

Warning message: ([00:00](#))

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Donna: ([00:19](#))

I had just lost myself. I think I, I just had this spiral of negative thoughts that I really couldn't get out of. I had really lost sight of anything that was good about me or I just felt like I couldn't see any other option.

Beverley: ([00:42](#))

Donna Thistlewaite had a great career, A loving partner, Greg, a gorgeous toddler, Matthew, and a bubbly extrovert personality, which meant she also had lots of friends. But after taking maternity leave, she returned to a new leadership role and suddenly life began to unravel. Even so, she was the last person in the world anyone expected to attempt suicide, as her sister Myee can confirm.

Myee: ([01:08](#))

Very outgoing, bubbly, happy, and very successful. She's always amazed me with her massive groups of friends. Like some people only have just a select a little group of friends, but Donna always has these huge major networks of friends. Like there was 40, 40 women at her baby shower and I've just never seen someone that had such a great network of friends and obviously her family. Career wise she seemed to be ticking all the boxes,

Donna: ([01:43](#))

Things were going reasonably well at work. I had a lot of uh, energy and I did feel enthusiastic about what we were doing until I hit a bit of a road bump where I started to really doubt myself. And I actually had one experience in particular at work where I had a disagreement with somebody and I took it really personally and it I think triggered some things for me really. It led to me, um, really doubting my effectiveness in this new leadership role that I was in and caused me to really question myself and I'd never had an argument at work before. So that felt really weird to me. And uh, it was actually sort of a little bit public as well. It happened in the office and I started to feel like I couldn't do what I needed to do in that job. And I started feeling that more and more. What I also realize in hindsight is

Donna: ([03:00](#))

that I lost sight of everything that I was good at and I just started focusing on the things that were going wrong and I didn't reach out to people to say I need some help because I felt that was further, I guess exposing myself really. And I

didn't want other people to know that I was failing. I think all my life I was really trying to prove myself to my, to me and to other people. And so I had experienced a lot of success. But I can see now that my identity was pretty wrapped up in that as well. And so when things, went, so, certainly from my perspective, uh, so badly. That really affected me. I've always wanted to be a good Mum to my little boy Matthew. And the thought of losing my job... Was just, yeah, that was horrifying for me because I wanted him to see me as somebody who is successful and you know, contributed to my family.

Donna: ([04:18](#))

And Yeah, the, the thought that, um, that I couldn't do that or wasn't successful doing that was actually really scary for me. So I told Greg that I had, um, been off work sick for a few days and that my world was basically falling apart, that I felt, uh, that I couldn't do my job anymore. And I'd been to the doctor and talked to her about what was going on and she thought I should take a break from work. And I told him I thought I was gonna get the sack from work. And yeah, he was, um, he was pretty shocked by all of that. And as I told him about what had been going on too, I think it actually just amplified everything as well. I just thought, oh my gosh, what have I done? This is all just such a mess. And yeah, I just started to think, I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how to get out of this situation.

Donna: ([05:32](#))

That conversation with Greg was on the Friday night. And that night I started to think about ending my life as a way to fix a situation because I couldn't see any other way to do it. I don't think that I had those thoughts before that, but I certainly know that I had them a lot overnight on the Friday and I explored in my mind ways that I would potentially do that. And I had a very, very restless night and yeah, by the time Saturday morning came around, I was thinking more and more that that was the course of action that I was going to take. I had just lost myself. I think I, I just had this spiral of negative thoughts that I really couldn't get out of. It's um, yeah, it was as though I was just, I had really lost sight of anything that was good about me or I just felt like I couldn't see any other option. I felt like a failure and I felt like everybody knew that I was a failure. So I think the height of my crisis, the actual crisis was really only seven to 10 days where I went from being like, okay to being fine, being like my normal self, to feeling like I was just spiraling out of control of feeling like I was failing, really failing and just messing everything up. Uh, that happened relatively quickly and then I just wanted to, uh, yeah, I just wanted to get away from that and I just thought, I can't

Donna: ([08:03](#))

I can't stay at work. I can't, um, I can't cope with this situation and I just want it over. And uh, it really then peaked that weekend after I talked to Greg and

then started having those thoughts of this is a solution. And I actually thought to myself, well, if I was to end my life and that would fix the situation and then I, um, that just got stronger and stronger over the weekend. So I guess things are really, peeked over that weekend. So on the Sunday, it was a weird day. Like, I'd made a decision that that's, that I'd made a decision I was going to end my life on the Sunday. And I remember a friend coming over, a, a good friend of Greg's and the three of us playing, throwing the football around the backyard with Matthew. And it was really surreal. It felt like I was detached. And I remember pouring myself a glass of Scotch in the afternoon and I'd sipped it and I just thought, oh, I don't want this. And so I remember leaving the house and walking out to my car. I'm not sure why my car was outside, but I remember seeing the neighbor's car. And again, I just felt quite detached from myself. And I stepped out of body I guess. And then when I got to the bridge,

Donna: ([10:11](#))

I parked up and I walked over to, um, the, the walkway at the side of the bridge. And I walked across a few times and I became really emotional and people were just going about their day exercises. And it was a Sunday afternoon, people were riding and cars are going past on the bridge. And then when I got to the northern end of the bridge, I just thought, I heard this voice in my head say: you're here now, just do it.

