

**Radha**

Good morning Vijay. Thanks for making it to Mrigashira and I'm happy to have you here.

**Vijay**

Entirely. My pleasure and privilege. Thank you.

**Radha**

Thanks Vijay. I just want to, you know, ask you about workplace stress burnout, which is so common for us, particularly today during the pandemic. So, um, I just want to ask you, why is it so common and more so for us Indians, you know?

**Vijay**

Ah, well, let me answer the first part of it first, which is that stress is a universal phenomenon. It has nothing to do with age, or geography or sector or anything like that, right? We are hardwired for stress. And we are hardwired for well being as human. And part of the challenges, as you know, your question reveals is that we assume that our circumstances or our situation is what is the trigger for stress? Okay, that's not actually the case. For example, two people could be facing the same situation, one person deals with it in a magical way, one person deals with it in a very stressful way. So one of the things to remember about stress in general, is that stress is the loss of equilibrium that we experience when our when the pressures imposed, either internal pressure or external pressure exceeds our coping resources. Now, the implication of that is that we may not be able to control our circumstances, we cannot control our circumstances beyond the point. So the only thing that remains with us is to manage our coping resources. And unfortunately, we have not been trained or supported in understanding what our coping resources are and how to deal with them. So to answer your question about COVID. Now, COVID is a planetary phenomenon. Nobody had expected COVID. So COVID has ratcheted up the pressure enormously. So clearly, COVID pressure is much greater than our typical standard coping resources, which were in any case under threat, because of workplace pressures, and you know, all kinds of issues may come to that in a moment. But if our coping resources have remained here, but the pressure has gone here, it's inevitable that we are going to be stressed. And when this gap increases between the coping resources and the pressure, we are going to get burnout. Because burnout is nothing but extreme and enduring stress. Correct. Right. So that is what it is. It's basically a gap between our coping resources and the pressure, we can't do much about the pressure, let's raise our coping resources, that is the essence of our work, whether it is with cancer or whether it is with workplace stress, the principle is exactly the same. So many people think oh, India, may stress jyada hai etc. Yes, there are some reasons why India may stress jyada hoga. But on the whole, it is not geography specific or sector specific. It is our hardwiring, and our training that comes into.

**Radha**

That's interesting that you, you pointed out two things that you know, our coping mechanism is lacking. And second, of course, is the fact that the pandemic sort of increased the stress levels right. Why is a coping mechanism still lacking and then post pandemic or or now that we are somewhere, you know, having reduction in cases? Do you also see, you know, a new dimension to wellness in the sense.

We're not just taking care of ourselves, but also, you know, our near and dear ones, our relationships with the ecosystem around us has also changed.

**Vijay**

Yeah, one of the silver linings of the pandemic, according to me, is that well being and immunity have now come into the mainstream,

**Vijay**

Otherwise, well being and immunity was left to people who are sick or in hospital or those crazy people who talk about well being all the time, and so on, and so on and so on. Right? It was on the periphery in general. Now it is in the mainstream, and I think that's a good thing. And the reason why I say that is because to answer your first question, our coping mechanisms are lacking, because simply they have not been trained.

**Radha**

Yep.

**Vijay**

we are expecting that we will be able to cope because of some default capacities which our body mind spirit has, which is true, we do have those. And therefore many of us have somehow managed, stumbling, fumbling, grumbling we've managed. But we could manage much, much better if those coping resources were to be identified and or to be actually developed consciously. Right? Just like leadership skills need to be developed consciously or presentation skills need to be developed consciously. In the same way our coping skills when it comes to pressure, external pressure or internal pressure needs to be developed. Now, you can't develop it until you first diagnose it.

**Radha**

Correct.

**Vijay**

So now the question becomes, do we have a common definition of stress. No, I conduct programs for 1000s of people, and there are 1000s of definitions. So that in itself is a problem, do we have a simple diagnostic tool to understand what my what the level of my stress is, and what types of stressors I have no. And therefore, we have created an online questionnaire which is free. which allows people to actually diagnose their stress. Once you diagnose the stress, and you get a picture, just like you would go to a medical report, you know, I need to work on my blood pressure, or I need to work on my cholesterol, I need to work on my blood sugar, I need to work on my lipid profile. In the same way, if you know, I need to work on my physical stress, then there are certain things that you can do to improve your coping. I need to work on my emotional stress, then there are many things that you can do to improve that mental stress, relational stress, spiritual stress, these are the five dimensions of well being that we work with. And so once you have the diagnose, once you have a definition, then you have a diagnosis, then you have the development tools. Now you can deal with it, how will you deal with it 100% may or may be not just like there are different people with different levels of skills, but at

least you will not be in a place where you're either ignorant, or ill equipped, that should not have that is our view.

**Radha**

When people are going through a lot of stress the ecosystem around it, how understanding are there and what should they do to be able to you know, help somebody going through, you know, these kind of upheavals so to speak.

**Vijay**

Yeah, so CBR as you correctly pointed out, even when it comes to serious illness, the role of the caregivers or the role of the ecosystem is neglected and underdeveloped. Certainly in our country, and in most countries, I can tell you from a cancer perspective, it is underdeveloped. And that is a problem because our well being and our healing does not happen in isolation or at an individual level. The whole system does need to be involved. But it is a it is a matter of time I feel that now that the awareness is there. And just like the person suffering from stress needs, coping resources and coping mechanisms. The caregiving And the ecosystem also needs awareness also needs tools also needs a mechanism by which a certain kind of dialogue can be had. Right? Otherwise, what happens is that I like to describe it as, you know, the deaf leading the blind leading the dumb kind of situation, nobody really knows. And therefore, people give completely subjective advice, including saying, chill, yaar, take it easy yaar, don't be stressed yaar, sorry, this doesn't actually help. This actually can make it worse, because, hey, I don't know what the problem I'm having. And I don't know what is causing me the stress, and I don't know how to deal with it. Right? So giving me either unsolicited or giving me ill considered advice can actually harm. So we need really good educational awareness campaign. For as I said, at the very basic level, what is stress? How is it caused? What is the impact of stress? And what are the tools that are available for you, the good news is that our zillions of tools, very powerful, very effective tools. And again, those tools, we have curated them, and we have brought them down to very simple 10 minute or 15 minute tools. So when I do my stress to swasthya workshop or play shop, as I like to call it, we teach people those tools, so that you can go and practice them on a daily basis. So awareness, education, opening people's minds, and then giving them a diagnosis, and then empowering them to actually do what is appropriate, all are important.

