

# EEP 147 - Stephanie Sarazin - What Is Ambiguous Grief and Ho...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grief, ambiguous, empathy, experience, person, divorce, people, death, hoping, grieve, events, maria, understand, activating, life, dementia, witnessed, stephanie, loss, feel

## SPEAKERS

Stephanie Sarazin, Maria Ross

### Stephanie Sarazin 00:01

For an ambiguous Griever, somebody who's grieving the loss of a loved one who is still living, but not as they once were, it can be such an isolating event in a person's life. And it's not something everybody relates to, you know, the specific event won't be the same as my specific event and then it kind of goes even further into that is sure. So if I'm talking about a group of people who are all experienced ambiguous grief activated by divorce versus a group activated by dementia or addiction, even the layers within those same kind of silos will be different because the relationships are all different. Right and the strength of the relationship the strength of the love will inform the girth of the grief.

### Maria Ross 00:44

Welcome to the empathy edge podcast, the show that proves why cashflow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. I'm your host Maria Ross. I'm a speaker, author, mom, facilitator and empathy advocate. And here you'll meet trailblazing leaders and executives, authors and experts who embrace empathy to achieve radical success. We discuss all facets of empathy from trends and research to the future of work to how to heal societal divisions and collaborate more effectively. Our goal is to redefine success and prove that empathy isn't just good for society, it's great for business. Divorce, losing a family member to addiction, the end of a friendship, and D nesting, even the loss many of us felt during the pandemic. These are all examples of ambiguous grief. Today's guest is Stephanie Saracen, a writer, researcher and experiential expert in ambiguous grief. Her work began with her own experience of midlife trauma, which sparked an ambitious journey spiritually and around the world to understand name and heal the grief she found within her. Her efforts revealed a first of its kind definition for ambiguous grief, where grief is brought on by the loss of a loved one who is still living, and where the experience of Hope presents as a stage in the grieving process. We talk about what ambiguous grief is and how it's different from grief brought on by death, how different people cope with it, the stages and the importance of empathy to help people heal and feel witnessed. We discuss the well intentioned reactions we have that are actually the opposite of empathy, and what we can do and say instead, if you want to be a more empathetic colleague, friend, manager and teammate to those

experiencing ambiguous grief, take a listen to this powerful conversation. Stephanie, welcome to the empathy edge podcast, I am excited to have this conversation about ambiguous grief. And it's just been great. We got connected through a mutual acquaintance. And I think instantly hit it off when we spoke. And your work so strongly resonated with me. And, you know, I would love to hear your story of how you became an experiential expert in ambiguous grief. But also because this is such a timely topic, I think, because we've talked a lot in our society, about the collective grief that we've been feeling because of the pandemic, and not just loss of life, but lifestyles that people lost freedom that people lost, you know, lost years of kids education that they'll never get back again. So there's a lot of ambiguous grief out there. So help us understand how you came to this work.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 03:37

Yeah, there sure is. Thanks so much, man. Thanks for having me. It. It is timely, that ambiguous grief is, you know, now now in our vernacular, and it's something we're talking about. And I'm so glad that it is. When I first discovered ambiguous grief, in my own life, it was because I had found myself suddenly divorcing after 20 years, this came, you know, in a series of unexpected events that led to it, and left me feeling quite alone and isolated. In my own experience. Now, certainly, I understood that I wasn't the first person to have such an experience. Yet I couldn't find anybody in my immediate network. Or, you know, when I called upon them, friends of friends, you've been somebody to kind of talk to me about this grief that I was feeling this this incredible depth of sadness. And, you know, it was disheartening to say the least, to feel so alone. Now, of course, you know, every relationship is different. Everybody's divorce story had is different. But I was, I was certain that I wasn't the only one. So I set about really trying to understand what it was that I was experiencing, and why I was experiencing this so that I could find a way to heal. I have three terrific kids and now suddenly, being a single mother knew that I had to work to heal myself, and take care of my children, right. And so, in my own desperation for understanding the nuance of this grief experience, I learned way more than I ever could have imagined and spent the next several years researching, writing. And lo and behold, binding lots and lots of people who were having a similar experience, and wanted to talk about

**Maria Ross** 05:28

it. Well, and I think it's interesting, because the immediate image that comes to our mind, when we think of grief is death, we're experiencing someone's death or loss. But grief comes in a lot of different forms in terms of, you know, something else dying, your, your identity, or your the life you thought you had, or all these other things. So can you talk a little bit about how we get to understanding this multifaceted nature of grief?

