

## **CUES 121 Famous or Not, We All Have to Work on Mental Health**

By Dee Baker Amos

**Tony Covington** 00:00

You're listening to the CUES podcast episode 121.

Thank you CUES podcast listeners for tuning in to the CUES podcast. We appreciate how busy you are, and I hope that these shows continue to be useful for you while you are listening on the go. As you know, this is the place where you can hear from the wide range of cross-industry experts discussing brands and topics that we hope are relevant to you.

My name is Tony Covington and I will be your host today. At CUES. I'm the vice president of new markets, where I am tasked with helping to design customized talent development strategies for nonprofit and social profit organizations. I have worked in the nonprofit sector for over 20 years with established organizations such as the American Heart Association, Special Olympics, the United Negro College Fund, and the NAACP to name a few. I'm a former NFL player with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Seattle Seahawks and a graduate of the University of Virginia, where I currently serve as the radio color commentator for UVA football. I am a motivational speaker, author, husband and proud father.

Now, enough about me. Let's get to today's topic, which has always been an important one. But many have felt or feel that it's that elephant in the room that no one really wants to discuss. As of late, however, its importance has been underscored by the pandemic. And now athletes are beginning to come forward to discuss it as well. Today's topic is mental health.

I'm incredibly pleased to have Dee Baker Amos as my guest on the show today. I've known Dee since our days back at the University of Virginia. And now she is the vice president of marketing and communications at DFW, the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Previously, she worked in executive roles at the American Heart Association and she earned her MBA at Clark Atlanta University.

Dee has a lot of insights to share about the role that executives play in caring for the mental health of their team members. She also talks about her efforts to take care of her own mental health and the importance of respecting those key moments of reflection that occur in all of our lives. I think you'll really enjoy this conversation with Dee and gather some ideas you too can use right away.

So, let's get started.

Welcome to the show Dee.

**Dee Baker Amos 02:33**

Good to be here. I certainly appreciate the invite. Thank you so much.

**Tony Covington 02:37**

Well thank you for your time and blessing us. And we cannot wait to hear what you have to say.

Why don't we help our listeners to get to know you a little bit? And I wondered if there's a professional quote or mantra that you live by that you'd like to share?

**Dee Baker Amos 02:52**

You know, my quote, and it's actually more of a scripture, but what I live by is "to whom much is given, much is required." And that is how I view both my professional life and even my personal life because I have been blessed. And I believe at the end of the day, you are blessed to help others. And so that is how I lead. And that is how I raise my children.

**Tony Covington 03:19**

That's awesome. Absolutely fabulous. I got chills, because I'm a fan of that quote, too. So we are seeing simpatico right now.

**Dee Baker Amos 03:26**

Awesome.

**Tony Covington 03:28**

The past year has brought the topic of mental health and self-care to the forefront. Obviously, there's been COVID that has affected a lot of us. But there has also been high-profile examples in sports recently, where athletes have set boundaries for their mental well-being. What should we be saying and taking away from this discourse?

**Dee Baker Amos 03:49**

So first and foremost, I think the notice about how you have high-profile people and athletes talking about their own mental health. First and foremost, I applaud that, because I think far too often, we don't feel comfortable in sharing it. But to your point and your question, I really think the importance of mental health and well-being, No. 1, it's real. And I think that that is what you're seeing in the discourse.

I think the other piece that you're seeing is that we all have to work on it, famous or not. And I want to actually repeat that because I think that it's something that people have to hear. We all have to work on our mental well-being, famous or not. And what I think you see in the latest discourse from the athletes is this whole need for boundaries. And I believe that things like social media have really been a part of what I call the blurring of the lines, where you don't have the same level of boundaries perhaps that maybe even we grew up with that I think are impacting people's mental well-being.

**Tony Covington 05:02**

I think it's fabulous, quite honestly, from the standpoint of being a former athlete and the issues that are out in the mass now. It's issues that have been going on, things that mean, I know, it was difficult, the loss of my mother, when the game was taken away, when it was over for me, and it was time to start the next career. And you know, it was depression, that you didn't know was depression. It's very refreshing to see these athletes being able to step to the forefront and feel comfortable because it is kind of something that you don't talk about in the African-American community and so to see these athletes coming out to the forefront, I think is extremely important for the next generation of athletes as well.

**Dee Baker Amos 05:45**

I couldn't agree more. And I want to underscore something you said, two points. No. 1 about the fact about depression. And even you have shared what I would probably call reflection points in your life. Everyone has things that happened to them that it is okay to feel sad, just like we celebrate people feeling happy. And when you have reflection points, like the loss of your mom, and I've seen your posts, and so I know how amazingly close you were to your mom, and how instrumental she was in helping you to be who you are today. I want people to know it is okay to be sad about losing your mom, period. And I want us as a people, as a world, to be comfortable with not only accepting that people are sad because it doesn't necessarily mean you have to put a label like depressed or bipolar. It's a feeling. And I think we rush and move so fast that we stop being respectful and caring about feelings. And I love it that you are really one that would No. 1 share those the way you do, because you're absolutely right. And the Black community, we haven't gotten to the place that I would love to see us get to where we accept that, we are open with the dialog. And most importantly, we're open with giving the care and concern that anybody needs when they go through any period of reflection of sadness, of loss.