**Radha**

And what is the kind of role organizations play in this because a lot of stress in today's, you know, environment is also caused by work, right? So what kind of roles organizations have played or need to play?

**Vijay**

Organizations have a huge role to play for a very simple reason that many of us spend more time in work than we spend at home.

**Radha**

Correct

**Vijay**

Right. And the stakes very often are higher at work than they are at home. Or at least that's what we believe. Right? But again, when we think about it, and organization can really provide a healthy and constructive platform. So that you can balance, productivity and positivity. See, the challenge for organizations is always balancing productivity and positivity, you want both. If you only focus on productivity, people will basically crumble. If you only focus on positivity, people may be happy, but you don't deliver the results. Correct. Right. So organizations, and particularly the leadership and HR has to really play that role. Now, unfortunately, most organizations do very little in this area. And therefore, there are major issues with stress and burnout. And the organization's general viewers, we will do a little bit product token pantry mein thoda healthy menu krenge, ya once a week, or once in two weeks, we will arrange a yoga class on zoom or a mindfulness class on this and that this does not really change very much, actually. Whereas if organizations take a systematic and structured and a strategic view, there are huge positive benefits. And again, in our programs, we talk about attrition goes down, engagement levels go up, motivation goes up, company reputation goes up, absenteeism goes down, medical costs go down. These are all significant, significant benefits that organizations can have. So I'm a big advocate, to go to my friends and clients and say, listen, guys, you can't let people simply say now you figure it out, we'll do a workshop after that it's up to you. Because let's face it, what happens in the workplace, the kind of culture that you create, the kinds of opportunities that you give, the kinds of platforms that you create, are going to have a huge impact. So the ideal situation is individuals must be empowered with the coping mechanisms and the tools and organizations must be empowered with systemic tools and systemic approaches to deal with this, and I'll take it one step further at a social level. Right, if you look at the rising we call them the five deadly these, right, okay, drinking going up, numbers are going up particularly young Among youngsters and women, divorce rates going up, connected to stress drinking connected to stress, divorce connected to stress, depression going up crazily connected to stress, that going up crazily connected to stress, EMI for this EMI for that, and finally death or illness going up crazy lifestyle illnesses going up. Unfortunately, we are not making this connection between these social issues. And the stress that is being created at an individual level, at an organization level, at the family level at a community level, or at a national level. And now even at an international level. Yes, right. So I think it's, I think it's really a neglected area that requires a lot more attention at all levels and for that, I would say that they have to work with experts can't happen on your own, you can't just tell your HR person kuch kar do then you will have these token efforts, you need to have a proper structured, systematic approach to it, which is what I recommend.

### **Radha**

And are there. So that brings me to the next question, which is that are there people, you know, who are good at doing this and good at, you know, sort of, like, for example, a quality journey, right? I mean, I know it's a journey, it's not a one time effort, and it is not something like a tokenism. So similarly, are there equipped qualified people in India who really bring a lot of capable of bringing a lot of focus into this.

### **Vijay**

When you're looking at one of them?

### **Radha**

I know you will say this.

**Vijay**

But I must say that there are other people who are in the same space and doing a good job, too. They're not as many as they should be, obviously, because it's a new area. And you require many years of thinking and a practice to arrive at a framework, which is scientific and substantial enough for organizations to pick up.

**Radha**

Yeah,

**Vijay**

At the same time, is deep enough for it to actually have an impact, which is why we look at physical, mental, emotional, relational and spiritual. Right, if you don't take a holistic view of stress, and if you're not able to offer a comprehensive approach, then you get into that situation, as you say, we think of quality as something that we do in an off site, as opposed to being on a lifelong quality journey. So it's not an easy process. For example, there are you know, The Art of Living foundation provides a program or the Isha foundation may provide a program or a ti SS may provide a program and I'm sure all of them are, you know, good. Whether they are as effective in an organizational setting, whether there is whether they are backed by data, whether they are sufficiently individualized because, you know, you can't give the same pill to everybody, unlike in western medical system. Correct. Right. You have to tailor it. So it takes a lot of time and effort to do it. And it requires a combination of technology and humanity. Yeah. You can't just say Chalo ek app bana dete hain, people will figure out there on stress, no, it's not going to happen so easily. And so it is getting there. I think a good start is being made a lot more needs to be done.

**Radha**

let's hope that you know, more and more people and more and more organizations coming to really practicing this, Vijay, thanks a lot for your time. It was great talking to you.

**Vijay**

Yeah, what I would like to do is to leave for your viewers just our viewers, the place where they can go and do this free diagnostic online

**Vijay**

It is called h HHQ at cancer awakens.com. Okay, HHQ stands for Holistic Health Questionnaire. So what I normally say is before you do anything else, just like you would do in every aspect of your life, Pahle diagnosis Karo. Uske baad whatever actions you want to take you can take, and this is true for organizations as well.

**Radha**

That's great. Thanks a lot, and all the best for your ventures and efforts.

**Vijay**

Thank you so much Radha pleasure to be with you.

