The restaurant pros. His name's Scott Peters and welcome to episode 34 of the restaurant prosperity formula. I've been coaching restaurant owners since 2003. And the restaurant prosperity formula is based on what the most successful restaurant owners I've worked with do on a daily basis to achieve their success. So the formula centers around achieving prosperity, freedom from your restaurant and the financial freedom you deserve. To achieve prosperity, you have to follow a very specific formula made up of leadership systems, training, accountability and taking action. centers on the crisis of mental health in the restaurant industry. Yesterday is easy Marshall, founder and CEO of the Center for Creative Arts Therapy and arts based psychotherapy practice and training center in Chicago. She helps empower businesses and organizations to reduce turnover, increase employee satisfaction, engagement and retention, reduce stress, increase resilience, and improve mental well being so everyone can thrive. As he is he holds graduate degrees in community health and theatre. She's been featured on Oprah Magazine, CNN, NBC News, thrive global buffle Reader's Digest, The Huffington Post, Chicago Tribune, and Glanzer magazine. listen in on our conversation, where we talk about how you can recognize and support team members who may be struggling. I want to welcome as easy Marshall to the show today. But first, a word from our sponsor. This episode is being brought to you by repeat returns. If you're a restaurant owner of a medium to high volume, independent restaurant, multi unit or franchise operator, and you're looking for a proven and realistic solution to attract, grow and retain customers, then you need to visit repeat returns. E returns is a modern marketing platform created by a restaurant owner for restaurant owners. It studies each customer's habits and patterns predicts the most profitable outcome for your restaurant every single day employs a marketing to make the finger to see if repeat returns is right for you. Visit repeat returns.com forward slash DSP. AZIZI I want to welcome you and thank you so much for taking time to talk with us today.

Oh, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here. David.

This is a big topic. Now you and I that little little disclosure we met in a coaching group that we both belong to and develop their friendship at some level and my daughter goes to Aurora University year out in Chicago area. We sat had coffee my wife you and I. And it was really a pleasure to learn more about what you do and it inspired me to bring you on today. Because you are somebody who really could make a difference in the restaurant industry and that's why we're here. And I want to really dive into it's really about mental health and with with all of your experience, what do you see as the challenges in the restaurant industry because I see it every single day from people really struggling just to cope with what's going on in their life to high rates of alcoholism and drug abuse, to just disorders that are that are literally not not seen. And there's this stigma about talking about it and so on. So, I really love for you to tell me, based on your experience. What do you think some of the major mental health challenges are in the restaurant? Industry?

Wow, I can definitely speak to just experience and work in front of house and and seeing a lot of the stressors that were happening in the back of house as well where there's this this rampant need to to achieve all these things in a very tight tight constraint timeline and the pressure to get it right and perfect every single time. And then customers now the shift with their mental health to when they're coming into the restaurant, and expecting all these things and the expectations have just grown and grown and grown. Yet nobody's been able to take care of themselves. And this existed, you know, pre pandemic, just the stressors of working in the restaurant industry in general. And then add all of this stuff on top of just survival mode. But now people are having trauma responses on a daily basis. And so that's what I've been seeing is the trauma responses are leading then to people having these mental breakdowns where people are talking about having panic attacks all the time. Or one person I talked to you said that they go into the cooler to cry. You know, just on their breaks when it's not even a break. It's like the two minutes that they have between making another dish for some other order that comes in. So a lot of it is coming from this just pandemics stress but then also the culture that existed prior to the pandemic. And so it's compounding on top of each other all these mental health challenges that people are experiencing and not knowing what to do with it.

You talked about the pandemic how's the pandemic impacted it because I sit there and I see it with my own children that they are especially my daughter who lost her senior year in high school and how it changed everything and she was working in the restaurant industry and and that from customers coming up and having to call the police this summer three times. Because at a little coffee shop a drive thru. Like how what is going on and people calling off just because they can't handle it. Like how's the pandemic ramped things up? Because you're right we had a problem in the industry before the pandemic, but now it seems just like at a crisis level.

