Episode 119: Brad Shuck

**KL**: Katie Linder

**BS:** Brad Shuck

**KL:** You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode 119.

[intro music]

# Segment 1:

**KL:** Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast about topics and issues related to research in higher education featuring experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, a national leader in online education. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](about:blank) to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I am joined by Dr. Brad Shuck, an Associate Professor and Program Director of both the Health Professions Education and Human Resources and Organizational Development programs in the School of Medicine and College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville. His primary areas of research include the application, meaning, and measurement of employee engagement, emerging areas of positive psychology, and leadership development. His research has been featured in refereed journals such as Leadership and Organizational Studies, the Journal of Happiness Studies, Human Resource Development Review, Human Resource Development Quarterly, and others. He is routinely cited in US-based international media outlets including Forbes, The Washington Post, and TIME, as well as international outlets including Business World Online and the Hindu Times. Shuck was named the 2016 Early Career Scholar by the Academy of Human Resource Development and has received several awards for his applied research. He is a Commonwealth Scholar and a member of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels and has done extensive work with the United States Army Cadet-Command in Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Thanks so much for joining me today, Brad.

**BS:** Hey, thanks for having me. It’s a pleasure to be here.

**KL:** So, I’m super excited to talk with about engagement at work because I know all of our listeners can probably learn a little something from the work that you have done. So, uh what does engagement look like at work based on some of the research that you’ve done?

**BS:** Yes, that’s a great question. So engagement looks like um effort and energy and passion and enthusiasm. It looks like raising your hand in a meeting, um staying late to work on a project, it’s helping out a colleague that needs something that, uh that you have a resource to or access to, it’s discretionary effort, it’s all of those things. Often times, organizations think about engagement as this, this outcome, this thing that happens outside of uh the work that’s actually going on but engagement is the work that’s going on and it’s how people experience it and then express their experience of work to their colleagues or their organizations or their leaders. It’s actually all around us all the time.

**KL:** So I’m curious because it sounds like engagement could actually be performed in lots of different ways like I would imagine that introverts are different in terms of maybe how they raise their hands in a meeting versus their extroverted colleagues. Have you found anything about how engagement looks based on you know personality type or other kinds of demographic characteristics of people?

**BS:** Yeah, that’s a great question. So, we have found that, so this is a question of like how people experience work, right and we know that introverts and extroverts experience work through different lenses or different genders experience work through different experiences. We find that women and men experience work in slightly different ways and women tend to report higher levels of what we call emotional engagement or this kind of effective commitment to the organization and men tend to report higher levels of cognitive engagement. It doesn’t mean anything to us other than people just experience and express work in these kind of unique and different ways. We have um, I mean you can imagine that an introvert would express their experience of work in way that is comfortable for them in the same way that an extrovert might express their interest in work in a really comfortable way. The, the important thing isn’t the way so much that they might express it, but that they do and they feel like they can work in a place where they, they can express themselves in a way that is unique to them and individual to them and it doesn’t ask them to be anything outside of what they are but it allows them to bring their unique skills, gifts, and strengths into the organization in way that is leveraged and is appreciated and really valued.

**KL:** So, I think you’ve gotten into this a little bit Brad but I want to ask it really overtly and that is why does engagement at work matter? You know why is this something that’s important?

