

## Episode 68: Bonnie St. John

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Host: Terry Vittone

Terry: Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, a CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone, and my guest today is Bonnie St. John. Hello, and welcome, Bonnie.

Bonnie: Thank you, Terry. I'm so excited.

Terry: Thank you. We're grateful to have you. Let me tell you a little bit about our guest. Bonnie St. John is an Olympian, a Rhodes scholar, author, amputee, and a world-renowned leadership expert who has guided individuals from Fortune 500 C-Suites to startup entrepreneurs to reach their highest performance goals. Her broad media exposure includes *People*, *Forbes*, *Essence*, *The New York Times*, *Today*, CNN, CBS News, PBS, and NPR. NBC News called Bonnie "one of the five most inspiring women in America," and I believe, Bonnie, you were also just chosen by *The Wall Street Journal* as a group of 20 women as well, so congratulations.

Bonnie: Thank you.

Terry: You're welcome.

Bonnie: I have had a crazy life. It's wonderful.

Terry: Inspiring! I enjoyed your book a great deal, that we're going to talk about. Our interview today is going to focus on Bonnie's book, called *Micro-Resilience: Minor Shifts for Major Boosts in Focus, Drive, and Energy*, which she co-authored with her husband, Allen Haines. To begin today, Bonnie, could you talk about your challenges and successes? Growing up, you have a fascinating life story, and I think our listeners would enjoy hearing how you got to where you are today.

Bonnie: It should have been impossible for me to become an international ski racer, right? I grew up in San Diego, so there is no snow. My leg was amputated when I was five years old due to a birth defect. When I was born, the growth was stunted in my right leg. I'm sure we have medical people listening so it's PFFD (proximal femoral focal deficiency), if you wanna look it up. And so it looked normal when I was born, but it didn't grow, and so they amputated it when I was five, and I've worn a prosthesis ever since. I'm black also, and you don't—you know, certainly when I

was growing up, you didn't see black people in Winter Olympics, and in fact, I'm the first African American to win an Olympic or Paralympic medal in Winter Olympics.

Terry: Remarkable.

Bonnie: So lots of crazy things. But what I'd say is the worst is, you know, it's one thing to ski on one leg, but it's another thing to ski with no money. My family has no money. That makes it really hard to ski. So, yeah, being the black one-legged girl from San Diego, you really didn't expect to be able to get to the Winter Olympics, and then win medals. I won a silver and two bronze medals in Innsbruck, Austria, on behalf of the US team.

Terry: Oh, what that must have felt like on the podium. Oh, my god. Is this etched in your memory, these moments, you know, of achieving these medals? I mean—

Bonnie: To be honest, I was terrible at standing on the podium.

Terry: Really?

Bonnie: I don't really like attention maybe because I got picked on so much when I was growing up. I'm like, "I don't like being the center of attention." I didn't. And so what I remember is the skiing. And I think that's true of anything that you're really good at is that you have to love doing it. If you're doing it just to be on the podium, you may not make it there. But so it wasn't the podium that I remember so much, it's just the training and the skiing and the races and the people. You know, you have to love the years and years and years that it takes. If you really only love the moment on the podium, it's harder to get there.

Terry: I can see how the actual skiing would be the thing itself. Do you still have a chance to get out on the slopes often with how busy your life is now?

Bonnie: I actually moved into my ski house lately. My husband and I—and my husband was a ski instructor, too, and so he loves skiing. And we used to live in New York City and have a house up in the Catskills, and we now live and travel from our house in the Catskills, so that helps to be able to get out more.

Terry: Wow. Well, congratulations on being able to be around next to a mountain to do the thing that you love and that you've medaled in in the Olympics. You don't say that every day to somebody. So how did you then—so this remarkable achievement in sports, and then but also, you're a Rhodes scholar. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Bonnie: So I applied to get the Rhodes Scholarship, which allows you to go to Oxford University and study. I actually stayed and studied for four years, and again that

was an incredible dream come true to get to travel and to get to meet the other people. I mean, as many of you probably know, a lot of Rhodes scholars are presidents like, Bill Clinton was a Rhodes scholar, actors, Kris Kristofferson, just a lot of interesting people. The tagline for it is "Fighting the World's Fight," is people who want to fight the world's fight. And so one of the people I was there with was Susan Rice who was the National Security Advisor, she was a UN Ambassador, Terri Sewell is also an elected official now, and just a lot of amazing people. So I was really appreciative of being able to be in that milieu.