What's what's happening now is I like to call really a few months ago we were in the eye of the storm of the pandemic and this happened with Hurricane Katrina. With 911 That people were surviving. They were in survival mode, and that's where we were we were we were surviving. We were getting through it. We were doing what we needed to do. And now we're coming out of it in some ways, and we're able to just somewhat let go of all of that. Traumatic responses. But once people start feeling safe now all this stuff that they've been experiencing is coming out in ways that they can't even explain. It's coming out in anger. It's coming out and lashing out at people. It's coming out and just the just the rampant struggle to survive on a daily basis and then now going okay, now I'm supposed to go back to normal, what is even normal now. So so that is the challenges people are coming out of this pandemic that have lived in this trauma response for almost two years now. And they're finally able to just breathe and now they have to deal with everything that they just went through that they weren't processing.

Nope, clinician, but I see it every day I talk to people every day. It's almost as if, I don't know eight out of 10 people I know at some level are suffering from some level of depression. Is that accurate? Am I over of overthinking it but I mean literally it's almost waves it's it's almost as if it be polar but right now there's a day that you have a great day and then it could be just the next day and it just Downey or what as a professional overthinking it.

Why don't we thinking that it all it's it's all trauma responses. That's what we're seeing and trauma responses can come out in so many different ways. It can come out in the forms of anxiety in irritability. I've seen that a lot with parents and their children just being super irritable. It can come out in depression or lack of drive. And all of these things are coming up in different ways but people aren't able to really name what it is. And it is it's this reaction to the trauma of the pandemic that is showing itself as depression, as anxiety, as overstressed and and people are unable to sleep and or they're sleeping too much. And all of these things are just messing with the brain chemistry and responses to other people and how people are engaging with one another. So yeah, definitely not overthinking it. It's it's it's what we're experiencing. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what that thing is because people respond to trauma in different ways.

So why would this be one of those those bright lines straight line that people are not talking about when it comes to the labor shortage in the restaurant business? A lot of people don't want to be in the restaurant business anymore from the way we treated them in the past to new flexibility they want to this emotional state but as we start to lose employees can't find them they don't want to come in is much of this a part of the this mental health crisis that nobody's really talking about?

Very much so very much. So there was a study done a few months ago about how employees 63% 63% of employees feel that they are burnt out, and when they feel burned out, they are two to three times more likely to either call off sick or to quit or to actively be looking for another job. So that is something that is compounded, just having to work in an industry that already has a stigma to any sort of mental health challenges and the restaurant industry specifically, I've seen that you know, I've worked with C suite people I've worked with all these different industries and I've seen it mostly in the restaurant industry where it's like it's just not talked about you just come in you get the work done and then you got

people self medicate. I mean, that's the biggest thing is all the partying that goes on and the self abuse from eating to drugs to alcohol, and it seems normal because it's the industry but the truth of matter is they're self medicating. Now, here's kind of the deal. You and I talked and I I don't normally want to talk about what you do and your company until the end. But I think we need to start there because I want to talk about how your program can truly benefit each employer from reducing turnover and, and labor costs to literally having happy people becoming an employer of choice and how they can keep people in your business staying with you much longer. So talk a little bit about your mental health at work program. What is that? Why did you create it?

So the Mental Health at Work program came from a need a very strong need for people to understand what mental health is how to support people, how to connect with people who are struggling. Understanding how to recognize the signs of mental illness, how to then support people. And we used to do this two days, full day trainings. And it took forever and people don't have time for that. And so we're realizing that if we can compound this to full day training into just two hours, that's it and gamify it make it fun, have fun scenarios so that people can practice it in this kind of virtual world. That two hours is really all they need. And we actually just did a test study that people went through the training, they they started to implement the things that they learned it already started to increase the productivity of their employees because their employees felt like they were cared for. They knew that that the people they work with could identify if they were struggling, even if the individual couldn't themselves and say, Hey, I'm noticing this is going on. Can I point you to some resources that can help you out? And so that's what mental health at work is. It's an online training program. Two hours, it's all you need. You have a full year of access to the program so you can go back at any time. And then another piece is thing that I'm so excited to be able to offer to companies is they can call in. So we have weekly and depending on your package monthly call in times where you can check in and say, Hey, this is what's going on at work. I don't know how to approach this employee. Do you have any resources I can give them and that is the biggest thing that I think is missing is employees are looking for support but they don't know where to go. And there are good therapists out there and there are bad therapists out there. So we want to connect people with therapists that actually know what they're doing who are trained in depression specifically or anxiety specifically, we're organizations that have free resources, so they don't have to use their own finances to pay for any sort of mental health services. So that's that's the other piece. It's the online training and then the Collins support that we're really excited to offer to businesses

