

ADVENTURES IN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE - HILARY GALLO (Katie Elliott & Hilary Gallo)

My guest on today's show is Hilary Gallo, a man who describes himself as an 'enabler. A former lawyer, negotiator and mediator, Hilary now focuses on his work as a coach and author and has just published his second book, *Fear Hack*.

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Hilary Gallo, thank you for joining me today.

Thank you, Katie.

I've been very much enjoying your new book *Fear Hack* and I was wondering if we could talk a little bit today about what you've been learning about fear?

Yes, I'd be happy to.

So I know that you regularly do 'Fear Hack' activities with people. Can you tell us what a 'Fear Hack' is?

Well, it's about fear and it's a bit of a hack. So it literally is those two things in that it, it's trying to look at fear, but look at it also then slightly differently as a way forward. And it's evolved - I started it as a conversation with some exercises and some of those exercises proved more powerful than others, so have stayed, whilst others I don't use so much. I mean, I open the thing up and talk a little bit about why I'm here and why fear is interesting for me and why it might be interesting for them, in terms of talking about it, how it stops us and makes us very positional and freezes us up. Then I do this 'Fear Wall' thing, which is a good way of getting people on the page because I think we can all engage with this self-help stuff kind of intellectually. But what's much more interesting is to put *your* stuff on the page. So I get people to step up and put something on the wall that is of them. And then the most interesting thing is to get people to come back up to that wall once it's complete and look at the wall as it exists for everyone in the room. And then they make some realisations about how other people see this and how what they see fits into the whole - which is kind of a breakthrough moment for people generally. And from there we have a conversation about what fear is and what it's doing and what they see in the patterns on the wall. And as I've done this more and more and more, just sitting with what's on the wall is incredibly powerful actually. And I've had a group of people standing there for literally an hour and a half just talking about what they see. And so the book is built on those findings. But also what I now see

as more of a way forward for people, because what I've worked out is that we don't always question our fears. We don't have a relationship with them. For example, somebody in a workshop once said, "My fear is going out of the house". And we realised through digging into that fear that actually going out of the house wasn't a fear, it was actually a strategy to deal with fear. And when this woman enquired about that fear, she realised, "No, the fear is actually I'm scared of what might come up when I talked to my neighbour. I can't cope with uncertainty. That's my fear". And it's kind of that breakthrough moment to realise that actually we don't even necessarily understand what our fears really are because we label them too easily. Because we're not having a relationship, we're not having a conversation with them. So part of it is just that enquiry. It's about learning. It's about, "What is this really about?" Even before we start the possibility of reframing it into something more positive or a better strategy. And that's just fascinating because I'd never have thought it was quite so basic and simple. Just enquiry.

You're encouraging people to externalise things and bring them into the light so that they can see them for what they are rather than being driven by them inside their own heads - is it along those lines?

Yes, totally. Yeah.

So when you talk about the 'Fear Wall', people are writing things down and then sticking them on a wall. Is that what happens?

Yeah. Yeah. The wall idea is growing because there's lots of people in the world who are talking about building walls in one form or another, and dividing us. But actually when you put your fears on a wall, it provides a place of hope. It's kind of an anti-wall because you're externalising, as you say, Katie, you're getting stuff outside your head, you're externalising it. You're then looking at it dispassionately and other people are looking at it dispassionately as you are looking at their stuff and you're thinking, "My God, this is crazy. It doesn't really exist. It only exists in my own imagination." Because none of this stuff when you look at it is actually real. And actually interestingly, it's quite self-interested. Quite a lot of this stuff is just about 'me' and protecting myself in the world and actually it's not really helping me to grow. You know, maybe I just need to accept that life is not that long. And my biggest fear is that I've become too small and my fears have made me smaller than I want to be. And actually my biggest fear is not being heard and not making an impact and not living the life I was given. Ooooh, what can I do about that? So the conversation kind of develops and that's kind of what I'm interested in, because if one person goes away from that workshop with a commitment to do something bigger, then I'm excited about that. And that's helping one person, but it's also helping all of us because all of us want to be bigger and greater and we can be.

Yeah. So when you have a group of people and they do this 'Fear Wall' exercise, what happens in the room when people see one another's fear?