**Tony Covington 07:26**

Yeah, and just to kind of piggyback on, you know, when we talk about the sports aspect, and then we move into how tricky it is to have that mental health discussion in the workplace. Most of us don't feel comfortable disclosing our struggles in detail anyway. And besides that there are a lot of legal issues related to health privacy at work. So managers need to take care of or figure out a way. How do I talk

about mental health? I want to make sure that I'm not making anyone uncomfortable, you know? And so with that said, how can leaders approach mental health and self-care in the workplace?

**Dee Baker Amos** 08:04

You know, that's a really great question. And it's actually one that I myself over the last year have found myself having to not only answer, but lead through that just because of I think the increased level of anxiety that COVID and the pandemic has brought. But to answer your question, I think leaders must first be willing to discuss and acknowledge mental health. And I think it becomes a part of the discussion around the benefits that a company or an organization provides. I think that's the safest way to your point about legal issues. And I'm also going to add HIPAA issues, most companies as a part of their benefits will offer some level of mental support, the same way they offer for physical health and wellness. And I think the first thing is for leaders to be aware of that. Be aware of the resources to be able to direct their staff and your employees if they have a need.

And then here's the second part that I have found that is really been probably the most impactful. Leaders must be willing to share and personalize their own journey and what they're going through. In my team at DFW Airport, I have conversations where I share when I am tired, when I am stressed. We just had a department meeting and just like everybody else, we're all on Zoom, and we're on camera and I asked everybody to raise their hand if this has been a really tough week. And most of the times, I raise both of my hands because I tell them that I'm counting for two because it is a lot to deal with. And what I have found is when I am willing to be vulnerable and to share, I have found that whether they share within the group, they will always come back to me via text or individually and say, "Thank you. I'm feeling the same way." And so leaders must decide that it's not just about leading people for the work, but it's leading people for the lives that they live. And this whole notion about mental health is really real. And you have to get to a place where you feel comfortable with sharing your own journey.

**Tony Covington** 10:30

Yeah, and I think, to your point, providing an atmosphere where there's psychological safety, because without that piece, they're not going to come forward and have those conversations, you know, by you making yourself vulnerable and sharing your story and your journey, that gives your staff then the opportunity. Well, you know what, maybe it is a safe space that I can talk to my supervisor about what I'm going through, because ultimately, things that impact you outside of work will impact your work. So being able to have that space, that safe space is extremely important. But from an organization standpoint, how do you bake taking care of mental health into policies and culture? You know, for example, how would a manager or supervisor react to an employee who calls out for a mental health day?

**Dee Baker Amos 11:18**

So it's a great question. And again, one of the things that we faced at DFW Airport, so I manage our communications. That includes, of course, our employee communications, our internal and at the very beginning of the pandemic, it was important for us to share information about COVID from the perspective of what are those protocols that you must do to feel safe and to be safe and to keep your family safe? Well, where we really netted out was, we really needed to balance that message with the balance of what must you do, in the midst of a pandemic, to really address the emotional, and the psychological on top of the physical impact of a pandemic and what was going on in our world. And so we actually started to include articles about emotional well-being and mental health in our daily employee messages.

And it was interesting because the moment that we started to include those, I would get emails across the organization, 2,000-plus employees, where people will say, "Thank you for including this. his is really great." And so now, as a practice, we include those types of articles in all of our employee communications. And we also take the opportunity to include those in our leader messaging, where we say, "Here's some additional articles that you may want to share with your team."

Because as I said earlier, I feel comfortable being vulnerable and customizing and sharing my journey, but not a lot of leaders do. And so what I would recommend is, if that's not the area that is your strong suit, then find great resources like articles and things to share so that, to your point, it creates a safe space, where people can say, "This is not a good day for me," and I have had those conversations with people on my team, where they have said, "Today Dee, I need the day off. It is not physical. I can't take anything else today." And what we have done, and what I'm very proud of, is I think we do a good job of listening. And we do a good job of saying, "Take the day off." But here's the caveat, "Take the day off and here are the resources that the organization has. Consider calling and either talking to a therapist or going and get a massage. Go and get a physical cause see, it should be connected to something that allows people to be able to improve or get some help.

**Tony Covington 14:04**

And that's great. Those points of connectivity and letting them know that their resources are there and available for them are extremely important in you being able to feel comfortable sharing your vulnerability and your journey. With that being said, what are some of your self-care practices?