from basically you're saying you've got a program that very simple to our training, but it's going to teach me the owner, the managers especially to recognize somebody who's struggling and how to actually approach them to get them help. I mean, that's tremendous. I love the support part of it. I know you and I talked quite a bit about that and how important it is that sure you got a great training but often the training covers one thing but you see something maybe you don't recognize it in a person and it feels crises What do I do and often management owners and managers they treated as misbehavior or that they're they don't care and they should be trimmed from our from our team and, and all these things that it's a I don't know behavioral issue, issue of their choosing versus one that is just materializing. How can this truly benefit both the employer and the team members? So if I'm a manager or I'm a I'm a an owner, you know, what are the couple keys that that make this program so powerful for them and vice versa? Kind of touch a little more you started talking about the benefit to the employee? Can you give me a little more light on that?

Yeah, so I would say the the benefit I'm thinking as a business owner is turnover is huge. It's a huge cost of businesses. And so if you have an employee that's struggling and you can name that for them and approach them and say, Hey, I'm noticing you're struggling with this. What here are some resources that I'm seeing that you that can really help you? Or even just talking with them? I mean, I feel a lot of times business owners are very quick to go. Okay, bye. I'm not dealing with that. Or they can just have one conversation and know how to have that conversation in a supportive way. That employee then will notice that recognize that tell their friends about it say I'm working at the best place ever. I had a panic attack and my boss knew what to do. Like that's huge. And then that helps to keep that employee engaged because they feel cared for. Then what happens when the employee feels cared for. They're going to care for your customers, because they feel loved. They're going to love their customers and that that's huge too, because then you get all of the wonderful feedback and testimonials. Oh, it's a great place to eat. You got to go there. Their staff is amazing. Yeah, there's definitely amazing because they're not completely stressed out. They feel cared for, and they're going

to work hard for you because of it. And that doesn't mean we're softening what the job has to do. They're still they still have pressure pressure situations to get things done and timing and follow and do the rules. And cleanliness and all these things. We're not removing that we're just giving them the skills to be able to deal with it and cope better. I mean, is my understanding that properly.

Yeah, and the additional support to

do in the in the discussions as you're trained to recognize of that conversation doesn't come up that anybody should be worried about, you know, talking medically to somebody and then getting into any of the the privacy issues or things like that, or is that something that how you bring it up in conversation without going down that track? Is that something you teach?

Yeah, so we teach you how to observe warning signs. So it's somebody who used to come into work on time all the time and now is struggling to get to work on time. That's a red flag and that's something to check in with that person with. If somebody is you know, usually super productive and now they keep making mistakes on on dishes all the time. You're like, what is going on? That's when you check in with that person and see what's happening. It's not necessarily teaching you how to diagnose and say, Oh, that's anxiety. Oh, that's depression. It's more of saying, here's some warning signs to look out for. This is what it could be. And here's the best way to support that person.

Fantastic. So I could be a rookie manager for that matters. First time I've ever managed people. And this training is going to give me a leg up on anybody else who's been a 30 year veteran who's never cared about an employee enough to show appreciation to recognize little things. stressors, if you will, that ended up being bad behavior at work, which could be something bigger, that could literally be let's get you some help. And I mean, is it that simple, or

it really is that simple. And I laugh because I wish people would understand this that with knowledge comes change. And so if you can teach somebody how to identify these warning signs and then offer the support that changes the whole system,

or can tell you as a as somebody who's grown up in this industry, I certainly wish I had those skill sets. Now I think I'm a pretty empathetic person. I think I'm a really good manager of people. And certainly take the time to give people the benefit of the doubt and so on. But I've also been quick to react and go get out of my team because I'm tired of the same behavior, showing itself over and over again and just going straight to a write up versus identifying this person may be struggling. And I can tell you from in just personal. You know, I've had family members struggle with alcohol and drug abuse and I've had depression through all these you know, through my family tree and you sit there and go. A part of it is difficult because for so many years, those things are stigmas. Like nobody wants to talk about it. Nobody wants to recognize it. In fact, you want to hide it because the moment you out yourself and say I've got an issue, then people start to treat you differently at work at home with friends because they think it's something you're doing versus it's not really in your control. Does that sound right?

