

#52 – 3 Simple Ways to Lift Yourself From Depression with Garry Cosnett

Donna Ferris: [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose no matter what happens. I'm your host, Donna Ferris, and today we have author and seasoned business professional Garry Cosnett with us. A little about Garry. Garry's mission is to report from the other side of depression. His book, Everything Slows Down, chronicles his decades-long battle with depression and his life beyond it. I'm so looking forward to exploring the practices that helped him stay resilient with this mental health challenge that affects so many.

Garry, thank you for joining us on Bounce Back Stronger. I'm so honored to have you on the podcast.

Garry Cosnett: Thank you, Donna.

Donna Ferris: And we met through one of my friends and a fellow Virgos. You may not know this about her, but a fellow Virgo, Erin Garrett, so nice of her to connect us.

Garry Cosnett: Yes, she came across my book, and she thought this would be a good connection to [00:01:00] make.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, well, I really appreciate it. I'm so thankful to have you.

So Garry, maybe tell me a little bit about your journey with depression and how it's shaped your life.

Garry Cosnett: Well, it started before I knew what the word depression meant. I came from a fairly unsophisticated family, and neither of my parents graduated from high school. We had an aunt who suffered from depression, but they would use euphemisms to talk about what her problem was.

Then my mother developed a profound depression and retreated into her bedroom for several weeks. Now we're doing this about every six months. And still we didn't use the "D" word. So I started when I was about 15, had my first depressive episodes, whatever I called [00:02:00] them. It wasn't until about seven years later when I was living with a sophisticated girlfriend who said, you're depressed.

And I thought, Hmm, that sounds right. Yes, I am. And she took me very quickly to the community mental health center in the community.

Donna Ferris: That's really great that you find somebody that could identify it and support you.

Garry Cosnett: Yes, both of those things.

Donna Ferris: And you wrote your book, and it's called *Everything Slows Down*.

What do you mean by that?

Garry Cosnett: When I am getting depressed, it is as if there's a speed control on my back, and it's being turned more and more to the slow range. And as it moves to the slow range, it also accelerates. So it goes slow more quickly. My wife tells me that she can tell by the way that I carry myself, [00:03:00] my gestures, rate of speech can give her a really quick idea if I'm falling into a depression.

So everything slows down is the processing of things internal, and it even affects my body.

Donna Ferris: And do you find that having people around you that know you and are able to help you identify it has been key to your management of depression?

Garry Cosnett: Yes, absolutely.

My wife is very medically savvy. She comes from a medical family, and she's very attuned to depression because, apparently, her 1st husband suffered from it but would never own up to it, which was an interesting conversation we had on our 1st date. Yes, absolutely.

Donna Ferris: Oh, that's good. That's so great. And it's so wonderful when we can talk about it.

And then it just makes it so much easier for everybody to navigate.

Garry Cosnett: Absolutely. The lack of communication [00:04:00] about and around mental illness in general and depression specifically is really quite

striking in this day and age. And I'd like to say that it's getting better. In some ways it is, but they're, at the same time, people whose approach is to quiet it down because it's not something we should be talking about in a good, healthy America.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, well, I think people really misunderstand. That it has genetic characteristics. It's not something you can't just tell somebody to cheer up. That's the kind of information we need to hear.

I think to understand it better

Garry Cosnett: You might as well be telling them to to heal their broken femur. It's in many ways biologically based.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, I have the anxiety of generalized anxiety and [00:05:00] quite a few phobias, but at one point when I was working with my therapist, I was just, you know, railing against the fact that I had it. That why did I get it?

Yes, and she said you might as well just be doing that against the fact that you have brown eyes. There's nothing you can do about it. It's just one of your characteristics.

Garry Cosnett: Yes, that's, that's very well put. And

Donna Ferris: She's still my therapist.

That's a good thing to have. Yes,

Garry Cosnett: Absolutely. I meet with my psychiatrist. Every two weeks, I do it quite religiously and have done that for many years. And that's part of what keeps me out of the hospital. I was actually hospitalized 5 times, most recently for 3 weeks. And I found ways that I can avoid getting that sick that I have no choice but to go to the hospital

Donna Ferris: And that's awareness. Right? [00:06:00] Some of it's externally people seeing you, but it's also building our own awareness of what what's happening in our bodies. Right?

Garry Cosnett: And awareness of denial. Because when I start feeling depressed, I will ascribe it to anything.

Donna Ferris: Yes.