And another thing, you know, and again, because we have so many people from the helping professions who tune in to this podcast, education and health care, one of the things that was different about me, too, is I was abused for many years as a child. And when I got to the Rhodes Scholarship level, you realize how few people survive things and get there. A lot of the people that I was around grew up with a lot more advantage and connectedness than I did, and so it makes you appreciate—we're going to be talking about resilience, you know, and that really is the core of my life is how can you rebound from the really bad things that happened, and the myriad of little tiny bad things that happen every day and be able to come back strong.

Terry: You made an interesting point in the book where you said, you know, sometimes these larger cataclysms that we have in our life that may seem to derail our purpose or our sense of our identity is that in the final measure, more of a challenge to a person self-actualizing than the micro-stumbling blocks that get in the way in the day to day that we go through. And I thought I really never had pondered that before. And I think you make a really interesting case in the book that sometimes surmounting by good habits, these smaller challenges and these nettlesome things that happened to us, whether it's a personality, or a schedule, or whatever it might be, to be able to—or bad habits that impact our health, that coping with those sometimes is more important than dealing with major, you know, setbacks that we might have in our life. I've never considered that before, and I enjoyed the book a great deal with that perspective in mind, so—

Bonnie: I don't want to minimize the importance of dealing with big things, you know. If you really have depression, you need to see a therapist, you know, or even get medication. You know, we need to deal with the big things in life, divorce and hurricanes and those things, but I do think that the small everyday things shape the fabric of our life far more than we realize. And for me, having had to overcome a disability, abuse, you know, moving up from not having a lot growing up of money and trying to be more successful, you know, making those kinds of changes, it is very much about the discipline of small things every day, you know. That is what's going to create those big changes. I guess the big things, you know, sort of therapy or fixing a town after a hurricane is a very intense process that takes specialized services, but making change over time, it's all about the little things, isn't it?

Terry: Yes. Now, CPI has the privilege, Bonnie, of having you present at our 17th Instructors' Conference that's being held this July 14 through 19 in Scottsdale, Arizona. We're lucky to have you. Could you talk a little bit about why your message is so appropriate for a group of CPI Certified Instructors?

Bonnie: You know, I keep telling you, I'm excited. I'm so excited to be on the podcast today. I'm so excited to be in Arizona this summer because I feel like these are my people. My mother was an educator who started out as a teacher, moved her way up finally to become a principal of several different schools, and earned her doctorate. So I grew up hearing about the difficulties in education over the dinner table, you know, all of my life and understanding how hard teachers have it and how hard administrators have it and just, you know, especially in today's world of education, things are just really challenging.

And then, you know, health care professionals, you know, I've spent a lot of time in hospitals. I was in and out of hospitals from the time I was 5 all the way to 18, had numerous surgeries to amputate my leg and, you know, just really appreciate the nurses, and the doctors, and all the health care professionals and what they do. And so I'm just so excited to be in Arizona talking about resilience, which is giving them more wind beneath their wings, helping them to put these simple, easy research-based tasks that can help them, and, you know, and if I can help, you know, the CPI Certified Instructor population, I know the ripple effects for that are huge; that just ripples out to make a difference in the world. Can you hear the excitement in my voice, Terry?

Terry: I can hear it, Bonnie, yeah, and—

Bonnie: And I don't just mean the ripple effect with people hearing about micro-resilience, but being able to empower and strengthen gives this group of people more focus, drive, and energy. You know, they make a difference every day for so many people, and if I could help them to do that with more grace and be less burnt out and just be their best more hours of the day, that is such a gift to the world. I appreciate the opportunity.

Terry: Well, let's get into an overview of the content of the book that the rest of the interview will focus intently on, *Micro-Resilience: Minor Shifts for Major Boosts in Focus, Drive, and Energy*. Talk a little bit about the content and purpose of the book, if you would, in a general sense.

Bonnie: Sure. You know, I get asked a lot, "Bonnie, you're so resilient, you know. You've overcome disability and, you know, child abuse and, you know, many, many different things, racism, and, you know, how can you help my team to be more resilient the way you are? How can you help my family, my kids to be more

resilient?" And so, I've written a number of books, but this one really, you know, feels like the culmination of everything I've written because it just gives you easy steps to do that. It's not just the stories of my life, although there are some in there, but it gives you real actionable steps based on evidence. There's a lot of footnotes in the book, if you're into that, you know, knowing what the research is, you can certainly look it up. But it's just really gives people actionable, easy things that make a tremendous difference.

And I've been doing this work since 2011, and thousands and thousands of people have gone through the program at work, as individuals, and hearing the stories, that it's just so rewarding that it really helps people be less, you know, exhausted. The pace of change is moving so fast. What we're expected to do every day is so much. People are just crushed, and being able to have concrete ways to sort of push back and feel better and be better is really nice. That's what we hear from people.