That sounds great. And there's actually a way to help alleviate some of that stigma first is just talking about it, making it a normal thing. I can't tell you how many people I know just in my own neighborhood that has had a panic attack. I want to say half of my neighbor's half of my neighbors have had panic attacks at some point in their life. It's it's a normal thing people experience it for whatever reason, and and to be able to support people in that is phenomenal to say hey, this is what I'm seeing. And let's just help reduce that stigma. There's also a workplace wellness action plan that is taught in that program and mental health at work that talks you through like here are the things that you can do. And the employee and the employer, fill it out together and the employee can say hey, you know, do some things that cause me additional stress and I may have a panic attack because of it. Okay, so here's some things as your boss that I'm going to help to alleviate some of that or you know, prevent that from happening as often. Especially, I'm talking it's Veterans Day today and I'm thinking about people who've been through any sort of war. And I know when they're in like those loud situations, that's just a constant trauma response that people are having to deal with and manage. And it could be something as simple as having headphones, they can work with headphones, or having to listen to music while they cook, whatever it may be. That can help and if the employee knows that you're going to support him with that, they're going to love working for you.

I think that's fantastic. I mean, you just talked about the stressors and things like that. I can remember when I was a famous Sam's the stress of turning around near bankrupt company. To a sale and dealing with bank issues and franchisee conflict and growing the company and doing all those things. I can remember driving into work one day having a panic attack I'm sure it was a lot of was was caffeine related. And you know, I knew at some point time my life I was going to have a heart attack because my father had one his father, uncle and so on. And I drove myself to the emergency room and it was purely a panic attack. Now fortunately for me, I outgrew and if you will, I don't know if I had coping skills or something happened in my life, but for a period of time, a year or so. It was it was dramatic. It would just make my heart just want to jump out of my chest for no reason whatsoever. And I got to believe that's happening more and more today to especially young people who've had everything changed because of COVID everything getting ripped away from them. Life is not normal anymore. In your program, how do how does somebody really sit down and I've identified you've got something that could be triggering a behavior that might be mental health. How do you sit down with that person? How do you prevent prevent people from not wanting to seek help? Because again, the stigma behind it? Is there anything they can do?

Yeah, it's, it's showing up as a listener and so that's part of mental health at work, that training is to teach you how to actively listen. And it's not just sitting there nodding your head, like when you think of going to a therapist they go but another part of it is just the body language that you have when sitting with somebody. So instead of sitting with your arms across your chest, you sit with your hands just gently in your lap and you're leaning forward because you're showing that you want to hear what they have to say, you don't interrupt you don't interpret. You then reflect back what they say so they feel heard. So these are all therapy techniques that we learned in graduate school. But in the program we're teaching you how to do that as well. So then, when a person feels like they're listened to they're going to share more they're going to feel more comfortable telling you what they need. And once you know what they need, then you can help them

so it's almost a you know, there's a lot of things when you go to interview they talked about mirroring your interviewer so that you've kind of kind of matched their energy. It's the opposite. And here instead of if I'm, I'm a very intense person and I look at you and my arms are crossed or they're just, I'm square on you. I'm going to put you in a defensive position versus relaxed and if I just open up just a little bit, those little triggers can truly make things relax and feel more comfortable. And you're literally teaching people things that you paid. I don't want to tell you how much money you probably spent in grad school, but to really be able to take it up a level is it again, it sounds like it's so simple, but it's not it's there's a lot of training behind what you're teaching people, right?

Yeah, yeah, there's a lot of training behind it. And the more you do it, the more comfortable you'll feel doing it, the more easy it will be. And that's why there's there's the your access to the program. So if anytime you're like, Okay, so what was I supposed to do? Here's the situation. Let me go back to that clip and see, oh, that's how they talk about doing it. That's how I can approach it. So you can constantly go back and get information on the approach to somebody

or to think as you're learning the approach, you say, Oh, I tried but they didn't want to open up. What would be some of the reasons why somebody wouldn't want to open up right away and say I've gotten mental health challenge.