**Stephanie Sarazin** 05:59

Right, I think step one is talking about it. Right. And so to order in order to understand it, it's something we have to communicate about, and listen to one another, having the experience, you know, for me, it was, it was so different. To recognize that grief by death, which we don't do really well, in our society

**Maria Ross** 06:24

anyway.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 06:27

You know, we find all sorts of creative ways to not use the D word or to you know, to gingerly talk about it, that when we don't have the tools, we don't have the societal norms for an ambiguous grief experience that we do for a grief by physical death, we all know that we're going to die. That's note your listeners will, nobody will be surprised by that. We all first heard it here first, folks. But, and we have a general idea based on our own, you know, family of origin and our own, you know, community, what happens when we die? How do we mark that with funerals, with you know, songs with different rituals, ceremonies, but when you are experiencing a death of another sort those so those that you just alluded to, right, the the death of our, our relationships with one another, whether it's the death of a partner of, you know, decades, to divorce, or, or a friend, right colleague, it could be a child to addiction, a parent to Alzheimer's, a loved one, to indoctrination to, you know, a culture again, incarceration, there are so many different activating events that will bring this ambiguous grief forward. And without those societal norms that we have with a physical death. There's no, there's no outward expression of our grief. Yet, it doesn't make it any less pronounced, right. And since there's often shame and embarrassment attached to all of those activating events that I just mentioned, oftentimes, the person experience ambiguous grief, instead of talking about it, and telling a friend or trusted group of friends, what's going on. They instead keep quiet, where they minimize, and often isolate and grieve alone. And you think part

**Maria Ross** 08:29

of that is we we also with each other don't know how to react to someone else's ambiguous grief, because it's not so clear cut as a death, right? So in a divorce, for example, the other person's still out there living their life, right. And I sense that what you're saying is a lot of the fear and shame correct me if I'm wrong, is maybe from someone feeling like they don't have a right to feel sad, they don't have a right to feel bad about this thing, because it's not a death. Is that accurate? It that's one

**Stephanie Sarazin** 09:01

part of it. It's kind of two sides to the same coin. So, you know, in one sense, the individual doesn't feel that they, you know, have a have a right, as you said, they don't have the it's not, it's like it's not so bad for not so bad. This isn't a death. And so they don't feel permission to grieve. They don't understand that it's grief is something I found in my research. But the second side of that coin is that the activating events that trigger it can be internalized, as shameful or embarrassing. Oh, my child who is addicted. And on the streets, I don't know where they are, you know, that might not be something a person might want to share. I interviewed a woman who had shared with me that her husband had been incarcerated for three years. And she had told nobody. Now he had a five year sentence. And this was during COVID which was a big relief to her because it allowed her to kind of keep up the guys and not have to You know, find excuses which she had done, you know, for the first year. But, you know, she wasn't sharing her grief. In this case, she recognized that this was a grief that she was experiencing. But that internalized shame and embarrassment of her husband situation? Didn't, she didn't feel comfortable talking about it with others. So it's kind of, you know, this two sided coin? And of course, the answer, certainly one helpful answer, as far as I can tell, is empathy. You know, so if somebody, what I came to quickly learn is that people aren't talking about ambiguous grief in their lives, because they don't want to be talked about. And if we could learn to do a better job of, you know, first of all, identifying what ambiguous grief is what it looks like, in ourselves and in others, then we can be more empathetic, compassionate friends, family, members, neighbors, colleagues, you know, it goes on and on. And, and

instead of, you know, hopefully, if that could build, then, of course, individuals would feel more comfortable coming forward. Because, you know, being met with empathy is such a beautiful way to relieve your grief.