**BS:** It matters for a couple reasons. So let’s talk I think briefly just organizationally. So it matters to organizations to have a highly engaged workforce because engaged employees are uh higher performing. 93% of people that work at a place they say they can experience high levels of engagement, they say they work harder so that does look like taking on extra projects or extra assignments or it could um being really supportive of a colleague. They also report that they are less likely to leave the organization and to be honest with you, why would you leave an organization where you felt like your work was really meaningful or your contributions were really valued or that when you spoke up, people, people heard you and they listened to you and they valued that space you were in. They also report that they give their best ideas, so creativity happens in this really unique kind of small, fragile space. In fact, when we ask people about creativity, we almost ruin creativity asking you to think about what was that experience like being creative and engaging is kind of the same way. The minute we ask you about how engaged you are at work or what you’re doing, we tend to kind of ruin that mode and pop that bubble if you will and ask you to kind of meta reflect around that. People who work in organizations where they experience high levels of engagement just perform higher on metrics that are important for organizations including profitability. So, higher levels of engagement often times equated to higher levels of performance and profitability over time. But here’s why it counts for me, this is why for me this matters. I, I care that organizations are performing high, and I care that people are I guess making money but the most important thing for me is that people who experience high levels of engagement, we believe, fundamentally experience life differently. And I only have to ask you to think about a time in your life, or for listeners to think about a time in their life when they didn’t work at a place like that, where they worked at an organization where they weren’t valued and they knew it, that they did not do meaningful work, where they didn’t want to raise their hands in meetings, or stay after work with their colleague because they didn’t like their colleagues and their colleagues didn’t like them. And then to ask them to think what was home life like at that time in your life? What was it like when you went, when you went out with friends? Did you find you had high levels of energy or you were kind of like emotionally eroded all the time? People that experience engagement at work, they tell us that they experience well-being on a different level. That they’re able to actually have more emotional resources for their families, partners, and friends, that life for them is just a little bit more positive. Um, and so for me, I care about that human experience, that element of what it’s like to be in a place of work or in a place of, uh of giftedness where you’re valued and your work really means something. I think there’s a personal connection with that and our research veers off that there’s health implications for that as well.

**KL:** So, I think that’s really interesting because some people might think kind of logically that if they’re spending a lot of energy at work through their engagement at work, they wouldn’t have that energy outside of work. You know, or that if they were spending less energy at work, then they would have more energy when they left. But it sounds like you’re saying it doesn’t quite work that way.

**BS:** Yeah. So we, we based this work on Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory and essentially it’s this: that when we experience peak moments, we have the tendency to spiral up and when we spiral up, it opens up this reservoir of resources that isn’t always accessible to us and we’re able to draw on higher levels of creativity, we’re able to draw on higher levels of effort, higher levels of stamina over time; but the opposite is also true that, we call it the spiral of dysfunction, where you actually spiral down where you actually close yourself off and those emotional resources and reservoirs are not accessible for you and so you go home tired or and you can’t explain it. You get home and your partner is like you know, ‘Why are you so tired all the time?’ Or, ‘You seem so on edge all the time, why what’s going on?’ What’s happening on the back of your mind is you’re, you’re replaying the day’s event or you’re thinking about your next move or next response and that’s emotionally wearing you down over time and it’s something we think about it in terms of engagement around something we call the cumulative effect and it’s these kind of small things that build up over time that help us or that build up over time and actually work against us.

**KL:** Okay so, some people who are listening to this unfortunately probably are experiencing some of this dysfunction that you’re talking about at work because work cannot always be the perfect you know unicorns, rainbows place that we always hope that it will be. What do you know about how dysfunction does impact engagement? You mentioned the spiral. Are there other things that it’s kind of having a negative impact on engagement as well?

**BS:** Yeah, totally. So, I think the first thing we would want to say that it’s not possible to be engaged a hundred percent all the time and that’s not, that’s not even a realistic ask for someone. I often talk with organizations and leaders and they’ll say we want a hundred percent engagement here all the time and I say it’s just not possible. There’s this natural ebb and flow of energy that we’ve got and when we give a little extra, we have to replenish that over time and that’s this issue that we call this capacity building. What, what we find is that between 28 and 36% of people in America report working for what we call a stinky leader or a dysfunctional leader or in a, kind of a stinky work environment and we us the analogy of a skunk to explain what happens to someone in this particular environment. That, just like a skunk would skunk an animal and it takes a long time for that kind of stink and skunk to wear off, leaders and organizations do that to their employees from time to time and it takes intentional healing and it takes intentional work to move through those dysfunctional experiences at work. What we find is that employees who work in chronically dysfunctional environments, they report lower levels of sleeping so their sleep is bad. They wake up at night, they have trouble going to sleep, there they don’t have emotional resources for their family, they tend to eat more fast food and engage in unhealthy eating habits, they also tell us that they drink more alcohol, and that they don’t get to the gym as often. These have implications for things like hyper tension and heart disease over time. So, not suggesting to you that organizations or leaders, more specifically, are causing heart disease in their employees but they may be leading to in the moment decisions that have a tendency to um predispose someone who has a higher risk for things like heart disease or hyper tension by elevating these bad habits over time. And again, we’re talking about not a bad day, everybody has bad days, some of us have bad weeks, but if you’ve had bad year or years or bad months over time and there’s this chronic environment, I would suspect that those people go home tired and emotionally eroded and they have very little left to give and so to compensate for that we, I’m going to take a drink and we take the edge off. Some people call that that’s a coping strategy. They don’t have one. They have two or three or four and over the course of six months can develop into some really you can imagine some pretty nasty habits.