Well, I mean, we touched on already is the stigma. The other part is with the restaurant industry. People haven't been able to open up this is something that is highly stigmatized, any sort of mental health challenge. And so it's it's earning the trust of that employee and that takes time. And so the more you can just be there and let them know hey, you know, if you're ever struggling with something, let me know like I'm here to support you because we're here working as a team. However it is to constantly say, I'm here as a listening person to help support you.

So if I'm sitting there talking to somebody in maybe in the counseling part of it, they don't want to open up stigma, all those things we just talked about. Would you talk to them about what some of the pros and cons are or four Do I just need to know what pros and cons are to interpret of really coming out and sharing that I've got a mental health issue? Is there any, you know, how can that help me as a manager of people to understand what those pros and cons are?

You able to talk about being open and it comes from like we were talking about earlier, mirror mirroring comes in a different way when you're talking about mental health issues, if you can mirror as a boss as the owner of the restaurant as the managers that mental health is something that we talk about, that we support each other with and to say hey, you know I've I've struggled with anxiety occasionally throughout my life. My perfectionism comes out big time and certain things that I do. And so when I can talk about that, just with my team, they can see that oh, it's, it's okay. Like if the leader of this place is talking about it, then I can talk about it and it and then they're going to talk about it in very little ways. They're going to drop little hints just to see like, is it actually accepted? And they're going to test and see what is actually welcomed. And the more that you can mirror that and show support when somebody brings it up, the more the whole team and the culture will see that and the more other people will start to open up.

So my my mind is racing in this is normally really energetic when I do interviews and things like this, but this is such a somber, serious topic. And again, it's a crisis in our industry. It has been as you and I talked about, you've got family in the restaurant business like you know, firsthand the restaurant industry just like I do. So it's not like you're just being a clinician and going well in the restaurant industry like you've seen it firsthand. When you look at this, and you say we can help people, but it's not only help people like if you're an owner, you're saying well why would I invest in this and I just go get another employee when we're in a shortage of employees in the first place. The buAziziword in the industry is appreciation that employees want to feel appreciated. They don't have to be like they have to be appreciated. It's a part of something bigger heard, you know, really being a part of the team. And then we sit there and say, well in the year is is coming to an end fourth quarter people analyzing whether they even want to what do they want to do with their life and in the next year and so they start analyzing maybe this is the job I give up and I want to go down another path. If you can help somebody go through this, it can really reduce turnover and your training costs. I mean, I think studies show it's like 6400 $7,000 Every time you turn over an employee from ads, to lost opportunities to burn steaks and broken dishes and workers comp and all these things. This program could really help you keep retain and maybe even find good employees. Like am I is that a reach to say that this program is not only just to help your people but if you want to look at your bottom line. This could really start to make your profitability go up and keep good people for a lot longer.

Yes, absolutely. Because Because people in this in the industry they talk they know where the good restaurants are to work and they know where there's a boss that will yell at you for dropping something on the floor. And they know when that goes up here. Let me help you pick it up. Like they know what places are the ones to work out where they are going to be supported. And that's where they'll end up going. So instead of yelling and screaming and not supporting and not hearing the people that are working with you, and having the leave mass exodus basically, they're then going to tell everybody else don't come and work for you. But if you are the one who supports them, who makes them feel safe, who makes them feel appreciated, then more people are going to want to work for you and more quality people are going to want to work with you. Okay, so

let's say I'm listening to us right now watching us. And I'm like, Man, I want to learn more about this program. Where do I go to find out about it? Like you have a website? How do I get there?

Yeah, so you can go to artful well.com. So AR T FQL, w e ll calm and it gives you all of the information. There's a nice little tab in the center that says mental health at work for that specific program. To learn more about just how we can implement that for you and what it looks like.

It doesn't matter where I am. As far as in the United States, you can handle anybody and help them through this process. Correct. Now what if I'm International, you may not have the resources there but the same training if you speak English that would work for you

that would work for you as well. Yeah, it isn't all in English, and we're hoping to be able to have a Spanish translation in the next four or five months.