**Maria Ross** 11:15

So, I think that that's such an important point, because many of us try to be empathetic to people we see are in crisis, or we see are experiencing a loss. And is it is it just harder for people to understand what someone is going through when they're experiencing ambiguous grief? Or are we just sort of doing empathy wrong when someone is dealing with ambiguous grief?

**Stephanie Sarazin** 11:42

Well, I'll let you answer the empathy part. You know, I don't know if we're doing it wrong. But I think there's definitely room for improvement. Right. And I think in large part is because we're, you know, we're learning really what empathy is, this isn't something that, you know, most of us grew up understanding, at least, at least intellectualizing what it means, you know, but for an ambiguous Griever, somebody who's grieving the loss of a loved one who is still living, but not as they once were, it can be such an isolating event in a person's life. And it's not something everybody relates to, you know, the specific event won't be the same as my specific event. And then it kind of goes even further into that is sure. So if I'm talking about a group of people who are all experienced, ambiguous grief activated by divorce, versus a group activated by dementia, or addiction, even the layers within those same kind of silos will be different, because the relationships are all different, right? And the strength of the relationship, the strength of the love will inform the girth of the grief. And so when somebody's coming to us, to show their compassion, I think

**Maria Ross** 12:53

they do their best I'd like to like to believe people do their are doing they have good intentions to Yes,

**Stephanie Sarazin** 12:59

and say, Oh, I had a divorce as well, I went through a divorce, you're going to be better off, hang in there. Trust me, it gets so much better. Well, okay. That's your experience that may this might be devastating and horrific to me or, okay to me, you know, without understanding where somebody's coming from, in their biggest grief, we often miss a sign and kind of project our own experience onto there's

**Maria Ross** 13:23

completely and I mentioned to you that I call this empathy, hijacking, because it is from a good place. It's the desire to connect and a desire to make somebody feel not alone. But in doing so it makes the conversation, not about that person anymore.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 13:40

Right. And so the Griever is in this funny, you know, experience that they're

**Maria Ross** 13:45

either justifying, or trying to console. Exactly,

**Stephanie Sarazin** 13:48

exactly. And that doesn't feel good.

**Maria Ross** 13:51

That doesn't feel good. And I think I may have told you when we had our pre call. The reason I even came up with that term of empathy hijacking, because it's something I've done many times in the past, in an effort to connect of, I want to feel like I want you to feel like I understand what you're going through. But the thing is that we don't understand about empathy is that you can be empathetic with no knowledge or experience of what that other person is going through, because it's about being with the person and not necessarily having to have had the exact same experience as that person. But we're such a fixit culture, that we think if someone's talking to us about their grief, or their pain, or just what they're feeling in general, we have to somehow fix it. And part of our desire to fix it is to offer a solution that worked for us, right? Because when I had my brain injury years ago, I had a lot of cognitive deficits from and I still do but immediately coming out of that, and people were trying so hard to connect with me because they couldn't even relate to what I had gone through. It could relate to that There's just these little minut moments of like, oh, I have to write everything down to, you know, that's just you getting older, that's just, you know, I'm never good with names either, and minimizing the experience of going from one thing to another in an instant, right, so that, but they were trying to relate, but in trying to relate, they minimized my experience.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 15:22

That's right. And I think a good indication if you're not sure if you're doing this, right, and I tried to catch myself as well. So this is, you know, a little tool for anybody who likes to use it and becoming more self aware, is, are you using an if statement? Right? Are you saying, Oh, I can't imagine I just can't imagine. Well, now you've, that seems benign, that doesn't, you've not necessarily, you know, just verbally vomited your own personal story, which we've established isn't the best answer. In fact, you've you're saying i, which is telling the person, you're comforting that you're not thinking about them, because what you're doing is your brain is processing, what it would be like to be in their shoes, and to experience a brain injury, to experience a divorce to experience your loved one's addiction or incarceration. Oh, I couldn't imagine I can't imagine. Well, that's what they're doing is they're imagining themselves in it. And then they're saying I can't, because it's painful, or if they're saying, Oh, I don't want you to cry. Oh, well, that's another signal of their discomfort with your emotions, reactions. Yeah, right, right. Or, of course, the third one, which we'd already touched on, which is I went through a divorce too, or as you said, I also am bad with names and have to write things down.