Quite a lot of what people are saying is, "Oh my God, 90% of what's up there, I recognise. That's me. You know, it's not like that's a bunch of people that I disown. There's a community of people, there's a community of people I thought were really cool and actually quite scary, some of them, who also feel like this. What could I do if I allowed some of these people to help me and what if I helped them? So I don't necessarily need to outsource this to a therapist. I can actually have this as a conversation between, not necessarily my best friend or my work colleague, but somebody in this room because we can all help each other". And that's what society is, you know, it's having a chat with somebody and trusting somebody and learning something from that conversation. That's a super-power that we have in groups that we can all bring for each other.

So if you see somebody else post something up on the wall and you look at them and you think, "But I thought you had it all together and you say you are afraid of not being able to provide for your children or you're afraid of physical pain or whatever it is that you might be afraid of.." The kind of softening that happens within people, the sense of compassion that can come for one another to realise that we all have those kinds of vulnerabilities but we just don't talk about them so much of the time. And as you say, it's not, it's not about a big mental health question, it is just part of the human experience, isn't it, that we have these uncomfortable feelings and we tend to keep them to ourselves.

Yes, we've got these amazing imaginative minds that are capable of so much. You know you have all this positive, there is a, what can be a negative element to that and if we can just talk about that bit, that helps us be even more positive and be more useful for ourselves and for others. Your job and my job in this is just maybe to help create some more of that safe space in the world, rather than more dangerous, scary, fearful, uncomfortable space. That's what I'd like to be doing is helping that safe space thing to grow.

I don't know if you find this, but what I find is that when you have those conversations about what it's actually like to be yourself rather than what you think you're supposed to be like, that people's bodies relax. Just the feeling of, "Oh, so it isn't just me". So much of the time we go through the world thinking that this weirdness, this is just us and we need to keep quiet about it because if other people found out, wouldn't that be a terrible thing? And yet in our own quiet way, most of us are doing a bit of that, I think.

Yes. Well, there's a world of 'should' out there, isn't there? There's a world of what we should do and what we're expected to do and what everyone's rewarded for doing. And there's a world of expectation, and I talk in the book about the 'framework of imposed power'. There's a world of imposed power out there that that impedes upon us and makes us feel like that, that is not helpful. The thing is we are guilty as well cos we carry this the bit inside ourselves and we, we use this imposed power upon ourselves and upon others in a way we don't realise or intend to be negative but actually is unhelpful.

So let's be really practical about this cos I always like to try and draw things back to practical examples. How can we in our everyday lives, just as regular people going about our business, how can we create safe spaces for ourselves and for other people and open up a conversation about the things that we're afraid of, so that we can bring them into the light and see them for what they are and realise that perhaps they're not as scary or as important as we think? How can we find ways of opening those conversations in those spaces so that we are safe but we're able to start moving through some of those limiting beliefs?

Yeah. Well I think that's the challenge. I challenge myself to be more of an anchor for this. So when I go out into life and into the world, um, it's like walking into one of those huge buildings where, you know, everything's marble. It might be a lawyer's office in the city or something where everything's so big and impressive and bears down upon you. And to me it's about retaining your humanity when you get into those challenging situations and spaces and not being made small or made fearful in it, and retaining your humanity to be able to give the gift of a little bit of vulnerability and a little bit of calling things out to create that safe space. You know, I used to think that small talk was one of those annoying things, but frankly, finding those things in common that we have and feathering the edges with things that make people feel comfortable and caring about the person as much as the outcome that I want out of this conversation. Caring about how this person feels and their state and that they feel comfortable and that I'm helping them to feel safe and to grow and to be of the best in that conversation and in their... That's important rather than prioritising what I want to impose or want out of that situation. Actually I'm more interested, not in what I want but what is possible of this situation to emerge that's actually really interesting if I can only give myself up to it.

There was something that I felt was a strong theme in the book about connection and re-engagement and reaching through to one another. A kind of collaborative process, a creative process of being in the world as an alternative to fear. A togetherness, whereas I think fear often pushes us into isolation.

