's for you. 'cause maybe you are burnt out, maybe you are done achieving everything and you just want your life back.

So in this episode, I don't just share. My personal stories that you resonate with, but also the science behind it. If you don't know this, I majored got my Bachelor's in cognitive sciences, so I'll talk about the science of why you're addicted to chaos. I'm wanting more busyness and what you can do to move forward for more peace and calmness and boring is good.

So now grab your coffee tea Boba, and let's drop the beat.

Okay. We. They'd be like, Elaine, your podcast, they just resonate with me so much, and you wanna know how I plan my content. I plan my content based off of conversations I have with my clients. I'm like, okay, what is a topic my clients have been sharing with me? And it's interesting, even before Philippines, when I went on vacation to even coming back, there's been a shift.

I feel like the shift has happened more so since elections of last year, and we're about. I am recording this on the eve of elections for this year in 2025. So by the time this comes out, elections have already passed, but I already voted. And for those that don't know, I used to work in political campaigns 'cause I'm very grateful for what this country has given me and my family to go from poverty to.

Surviving, providing and thriving. So here's why I decided to do this podcast. I work with high achievers, primarily women of color. I have allies who I work with. What matters is that we share similar values, and it's been interesting and liberating that every single one of my clients I'm working with now, they're just.

Done climbing, improving. They want this permission to just be, not get stressed and let that consume and take over and have life beyond work. And sure, yes, I do work with clients who wanna get to their next level. Just so recently, I, I helped a client with being a partner, but. As they get to the next level, I'm saying air quotes next level, but not at the expense of their piece, and we discover and have this conversation together.

Also, I don't wanna equate. Quote unquote, next level to working harder. And just a reminder, I always need to give this warning. I am not a therapist, so if you need further support in the conversations you hear from this episode or any of my episodes, I highly recommend finding the right therapist. And to find the right one for you, go to [psychology today.com](https://psychologytoday.com).

I'll put the link in my show notes. Use its filters. Share where you're from because they need to be licensed in the same state or country. And if you have a preference, maybe specific ethnic or gender or maybe sharing that you're neurodivergent. So this episode is broken in two parts. One is why chaos feels like safety, and second is.

How to actually rest. So let's start with the first. I'm gonna talk about three different theories. One is the dopamine loop of achievement. I learned this from the National Institute of Drug Abuse. So our brains, they, they love dopa. It's that neurotransmitter that makes us feel accomplished. It gives us that hit.

You know when you check something off your list, Ooh, that felt good. Responding to an email, deleting an email, responding to text message, making sure there's no unread finishing a workout. And you know what I. Caught this myself. When I was gone for two weeks, I, before I went to El Nito for a week, we were at Taal Lake.

It's still an active volcano where my niece got married and I was posting stuff. I'm like, I'm not being as present and. I knew going to El Nito for me and my partner's eight year anniversary. I wanted to be present, let me not be posting so I could be completely present and not be in the loop of wanting, likes, comments, engagement, looking if anyone's looking or liking.

I. And, and I'm glad I did that. And how this might translate to your everyday life, which it has before. Well, I still am working on it. Let's, let's be real. It's not like I've completely overcome it, but you know when your calendar is white. for me, I use Google Calendar. I'm like, oh, I put some color in it.

Why does the whole calendar need to have color in it? Why can't it just be empty or trick yourself? Put a color to not do anything. I'm not even kidding When there are days where, for example, I just had my period, I need a day or two to do, to just not work. I put do not book all in caps. 'cause we are just high achievers and we want to keep it busy Usually what happens is high achievers, they unconsciously wanna fill spaces with busyness. So what do you do? You're like, Elaine, I know this. I know I get those dopamine hits to just color code my whole calendar. It needs to be really busy. So what I want you to do is every day start with one mindful win, instead of doing just task all the time.

And that mindful win could just be what's already happening. Maybe it is a workout, maybe it is a sales call. Maybe it's a project that you've been needing to do. Like today I had a great call with a client and something we are working on is exactly this. How do I not take things personally and have a life outside of my work?

And she is an executive and she's you know what? Today was really great. what made today great? I got to see the leaves change color and I didn't let stress at work get to me. And isn't that amazing? Just that simple one. sure, I shared that I went to Philippines. It's a great win. But what are the simple things we could be grateful for?

That's why I'm all into gratitude journals because it helps us stay present as opposed to productive. So throughout the day, you could ask yourself this difficult question, am I chasing a dopamine hit or doing? What actually matters. Like I shared, I'm getting TMI, but even last week I had plans to go every day, do Muay Hai, but I'm like, I, my body's not feeling it.

I want a nap. I don't wanna do anything. I wanna stretch. So I just honored what my body wanted. And when you ask yourself. If you're chasing the dopamine hit, like I wanna just delete all my emails, which I do. I, I'm not gonna tell you the number of email, unread emails I need delete or doing what actually matters.