**KL:** Well, we are going to dig in to this idea of intersection of work and health in the next segment so we’re going to take a brief break and when we come back, we’ll hear from Brad a little more about his work. Back in a moment.

[*music plays in the background*]

**KL:** In addition to producing the “Research in Action Podcast,” as the research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, I’m fortunate to work on developing original learning and teaching research projects. A recent one I’m excited to share with you is our online learning efficacy research database which allows users to explore whether the learning outcomes of online and hybrid educational environments are equivalent to face to face environments. This tool supports faculty in comparing course modalities and making assessments of the outcomes of studies. Learn more about the data base at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/research-database](about:blank).

# Segment 2:

**KL:** So Brad, as we ended segment one you talked a little bit about this intersection of work and health and I would love to chat about that a little bit more because I think this is something where we’re at work, still many hours of the day, and this can really impact huge portions of our, our life and our well-being. What are some of the things that you’ve learned about the intersection of work and health in your work so far?

**BS:** So one thing we’ve learned is, this is hard to study. It’s hard to look at people’s experience and ask them to kind of self-report some things about their work and then also then ask them to think about their health and their health behavior and health outcomes. So, some exploratory research that we’ve looked at has really explored health-related behaviors that have long term consequences. So I mentioned in our first segment that people who report working in chronically dysfunctional environments, they report high levels of drinking behavior so almost like binge drinking behavior over long periods of time. And it’s hard for people to report that information sometimes because it takes a level of self-awareness but also it takes a level of confidentiality to be able to even ask those kinds of questions. But, what we find is that people are really forthcoming about their behaviors, in particular around bad work environments because they want to tell somebody. It’s a coping strategy for them. What people tell us when they work in chronically dysfunctional environments is, as I had mentioned in the first segment, that they lose a significant amount of sleep and they lay in bed awake at night for long periods of time or they’ll wake up in the morning around you know three or four o’clock in the morning, if that’s not a normal wake up time for them and they cannot go back to sleep because their mind is constantly racing. They tell us that they report lower levels of well-being, not only physical well-being so manifested physical pain in the body, but also levels of psychological well-being so they say things like, “I’m not able to easily forgive myself for my failures,” or, “I don’t think my family supports me,” and those are, those are problems. I mean, when we get reports back, when people telling us these things, I’ll be honest with you like that really breaks my heart because I know that there’s a really deep story there and that someone is hurting. People also tell us that they have problems with physical functioning. So, you know, somebody who was once really athletic and vigorous, just they just don’t function as well as they once did. They report lower levels of mental depression, experience manifested pain as mentioned, they’re more likely to be clinically depressed, and they interestingly report things like stealing behavior. And one of the things that we need to do in explaining and understanding people’s decisions at work, is to, if you will, suspend some judgment around that. So I’m not making a judgment statement when I say that people report stealing behavior, but it makes sense to us if we think about someone getting even with our organizations. So they might take something from the office as a result of some bad interactions that they might have had and though stealing is wrong, the law says shouldn’t do that. But people do this as a as a reciprocity, as kind of grounded in this idea theory of reciprocity around, ‘you treat me really bad here so I’m going to get even with you for that.’ There is another issue that I-I think is important to talk about with this and that’s this idea of what we call dysfunctional wellness. So in the health and work kind of intersection space, lots of organizations, in fact 6.8 billion dollars were spent last year in wellness programs and there have been reports that have come out that wellness programs are bogus and you shouldn’t invest in them and it’s a it’s a bad idea. I don’t think that’s true. I actually think wellness programs are a really good idea and they provide a segment of your population at work, at least a healthy outlet to reduce stress and to be able to manage through some of the dysfunctional issues that they’re through. But here’s the problem. Organizations spend this seven billion dollars in wellness programs and they encourage people to go to the gym and eat healthy and do these kinds of things, but they have done very little on the back end to actually address the root cause issue of the chronic stress over time. And so while we may have people that go to the gym, or we may have people let’s say they’re eating healthy they’re coming right back into dysfunctional work environments and so there’s this vicious cycle of this function and we call that dysfunctional wellness. It’s a it’s a band-aid and it looks good from the outside, but the reason people are not seeing progress with wellness programs is because of not addressing the workplace capacity issue that so many people are under today.