Garry Cosnett: You know, sunspot activity, solar storms, relative humidity. I will come up with a very elaborate explanation of why I'm not getting depressed. And now I've learned that that's a trigger that I should be thinking more accurately.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. That your body's giving you clues in many ways.

Garry Cosnett: Yes.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, it's a very helpful partner in this, if we pay attention, but it's hard to, and denial is a very wide river.

We spend a lot of time in it. I do too. Maybe share some practices that have helped you manage and thrive beyond, having other people see what's happening, or you keying into your [00:07:00] own feelings. Are there regular practices that support you in your health?

Garry Cosnett: Well, to stay with diagnosis for a minute.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: Now, what I call the Abbey Road test is I put the Beatles Abbey Road side two on the turntable and I will respond to it in one of three ways. I either love it because it's glorious music. I will have, like, a flat response, no response, or the most extreme is I will have a response of aversion.

I really am not able to listen to the whole thing because I have such an aversion to it. Now, a doctor once said that I had anhedonia, which is the inability to enjoy things, but I said, "I think I have anti [00:08:00] hedonia because not only can I not enjoy things as I do in that flat range, but I also have a strong visceral aversion to them."

So I have a diagnosis - I put on Abbey Road, I see where I'm at, and then I have work to do if I'm down in that flat range or that anti range.

Donna Ferris: Well, that's brilliant. It's a really insightful way of doing it. And I think, a lot of people can relate to that. 'cause there are things in your day, I can look at burnout for example.

When I'm burned out, it's not the same thing as depression, but when I'm burned out, there's certain things that I normally would find joy in that I can find no joy in.

Garry Cosnett: Yes.

Donna Ferris: So I love that you do that. I think that's a great idea for a lot of different use cases around mental health.

Garry Cosnett: Yeah, it's something I cooked up myself, but it's really the most reliable indicator.

That and listening to my wife, who has a wonderful [00:09:00] way of letting me know so it doesn't raise my defensiveness or my denial. Yeah. But the first thing that I do now when I'm moving into a depressive episode, is really counterintuitive. And you hinted at it in some of your therapy when you were talking a couple of minutes ago.

And the first thing that I do is accept it. I accept it. I sit with it. I don't fight it. Because I've found that if I'm fighting it, I'm actually reinforcing and strengthening it. And if I just sit with it and say, okay, here we are, we're moving into depression. We've been here before. We recognize it.

Let's accept that as a given and just sit with it. And that's always the first step after I take the record off of the turntable to sit with the depression.

Donna Ferris: Absolutely. [00:10:00]

Garry Cosnett: Sometimes that has such a powerful effect that it seems to be moving me in the other direction. That's not when I'm really moving toward one of these overwhelming depressions, which I'm essentially immobilized, but it always makes it better.

And it also clears my head to think about what else do we need to do? So the second thing that I do is I look at my calendar. And I figure out everything that's not absolutely imperative. You know, I say, well, will I lose my job if I miss this meeting? Probably not. If I take 2 mental health days at the end of the week, will that affect my bonus?

No. That's 10 months away. I really look at my calendar and I try to choreograph it to accommodate the fact that I'm getting depressed. And then the third thing I do is I always communicate with [00:11:00] my doctor, who's very

familiar with the Abbey Road test, and will ask me, Where I am on that dimension.

Donna Ferris: On the down the Abbey Road test.

That's really brilliant

How long did it take you to get to those three things

Garry Cosnett: about 40 years? Yeah

Donna Ferris: I think that's really true. I think the same thing. Yeah,

Garry Cosnett: I have good ideas. It takes me a little while to reach them because I was as I said, I was hospitalized five times, and interestingly, they're almost exactly six years apart, each one of my hospitalizations.

So, six fives or 30, then a year that I wasn't hospitalized, at 35, then get up to the most recent one, it pretty much fills my life with either moving into or moving out of depression. Except for the [00:12:00] past year and a half, where I've really been largely free of depressive episodes and symptoms.

Donna Ferris: And do you have any thoughts on why that might be?

Garry Cosnett: I think I've really mastered the ability to see myself from the other side of depression and kind of pull myself forward. Now, I will say that I still meet with my psychiatrist every two weeks. I take medication, actually three psychiatric medications, and I take them religiously, irrespective of the unpleasant side effects because the most unpleasant side effect that I know is being depressed.

