Liz Wiltsie: Becoming Sustainably Human At Work isn't a small undertaking. It often means letting go of systems and behaviors that don't serve us individually or collectively. So what do we do as individuals, as groups of folks, as leaders? How do we carve out space for our humanity while making sure we're not the only ones? How do we thrive in the workplace while not imagining we have to be superhuman? How do we cultivate spaces that are generative and healing, creative and extraordinary? I don't have the answers to those questions, and to be fair I don't believe one human can ever have all the answers to those questions. I'm working through them every day.

This podcast is an invitation, an invitation for you to join me on my quest. I've asked my teachers to share their wisdom with you, and here we are. This is *Sustainably Human At Work*, and I'm Liz Wiltsie.

Welcome, everyone, to the podcast today! I get to welcome my friend Marie Poulin who is someone who works deeply with systems for your business and your life to make sure you're getting what you want out of it. Her tool of choice at this moment is Notion, and she's my Notion Fairy Godmother, personally. She runs a fantastic course called Notion Mastery, and I've really invited her today to talk about what that looks like for people. So Marie, thank you for being here!

Marie Poulin: Thanks for having me. I'm excited!

Liz Wiltsie: So one of the things that I love about your program is that it's really about how do you find what works for you and the tools that you can use. So how did you start realizing what you needed via Notion?

Marie Poulin: Yeah, I think trying to be effective in our lives is often exploring different tools and ways of doing that, and then if you're collaborating with other people and then other people have different ways of also tracking that and as a team how do you make sure everybody's got the same information? I think a lot of us have at least been in that point where we're trying to figure out, like, ahh, I'm trying to get things done, and the to-do list is feeling like it's growing and growing and we're not really being effective and we're kinda spread across a number of different tools. For me, that's what I noticed. I felt like we're all kind of exploring lots of tools all the time, right? We've got our different things to manage our calendar and our time and our to-dos, and then often we're switching tools. You're like I like Todoist better or whatever, right?

So any of us are kind of — the places where I was trying to get things done day-to-day (like in a sauna or something like that) was very separate from the places I was doing creative thinking or strategic planning, and I felt really pulled across a number of different pieces of tech. So I felt like I wasn't really being effective. I was checking things off the list, but I sort of felt really scattered and my attention was pulled in a lot of different ways. I was like surely there's gotta be some better way of doing this. How do you make sure that

your day-to-day actions are really moving you toward your longterm legacy work, body of work stuff.

For me, when I discovered Notion, I was so excited to have this place that I could have a mix of the really messy thinking and the stuff that's — strategic planning is messy. It's not so linear — and a place where I could also track that day-to-day. For me, Notion was that creative tool that kind of helped me start to pull those things together. It felt like it just calmed my brain. I was like, "Oh, I'm not a total scattered mess." I just hadn't found a tool that reflected the way it felt like my brain worked.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah, and one of the stories that you've told in the past is — so Marie's got a journal that — she actually does sell her Notion journal setup which I will link to you as well, and it is deep and exciting. But in it, there's a place for three words about your day. You've told a story about that shifting for you and some of your work. Can you tell us about that?

Marie Poulin: Yeah. So I've been keeping a daily journal, which I was never able to do before Notion. I think that's part of the reason I get so excited about the tool is it's allowed me to just get more visibility into what do my days look like? When am I feeling in flow? How happy am I? How effective am I? What does it all mean, right? A lot of existential tracking, basically, that happens inside my journal. But it's really fun! I just think these tools have the potential to be used well if we use them with intention.

So I was just paying attention to — I would give every day three words that kind of describe how I feel, and I was noticing in my, you know, weekly agenda, my daily journal "overwhelmed," "overwhelmed." I kept noticing key words that kept popping up, and at some point as I was doing these weekly reviews, I'm looking at how I felt about my day and I was continuing to notice overwhelm was the word that kept popping up a ton. I was like this is silly. I run my own business. I decide how I spend my time, so what is happening here that I'm continuing to make choices and to add projects onto my list that contribute to that overwhelm.

I think Notion was that first tool for me that kinda had way more visibility into how, "Hey Marie, if you're saying you feel overwhelmed and yet you just added three new projects to your board this week, what are you doing there and why?" So it really forced me to look at how much work in progress I had, and a lot of us, I think, have a ton of projects in progress that we don't really realize they're a project because they're just kind of things we've committed to but haven't really all put in one place. And so, when you have a space to actually look at every single project you've said yes to — anything with, you know, more than one step or more than one task is a project. Well, we have a lot of those that I think we don't always name, and put down on paper or whatever it is.

I was like oh, I am continuing to overcommit over and over again because things kind of get lost in the ether. And so, this was a tool that was like, "Hey now, don't add another thing until you've addressed the thing that's causing you this overwhelm." So for me, it felt like a tool that I was really starting to see the real picture of what I was committing to and what I put on my plate. So I was like oh, now I can, hopefully, start to make some better decisions about that.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah. Well, and that feels like a thing that people — you know, if you use Notion, you can wire it into a journal. If you don't use Notion, you can write it in a journal. You can write it in an actual journal.