Terry: Excellent. So let's begin with the difference between, to focus on how the book is laid out, the difference between macro-resilience and micro-resilience as is in your title.

Bonnie: So, we coined the term micro-resilience, so that's what we titled the book, it's "Micro-Resilience." And we get that to contrast with what we, you know, put under the heading of macro-resilience. So, macro, we scoured all the research, we looked at physiology, and neuroscience, and psychoneuroimmunology. I just like to say that, psychoneuroimmunology. But we look at all of it, and there's so many different ways to be more resilient, but we really wanted to focus the lens on the little things, so that's why we called it micro. But what we put under the heading as macro are the big things like eating right on a regular basis, exercising on a regular basis, getting enough sleep, you know, doing all the things we kind of know we should do to be healthier, things that only pay off when you have it as a habit. You know, if you exercise once, it doesn't really, you know, help you for macro-resilience. Contrast that to micro-resilience, we were really looking at what are things that you do today and they help you today, things that make imprints in the immediate way that you show up with your brain working better, your body working better.

So it's interesting. You see the example of exercise, you know, of course, you know you have to do it as a habit to be physically healthy. But there is actually—in micro-resilience, we look at research that talks about if you do a little bit of exercise in the morning, it doesn't have to be, you know, your whole exercise routine, just 10 minutes of walking to make you smarter for hours afterwards, so getting a little bit of walking or—there was one study that talked about 20 minutes of dancing and people afterwards were able to generate more creative ideas, make connections,

interesting connections, remember more things, so it makes you smarter for hours after.

So we were looking for hacks like that, or what are the things that have an immediate effect, and how do you utilize that in a creative way? So, like with the exercise example, people tend to think of exercise as just for their body. So if you have a really busy day, when you have to give a presentation or have to finish a proposal, you tend to say, "Well, I exercised yesterday, but today I just need to do the work." Now, if you're thinking from a micro-resilient way, you would do the opposite. You'd say, "Wow, if I know that, you know, 15 or 20 minutes of exercise is going to make me smarter for hours, I'm going to do that, and then write the proposal, and it'll look better." And, you know, I don't know if you've tried that since you read the book, but I definitely implement that in my life a lot more than I used to.

Terry: I do begin the day with calisthenics and yoga stretching, and I do find that when I miss it, when I rush or whatever it is, I feel the difference 20 minutes later and then for the rest of the day in a sort of overall dullness, so I am familiar with that. And I've also read research recently that said that how exercise actually changes the brain in positive ways, which I think is fairly recent as a scientific fact.

Bonnie: Yeah, there are long-term impacts in terms of exercise and the brain. With micro, we're really emphasizing the short-term impact, but if you're leveraging that and doing it over time, you're going to get the cumulative effect as well. But what we find here is people are so motivated with a micro way of culture. So if you know that if I do this today, it's going to help me today, you're more likely to do it, and then you end up with the cumulative benefits, too.

Terry: That's an excellent point. So let's go to the book. We have a lot to cover today. And I want really people to get a sense of the overall scope of this book so that they read it because I think it's tremendous. In the introduction to micro-resilience, you introduce what you call five frameworks. This is a set of five strategies that you write, "can get us on track quickly and efficiently." Could you talk about those?

Bonnie: Sure. So we curated the research, we look for evidence-based ways of being able to get these benefits, the short benefits that we're talking about, and we curated it into five areas. Actually, you know, just quickly, I want to share one story that sort of puts all this in perspective too, is there was a researcher looking at why certain tennis players win more than anyone else. So if you're looking at the US Open, everybody is world class, but you're only talking about a handful of names in the news. You know, everybody's talking about the short list because they win all the time, and this researcher wanted to know what sets them apart.

Now, people have different skills. You might serve 90 miles an hour, or run faster, but he wanted to know what sets these winningest tennis players apart. And he watched videos, he couldn't see a pattern until he started looking at what they did between the point. And it was these little recoveries that they were doing of their energy. Now, for a tennis player, it might be putting your racket in your other hand and resting your racket hand. So we need to look for ways that the rest of us can do. If it's not moving your tennis racket to one hand from the other, what is it? And it's just interesting because this little tiny micro recovery helps people that were world-class tennis players to be better than the best. And it makes sense because if we're playing tennis and I'm waiting to recover until the end of the game or the end of the match but you're recovering along the way, you're going to sustain your A game more.

So again, this is the gift we wanna give to all of the folks in the CPI communities, this ability to restore yourself as you go so that you're giving your best and you're not wiped out at the end of the day so you can go home and be nicer to your family and to yourself. So we curated all of the evidence-based text that we found that sort of match that and what are the little things you can do between the point to recover. And so the first framework is things for your brain to help your brain be less exhausted. Sorry, I'm laughing, but whose brain isn't exhausted these days, right?