Donna: ([10:56](#))

So I do remember hitting the water and resurfacing. But the next thing I remember was actually waking up in hospital. I was really shocked when I woke up in hospital because I hadn't actually thought that if you were to jump off that bridge, then you died. And I, it surprises me now, but I hadn't actually even contemplated that as an outcome that I would survive and that I could actually be seriously injured. That hadn't occurred to me at all. So, yeah, clearly I wasn't very rational at the time.

Lifeline: ([11:39](#))

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Myee: ([11:53](#))

Yeah, it was, it was just a huge shock and I didn't believe it. I was like, no, that's the wrong person. Definitely the wrong person. She would never do that. Why would she do it? She has everything to live for. Yeah, there was definitely initially grief and shock and then I kind of flipped over to a bit of anger and um, I know we had a moment in the hospital where I was really angry at her. And a few days later when it all hit and you know, said to her whatever was going through your head, like you have to imagine how hard it

would've been for all of us to have lost you and in those circumstances as well, but how it would have just shattered our family. Like not seeing my nephew, I was scared about not seeing my nephew again and you know, it was just, yeah, I was just angry at her for a period of time. But we talked about it and then I can switch out of that anger mode again and just be grateful that she was here.

Donna: ([12:54](#))

So I was in hospital about six days and I wanted to go home after that and I sought of talked them into letting me out. We had a niece's second birthday on the Sunday and I wanted to, to go to that and they let me out of the hospital on the condition that I connected with the mental health unit, that local mental health unit.

Myee: ([13:22](#))

Yeah. It was like, Oh, you know, as much as she said she was never going to happen again. And um, she was very apologetic and it's like, you know, can you go to the shops by yourself? Can you do this for yourself? Are you all right? And you want to constantly be checking on them because you didn't see it the first time. Is it going to happen a second time. And then there's also this fear of, um, is it going to happen to someone else in my family because you don't know how those links are made. I've got kids and I was like, oh, hopefully, you know, my kids never, ever want to go through that as well or, yeah, it was kind of scary for a long time until you had to work through it and get it out of your mind a bit.

Donna: ([14:08](#))

I didn't have to worry too much about what to say to people because we didn't actually tell anybody for a long time. So Greg's really private and I was still grappling with what had happened as I'm sure he was. And somewhere along the way I decided that I wanted to be the person who told Matthew when he was old enough to know. And so I just didn't want people to know because it might risk that. Yeah, I needed him to know from me. I committed to attending a psychotherapy every Friday afternoon for an hour for a year. And it was really useful. It was great. And it helped me work through some things because I had come to understand too that I had had these, I have these strengths and I had worked out earlier in the year before my crisis that they were vitality, tenacity, and integrity. And, and part of what occurred for me and my crisis was that I felt like I was none of those things and therefore who was a I? Because if I had my vitality, then you know, I'd be able to get through this and my tenacity. Cause everybody had always talked about my tenacity. But there I was giving it up, like throwing in the towel and my integrity was compromised as well because I, I didn't want to be at work and I felt that I could have been at work, but I have made a decision that I couldn't do it

anymore. And so it was like everything about myself was, I was questioning it all. And so working through that with the doctor was really helpful. Where I realized that a, a failure or a, you know, not living up to those strengths or those values didn't mean that I wasn't still that person and that I wasn't a good person. That I, I can still aspire to be like that all of the time, but that it's okay to have a slip up.