**KL:** So I know Brad that you’ve recently also started to explore this concept of compassion at work, and I’m wondering how you see that as related or not to this intersection of work and health?

**BS:** Yeah so I-I do I do see this absolutely connected and compassion is um, a couple of years ago if we were to talk to you about engagement a lot of people were like, ‘Oh it’s a soft thing. That’s, oh who cares about that, it’s not related to performance.’ What we’ve found is that it’s actually a hard soft concept. So it’s hard in that there’s absolute metrics that we can connect to it, but it is around the interpersonal and human element issues associated with work. Compassion is the same way. But when I talk about compassion with organizations, oftentimes they will say, “Well that sounds soft and I don’t know I don’t know that I believe the evidence with this.” Well here’s what I’ll tell you. When we look at what we call compassionate leaders, or compassionate organizations, they are absolutely connected to hard metrics around everything that we’ve talked about already today so creativity, discretionary effort, intent to turnover, well-being, health. And we identify six specific behaviors of compassion that leaders or organizations kind of enact. The first is dignity, so treat people with a sense of dignity, second authenticity, presence, accountability, empathy, and then the last one is this idea of accountability. What we find from that is that when leaders can work from a place of dignity, all right, when they work from a place of empathy or accountability, that that invites people into a space that they may not have been invited into. Below that, so if you’re not coming from a place of dignity, you might be coming from a place of humiliation. Or if you’re not coming from a place of authenticity, you might be coming from a place of insincerity. And we can see how chronic levels of humiliation, and to be honest you we’ve talked to leaders who use that as their tactic are really overt about that, “I uh use humiliation to lead.” And I’ll say that’s not a very good strategy, but they’ve used it for years and it’s hard to convince them that treating people with dignity over time is a much, much better strategy.

**KL:** Okay this is very interesting, so I’m curious what people can do to be more engaged and to be more healthy at work? And maybe particularly if they’re in a dysfunctional environment where they don’t necessarily have control over some of those factors?

**BS:** Yeah, so we hear from people across the country around um their stories of this function and so oftentimes people are looking to share with us, ‘You know I’ve got this really bad boss,’ or, ‘I’ve got this really terrible work environment, what do you think I ought to do?’ So we wrote an article around what can you do. And some, some specific t-tactics that we encourage folks to do is, where you can, place some boundaries. And I get some pushback on that sometimes because people say, ‘Well I don’t I don’t have the autonomy to put some boundaries in my place.’ And I disagree with that. I think that we all have some influence within our own life to say, ‘I’m not going to answer my phone right now. Every time my phone rings, I don’t have to answer it. Or every time an email dings I don’t have to give that email a sense of power.’ We encourage people to put boundaries around healthy behaviors like, I’m gonna go to the gym today at 3 o’clock and that’s your time, or I’m gonna go to the gym after work, or on the weekends this is the time that I’m gonna carve out. So I encourage people to think about boundaries. Second, you can’t take every hill. So we encourage people to pick and choose their battles and pick the battles that are centered around [inaudible], around dignity, and authenticity. Those are the hills that you want to fight over time. And then lastly, to know your triggers. Sometimes we get an email from somebody or our boss comes in or a co-worker comes in and they’ll say something that sparks kind of our blood to begin to-to boil and our blood pressure to start to rise. When that happens for you, know that trigger. You might write it down, think about it when you’re in that way when you’re in a meeting next time and somebody does that or says that one thing that really sets you off, you know it’s coming and you can control your reaction to that. We cannot control other people’s behavior. What we can control is our reaction to that and what we choose to give power to. For other people who work in these just really terrible places where we’ve heard stories of leaders who throw things at employees or emotionally abuse them, that’s not dysfunction. Dysfunction is this kind of chronic low-grade annoyance over time, right? And it’s just like, ‘Gosh, you’re just getting in my way.’ If a supervisor or a leader is emotionally abusing or physically abusing, look you gotta get out of there. The most healthy thing you can do is to leave. And that’s a really extreme thing to recommend, but we do recommend that in the article that sometimes the most healthy thing that you can do for yourself is say, ‘I gotta get out of this place. This place is killing me.’ And then, then to form an exit plan and and walk away. The other thing that I would want listeners to know is that community goes a long way in healing. So oftentimes when we work in a dysfunctional environment where we can’t be engaged, we feel very isolated from those experiences and that’s intentional. So the more that you can build a sense of community and team, the more likely you are to be able to cope with and then eventually heal from those kinds of experiences.