And the second framework is about being emotionally exhausted. And so our fight or flight reaction kicks in a lot and, and it's really exhausting. The third framework is being positive. So the second framework is kind of mitigating that response to the negative, that fear response, the third framework is more about how do we strengthen our muscles towards the positive. The fourth framework is refresh, is about the body, and we're not fitness experts, so I'm not giving you an exercise routine or a diet, but it is talking about how keeping your metabolism more even makes everything else easier. So like we've heard the term "hangry," you're angry because you're hungry, you know, you can't control your anger. It's easier not to be emotionally hijacked if you're keeping your metabolism even. So in that one we talked about hydration, we talked about blood sugar level, and it's just very simple.

The fifth and last framework is about purpose, and how do you harness purpose, again, to give you more resilience and more energy? And we all know when you feel a strong sense of purpose, you can overcome more things, you can stay on track more, you're often more focused about what's important and what's not. And so, again, the CPI community is such a purpose-filled community. So you'd think, "Oh, we don't need to work on that, everyone's got it with purpose." But the key is how do you use purpose to refuel? So when you had a difficult day, and you're dealing with crazy people, and we know in the helping profession, you're often dealing with crazy people, and, you know, CPI really helps people to deal with those difficult situations. But are there ways that you can use purpose as fuel in the midst

of those processes? So, at 3:00 in the afternoon, can you tap into your sense of purpose in order to get energy and clarity? And I've never seen anyone else talk about how to do that. Lots of people talk about how to get clearer about your purpose, but they don't talk about how to sew it into your day as a form of sustenance. So that's part of what we do, too.

Terry: All right. And I will say after having enjoyed the book that each of these five frameworks is well-illustrated—there are personal stories, there are examples about habits you can use to make each of these frameworks the most effective behaviorally that you can to master micro-resilience. In chapter two—and to go back to what you said about everyone's brain being exhausted these days, I think this fits into that, and I think we're all familiar sometimes with the fact that we feel we have to do this to keep on pace with the amazing amount of work that we've been asked to complete these days, especially in our culture here in the United States. You write that multitasking is regarded as a nearly essential skill, but it is not the answer to more efficient productivity. Why not, Bonnie?

Bonnie: I don't want to give people the idea that you can't multitask. We do. And as you said, our culture really requires that these days, is that we have to be multitasking in many cases. It's just that it's such a drain on your brain. Part of the reason we feel so exhausted is because we do so much multitasking. Some studies say that it lowers your IQ by as much as 10 to 15 points where it's like losing a night of sleep, that we become so exhausted when we're multitasking so much. Another researcher said, "Multitasking is fine as long as you don't need accuracy, quality, or creativity, or innovation." So, to me, that's—

Terry: As long as you can do without those, right?

Bonnie: Yeah, folding laundry in front of the TV is a great form of multitasking, you know. But if you're working on a proposal, if you're, you know, dealing with a client, or a student, or a patient, you know, you need a higher level of attention, right? So what we talked about in the refocus framework is to be more intentional about when you're multitasking and when you're not, and being able to carve out times when you are not multitasking. Again, you can't never multitask, you know, we're going to need to do it, but can you carve out islands in the stream of communication, you know, you have flows of communication, people coming up and talking to you, you have phone calls, you have text, you have, you know, IM, there's Slack. You know, we have a million ways to do this now.

Terry: Sure.

Bonnie: And how can you carve out an island in that stream of communication when you can be more intentional and get things done. And I've had people who focus on

this, and they come back and then they say, "Oh my gosh, Bonnie, it's like having more time," because when you carve out that island, you get twice as much done, and then you can go back to communicating with everybody again. And so being able to switch back and forth between multitasking and not multitasking, it just can make you a lot less exhausted.

Terry: And you have anticipated my next question, which is also from chapter two. You write about zones or what you call "islands in the stream," could you be a little bit more descriptive about what those are and the benefits of establishing them?

Bonnie: Thank you for asking that because it can be a place. You know, if you have an office you go in and shut the door. When I worked in a big busy office, I used to take off and go to a coffee shop like Starbucks and go do my work there where, you know, I could be less interrupted. It's interesting, I did a lot of micro-resilience work with leaders of nurses, nurse leaders, and they didn't want to shut their door. They're such a friendly, helpful people. They want to help the other nurses, you know, they want to provide support, and so one of them said to—what they decided to do after having this conversation was to shut their door, but put a picture on the outside, it's like a beautiful sunset or a tree and it says, you know, "Hard at work for you," and then put a Post-it note pile there and say, you know, "If you need something, you know, just write it on this Post-it note and stick it on the tree, and I'll come and get you afterwards."