So I have to remind myself periodically.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: And the other thing is being in the relationship with my wife, Kristen, to whom I dedicated the book, she [00:13:00] is like my co-pilot. And she knows all these idiosyncratic ways that I respond and that I go in different directions than might be what you would think intuitively, with the acceptance and things like that.

She gets all of those things. And really is like a co-pilot and sometimes the pilot, and I'm the co-pilot. Sometimes I'm probably in the bathroom of the plane, but it's great having her. And I don't think I would be where I am without it. And I would not have written a book without her encouragement.

Donna Ferris: What has been the response to the book?

Garry Cosnett: Well, the book really comes out of, A 500-word essay that I did for my company's internal website. Every morning, you get on, and you see what the stock price is and [00:14:00] see what's going on in the organization. And every once in a while, they'll have an essay, and I wrote an essay 500 words called "How I Bring My Full Self to Work."

And I wrote it, and I put it out there. I was very direct, talked about setbacks and treatments and hospitalizations and whatever. And this was the most read essay that was ever on that website. I got about 200 responses on the website with people with comments and questions. And I responded eventually to all the questions that I got, and then I got another 20 or 25 emails to my personal email address, because they didn't want it to be public on the web.

Donna Ferris: Yeah,

Garry Cosnett: So it was really striking to me. I put this out there. I largely did it [00:15:00] for myself. So I wouldn't have to explain myself. The people that I work with would understand why sometimes I'm not as sharp as I can be. Right. And Kristen said, you have a story to tell, you should write a book.

And she might as well of said that I should build a rocket ship in the backyard. I just thought that was preposterous. But she had the wise counsel to write one page a day. So I would set the alarm for 15 minutes early. I'd come into this room, start typing, I'd bang out a page. Over the course of weeks, one page became three, three became five, five became seven, and I ended up with 45 pages.

I had it sitting on the table in our sunroom, and my mother-in-law, who's a retired doctor, said, "Can I read this?" And I said, "Yes." She said after reading it, "You have the makings of a [00:16:00] book here. You should continue." So that gave me the impetus to charge forward and finish the book. The hardest chapter to write was the last chapter because it was beyond depression and into the world.

And I had such a vocabulary for talking about depressed states. But I had a very limited vocabulary for talking about the wonderful way that I'm living now. So I had many drafts of that and a lot of stuff in the wastebasket. But I finally got it to the point where it made sense, and it rang true. And I could actually describe a life that was free to a large extent from depression.

Donna Ferris: And that's probably a really great process to write that down.

Garry Cosnett: Yes, it was. Now it's very therapeutic. I have several of the books around the house because I pick them up whenever I'm feeling a little [00:17:00] anxious. And I say it's all contained here.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: Everything that occurred in this book is manageable, ultimately.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: Whatever's going on today, I'm sure I'll be able to manage that as well.

Donna Ferris: So, how long ago did you write that essay?

Garry Cosnett: I wrote it about a year before I started the book. And then the book took me almost two years.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: So that was about three years ago, but interestingly an influential person from the company said, would you be willing to do a live webinar on depression?

And I said, sure. And we did. We had somebody doing an interview of me live on the webinar. We had 500 people present in the auditorium. We had 700 people in listening rooms throughout the company. And [00:18:00] my favorite listening room, because it was 11 o'clock in Baltimore, it was 4 PM in London, and they had the listening room that all went out for a pub crawl after the hour-long discussion of depression.

We have a technology called Meeting Pulse. Which records people's questions, and the moderator was using them, but I had about 108 that weren't covered, and I responded to all 108 eventually.

Donna Ferris: Had the company done something like that before?

Garry Cosnett: No.

Donna Ferris: Maybe follow up on something you said - that part of the reason you wrote the essay is so that people understood you and you could be yourself at work. It's really helpful when you can talk about and verbalize the things that you have. Like I'm pretty open about what I have because it has helped my companies a lot really.

Yes, having [00:19:00] anxiety lets me see all of the things, I'm always looking for the thing that's going to go wrong. But you need to know that because I'm always going to be conservative about things. I need somebody to push me the other direction.

Garry Cosnett: Yeah.

Donna Ferris: So it's those dialogues are really helpful to have so that you can be valued for what you bring but also be managed too.

Garry Cosnett: It was on some level a selfish act by which I wrote that first essay because I wanted it to be known where I was coming from, and what you might be seeing it would be baffling to you.

Donna Ferris: Yeah, and there's a whole movement to bring something called mental health first aid to corporations so that managers can start to see that.

