

Shrink Rap Radio #407, Mindfulness as An Antidote for The Busy-ness Epidemic
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Brigid Schulte
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Virtual Elves)

Introduction: My guest today is Brigid Schulte. An award winning journalist for the Washington Post and Washington Post magazine. She is the author of the 2014 book *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*. She is also part of the team that won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize. For more background information on Brigid Schulte, please go to our show notes at Shrinkrapradio.com. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Brigid Schulte, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Brigid Schulte: Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Dave: Well, I’m very pleased to have you on the show and I’m particularly impressed because I saw in your bio that you’re part of the team that won a Pulitzer Prize. What story was that?

Brigid Schulte: Well, that was a couple of years ago – for the - when we covered the Virginia Tech Massacre. So, it was a pretty horrific story. There’s a lone gunman who was very mentally ill and he has been on a mass rampage and it was really a horrible shooting and we covered that – it’s one of those difficult things that you want to win Pulitzer Prize for because it was just so horrific and so much tragedy, and yet it is the role – one of the important roles of the media which is to really tell true stories about our life as it unfolds. And so, we get that honestly and all.

Dr. Dave: Well, congratulations on that. Sadly, of course, I’m sure you are aware, we had just a replay of that story here in California with the shooting

Brigid Schulte: Yes, it’s awful.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well, I was immediately attracted to your book that just recently came out. When I encountered a mention of it in some publication. I think it was just a little capsule mention – I don’t remember where I saw that – but the title grabbed me, by the way because it spoke to me my own life and of course the title is, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*. I got that right, right?

Brigid Schulte: That’s right, yes. That’s right, yeah.

Dr. Dave: As luck would have it, there is only sensitive review of your book that just came out of this week, May 26, 2014, New Yorker and the review is by a staff writer, Elizabeth Kolbert, and it’s titled *Where did the time go?* In her review, she tries to place the epidemic of busy-ness in a larger context. How do you feel about her review?

Brigid Schulte: I thought that what she talked about were all the things I have written about in the book. The book is really about time pressure and why it is we're feeling so, that we don't have enough time to do everything we need, to even want to in a day. And if you looked at things like the General Social Survey asking people "Do you feel more rushed than you used to?" These numbers continue to increase, regardless of your race, ethnicity, socio-economic status. There is just the feeling of breathlessness that seems to be permeating the way we live in the United States. And the big question is "Why?" And that's really what The New Yorker piece was about and it takes up some of what I wrote in the book. Back in the early 20th century, you had economist like John Maynard Keynes writing about by this time, by 2030, we would work maybe 5 or 6 hours a day, maybe you know 15 hours a week, maybe 6 months a year, and that we would retire by the age of 38. That many people even into the 1950s were predicting that by now, we would have this age of leisure. There's unprecedented time where we would have enough productivity, where we would be able to meet our basic needs so we wouldn't have to work and we would have all this free time. And there is a lot of worry at that time, that what would people are going to do? And would they able to use this time wisely. And wow! And that was sort of the argument was about. And when you talked to leisure scholars, the question really has become, instead of, what we are we gonna to do to fill these hours of leisure? The question is really whatever happened to them? And that is – that is the real puzzle. It's a mystery. Nobody really quite know. So, there are number of factors: Economic factors, income inequality, pressures to work, we don't have workplace laws that protect short of work hours, you know, there is also the sense that advertising has created new wants and so we spend more money on stuff, and you know, and so, the economist Julia Sures written that "We'd become stuck in this vicious cycle of work and spend, that we spend everything that we earned." And that's where our leisure time is gone. It's in the getting of more stuff. So, there's a number of different theories out there. It really is a puzzle and it's a good one to ponder. I think it's one that we need to get to the bottom of and figure out how to solve and get out of.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, well that's what really grabbed me, just by the title of your book, really spoke to me. It spoke to my own life, maybe we'll get into that a little bit. How did you come to write this book? Weren't you already busy enough? I say that as impressed.

Brigid Schulte: Well, absolutely. I was absolutely busy and kind of mindlessly busy – as I would have said. Just very much caught up and trying to live up to expectation that I didn't even realize that I was trying to almost living somebody else's life in a way. Very busy, really crazy and it all really started when a time study researcher that I was interviewing for a project at work at The Washington Post. He told me that I have 30 hours of leisure a week, and I've about to fell out of my chair. I said, "I didn't feel like I had any leisure time or what I considered leisure time." And so I told him he was crazy. He said, "Well, come and do a time study with me and I'll show you where your leisure is." And so I did that and it was a tough experience for me because part of me wanted to prove that he was wrong and show him how busy I was, and the other part of me was really afraid to find out that he was right, and that I have this time that somehow just didn't know how to avail myself of it. And so, when I did this study, he found 27 hours of what he called leisure time, and to me, it looked like little bits and scraps of what I called time confetti. That really didn't add up to anything. So, I wrote a magazine piece of that a couple of years ago. Just about the experience, and after that I got a flood of emails from people who said they felt the same way and they wanted me to help figure out "why?" And so that's really what launched this book process.