**Maria Ross** 16:44

Okay, not the same. You know, it's a, it's really interesting, because as I've been studying empathy for these years, I've changed my very intentionally tried to change my default around that when someone is confiding, or if I'm trying to be there and actively listen, to say, instead of like, I can't imagine because I used to do that, too. And sometimes I do it when I forget. But more focusing on that must be really hard. Or, Oh, you must be feeling really alone. Right now. I'm here for you. Like, yes, being able to make those statements exactly what you said, like making sure it's not about I, but about you. And I think, again, that the myth is that unless we can have experienced exactly what that person has

experienced, or bring in a similar situation, which that helps with empathy, but we don't have to, because right is about seeing things from someone else's perspective. And if I'm going to talk to a Syrian refugee, I've never had that experience, but it doesn't mean I can't be empathetic to that person.

**Stephanie Sarazin 17:50**

Absolutely. And no matter who you're speaking to, you know, somebody's having a grief experience. And, and going through some really hard things, whether it be at a Syrian refugee, or you know, any of the other activating events that I had shared, it's not our place to deny them that experience of feeling that emotion, any more than it would have been our place to deny them the love that built the grief. Right. And so instead of trying to fix it, because it is so uncomfortable, I understand everybody to be happy. Yeah, yes, yes. But that, you know, grief is love. This is the invoice we have from love and how lucky we are to pay it. And so if we can find a way to you know, hold space for that person talking about their experience, and say just what you said, Maria? Oh, that sounds really hard. I'm here. I'm here for you. Yeah. And you're not asking what they need. They don't know what they need a lot of times, you know, that's adding that's kind of just heaping on more to do on an already confusing time. Right. So I think just I think saying that sounds really hard. That sounds so hard, is helping the person be witnessed and in grief. Healing is not possible if our grief isn't witnessed. And I went through, I have a Master's in Public Policy. That's my background. I had in no way set out to research or write a book about grief, much less the subset of grief that's unrecognized. And yet, you know, it's, it's been something I've learned along the way that without grief being witnessed, healing can't happen. And if we think about all of the ways that our love is witnessed, and that we celebrate our love with, you know, I mean, gender reveals weddings, all the ceremonies, birthday parties, engagement events, bar mitzvahs, Bat Mitzvahs, all these things that we do in life to celebrate miles stones and, and celebrate our love. What do we have on the other side of that for grief, you know and to be able to create a ceremony on your own that helps allows grief to be witnessed, you know is ideal. We have funerals of course when there's grief by death, ambiguous Grievers have to be a little more creative. I call it a faux funeral, you can still create your own ceremony and work in your own rituals. But witnessing grief being with that Syrian refugee being with the daughter whose mother has dementia, and saying that's really hard, right? I love you. I'm here for you. Right? And I want to talk about

**Maria Ross 20:39**

how or why grief is actually a great teacher for empathy and meaning when you experience it. But when you also witnessed it, how is that helping us build that empathy muscle? Well, I

**Stephanie Sarazin 20:51**

think it's a great teacher, as long as we are willing to allow it to be right, because we just said it's so uncomfortable. Depending on how we were raised. Grief can be something we just want to get rid of. I call it the grief cooties, you'll be able to tell pretty quickly who in your circles, you know, don't want the grief cooties. It's almost as though witnessing your grief some way transmutes it to them. And now they've got the grief and nobody wants the grief, right. And so if we allow it, if we can lean into it a little bit, when it happens around us, then we can learn how to be how to show up for our colleagues or our neighbors or our children, whomever in our life. And we can learn by seeing empathy and action. How we can show up for others, right? And and contrast is a great teacher too. So you'll see an empathetic friend, and later go Oh, that was Yeah, okay. And reflection. That's how I want to show up for people,

right? That person was modeling empathy, whether we have the language to identify that or not, and maybe we'll model and, and try to emulate. But contrast is great, too. Because we can say, oh, man, that person made it all about them. And I'm bringing them a casserole now, right? And, you know, their loss was five years ago, and now I'm resentful, and judging and you know, all of the things, but, you know, if we allow it, if we are accepting of our own grief, then it is just a playground of learning empathy. You know, it's just so it's just a wide open field, to learn how to bring yourself in an empathetic way. And also how to, can we give empathy to ourselves? You know, it's like, how to show up with an with empathy for our own heart, you know, and say, you know, it's, this is okay.