**KL:** Alright well these are great tips, we will also link to this article in the show notes for folks who want to follow up. We’re going to take another brief break. When we come back, we’ll hear a little bit more from Brad about his work on capacity. Back in a moment.

[*music plays*]

# Segment 3:

**KL:** Brad, I know some of your recent work has been on capacity and I’m really interested in this topic because I think a lot of us feel like we are at capacity or over capacity and this really does impact our lives at work. So first, when you’re talking about capacity, what does that mean for the research that you’re doing? Like, how can you define that?

**BS:** Yeah so, capacity is this um sense of being filled up all the time with work responsibilities, tasks, demands, to the point of where you’re just not able to take anything else on and anything else kind of push you into a bit of a panic.

**KL:** Okay. So I would imagine that this is tied to things like burnout, um exhaustion, feeling like you’re just completely overwhelmed. What is kind of the relationship between capacity and some of those more negative experiences that people might have at work?

**BS:** Yeah so this, this line of research has really come out of conversations I’ve had with our medical, our medical school here at the University of Louisville around physician burnout and nurse burnout and dentist burnout, that doctors are pulled in so many different and varieties of areas every day, week after week after week, and we all hear, we all kind of hear the old mantra, to do more with less, and that’s not possible right like you can-you cannot do more with less. So we started to look at what are the- what are the chronic conditions of physician burnout. And what we found, burnout is almost exclusively defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and cynicism. So that comes out of the National Burnout Inventory from our friends over in the Netherlands who kind of developed this idea, the NBI altogether. But what I would tell you is that chronic capacity right, chronic overcapacity, is a state of chronic emotional exhaustion where you just are exhausted, you’re overwhelmed, you cannot take on anymore. And so the coping strategy for that is then depersonalization or cynicism. So what that looks like is a doctor will dehumanize their patient, they’re just they’re a thing on my daily to-do list. So I have six surgeries today, I don’t have six people, or six lives, or six stories that I’m working on. They depersonalize that as a way to build capacity in their own mind. Or sometimes we might say like, well this doesn’t matter anymore, being kind of cynical about the behavior or about the environment. That’s well it doesn’t matter if I raised my hand because no one is gonna listen to me anyway. So depersonalization and cynicism are outcomes, or coping strategies, of chronic levels of emotional exhaustion. And we see health implications from that, we see turnover implications from that, performance implications, effort implications that really impact doctors. But we’ve started to think about this with teachers, right. So my wife’s a first grade school teacher. She starts school every day at 7:30 and if I see her before 6 o’clock at night, it’s it’s been a really good day. So she’s been at school for almost 12 hours with seven-year-old kiddos who have a variety of cascading issues plus they have all of the other challenges that we’ve kind of heaped on teachers over, over the years and asked them to solve all these kind of really complex social problems. So, do teachers have the same kinds of burnout? Do police officers, or law enforcement officers have the same kinds of burnout? Do frontline service workers, do they have the same kinds of burnout? Do leaders have compassion fatigue, or a sense of burnout where they’re just at capacity? For us, we find that people are being asked to do a lot of work. And as positions are getting eliminated in a variety of industries, that work is not getting, that that’s, it’s getting redistributed back to the same people who stay within the organization. And that’s what we mean when we talk about capacity. There’s just, there’s a level of capacity that we all have and once we get to that level we can’t take on any more. The analogy that I use when I teach this in class is like, taking a glass of water and filling it all the way to the top and then having a second glass of water and trying to pour that second glass of water into- it doesn’t work. It spills all over the floor. Something, you know, gosh I forgot to send an email, or I forget to do this, or I lose my temper, a little bit. There’s just not capacity to put more things in. So I do think we need to start thinking about not, not how much work gets done, but how the work is getting done. We have to begin to begin to think about the human element of work and what that means for people in how they experience it.