Dr. Dave: Just what you needed, another big project on your plate. Well, I gather the reference in the subtitle *To Work, Love and Play* comes from the famous psychologist, Erik Erikson. What's the significance of that reference?

Brigid Schulte: Well, you know, I was really wondering what – how I would shape this book? And I had this idea that I wanted to understand, why are things the way they are? But I also wanted to understand, How could it be better? And Where there bright spots out there? Where things are already changing? Where there innovative work places? Where there countries that can have it wired better? Where people in the relationships being farer about the way they divide labor at home and at work? Because right now in the United States in particular, it's still very lopsided with women doing twice the housework, twice the childcare. I wanted to know did anybody - was anybody doing it better? You know, and did anybody have this sense of leisure time, or play, or likeness of being or spirit. And I was sick one day, and I was watching Ted Talks which I absolutely love. And yeah, Martin Seligman came on and he was talking about the Positive Psychology Movement, and at one point he quotes Erik Erikson, the Harvard Psychologist, saying that the richest and fullest lives maintain some kind of internal balance between what he called The Three Great Arenas of Life: Work, Love and Play. And that if you have a sense of adequate time in each of those arenas, then you have the foundations for the good life. And when I heard that it's sort of like, it was one of those “A-ha!” moments that really delve for me. That's what really I was looking for is the good life in this modern, 21st century and wanting to understand, what had happened to these three great arenas that make for the good life.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you know earlier, you were talking about how pressed we all are for time and it seems to me that I'm more busy now than I was 20 or 30 years ago, or even 40 years ago, and even right now, I'm close to retired which is a very paradoxical. Is there any evidence that would support this as a cultural phenomenon in the US or such as me? And your book seems to say it's not just me.

Brigid Schulte: No, it's not just you. And that's one of my questions after I wrote the magazine piece. I thought that well, it maybe it is just me, and everybody else hasn't figure it out. And honestly, it's when I got the response to the book that I or response to the article, and so many people said you climb into my head and you wrote about my life. That's what gave me the courage to say, okay it is not just me. What is going on? And I will tell you that it isn't just you, it isn't just me; that we live in a culture that right now celebrates values and rewards long work hours – longer than they've ever been really for white collar workers. We worked among them most extreme hours of any advanced economy. The work hours for white collar worker have been going up since 1980s, at the same time, for blue collar and working class workers, their work hours had been going down, but their wages had been stagnant, and costs have been going up. So you need to cover together a couple different jobs in order to make ends meet. So, there's feeling of pressure at work on both ends of the spectrum for different reasons. So work hours are more intense. We got technology on top of that that makes you feel like you're always on call, that you can never fully get away from the office. Your boss can send you an email at 11 at night, another boss can send you an email at 3 in the morning, and a third one can send you something at 5, and they may all be working in different schedules but they come to you as the middle manager, and you have to respond to all of them. So, there is the real feeling of almost panic! That you have to be on call all the time. You're never fully away. At the same time, our standards for what we think as a good parent, particularly, a good

mother have never really been higher. And we expect mothers and women to do it all, in a way that we never expected before. So that's another thing that really kinda increasing the sense of breathlessness that we feel that we have to do and overdo for our kids in order for them to get a start on life because we're sort of afraid. We don't know the keys to success anymore. And you know, the one thing we know from all sorts of studies is you have to go to college or you're gonna earn like a million dollars lesson on your life or there are a lot of indicators about how college have become, what high school used to be. So the pressures on the parents and at the same time, instead of valuing the sense of leisure and play and even relaxation, if you really could – we've always had a very strong Protestant work ethic in this country but it's coming to be seen almost a weakness. When I've been out reporting, people don't want to admit that they have leisure time and so they fill it up with stuff, almost to show your status by how much you can juggle.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Wow! You just identified a lot of really major factors and one of the ones you're related to is technology which is to me, it seems like a major culprit and you know all of these tools, the technology was supposed to free us up kinda along the lines of John Maynard Keynes scenario that you mentioned earlier and so that robots would do all the work, and we would have this free time, and it's turned out to be quite the reverse of that. That because we have a powerful tools, we're expected to use them more and more and all the time.