**Maria Ross** 22:55

Well, and I'm going to shift gears just a little here, because I think, you know, the relevance to our workplaces. And our Dynamics, as we're colleagues or as managers to employees, is that it is a little bit because there are known rituals and duties around a death, right? But if someone in your workplace is experiencing ambiguous grief, that's going to come out in some different forms. So can you talk a little bit about what what are kind of the effects of ambiguous grief on someone experiencing it?

**Stephanie Sarazin** 23:27

Gosh, you know, it's widely different for everyone. You know, I've interviewed folks who are going through incredibly difficult challenges and layered, ambiguous grief, with multiple family members. And they're showing up to work every day, because that is the only constant they have. They've not shared it with their management team. Because they don't want anybody to know, they're holding on white knuckling. This is that stability is the only stability in somebody's you know, in their life. Conversely, somebody may come in and say, I'm going through a divorce or my mother was diagnosed with dementia, my husband's just been incarcerated for five years, I need to tell you what's going on, because I'm needing to take some time for myself. Right. And, you know, bereavement policies today are not as great as they can be. I think there's a long way yet to go on that. I know California. They're not as great as they could be not as good as they could be. I mean, it's three days, five days, California now has a new law which is just been signed in which is making strides going forward, but speak up, you know, because something about ambiguous grief depending on whether or not this was an activating event that happened all at once, you know, a diagnosis and you're really shaken by it or, you know, a slow progression of decline such as dementia, and you know, and your loved one and you're a caregiver now and finding care for your The primary caregiver for your loved one with dementia or a diagnosis, you know, speaking up to your HR team, to somebody trusted at work, where you can say this is what's going on, advocate for yourself, find out what your company offers, in terms of leave what qualifies what part of you know, FMLA might be available to you paid time off whatever it might be, understand what your resources are, and don't be afraid to use them. It's okay, that's what they're there for. If your company doesn't have a bereavement policy that, you know, in place, or one that could use some work, you know, raise that flag and champion that that policy to change. That is how they're being changed.

**Maria Ross** 25:42

Do you think that society's view of ambiguous grief is starting to change? Do you think that the pandemic helped with that at all?

**Stephanie Sarazin 25:50**

That's the reason? Absolutely. I think so many people experienced ambiguous grief, didn't know what it was. And it was this collective of other saying, me too. Oh, my goodness, you know, what is this? No, you're not, you know, mentally unstable, you're not having a mental health crisis, grief, ambiguous grief, grief of any kind, is a normal, nuanced and navigable human experience. It's what happens when you go through a pandemic, and you're isolated, it's what happens when your relationship changes with a loved one. With you know, when your identity changes, something that I hear a lot of, in August, most years, is parents, mothers, specifically, feeling ambiguous grief over empty nesting. Who am I now? What is my role in life? What is my purpose, I've given so much attention to mothering, it's my calling. And now they've flown and this ambiguous grief sets in. And we have to be careful, I say about judging. And this especially is, you know, keen for the workplace. But it really holds, you know, throughout, when you see a colleague who's not coming in, because they're going through a divorce, or because they're moving their mother into assisted living, whatever the case might be. It's so important that as we learn empathy, we also understand that empathy is not judgmental. Right? Absolutely. And so if you find yourself saying, Oh, well, you know, there's Maria, she's taken five days off. And, you know, in a day beats the purpose. Yeah, my dad was sick, too. But I didn't take any time off. So, okay, Maria, I guess here's what I'll do for you. I can do you know, and the person might feel like they're really showing up, and they're gonna take your workload for five days. But they're bitterly resentful about it, because they didn't take five days. And I think we just have to do our best to understand that. Grief is so individualized, and people grieve differently. And just because Maria's taking off five days, and Susie took off one for none, nobody's right, nobody's wrong. If we can just show up for one another and say, That sounds really hard.