So I'm not gonna lie, even before this call, I'm like, I'm actually, there was an event I got invited to tomorrow. I always repeat, but I'm thinking, mm, do I really need to go have other things I need to do? Why am I going just to show up face just to prove something? Why am I going. As I'm saying this out loud, you're actually helping making a decision.

I'm not gonna go to the event. This is so not me, by the way. even a year ago I was going to all the events. Right now I'm like, do I need to go? No. Maybe this is your also hint that maybe you shouldn't go to an event or do something. And it's great because even being mindful of this, you get to rewire your brain.

I'm rewiring my brain in the process talking to you to get pleasure, not from presence, not from productivity, but presence instead. All right. The second framework, the cortisol trap. I learned this from Harvard Health, so I'm the oldest daughter. Yeah, I know. At insert add stereotypes, and I've been in go mode forever.

Stress hormones not turning off. So hey. Yeah, I'm addicted to adrenal scan, adrenaline scanning, Think about what's gonna happen next. Preparing for the worst. This explains why I used to work in politics and doing a lot of fundraising events 'cause you're just prepared putting out fires all the time.

And that's why when you finally stop stressing over things, you feel more tired. And an example of this, just current day, it's like. Watching the World Series, the Dodgers winning. Oh my gosh, the cortisol on that was high. Just not anticipating what was gonna happen. The amazing classic plays that happened on both sides of the teams.

That's why on Sunday morning when I woke up after game seven, I remember telling my partner, why am I so tired? And he was like, yeah, this is normal 'cause you're adrenaline rush. And it's similar to, I also think about. Back in college or undergrad after finals and studying and doing the test when you just crash.

Or maybe you always hear this all the time too, when you've been working so hard at work, then you finally go on vacation and then you're sick. Why are you sick? It's because your body knows you're not, you're, no, you're not running off adrenaline. Your body knows it's rested and then it's Hey, you could be sick now.

So it's being completely transparent and honest with how you're feeling, what you need. And you could ask yourself these questions, what's feeling heavy? How can I make things easier? And I did this recently. Specifically for work, and then I'll share something personal after.

I know this episode is so good, and you're like, how can I get more of this? Well, I have a newsletter that comes out every Thursday that's free. Fun and full of real talk. It's a live journal LGA on Leadership and Life with actual scripts behind the scenes stories and lessons from mistakes I've made so you don't have to for work and life.

Just go to elaine liu.com. Join. That's E AE I Ocom, join. Alright, back to the episode. There's this new system, I've been wanting to edit my business, and I was thinking, oh, okay, it's these two people. This person could do this, this other person could do this. I was like, this feels more complicated. I'm like, you know what?

Let me sleep on it. And I'm glad I listened to myself like, wait, one person just could just own this whole project. Why am I making it so difficult? And it just made things more simple. Something that's also happening right now. Ugh, I, I just go through phases with workouts. After two weeks of not doing Muay Thai, when I went back to Muay Thai this past week, I've gone three times.

Oh my gosh. I didn't realize how much cardio Muay Thai does. Like it's tiring. And because I haven't done it, actually lost two pounds, which is insane. And you have to think about it like your mohai kickbox Tie Kickboxing. You are moving your body making impacts, hitting with punches and kicks and. I remember talking, I was actually talking to my coach today.

My kickboxing coach was like, oh, you lost me. I was like, I know I was gone for two weeks, but like my cardio, oh my gosh, I'm so behind. I'm outta breath. He's yeah, It could be tiring 'cause it's so much impact on your body. And so I'm even asking myself this question, do I need a break from Muay Thai?

Is this too much impact for me? Or maybe I shouldn't be doing it as much. I hate that. I have to admit that, but I have to be honest with myself. How can I make things more easier? And what does my body need? Okay. The third framework is Trauma of Chaos. I learned this while reading The Body Keeps Score, which I needed to read to be trauma informed, certified.

I will warn you the book, the book I recommend yet with Warning, it is a heavy book when reading and learning about trauma. So many of us women of color, children of immigrants, let's be honest here, chaos is a baseline. We. Stay alert to survive. For example, like in everyday life, this sounds very la When I give directions to friends, if I'm like passenger princess and I'm giving directions, I, I give kind of like two steps ahead.

Hey, two blocks from now you're gonna make a left, and then the freeway on wrap is gonna be to your right. I always give. Steps ahead. I get so irritated when people give me directions last minute, oh, you're supposed to make a left. Now. I'm like, why are you telling me this right now? Making a left, you could have told me that.

A street or two streets away. So this kind of shows up with our nervous system, right? We panic and we always are thinking about the future and not being present even on vacation. For two weeks. I got to go scuba diving for the first time. By the way, I don't know how to swim. Yes, you could actually scuba dive, not know how to swim 'cause it's two different things.