**KL:** So it sounds like a little bit more of a focus on quality over quantity you know, like what’s going on with the process of getting something done versus the product that’s resulting.

**BS:** It is for me. All it is about quality and not so much quantity and and I get we want to do everything but I would encourage leaders to prioritize those. Like, what are the three most important things that we should be focusing on, not chasing everything that looks you the shiny penny over here, but how do we focus in our effort so that we can- we can use our resources and use our strengths and our gifts in a really wise way? But this is connected back to the compassion research, right? And connected back, it’s not if you’re emotionally exhausted, can you be engaged? I don’t think so. I don’t, I don’t think it’s, I don’t think it’s safe for you to be engaged if you’re emotionally exhausted. There, you need some time to recoup. Connected are also um, are the, are the kind of bad habits that we talked about. So we thought about why do some physicians develop unhealthy habits outside of their jobs? So they might go home again, and have a drink. Well what is, what is having a couple of drinks do? It numbs your mind and it creates capacity for you to think for, even if it’s just an hour, to not have to worry about all of those things. Or we see people who are doing drugs at really unhealthy levels and what does that do? It creates a sense of capacity that you didn’t think you had. Or we engage in unhealthy sexual relationships or behaviors. When all those things are coping strategies that allow us to escape in the moment, even if it’s for a brief period of time, this feeling of being overwhelmed. And so again we’re not passing a judgement around that but we are perhaps explaining why some of these things happen um, and we see them in the workforce all the time.

**KL:** So I find it really interesting wha- to hear you just say like there are limits. I mean I think this is something that people pretend there are not and that we can kind of, like you said, do more with less all the time. But there is, it sounds like, a hard limit that you’re gonna kind of run up into a wall where you are kind of at over-capacity and I’m wondering if we have listeners who are hearing this, hearing some of the symptoms you’re talking about and they are feeling over-capacity. You know, what are some things that you can potentially do to bring yourself down from that?

**BS:** Yeah so we are, we are really investigating this hard right now and most of the time what’s recommended are things like resiliency training or meditation or yoga. And I think those are good strategies for people if you have time to do that. The question that we’ve got is: in the moment, when you’re in the heat of battle, you’re in this meeting that you cannot, you can’t just get up and do some yoga, what is it in the moment that you do? And what we’re finding is that if you can for, even for a brief moment, just pause your, the script of thinking that’s running through your mind to recapture that sense of presence. Being in that moment, right here, that’s a really good strategy for people. We also recommend, as I as we recommend for like the dysfunctional leader stuff, to put some boundaries in place. To know what your own limits are, and to build in times of recuperation and rest. So for academics for example, we can every seven years, at least here at the university, I get to take a sabbatical. So I’m gonna take at least six months or a year away and the idea is that I get to rest. Well that’s not something that every occupation has access to. But that doesn’t mean that we also don’t need that rest and relaxation. Some organizations that I’ve worked with have had like no technology weekends. So nobody sends an email Friday from 5:00 until Sunday, Sunday evening around 8:00 or Monday morning at 8 o’clock in the morning. I don’t know about you, but I’m constantly connected to my phone and I can imagine that listeners would be like, ‘That’s just not possible. I can’t I can’t be away from email for the weekend.’ I’ve worked with some fortune 50 organizations who have implemented these policies, and I’m telling you, I see a huge difference in their leaders. I see a huge difference in their employees. Encouraging things like wellness plans, and to get involved with those things. But I would also encourage leaders who have influence to prioritize what’s going on at work, should step up and be empowered to really prioritize like what is important here? How should we be spending our resources? Not only our financial resources, but what’s the experience of work like, work like for the people who work here? And that’s an important question I think people are not asking.