**Maria Ross 28:10**

Mm hmm. Do you see like leaders of teams or managers being able to play a good role in helping someone through ambiguous grief?

**Stephanie Sarazin 28:20**

Well, I think that it depends on the person in that position, it's such a top down. And you know, as empathy training continues in those top spots, it's a thing. It's a wonderful opportunity for, for leaders to practice empathy, through grief. And that's circling back to grief and empathy being, you know, great training partners, because we're all going to grieve. And we all at least, the large majority of us have the capacity to learn empathy. So let's put those tools to use when inevitably, those around us are grieving. And then when it's our turn to grieve, may we be as lucky as to have empathetic folks around us too.

**Maria Ross 29:05**

So I know you wrote the book soul broken a guidebook for your journey through ambiguous grief, we'll have a link to that in the show notes. But where has this work taken? You? What kind of work are you doing now? And are you working with individuals? Are you working with community organizations? Are you working with companies? Where are you taking this work next?

**Stephanie Sarazin 29:25**

I've not worked with companies and I've done some community panels, which was, you know, really enriching, mostly one on one and small group individuals who are experiencing ambiguous grief and



feeling like they are out in a boat in the middle of the ocean all alone, you know, which is understandable place to feel like you are in the beginning. It's certainly where I was. And you know, what has taken an interesting turn for me is in the ritual and reconciliation component, which is one part of the process model. One chapter that kind of came from you No healing, ambiguous grief. So this is what ambiguous grief is. And here's kind of the process model I co authored with another with a therapist who's terrific. And we were able to identify kind of what was happening in model form. But when we talk about how are we, so here's what it is, how do we heal? How do we move forward with it. And, you know, it's, it's incredible to me to see how impactful a ritual can be, in lieu of a funeral where, you know, there, eulogies are given and all these beautiful rituals are under the umbrella of this ceremony. You know, we don't have our last witness on that grand scale. So I've been working with individuals, when they get to that point of creating their own funeral. Creating what for them, gives the opportunity to invite others to witness their loss, to honor their love, and recognize their grief so that they are able to move forward.

**Maria Ross** 31:03

You mentioned a process is this mapped to Kubler Ross's, work about about the stages of

**Stephanie Sarazin** 31:10

grief, it isn't But similarly, right, so tell us what those are. Yeah, so Elisabeth Kubler Ross, her seminal work, the stages that she identified are anger, bargaining, denial, depression, and acceptance. But those are nonlinear. Those aren't meant to be we bounce it, I've done work exactly. And, and worth noting is that just two years ago, David Kessler added meaning to that group as well with the permission of the Kubler Ross family. And what I found in my surveys and my research, absolutely, these emotions are experienced for somebody with ambiguous grief with an ambiguous grief as well. However, there was one wily emotion that kept popping up Maria and I couldn't quite name it, but I could see it. And I would see it in myself, and I would see it in others. And I couldn't quite name it until I recognized it as hoped and so forth. And

**Maria Ross** 32:17

I totally thought you were gonna say shame, but no, so Okay, great, right.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 32:21

Yeah. So hope shows up for an ambiguous Griever in a couple of different ways. You know, if you think about if we were grieving the loss of our loved one to a physical death, nobody is hoping that they're going to ring the doorbell and show up on our doorstep, ever. That would be very frightening. Nobody is hoping for that. But for an ambiguous scraper for that mother whose child is addicted and on the streets? Yes, you better believe those parents are hoping for their child to return return, right? So for the the child caring for their parents with a traumatic brain injury or dementia or Alzheimer's, hoping for a cure, right? And all of these different activating events that I named, there's hope, because the person is still alive. And so we are hoping they come back to us right now, the problem with that is that hope kind of plays the role of a double agent. It's good, and it's not so good. And this is tricky, because we know hope to be a wonderful, glorious thing that we need. And I always say don't misunderstand me, I get it. Hope is a wonderful thing. It is a virtue it is. It's something that I want for everybody. Emily Dickinson, I love her one of her most famous works is Hope is the Thing With Feathers that perches in