But thankfully, having an incredible instructor, Wilson, and he was teaching us how to use the regulator that helps us breathe. And you're supposed to be breathing in and out with your mouth. And before we got into the ocean, we were in this four feet pool and I was practicing. And I was thinking worst case scenario is what if there's a shark?

What if the regulator comes off? What if I can't breathe? What if I die? Like I was just thinking everything. But the number one thing he was teaching us is the importance of breathing in and out.

And let's say the regulator comes out where the oxygen tank is, it's continued to breathe out and then putting the regulator back in.

So when we finally got to the ocean. And sub I. My whole body was submerged. I was so tense probably the first 10 minutes, like I was really tense, and then afterwards I just focused on my breath, just like Wilson shared and my body loosened and I got to really be present and enjoy scuba diving. I got to see like tadpoles come out like.

Like an explosion of tadpoles, which were beautiful. I got to see Nemo and Dory in real life. I wish I had a camera, but, well, we didn't have a GoPro and I just wanted to be present. It was so beautiful. I was so calm. And in the two weeks being present on my vacation, I came back home to 10 sales calls, which is insane.

So let's talk about the truth of actually resting. A reminder, and I know it's hard for you to believe this 'cause I am a fellow recovering high achiever. Rest is not laziness. It's. Regulation. And if you don't know what regulation means, I know it's a word. I feel like it's trending right now. The word regulation simply means making sure your body feels safe and steady again.

It's breathing right? We see these. This with athletes like Simone Biles before she does an event, she's breathing in and out, but before fighters get into the ring, they're moving their bodies and they're breathing. It's when your heart rate slows, your breathing evens out, and your mind is not constantly figuring out what's next.

And when you're regulated, your brain shifts from survival mode. Which is the amygdala into presence and problem solving mode, which is the prefrontal cortex. It's the space where your creativity, your intuition, and leadership thrive. It's kinda you know when you take a shower and the best ideas happen, you're like, why is it happening right now?

I don't have a piece of paper, by the way. I learned that there's these little post-it notes, or like waterproof post-it notes. You could hang in your shower. I don't have one of those, but I heard they exist. See, I should have done that research before I did this anyways. I'm being present right now, and that's another thing too.

Even me being present in these episodes, I listened to other podcast shows and I've been really annoyed with podcasts where I could tell AI scripted the hell out of the podcast as opposed to the host being really present. You can just tell it's just way too perfect. right now I will be transparent.

Yes, AI helps me like outline stuff, but I'm still saying things on the fly like clearly right now. Alright, let me go back. So the truth of actually arresting, like I said, think about athletes where. They're constantly taking breaths and pausing Dodgers is a great example. We thought we were gonna lost game seven, but they were just so focused and present and just me rojas hitting and just these outs, the plays were just obsolete.

Incredible. And that's regulation. Seeing individuals, seeing teams and communities pause and be present and being focused and ready. What we could learn from athletes is it's not just doing. Playing and performing. It's resting on purpose. They know recovery is the work. 'cause if they train 24 7, they get injured or burnt out, they need rest.

Their muscles rebuild, their nervous system resets, they come back sharper, faster and more present. And that's the same for us, even if we're not athletes. When we rest, we, we get more clarity and creativity like we do when we take a shower and our body turns into regulation. So maybe for you rest looks like, I know it might be hard having multiple tabs on your computer without.

Multitasking. I say this as I have a ton of tabs and windows while recording this podcast, but guess what? I am really focused on this, but I'm just like, why do I have all these tabs opened? Maybe it's stepping outside for a few minutes between meetings and walking, or if you have a walking pad like I do walk or maybe after a meeting or task instead of reaching for your phone.

Yeah, I know I'm calling you up. I'm calling myself out too. It's actually taking some deep breaths. Remember, that's not. Wasting time to take a breather to walk. It's your body learning to be addicted to peace and not chaos.

Now if this episode made you breathe or rethink of how you've been addicted to chaos and finally want rest, I, I know it's weird. I wanna celebrate you for this self-awareness that you are listening. So I want you to journal about this. Think about. Why perhaps you might like me have loved overwhelm. I know that sounds weird, like I don't love overwhelm.

Who loves overwhelm? well, where it may have come from, like I shared earlier in the beginning of this episode, it was me not wanting to do chores. It was me because I got the compliments from my family. And if one or two friends that would resonate with this episode, share it with them. And if you really loved this episode, take a second to leave a rating and review.

It helps. More amazing leaders like you to find this episode. And if you're ready to go deeper to actually practice this in your work life leadership, I'd love to support you personally. You can schedule an introductory coaching call with me@elainelew.com slash call, and in this 30 minute call, we'll we'll see where chaos might still be running your decisions and design.

A new way of leading and living. When that's built more on clarity and confidence, 'cause you don't need to earn rest. Rest can start now. So take a breath.