It's something that it's starting to be embraced. So I'm hopeful that that will start to happen because people do tend to go first line to their supervisor. And nobody wants them to get in the role of a therapist, if they can help them find help quickly, because most people have [00:20:00] really, really good resources for these things.

These things is not the greatest way of putting it. But these conditions, it's hard to know, like the managers may not be aware because it's just not, something that they're close to.

Garry Cosnett: At the end of the webinar, we had first somebody from HR who spent 20 minutes talking about resources and opportunities for people who are experiencing mental health issues.

And then we had the CFO come out and talk about a very open and direct conversation about what she learned today that she didn't know yesterday.

Donna Ferris: That's great.

Garry Cosnett: It was terrific.

Donna Ferris: One thing I've seen people do in these open forums is can you raise your hand if you know somebody that's been affected by depression, and Everybody raises their hand because if you don't have it, then somebody, you know and love has it. As I opened up with it's so prevalent

Garry Cosnett: I have not yet met an individual who cannot point to [00:21:00] someone in his or her life or his or her family, and they usually talk about one.

And then all of a sudden, they're talking about a 2nd, and so on.

Donna Ferris: And you said it so well, many times. We didn't define it. In our heredity or in our past with our family, we didn't talk about it. We just knew something was off. Or something was not working out for them is a lot of times what would happen.

Garry Cosnett: I was in college in Indiana. My first psychiatric hospitalization. I called my parents. And then I talked to my twin brother the next day, and he said, "How's your asthma?" I said, "My asthma is fine." He said, "Oh, Mother and Dad said you were in the hospital for asthma."

Donna Ferris: Oh, my.

Garry Cosnett: So that was how clearly it was not a sound, a reasonable topic in our family.

Yeah, despite my mother's [00:22:00] spells, which ultimately she had more hospitalizations than we could count.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: Then we finally learned the “D” word and some ideas about how you might treat it.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. And it's sad too, because as we already touched on, it's a chemical imbalance in many cases.

Garry Cosnett: Yes. And it's astonishing how chemical treatments can make that a whole lot easier.

Donna Ferris: Yeah.

Garry Cosnett: The meds that I take - everybody's theory is they flatten you out, but I don't experience that they don't make me happy at every moment of every day, but they just make it simpler and easier to be reasonable when these things do come up.

Donna Ferris: Yeah. I personally waited a long time before I started taking anything for anxiety, and when I did, it really made a huge difference, but I think they have to be paired, right?

Garry Cosnett: It's both a psychological [00:23:00] and a physiological phenomenon.

Anxiety. Depression and they're actually very, very ancient. The further you go back in the history, you can even go back to the Bible, and you can read about depression, although that's not the term they used.

Donna Ferris: So maybe at this point, I just want to make sure that I give you time to share anything that you want to share that I missed during our conversation, which has been so great, Garry.

Garry Cosnett: Oh, thank you. Yeah, I will tell you, I speak to the psychiatrists at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

I speak to the medical students. I speak to the psych residents. In fact, the psych residents, now my book is part of their curriculum.

Donna Ferris: How great is that?

Garry Cosnett: Which I'm really thrilled by it. And I tell them when I finish my presentation, “You are scientists. You are [00:24:00] very, very good scientists. This is why you're sitting in this room today.

But you're going to encounter people who are lost in this world and suffering deeply, perhaps beyond your imagination. Now, as scientists, I realize you have to see them as a set of symptoms for you to draw a conclusion and a diagnosis. But if you do only that, you're doing half the job. The other half of the job is bringing your humanity to encounter another person who is suffering deeply.

And if you really are dedicated to the practices of psychiatry, you will be sure you bring both of these things.” Every time and then I follow up by saying, “I've had a great number of psychiatrists in my life I can tell you the three it didn't bring that second part to it and I'm no [00:25:00] longer with them as a result.”

Donna Ferris: Well put, well put. Well I can't think of a better way to end the podcast with that thought of how important humanity is in all the things that we do, but particularly in that profession. Well, thank you so much, Garry.

Garry Cosnett: Oh, Donna, it was an absolute pleasure on my part.

Donna Ferris: That's all for today. If you want to learn more about Garry and his book, those links will be in the episode notes.

Thank you so much for listening. I hope this episode was helpful. If it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends and family. That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit. And if my daughters Sienna and Sylvie are listening, I just want you to know how proud I am of you, and I love you so much.

Bye now.