Yes. So whenever I'm feeling down or you know, your mind starts to go off in that space, I call the sort of horizontal projection - forwards and back through time about about what has happened, what might happen - and I feel my mind starting to wander into that space. I tend to just anchor myself in the moment because I find that when I go out into the world, so I go for a walk, I go and look at nature, I go and look out the window, I find that anchoring in the moment to what actually is and what I think of as vertical awareness in the moment, in this moment of time I'm in, I find that is the salvation for me, in all things. The weird thing is we live in this amazingly beautiful place that we've evolved into and we don't look at the beauty of it. I mean, if, if we did, we wouldn't do anything because we'd spend all our time wandering around going, "This place is amazing. Look at those clouds, look at that bird, look at that tree! Isn't nature astounding?" You know, there'd be people you know, wandering around and we'd think they were all on drugs because - and maybe that's what that experience is - because people would be wandering around saying, "Have you seen that?" Because life is amazing and yet, you know, so much of our minds causes us to bypass it and to worry about this little world of 'I'. So I do have a great fundamental belief in the natural environment that exists around us that, you know, isn't the concrete the man laid, but rather the world that kind of happens. If the roads and streets are left, the grass grows through them and I find all the salvation I need there, I have to say. And I think that also, when we connect as humans to the power of that natural world, we see it in ourselves. And that's what's really interesting, interacting with other people who are excited and engaged and energised by, you know, the experience of being alive. And I think it's massively underestimated.

And it reminds us, I think of our own fundamental capacity for health. What you say about the grass growing through the pavements when they're left - that impulse to grow and be healthy and to find creative new ways of doing things and exploring the environment. We have that too, but we don't necessarily trust that in ourselves, I think. I think we worry, I think we worry that we're not okay. And actually if we just allow that okayness to be it finds a way of manifesting itself.

It's interesting to note that mankind is the only animal that interferes with its own growth. Let's just dwell on that thought.

Aaah, too clever for our own good sometimes.

Well yes. It's true. So it's good that we're clever, it's great, but see the limits.

Yeah. Yeah. So thinking about humanity then I'd like to move on and ask you what your little challenge would be for our listeners. So what would be a little thing that you would encourage people to do that you think brings a positive benefit in life?

Well I have this little thing that I do occasionally out on the street, particularly when I'm feeling a bit stressed or a bit depressed or a bit, you know, I can feel those edges creeping in. I tend to look people in the face and I wish, I do thing called 'wishing them well'. And I dunno, I absorb what I saw about them in their face and what might be their thoughts. And I just wish them well for their day. Just in my own mind and my own thoughts, I wish them well - I don't voice it. But I find that just by wishing good on other people, particularly people who look troubled, I find that incredibly powerful and energising - as much as it might be for them, it reflects on me. It helps me. I mean I kind of believe that we're more connected than we believe we are, that we're not all just these separate individuals. And if you think of it like that, if we're connected, it's kind of wishing well upon the system of which we are a part. And ultimately by doing good to others, you're doing good for yourself. So I just have this practice that I find really helpful of 'wishing well'. In a kind, sort of gentle way, just doing that to five or 10 people as you walk along the street, I find really powerful.

That's very lovely. Cos there's so much in our everyday experience at work and being out and about being busy human beings that can feel quite dehumanising, I think, a lot about the systems within which we live. And just that act of looking at someone and connecting with them and sending a good wish to them feels deeply humanising.

Yeah, it kind of works for me.

I love that. Thank you Hilary and thank you for your time today. If people would like to find out more about your new book, where should they go?

Well it's easy to find. It should be in bookshops and it's on Amazon. I have a website which is just HillaryGallo.com, so just search for it. It's fairly well out there and if, when they read it or connect with it and they'd like to say something, I find that in the most amazing thing of all. It's not, it's not wanting it for any reason but being curious as to what people find. So I'd love it if people connect and say something, wherever they say it. It's nice to hear a reaction because what I'm really doing at the end of the day is I want this to be a conversation that goes wider. So if people can help me to do that, to spread the conversation and to make fear less of a problem - that's what I'm really about.

Fantastic. Let's see what we can do. Thank you so much, Hilary.

Thank you, Katie. Thank you everyone.