**KL:** Well Brad, you’ve raised so many important points here. I’m excited to share your research with our listeners. We’ll definitely make sure to link to some of these things in the show notes for people to follow up. And, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to talk about what does it mean to be engaged at work and to have well-being at work.

**BS:** Awesome. Thank you so much for having me. This was an incredible talk. I love this stuff and engagement is how I view the world, no doubt about it.

**KL:** Awesome. And thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of “Research in Action.” I’m Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

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# Bonus Clip:

[*intro music*]

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode 119 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Brad Shuck discusses hot to create highly work environments. Take a listen:

**KL:** Brad, I’m really curious, from your perspective having researched this for such a long time and maybe this is just you know opinion based on what you’ve seen in your work, what are some things that people can do to create work environments that are really encouraging high levels of engagement with their employees?

**BS:** Yeah so, I get this I get asked this question quite a bit and to be honest with you I am oftentimes reluctant to give my opinion I-I try often to work from a place of evidence and research and really kind of let that drive any kind of outcomes that I might recommend. But there are five things that I like to talk about when I’m working, either one-on-one with leaders or if I’m able to work with like a leadership team. And I’d love to show you real quick. The first one is, this is these are gonna sound pedestrian but I think that they’re they’re so impactful and influential, if we are able to use these in a positive way it could be really helpful. So the first one is, is essentially to be kind and treat people with dignity. I cannot tell you how many times in my own life I’ve been at a restaurant or been at a hotel or been on an airline or there’s been someplace with my family and seen someone at work being treated in such an undignified way. And, I have to think to myself, how much does dignity cost? It doesn’t cost anything. It’s free. We just have to take the time to do it. And so, if we can find way to really just be kind to folks and to find ways to to help everybody experience dignity in their work, I think we can elevate everybody’s experience of work. The second is connected to a book that I’m recently reading around moments, around elevating the experiences that matter. And in a time of resource, kind of drought in a lot of places, thinking about elevating experiences is about cause spending money and things that cost money. But I would wonder at a place of work, what are the what are the experiences that make a huge difference? So, for example, if orientation day, your first, somebody’s first day of work, is the defining experience, then we should elevate that and we should make people feel really special. We should celebrate milestones. We should find ways to encourage people’s work through authentic levels of recognition. The third thing is to sharpen your own saw, and this is taken right out of [*inaudible*] philosophy, that you cannot pour into someone if you are not pouring into your own self, right? And, so I have a gave me a picture and it says, “An old, an old woodsman is told that he’s got 15 minutes to cut down a tree. And he spends the first 10 minutes sharpening his ax.” And so the premise of the is simply that we have to spend some time sharpening our own saw. But then I would encourage that we also try to find ways to sharpen others. And that is to be encouraging for other people, and to help them see the value and meaning in their work. The fourth is to look beyond the now and not be stuck in the past. As leaders sometimes there can be a lot of dwelling on what happened in the last quarter but I would encourage people not to do that, but to rather refocus their efforts towards the future. When you look past, you tend to get stuck there and actually sunk there. So if we can find ways to reorient, or reframe, our perspective to the future and what we need to do today to prepare for tomorrow, it’s a much better use of our energy and our time. And then lastly is this concept I call Oak Tree Strong. And it’s finding an anchor in your own life, it could be a person, it could be a place, it could be an experience; something that allows you to get re-grounded. We need community. We need anchors in our life that help us not drift out into the sea. And so I encourage folks to find who is your oak tree? What is your oak tree? Can you name it and can you define it? And if you can they cling to that in moments of this storm. When we talk about burnouts and capacity, we talk about that from that being in the storm, and yoga sounds great, but in the moment like I mentioned, you can’t and do yoga in the middle of a meeting. In those moments you’re going to need to find and know you oak tree be tree strong at that time. So those are kind of the five things that I like to recommend to leaders and organizations to kind of think through as they consider how do we create places that inspire high levels of engagement, and what can we do to elevate the experience of work- for our employees?

**KL:** Thanks so much for sharing that, Brad.

**KL:** You’ve just heard a bonus clip from episode 119 of the “Research in Action” podcast, with Dr. Brad Shuck, discussing how to create highly engaging work environments. Thanks for listening.

[*outro* *music*]

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