Marie Poulin: Absolutely. It's like it doesn't matter what tool you're using but be conscious about it.

Liz Wiltsie: And three words, right? It's not I'm gonna track my heartbeat across the whole day and I'm gonna do whatever. It's like what are the three words at the end of the day. That's it.

Marie Poulin: Take a pulse. How are you feeling, right? Something in the morning, something in the afternoon, in the evening — just what were three words that kind of encapsulate how you felt about the day. I do track flow. Flow is a thing that's really important to me. If I want to optimize my business for — the more time I'm spending in flow in a way that's really aligned with the work I should be doing, that's ultimately what I want. That I'm playing to my strengths, that I'm doing work that has impact, that I feel really good and happy about what I'm doing and the impact that I'm having. And so, if I'm not paying attention to that, you know, I think it's just easy to get caught up in those urgent tasks and things that just kind of pop up.

So flow is a thing that I track. Am I in the zone? Am I aligned? Is this what I want to be doing? If not, well, what decisions need to change? What things am I putting on my plate and why am I doing that and yeah, maybe some things need to change to start accommodating for how you want to feel at the end of the week. Burnt to a crisp is not one of those things that I want to keep feeling over and over again, right?

Liz Wiltsie: [Laughs]. Yeah, I say run over by a truck. Same idea!

Marie Poulin: Yeah, same idea! Yeah. [Laughs]. Burnt to a crisp and then run over by a truck. That's kind of what — [laughs].

Liz Wiltsie: [Laughs]. Yes, yes, and I think, you know, there's a lot of discussion when someone works for someone else of, like, how much control they have, but I think there're a lot more ways you can push back. But what you said in terms of I run my own business. I make my own schedule. Why do I feel burnt to a crisp and run over by a truck at the end,

right? I can do that for someone else. I can do that for someone else and not have the risk I have in my life.

Marie Poulin: Yeah, I think we can be guilty of just — because it's our own business and we just work 10x harder, and maybe because we love what we do, we just work 10x harder. It's like ah, there's — we have to put our own limits around that because we've previously had someone else put those limits on. Okay, if you're working nine to five or whatever your hours look like, but to have to put that in place for yourself — and I think we forget there're so many activities that we do as an entrepreneur that aren't billable or you don't maybe see the results of for five years, potentially, like marketing activities. So we don't really factor that into our pricing, and so we overcommit because we're like oh, I gotta get that thing done. That's the stuff that pays the bills, but these other things — so I think it can be hard to put those boundaries on our own work for sure.

I'm guilty of that too, right? It's like, "Oh, but I love my work and so it's not really work." You know, it's work on the weekend. So I think we all can be guilty of that, and especially in a pandemic world it's that feeling of being tired and oh, I wasn't really effective today so I guess I'll just try and do it tonight. It can be really hard to know when work stops, right, and put those containers and boundaries around things.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah. So Marie, my other question that I like to ask folks in what are you grappling with?

Marie Poulin: Currently, the big grapple for me is I feel like there is some bigger legacy work emerging that is fuzzy, and I don't know what it looks like, and it might be a framework, it might be a book, but it's looking at how pulling principles of permaculture and applying them to business design and giving that shape. I'm figuring out what that looks like.

Liz Wiltsie: So I learned the term permaculture from you. So explain to people who don't know what permaculture is what permaculture is.

Marie Poulin: Yeah, it's like a toolkit, framework for designing systems that support humans and thinking longterm like designing for sustainability. Yeah, it's closed-loop systems. It's designing for collective wellbeing, planetary wellbeing, personal wellbeing. That might involve designing systems in nature, but it also might be designing how do we think about how we approach the design of our own communities. So it can mean a lot of different things. It's sort of a bigger concept that I think is not just about designing effective gardens, but it's designing effective human systems.

Learning about it, I think you can't help but think about how that influences business, how we think about the design of communities. I think a lot of things are just the way they are. We haven't really considered the thoughtful design that should have happened underneath it. Why didn't we think about these things longterm and what the impact of that was gonna

be? It's something I'm really curious about just thinking how do we approach the design of our collective wellbeing?

Liz Wiltsie: Yes, we're gonna end right there. Thank you, Marie. Thank you for being with me.

Marie Poulin: Thanks so much for having me!

Liz Wiltsie: Full show notes for this. And every episode are available at futureproofskillslab.com/podcast. You'll find a transcript there as well as links to everything we talked about. Plus links to all the ways to connect with Marie. Since we recorded this episode. Marie has released the newest version of Notion Mastery.

As I've said, I'm a part of that community. And I'm excited about the way Marie helps folks use Notion to improve their life and work systems. You can find all the details@notionmastery.com.