And that brings up—one of the critical issues per zone is that it's not just going into the zone, it's how you communicate about it that makes it work. So she's using that whole method of putting the picture on her door to communicate to the other nurses that she wants to be helpful, and she's hard at work probably doing your schedule, or your payroll, or, you know, whatever, something that really needs to be done for you, and she wants to do it well and accurately, but she'll come back and help you with what you need later. And I think that also gives you peace of mind when you're carving the zone out for yourself that you can be in that zone, and you know that you're still going to be able to deal with the things that come up. It's also important to have a threshold, you know, when should somebody interrupt you and knock on that door, or call you anyway even though you're in the zone, and, you know, having some criteria for what that is.

I knew one woman who works from home, and she said, with her kids, she told them, you know, "Don't knock on my door unless there's blood." [laughter] Maybe she's joking but, you know, but having some kind of negotiating when should people interrupt you or not interrupt you, that helps give you peace of mind. One more example I want to give you, it's a great example from a hospital, is it isn't always a physical space, or sometimes you'd make it a time of day, but with nurses who are dispensing medicine, they can—you know, accuracy is really important. If you make mistakes when you're dispensing medicine, that could have big

ramifications. And so they had a system at this one hospital where the person dispensing the medicine wore a sash, and so you can't be in a special place, you know, but that communicates to the other people, don't interrupt this person because they're dispensing medicine. So a zone can even be something creative like that. It doesn't have to just be temporal or spatial.

Terry: But what it does establish is this kind of micro zone of respite for yourself in the middle of a very busy and hectic day.

Bonnie: Right, when you can get things done. And, you know, studies show that if you're interrupted, they take three, four times as long to get done. So again, if you can create a period of time with little interruption, it's like there's more time.

Terry: One of the things I found really interesting, and also in this chapter, was you wrote about the beauty of a checklist and how it was different than a to-do list, which I'm sure all of us are familiar with. Could you quickly articulate the difference between the checklist and the to-do list?

Bonnie: Sure. We make lists to help save mental energy, so we don't wanna remember it, so we're offloading, and that's good. So it's good to make lists. A to-do list, so it's something you get done, you check it off, and then you throw it away. A checklist is something you do repeatedly. So people could have checklists for leaving the house for work, what are all the things I may need to have every day when I go at work, checklist for travel, for business travel, what are all the things I need to make sure I pack. Some people have checklists for vacation with their family, you know, here's what I need.

In the process of daily work, one manager told me he had a checklist for his monthly meeting with his direct report, and here's all the things we needed to hear from each one of them. And so anything we do repeatedly, if you can make a list and make it a checklist, it saves mental energy. There is a whole book written about this called *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande who's actually another Rhodes scholar that I know. But he's a doctor who wrote about this and the importance of—I mean, it saved lives having more checklists in different areas at the hospital. And he said himself in the conclusion that he wrote all of these, he did all this research, but he said at some level, he still didn't really think it applied to him. But he thought, "Oh, I need to put checklists in my department, too, and everywhere in my department just so that I can practice what I preach."

And he was very humbled by as soon as he put them in, there were things that were caught that wouldn't have been caught if they didn't have the checklist. And so we're all vulnerable to not having perfect attention and perfect memory, and these checklists give a scaffolding to make our brains work better, essentially, to catch things we wouldn't have caught. And they also take a load off because we're

not in the actions of a checklist, we're trying to just remember these things all the time. And by giving our brain scaffolding, we allow our brains to focus on not the routine things but the more interesting things, and essentially, we show up smarter because we can put our brain on the best and highest use.

Terry: Excellent. Moving on to chapter three—this is fascinating, I think—it's called "Reset Your Primitive Alarms." You write about how emotions could be hijacked by our evolutionary biology. And, Bonnie, what is the physiological history of primitive alarms and survival mechanisms? And why are they often the opposite of what we need today?

Bonnie: If you think about it in primitive times, if, you know, a cave man or a cave woman saw the bushes rustle, you might think that an animal is coming to attack you, or the next village is coming to attack you, you know, and you get on guard, and, you know, you're very intense. But on the other hand, if you see a bush, if you see berries on a bush, you don't go, "Berries!" you know. We don't have the same intense reaction to the good as we do to the negative. So that's just the way we're programmed. And I think it's really helpful as human beings to just realize it's not our fault. That's how we're designed because people die if they didn't live that way. But in an office, that's less helpful. So in today's world, when things happen, we have these same threat response, it's as if we're going to run or hit somebody on the head, but we're trying to solve 21st century problems.