Beverley: [\(16:28\)](#)

Despite the help she was getting. Donna still felt she was boring and unpopular. One day having coffee with friends, she decided to share those fears. The woman's reaction finally made her realize how distorted her self-perception had become and she decided to do something about it. Quite a lot of things actually

Donna: [\(16:51\)](#)

When I was having coffee with those ladies that morning and they were talking about how they saw me and you know, I realize what I was experiencing and you know, felt was going on. I actually shared with them about my suicide attempt. And I felt like it was, it felt good to do that. It felt before that it felt like I had this big dark cloud that hung over me and it had actually got, I don't know, heavier because it's, I felt like it stopped me from connecting with people. It felt like I had a big dark secret and I couldn't be myself because this big thing that happened and I was hiding it from everybody. And when I spoke about it that morning, it felt good. And then over the next few months I spoke about it to a few more people and I realized that when I did share it, that it felt good and it, it felt that I was able to connect with myself and other people better, easily, more easily. And yeah, the more I shared it, the, the lighter I felt, I guess

Myee: [\(18:09\)](#)

I am extremely proud of her for being able to come out and talk to people about it. Cause you know, that stigma, I know the stigma was intense and the first, you know, few weeks and then it's like, do you tell anyone? Do you not tell anyone? Um, and I guess I'm grateful that she did it because I'd like to be able to talk about it with people as well. Whereas, if she'd kept it in the closet, then it's kind of like everyone has to. But because she's been so open and you know, willing and wanting to help people and wanting to show people that they can reach out and everything, it makes it easier for the people that were involved as well to be able to talk about it. I'll always supported her regardless. I mean, I did go through that bit of anger period, but I'm just so grateful for her being around and quite willing for her to be able to talk to people about it. And so when she said to me, I think I'm going to start talking to people about it. I was ecstatic for her, it was like this is great. Like, it's awesome and I will always support her with um, every decision she makes

regarding that and everything else, probably in her life anyway,

Donna: ([19:23](#))

That morning at coffee with those ladies, that, somewhere during that conversation I just went, right, I am going to find what I need to live a fulfilling life. I'm just going to keep going until I find it. And so I, what did I do first? There's been so many things I, I reconnected. I know I went to the Woodford folk festival that year and I love to laugh. And so I just went to comedy act after comedy act and I just laughed and laughed and laughed. And I also went to a storytelling event at Woodford and yeah,

Donna: ([20:02](#))

I don't know if it was that year or the following year, but that really changed things as well because I never even knew there was such a thing as storytelling and I was totally mesmerized at this event and when we walked away, I just had this feeling like I'm meant to do that.

Donna: ([20:23](#))

So yeah, when I got back from Woodford that year, I, uh, had, uh, started, uh, with, um, an NLP practitioner in neuro linguistic programming and that was really helpful. And I started meditation as well that year. So that was like just the best way to start the year. And with the working with the NLP practitioner, I think he was a catalyst to me having, you know, one of the most significant shifts, which was self-acceptance. He helped me to, um... It was funny. He had me visualizing myself as a little person and going to give her the gift of your perfect just the way you are. And uh, I really struggled with it cause I'd never done any visualization in my life and I really couldn't do it. I was always somebody who very much lived in my head and not in my body. And I remember just trying, trying and trying. And then all of a sudden being struck by the idea that there was nothing freaking wrong with me. And I sat there and literally said that. There's nothing wrong with you. And I felt like a weight lifted off me then and there it actually felt physical. It felt like something moved out of me and that I was lighter and I actually don't have those thoughts about myself anymore. Yes, self-acceptance was a game changer without a doubt.

Beverley: ([22:05](#))

Donna went on to develop six powerful strategies to help her remain in a positive mindset. She now shares them in her new life as a public speaker and career coach. One form of gratitude power posse.

Donna: ([22:20](#))

Gratitude is amazing. So I had kept a gratitude diary for a little while and I would often go to bed and forget that, I'd forget to write in the gratitude diary.

And I would just think, all right, what am I grateful for?

Donna: ([22:35](#))

And I do a little sort of mental exercise. But I came across this woman, Pam Grout's work on a podcast, and she talked about having a power posse. And it's a little group where you text your gratitudes to each other every day. So it's been three years that I've had this practice, and it's been amazing. It changes what you see in the world. So myself and four other women participate in this. And it's amazing because you actually get to be connected with what's great in your own life. You see all of that around you and you get a reminder when their gratitudes come in. So that's helpful. And you've got accountability because they're expecting to get your gratitudes. But what I really hadn't appreciated is that you get to vicariously live their joy as well. And that's amazing because it's like a megadose of gratitude.

Donna: ([23:36](#))

It's just incredible. And it's such an honor to be witness to other people's lives. And I think it's just retraining our mind to see stuff.

Beverley: ([23:46](#))

Two. Re-energize.

Donna: ([23:49](#))

Cycling is my happy place. I think we all need to have something in our lives that reenergizes us so that that's, you know, puts us in the zone. It's often referred to as the flow state and I'm fortunate enough that I get that in a few parts of my life. My work does that for me as well, both speaking and career coaching and then also cycling does it for me. I think that that experience exists for everybody and I think sometimes people don't prioritize it. And I think for some other people that haven't found it yet, and I think it's so important to keep looking for it because I reckon it's out there and it's just waiting for them to find it because sometimes it can be something that you would never predicted. You know, one of the mums at school found archery and it was only by accident because it got set up at a school camp and her kids weren't that interested, but she fell in love with it. You know,.