Oh, fantastic. I I'm really glad that you you came on with me today. Again, it's an issue that that sits personal with me family and what have you. And just because this is an industry that I love, it is full of stress. It is full of people that shouldn't be managing because they not only don't recognize that somebody is having a struggle, they're bullies. And our industry can't do that. anymore. In fact, that's why we're having the labor shortage we have today. I've talked about in past podcasts about becoming an employer of choice. I've talked about how we should be re recruiting our employees right now and thanking them for those who survived the pandemic with us stayed with us. Ask them why they stayed with us and what we can do to keep them and make them happy. But I also wanted people to understand that it doesn't mean you're becoming soft, it doesn't mean you're lowering your standards. It doesn't mean that you're bending and whatever employees need and want if it doesn't help the company that you're bending and so on. It's literally giving them the social skills, the personal skills to cope. Be a good citizen, have a happy life and be a good, fruitful employee, if you will. Does that sound accurate?

Absolutely. That sounds 100% accurate.

So you and I spent time together I know you're really passionate about this. What what what motivates you to one to have created this program into just to keep going because your job is stressful? It's not more stressful because you take on everybody else's pain and struggles?

Well, I would say what what keeps me going is my upbringing. Actually, both of my parents were therapists, and I actually didn't want to become a therapist growing up. I wanted to become an actor. And so I did that had fun in Chicago, and then everything kept pulling me back to working with people and working with their stories and supporting them and having them see a different trajectory in life. Also, my brother's in the restaurant industry he has been since he was 15. And still is and I hearing his struggles in the restaurant industry just breaks my heart to know that it'd be people would listen and support better. The whole restaurant would be so much happier. On top of that, having family members with mental health issues. My father had had PTSD growing up experiencing that witnessing that all of that keeps me going. That's That's my why I want to make sure that people, they're going to struggle, everybody struggles, but I want people to know that when they are struggling, that they're going to be supported.

Again, why I'm drawn to you and why I really want to do this and we're gonna have to do this again. But before we go, what can employee let's say, for some reason, somebody is listening to podcasts. They're not an owner, they're not a manager, or I'm a manager owner and I want to share a little information, how can employees take care of themselves? I mean, do you have any tips for them?

Well, I want to I want to go beyond self care because people talk about bubble baths and massages and things and the big thing is, is boundaries what boundaries can you put up for yourself to say no to things to say yes to things for me if it's not a hell yes, it's a hell no. Like, I'm going to set that boundary very strong like time with my family is precious and nothing comes in between that. Another way is there's tons of free resources out there for mental health services. There are organizations that if you don't have the funding to find a therapist within your health insurance premiums, whatever that may be. There are free organizations that have therapists that love what they do, and can support you even if it's just coming in and checking in once a month. Like anything to help where you can go and just lay it all out there. feel supported, say what you need to say and then go back to your daily life like that's, that's what us as mental health therapists are there for. We are here to listen to you to support you. And there are many free agencies out there that offer that

Azizi Marshall, you're awesome. Before we go, is there anything that we didn't talk about that you want to share with people, whether it's an inspirational quote, an idea of calling, or just a tip you want to give him before we go?

It doesn't just take care of yourself, when you can take care of yourself, care of others. And I think that that is another part of the training that we also teach you how to practice that self care and to identify things within yourself that may be coming up that's affecting how you're interacting with employees. So take care of yourself so you can take care of others.

But fantastic. AZIZI I want to thank you so much for talking today. I hope we can do this again real soon. And I hope that your website gets loaded with restaurant people who really want to take their business to the next level and help their team really feel appreciated, and obviously take care of themselves in their mental health. Thanks so much. Thank you. It was an awesome episode. I want to thank you for taking the time to take action on building a better more prosperous restaurant. Before you go. I want to give you these three thoughts. One by combining leadership and taking action with systems and training being checked by accountability. You're on your way to creating prosperity for your restaurant. I something I need from you. Please leave a review on Apple podcast Spotify or wherever you happen to listen to podcasts by leaving us a review other restaurant pro seeking out this information are able to find it. I read the reviews and hearing how this information has benefited you does wonders for me. And three if you find any of the discussions helpful share them, but more restaurant pros who have access to them, the better we become as an industry. For more restaurant resources where to get in contact with me. Connect with me at David Scott peters.com Be passionate about what you're doing. Be persistent, but more importantly become better and help everyone around you become better and he's going to kick some ass.