So when a problem comes up in school, or with a parent, or with a teacher, and your instinct kicks in, it literally redirects your energy from your higher-order thinking to your muscles, and you breathe more shallowly, you know, your palms could get sweaty, your vision actually narrow, and so you stop drawing on higher order thinking for solutions because your body is prepared to run, or fight, or something. And so, when we often say, "You know, oh, I said something. That just wasn't me. I did something that just wasn't me," that's literally true because you lost access to your mature, evolved, higher order thinking, and you just reacted from the caveman place.

So it's important to recognize these patterns, and sometimes they're, you know, quite intense, and sometimes they're a little bit more subtle. You can call it an amygdala hijack, or an emotional hijack. You know, it happens at different levels. But when you start to recognize the patterns, you can mitigate those patterns and shift it.

Terry: I thought it was fascinating how you got into the—

Bonnie: Did that answer your question?

Terry: It does! I just wanted to kind of touch on that because I think it's really fascinating to sort of understand physiologically—you go into a discussion about the prefrontal cortex and the higher order of thinking that happens there as compared to the reptilian back brain, if you will. And I think it's really interesting that it helps to reset if you understand that architecture.

Bonnie: In the book, too, I go into the neuro pathways, and I just think all of this stuff is fascinating, too, is that the pathway from your sensory perception to your amygdala, which is the, you know, center of calling the threat reaction, the pathway is shorter to your amygdala than it is to your prefrontal cortex, and so that's why it's called a hijack because if the message gets to your amygdala quicker, you have a reaction before you can even decide not to.

Terry: Like road rage I think comes from the amygdala, or I've read that theorized, you know, right?

Bonnie: Yeah. [laughter] I think so.

Terry: So you mentioned a hijack, and that's really interesting because you write about something called an office hijack, and I think a lot of us can relate to that. Could you explain that and what some of the most likely triggers for an office hijack might be?

Bonnie: Daniel Goleman, who coined the term "emotional intelligence" and "EQ," writes about the most common things that happen in offices, and it's things like feeling like you're not being heard, unrealistic timeframes and deadlines, being treated with disrespect, and all of those can go into, you know, having a really primitive reaction because we feel a sense of threat. Even things in the brain research, even things like not being invited to an important meeting where decisions are going to be made, it creates a pattern of blood flow in your fMRI that's the same as if you were starving to death.

Even having your manager come to you and say, "I need to give you some feedback," which is the brain pattern again is the same as if you were in a dark alley and you heard footsteps behind you. Oh, we have to be careful how we react when we get thrown into that primitive, physiological—you know, and it's real. There's hormones coursing through your veins. It's not just that you can decide and say, "Oh, I'm just not going to be that way." You have to manage the processes that are going on because you're fighting against nature.

Terry: Cortisol and so forth, the things like—

Bonnie: Cortisol, adrenaline.

Terry: Adrenaline, yeah.

Bonnie: Absolutely.

Terry: And one of the things I liked that the book does is it really thinks about the whole human animal, and you have some sensory reset tips involving sound and smell people can use to calm their work spaces. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Bonnie: You know, it's funny. I've been doing this work for years as I said, and what I've come to realize is that I had heard some of these smells could calm your reaction, but what it is is your sensory perception is getting input that says, "Danger, danger!" and if you put in different input that says, "Safe, safe!" it shifts it, so it's a way of just staying in the driver's seat on that and not letting other things just trigger you. So smells like cinnamon, and lavender, vanilla, things like that—what was interesting about this, when a researcher first told me about the different smells that could calm your hijack, I said, "Those sound like the holiday smells, right, like vanilla, cloves, cinnamon," and she said, "It's not because they're the holiday smells; they are the holiday smells because they're calming." You know, yeah, we picked those because they calm us down to relax, and sound, certain pure sounds can calm us as well.

It's something you can experiment with, too, to see what works for you. And again, it's just giving your brain different input. It has the input that says threat, and you can give it some different input. And smells and sounds go to a very primitive place, so they work really well.

Terry: All right. In chapter four of the book, "Reframe your attitude, spiral into the positive," you write that we evolved as a species to be more negative than positive. I think we've kind of touched on that a little bit, but could you explain how the negative is part of a reaction from our ancestral past?

Bonnie: Oh, it's this survival mechanism as we said before, is that our ancestors who didn't have a really strong, intense physiological reaction to a sign of threat, they die so they need to procreate. And we've descended from the crazy people, the ones who you know, lost their temper, and so we have to manage that as well.