**Dee Baker Amos 14:21**

So you know, you asked me this question and I laugh about it, because probably one of the things that I need to work on the most, and I recognize that, but I will tell you what I do and I started to do in the midst of the pandemic. I didn't do beforehand, but it's really made a difference for me. So just like everybody else, at the very beginning of the pandemic, we were all in lockdown, and we were all in the

house with our loved ones air quote, for a long, long period of time. A long, long period of time. Let me say that again, a long, long period of time.

And so one of the things that I started doing on Saturdays is I actually started getting out the house, and I would get in the car. And I would simply drive around and be by myself for about an hour to an hour and a half. I finally decided that I wanted to go to a couple outdoor shopping plazas and so because shopping is always a great therapy for me. And here was the thing. I didn't always go into the store. Sometimes I would drive to the place, and I'd sit there, and I would think about the people who I hadn't talked to, and I'd catch up with people. A couple of my friends know they can get me during this. She's in the car time on a Saturday. And it became one of those things that I really look forward to.

What I liked about it was it was me saying, "I need to do something different." And I point that out, because that, to me is what self-care is about. Self-care is about you identify what you need, and it may not be the same as your best friend or your spouse. One of the other things that I started to do since the pandemic because we are always sitting in chairs a lot. And I don't know about you, but I keep a lot of stress in my lower back and in my shoulders. I started getting a massage every month. I had someone that had suggested for me to do that years ago. And I kept saying, "I don't have time. I don't have time." I decided, after my right hip kept hurting me to the point that I knew that it was because I had been sitting in this chair, I had to make the time. So I go and get a massage. I drive around on Saturdays. And, you know, I probably will continue to add to the list as I need to.

**Tony Covington 16:47**

And I think that's the biggest thing, just finding a space for self, bottom line, you know, and to just be whatever that is for you. You know me. I have this thing with chasing greatness to find what greatness is to you, and then go out after it with relentless pursuit. I think when it comes to that self-care piece, that it has to be that type of journey for each individual, and no journey is a life, you know, and so to keep moving forward, taking kind of a overall understanding of what you're going through into your earlier point. It's okay. It's okay to show emotion to break down some time because you recover. And that's the biggest thing. You can recover. But you got to be in tune with self sometime and the overall taking an inventory of how you're feeling, we have to do it. We have to take time to do it. If we don't, then we do ourselves a disservice. And the ones that we love a disservice if we don't take care.

**Dee Baker Amos 17:45**

Absolutely.

**Tony Covington 17:46**

Kudos to you for having done the inventory and are looking for ways to continually develop self-care techniques. Thank you for sharing that.

**Dee Baker Amos** 17:57

You're so welcome. It was actually out of necessity. You know, and I think that's the other piece about self-care. I liken it to the gas indicator on your car. You guys think about your gas indicator on your car. We don't wait until we are past the E to go and to refuel. Most of us don't. I remember a time when I did do that. So I can admit that. But now I do try to make sure that I don't get past the E and that to me is what self-care is. It's about you having your own odometer, your own metric, your own measurement, and figuring out what do I need to do to refuel? And I think the reality about, you know where we are right now in the pandemic, and how our worlds have changed is what worked for probably a year ago may not work now. Be flexible with finding something new.

**Tony Covington** 18:54

Indeed, indeed. Well, before we get out of here, we want to close with one little segment called message in a bottle. And what that is, what is the message that you would leave to your younger self?

**Dee Baker Amos** 19:06

You know, because I have a son that's just gone off to college, I have been thinking about this because I've been trying to figure out how to give him advice. And the one thing that I would tell my younger self is one of my favorite words. And it is perspective. I think when you become older and more mature, you start to see things and your perspective grows. And I think that that's the one piece that if I could do anything differently, I would make sure that I was looking out for perspective.

And let me give you my analogy and how I see this. The best one that I think of and I even used to use this before going to DFW Airport is about an airplane. When you are in the terminal and you're looking at a airplane out of the window, the airplane looks really big. When you're walking on the jet bridge, and you're getting onto the airplane, the airplane, again, looks really big. When you are in, whether it is a building, or outdoors and an airplane is flying above, that same really big airplane now doesn't look as big. That is how I think about perspective. When we think about challenges in our life, things that we're facing, I ask people, "Are you looking out the window? Are you on the jet bridge? Or are you watching it soar?" And oftentimes, no matter what the challenge is, if you can look at it through those different lenses, more than likely, whatever seems like it is the end of the world and it is just never ever going to be right, you will figure out how you can soar in it.

And so that's what I wish I could tell my UVA, Delisha self is, "Think about perspective. And don't just look out the window at the big airplane. Figure out how to look above at the sky."

**Tony Covington 21:11**

Wow, thank you for blessing us with our first show. And this has been awesome.

**Dee Baker Amos 21:17**

Well, it has been a blessing. And again, thank you for the invitation. It's always a blessing to talk with you.

**Tony Covington 21:26**

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to listen to today's episode of the CUES podcast. And many thanks to Dee Amos for being our guest.

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