Beverley: ([24:50](#))

Three. Plan your best year ever.

Donna: ([24:54](#))

Basically what you do is think about the six things you would like to have happen over the next 12 months. And so I often suggest to people, look, let's imagine we meet up in 12 months time and you tell me you have had the best year ever, what has happened? And write those down in past tense as though

they're there already. And then put some pictures next to them to remind you of them. Because they say the subconscious works in images and I've had amazing success with it.

Beverley: ([25:26](#))

Four. Seek out positive people.

Donna: ([25:29](#))

Jim Rowan, uh, famously said, we're the average of the five people that we spend the most amount of time with. So reflecting on how we feel after we spend time with people is really important. I think it's so important to have the right people around you, people who energize you rather than bringing you down. We live in such a connected world now, you know, a high tech world where those people don't even need to be physically with us. You know, we can have amazing mentors that, uh, you know, people we follow online. I think the important thing is that we've got positive energy around us and uh, I think, uh, definitely the right people are part of that.

Beverley: ([26:12](#))

Five. Be a human being, not a human doing.

Donna: ([26:17](#))

I often suggest to people in my speaking that they start with stopping and breathing. I think it's really important just to be. And focusing on your breathing can, you know, it's that when you focus is on that, it's really hard to have your focus on two things at once. So, you know, you're, you're there focused on that rather than thinking unhelpful thoughts or you know, worrying about the future. And I think, you know, it allows you to connect better with people too because you're there, you're present with them and they can sense that.

Beverley: ([26:55](#))

Six. Help someone every day.

Donna: ([26:59](#))

If we're in a bit of a funk. I reckon one of the best ways to get through that, or accelerate through that is to actually go and do something for someone else. And it's amazing because it helps you and it helps them. And there's some research that says when we help somebody else, they are likely to pay it forward twice. So I just love the potential ripple effect that you can create by that.

Beverley: ([27:29](#))

One of the ways Donna helped other people was to become a lifeline crisis

supporter.

Donna: ([27:33](#))

I think the resilience strategies are great in terms of being proactive and you know, from a preventative perspective. But when somebody is in an acute crisis or you know, we've noticed somebody is really struggling, it's important to, to reach out to them and you can actually save a life with it. So as part of the crisis supporter training, uh, we, we learnt to ask the question, are you thinking of ending your life? And I know mental health first aid, uh, has that same position that the question needs to be asked. And it can be one of the scariest questions to ask for people. Um, but it honestly can save a life. So I have asked many people now and most people say, oh, no, no, I'd never do that. But there have been several occasions when people have said Yes. And once you know that, they can get help, you can support them to get help and you don't need to solve their problem.

Donna: ([28:41](#))

I think it can seem really scary for people because they're worried that if they said yes, what would they do? Like how would I be able to help them? You just need to help them to get help. Like no one's expecting that you're gonna, um, solve the problem. You're, you're not an expert in that at all. But you know, whether it's connecting them with lifeline or, you know, identifying some people that they might reach out to if those thoughts come up again or, uh, you know, making sure they get off to a psychologist or, you know, a suitably trained person, um, that's, it can absolutely make a difference.

Myee: ([29:16](#))

I think we all went through a little bit of personal traumatic growth after that experience.

Donna: ([29:21](#))

Yeah. I remember hearing about this term post traumatic growth. Um, earlier this year my sister was at the police academy and she came home and said, oh, we got told today that one of the reasons they selected us as recruits was because the potential that we would experience post traumatic growth rather than post traumatic stress disorder when we experience challenge. And we just looked at each other and I went, oh my gosh, that's what I've had, isn't it? That's what I've had. And it was just amazing because it like named something that, that, you know, I, I knew that I was stronger and more fulfilled than I've ever been in my life. I just didn't know what it was called. And so yeah, it felt really great to know, well, it's a thing and it has a name and I think it's important that people know that we can transform, you know, our response to adversity into something positive.

Donna: ([30:29](#))

They talked about this continuum where people, you know, at one end are floundering and at the other end of flourishing and in the middle is sort of this neutral place and they'd done these studies at an individual, individual, organizational and national level, which showed that a lot of people actually sit in that neutral space. Right? And the problem with us being neutral, which I would say that I was neutral. Uh, when you experience a significant challenge or crisis, you dropped back into floundering. When you're in flourishing and you encounter an obstacle, then you go to neutral and neutral is a safe place to be. And we can get ourselves to flourishing. Yeah. And we can have great resilience. We are going to fare so much better in life. Hey

Beverley: ([31:29](#))

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