And there's a lot in the book to give people practical help for that, too. The Joy Kit is what we call it in the book. Since the book was written, we've started rebranding the Joy Kit as a first-aid kit for your attitude, and I think there's again—the CPI family I think would really love that terminology and really get it and, you know, you have a first-aid kit because you might get a cut, or a bruise, or a burn, but you know you're going to get cuts, bruises, and burns to your attitude during the course of the day or week, but why not have a first-aid kit for your attitude to be able to turn that around?

And it's really simple because you can put them in a box, in a drawer, or in your car, you know, whatever makes sense, even on your phone. Some people put their first-aid kit in their phone. If you travel a lot, too, you can make it digital. And it's just thinking about what are some things that could help you turn your attitude around. When your attitude goes negative, how could you pull it back? So it could be thank-you notes from people. You know, on days when you feel no one appreciates you, you could read some thank-you notes from people. In mine, I have a note from my mother that says, "Cherish yourself," and she has that old-fashioned penmanship that's just beautiful. And my mother passed away 10 years ago, and my mother had a very difficult childhood as well. She wrestled a lot of demons. And when she writes, "Cherish yourself," she knows how hard that is.

And as I said already, she was a principal, you know, she dealt with a lot of issues. And so, something like that, just put whatever you're dealing with in the moment into perspective, and, you know, the ability to push back and to be able to turn it around. I have somebody say, "You know, did you have a bad day, or did you just have a bad hour that you let ruin the rest of your day?" And that's so true, is if we can—you know, if you had a bad interaction with a parent, or a teacher, or a patient, and then you got to be able to shift gears, you know, like the tennis players between the point, you'd be able to go in in the next part of your day. And that's something you can be intentional about and having a first-aid kit can really help you do that.

One tip my husband likes to give people on this, too, is to say, "Don't just put it on your desk or on a bulletin board because if you see it all the time, it loses its ability to help you shift your attitude." So you might have pictures of family, or vacations, you know, up there, but keep some things for just when you need them and apply them as needed.

Terry: Nice.

Bonnie: So that's an important thing to say, too, "Don't just put it up on the wall."

Terry: And I have to say this book is full of practical things like this that you can do to build up your micro-resilience and to really refresh your attitude to the positive as you go through a challenging day. Speaking of, you've got something called the Reversi, Reversi, I don't know how you pronounce it, but it's called the Reversi Reframe, and how in the middle of a challenge they it can make us reconsider the situation we're in. Could you talk about that?

Bonnie: Sure. And it's a pretty simple hack that you can do is if you think about a limit or an obstacle that you're facing and you write it down—we often do this in groups with an index card, you write it on one side of the index card, and then you flip the card over, and you write the opposite of that limit, so Reversi, you reverse the limit. And

it's interesting, I've had people in my workshop do something like say, "You know, I wanna get further education, but I don't have any time or money," so you just flip over the card and you write, "I have time or money to get further education, to get another degree or certification," and your brain might be thinking, "Well, that's just not true. It's a lie, you know, what's on the second side of the card is just a lie," but what it does is it frees you up from thinking in terms of limits and just allows you to have some creative ideas about what you could do. I had somebody say, "My department didn't get a budget increase, so I can't do the innovative things I wanted to do," and so you write on the other side, "I can innovate, you know, without the budget increase."

I actually had somebody—I was doing a radio show and actually had somebody email me afterwards that she was listening to the radio show, and her limit that she wrote down was, "I'm going to lose my house after the divorce," true story. So in each of these cases, you know, if you flip over the card and you say, "I have the time and money to get further certification or degree," you can start brainstorming about how to do it, and if you start talking to other people from the second side of the card, they'll give you ideas, "You know, maybe you could do a virtual degree," you know, "Oh, maybe there's funding for that over here," or, "You know, here's the way that I did it," and then people will give you ideas.

If you talking from the first side of the card, like "I don't have time or money. I'll never get ahead," like, "Oh, yeah, me too. Let's go have a beer," if you talk from the first side of the card, people will agree with you. The person who said, "I can't innovate in my department," literally was sitting in a workshop and flipped over the card and started talking to the people at his table, and realized, "You know what, if I go out in some of the things I'm doing now, if I prioritize what I'm doing, get rid of some of the things I'm doing now, I can bring them that innovative thing," and it might seem so obvious when you say it, but when we get stuck in our limits sometimes so much we don't see it. Oh, and the woman with the house, she said, "It got me thinking that my mother's getting older. She's okay really by herself now, but in a few years, you know, she might not be. So if I move her into my house now, I can keep my house after the divorce with our two incomes."

So it can help you to think more creatively and more open mind. I know one team where they decided to do Reversi at the beginning of their team meeting. One person talk about an issue they're facing, but everybody else try to come up with ideas of, you know, how to flip the card, how to flip the script. If we have a script, that we're going out in the world saying, "Oh, poor me," and if we flip the script, maybe there's possibility.