the soul and sings the song without the words and never stops at all. Oh, well, that's just so light and beautiful. And who doesn't want something perched within us that, you know, sings the words are things the tune without the words and never stops at all. And it's this beautiful, you know, image of a Cinderella bluebirds that comes to mind for an ambiguous Griever that sees that bird that never ceases to stop tweeting is more of an Iago from The Lion King like the squawking parents, right? You don't want that parent in our ear. Right? But when we're when hope is all we have. And we cling to it so desperately because we want our loved one back. Hope in that form is external hope, as opposed to internal hope or we're hoping for ourselves and too much external hope is as dangerous as it is good because there is in the DSM five prolonged grief disorder, which is something that is, you know, pretty much where you're in such a deep grief. It's defining you, right. You're obsessively thinking about it. It is all consuming and it If you're in prolonged grief, if you're experiencing a prolonged grief disorder, that's something that needs a clinician practitioner, and professional help to work you out of that. It's like a quicksand really. So by being able to identify when we're hoping, and to say, okay, am I hoping for myself? Is it healthy hoping? Or is it right? So hoping Yeah, exactly. Is this internally driven? Is it externally driven, because I can't change another person, I can only change and work toward my own healing. And so hope can be tricky, but just like empathy once we learn to identify it, and we know better than we can do better.

**Maria Ross 35:43**

I love it. Thank you, Stephanie, so much for sharing these insights. And I hope this episode will help so many people listening and also be able to help all of us leaders, colleagues, show up for our workmates that might be experiencing these issues, and we're just glossing over them. And to you know, I always say, you know, we spend the bulk of our time at work. In some weeks, we see our workmates more than our family. And so we should hold those relationships sacred, there shouldn't be love in there, right. And so this is part of that is yes, we're all there to do a job. And we have a mission. And we have performance benchmarks and all those things. But we also just need to care about each other as people. And if we can't, in that particular workplace environment, maybe we need a different one, maybe we need a different culture where we can find that support. And as you're talking, I'm thinking, oh my gosh, every HR department needs to add some sort of resource around ambiguous grief to its bag of, you know, benefit tricks for people, whether it's, you know, resources, have specific therapists to talk to about ambiguous grief, whether it's educational resources, because I think, even though, and this is just me waxing on about this, but, you know, like you said, everybody experiences death, and we still don't do that very well as a culture anyway. I almost feel like many more of us experience ambiguous grief in certain forms, like you said, an empty nester, you know, someone who gets divorced someone who ends a relationship or ends a friend relationship. I feel like that happens more often to us than the significant big deaths in our lives.

**Stephanie Sarazin 37:28**

Absolutely. And I'll add to that familial estrangement. Yeah, you know, in a growing culture of divisiveness, families, you know, maybe aren't coming together around the holiday table as they once did. Right. And so, losing your family members is incredibly painful, and being cultivating a workplace environment where we recognize that these are hard life events. And you know, as an employer, we can show up for our employees or employee family a little bit better, I think is a noble task to take on. I love it.

**Maria Ross** 38:04

Thank you so much. We're gonna have all your links in the show notes, including a link to your book, but for people on the go, where's the best place? They can find out more about you and connect with

**Stephanie Sarazin** 38:13

you? Sure. My website Stephanie sarazen.com.

**Maria Ross** 38:16

Wonderful. Thanks, Stephanie, for joining us today.

**Stephanie Sarazin** 38:20

Maria. Thank you for having me. And thanks for the important work you're doing. I'm so glad to have chatted with you today.

**Maria Ross** 38:25

Thank you, everyone for listening to another episode of the empathy edge podcast. You know what to do. If you like what you heard, please leave a rating and a review and share it with a colleague or a friend. Until next time, remember that cash flow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care and be kind.

**Maria Ross** 38:52

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