Terry: Excellent. Now, you touched earlier in the interview about purpose, Bonnie. And in chapter six, called "Renew Your Spirit, Tap Into the Power of Purpose," you discuss the difference between having long-term goals and knowing one's purpose in the

world. You write, "Most of us treat goals as a sufficient substitute for purpose," how can people start to understand the difference between the two?

Bonnie: Well, gosh, I define purpose as goals plus values. And so when you just do your values sometimes you just, you know, put them in a drawer, write down your value and put them in the drawer. So, to me, purpose is values in action. So combining purpose and goals helps us to live them more. So, in the book, we give people a few exercises to help them get clearer about both values and goals. And it's just a beautiful combination of doing that and being able to see how those things overlap.

And then there's a third exercise we called "tagline" where you kind of create a motto that helps you encompass the work that you did to think about your values and your life goal. And it's a really powerful process that helps people to get there. It's a great teambuilding event, you know. This is something you wanna do with your team at work or with a few friends, or even, you know, your spouse. These are great ways to get clearer about what's really important in life.

I had somebody do this. I was in a big workshop, and we were heading to the bathroom at the break, and this tall Indian guy or whatever, he's just gone in the life goals exercise, and he said to me, "You know, going into that exercise, I felt like I was really off track, like I wasn't doing the things that mattered most in life. And I did the exercise, and I realized I was," and so it's re-affirming for him, and I can only imagine that, you know, maybe he was getting a lot of pressure from, you know, his in-laws or, you know, his friends or, you know, other people, priorities, but when he shut down and he looked at his own, he said, "I am on track." So it's a really powerful set of exercises that could help you really affirm where you want to put your energy and what matters for you. That can take some weight off your shoulders and make you stand a little taller.

Terry: Well, that's sounds like a very, very productive way to get closer to what purpose is through kind of treating—well, making goals more accurately related to purpose, I guess, if I could summarize that. I'm also seeing that we're kind of running out of time here a little bit, Bonnie. So, let's close today, if we could, by having you talk about how organizations can now—I know that you have a program that you will bring to organizations where you actually teach micro-resilience. Could you talk about how organizations and companies that are interested in having you come and work with them can make that happen?

Bonnie: Well, thank you for asking that. We worked with companies in a variety of ways. And, you know, I've mentioned, you know, being in a workshop, and being on site, and doing that with companies, and we certainly do that. But we're also looking at being able to do things at larger scale now, and being able to do a combination of some self-study programs, and so instead of, you know, maybe reading the book

from cover to cover, people can have some activities that they can do that help them process some of these information quickly, you know, that we're explaining it really quickly, so a little bit of self-study and also giving leaders some scaffolding to create conversations around it. So, it's one thing to have individuals doing it, but there's ways to implement it as a team.

One of the nurse leaders that we were working with, she decided that she would have impromptu huddles where it sort of when you feel like the energy is going negative on the floor, you know, maybe somebody called in sick and then there's a big accident on the highway and everybody's stressed, she would call huddles and use some of the tools for that. There's things that you can do as a team in addition to things you can do as an individual. So by either, you know, me coming and giving a workshop, having self-study programs, and then having leader-led programs where they can pull everybody up or have key conversations, we can have a variety of ways to provide some support there. It's about creating a culture of resilience.

Terry: And how can people who might want to begin that dialog with bringing you in to do a workshop, how would they get in touch with you?

Bonnie: You know, I don't give out an email very often when I'm asked this kind of question on a project, but because of this community, and I really want you to be able to get what you need, I'm going to put you in touch with Emily at Blue Circle Leadership, blue the color, circle the shape, leadership, dot com, [emily@bluecircleleadership.com](mailto:emily@bluecircleleadership.com). She's my right-hand person, and so if you reach out to her and let her know what you're interested in, you know, we can work with you really quickly because again, I'm just so passionate about this community and wanting to put some wind beneath your wings.

Terry: Excellent. Well, thank you for sharing that information with our audience, Bonnie, and thank you for taking time for a CPI podcast today, and we're very thrilled to have you presenting at our Instructor Conference in July. And that information will be in the blog that accompanies this podcast. My guest today has been Bonnie St. John. She is an Olympian, a Rhodes scholar, and author, world-renowned leadership expert, and she has also written a book, *Micro-Resilience: Minor Shifts for Major Boosts in Focus, Drive, and Energy*. Thank you so much, Bonnie.

Bonnie: Thank you, Terry. And I'm just excited to see everybody in July in Arizona.

Terry: Excellent.

Bonnie: Take care.

Terry: Thank you. And thank you all for listening.