Brigid Schulte: Right, right. I think that is a really important point. You know at various points in human history, William Powers wrote about this really beautifully in his book *Hamlet's Blackberry*, there have been times when there's been, say a technological breakthrough and it makes it feel like the world is speeding up, and that, you know, that could have been the invention of the pencil or, you know, the printing press. And this is just the latest iteration of that. That we have this new technology. It just floods us with information and choices and while there is a lot that is really good about it, it still so new, we have yet to adapt to it. And we have adapted to technological breakthroughs in the past. It takes us a while as a human species, if you will. So my hope is that this is also something that we learn to adapt to. And I don't know that I have great hope that we need a Google Glasses and we will be carrying things around the note on our lists. I think it gives us great freedom and there is great potential, and great hope with all of that connectivity, but at the same time, yet, even back in, you know, in the days of the great philosophers, there is a value to getting away from the city, walking in the woods, you know, that was sort -- to have those moments of rest and away from maddening crowds to the speak -- to hear your own thoughts, to be able to follow your own internal compass rather than be caught up in the maelstrom and sort of, bending the bow and feeling so reactive all the time. So, what I'm hoping is that we're in adaptation because clearly it's not saying it's not time, it is sucking more of our time, because it's really addictive. When you looked at parts of the brain, the structure of the brain where things like say, Twitter or social media, you know, when you get a ding on your phone, the part that lights up in your brain is the same part that lights up with addictions. So, these is a very seductive technology. You always itching to check it. And so the more you are aware of that and understand what it is, the very seductive force, but that it can -- it can swallow you whole as you fall down in the rabbit hole, and as you learn to use it wisely and perhaps bound to the time that you use it, that it can be a really effective tool. But right now, it is the same thing with, you know, in the 1950s when we had all these great cleaning devices and appliances that came in that was supposed to help women and housewives, you know, saves so much time

cleaning. What happened instead, through advertising our standards of cleanliness just got higher. So, the ironic thing is that the time study showed that even with these new "time saving appliances" didn't end up saving anybody any time.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, amazing. I like your optimism but I also resonate with your concern that this gonna be a quite challenge for us to adapt to all of these. You mentioned earlier, the Protestant ethic that seems to inform our attitudes towards work and leisure especially in the US, how we in the US compared to the other countries, in this regard.

Brigid Schulte: Well, you know, there are other countries where hard work is clearly a value. You know, I don't know that there is a particularly in the advanced economies. I don't know if there is country of slackers out there. But I think what's important is there are other countries that see the value of time away or walk in the woods, if you will. The time to refresh your soul, which is what the Greek said was the point of leisure and the point of work. There are other countries that clearly see the value in making sure that people have full lives, which means, whether you have a family or not, that you have a life outside of your work. And that the richer and fuller that life is the better, more innovative and efficient and harder you're going to work when you come back to work. For instance, I went to Denmark and the interesting there is like many European countries, by law, they have short work hours. It's the European work time directive mandates -- short work hours. There's also a cultural value for leisure and family time, and relaxing, if you will. You don't have people bragging about how busy they are. There was an American that I interviewed over there who kept getting performance evaluations that weren't all that great. And she finally said, you know, how come I'm working so hard for you. I'm here early. I stay late. I'm the last one to leave the office at work so late that the only place that's open for dinner when I leave is the gas station. And how is it that I'm not the most valued employee. And they sat her down and they showed her, we value work-life balance. That's the third most important thing we have here, and you don't have any. So, you get better performance evaluations when you learn how to live a good life because you gonna do a better work for us when you do. So, there are different cultures that have different values which is a value of hardwork but not crazy intense overwork. In the United States, we have particularly since the rise of Silicon Valley, kinda worship of what some people called this "hero hours" where you work is you meet an insane deadline and you kinda come through to this insane obstacles, and it's very interesting that when I've talked to people. There was a couple that were trying to get jobs in Europe and living overseas and couldn't get jobs at their level as managers because nobody wanted to work for workaholic Americans.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you know what you can talk about that the whole Silicone Valley thing but it seems kinda sort of mythic stature in this country. That's an interesting point.

Brigid Schulte: What's interesting is that there are countries who view long hours simply as inefficiency, and they would look at Silicon Valley and say, you know, that's not being heroic and does not particularly doing great work and at least not consistently. That's bad management.

Dr. Dave: Well, I hope their ideas infect us rather than vice versa.

Brigid Schulte: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Of our values, current practices almost become like infectious means that infect the other person or world and even places like France, would like to preserve their cultural integrity and shield themselves from us and some ways. The title of your book is *Overwhelmed*, but you turned it into a proper noun referring to it as *The Overwhelmed*. What are you getting at?

Brigid Schulte: Right. Well, you know, as I reporting the book I kept trying to explain to people what I was doing, and I would, you know, telling people feel overwhelmed and I would try to explain why and so, bring all the different factors into it, and it just begin to shorten into the Overwhelmed. And immediately, people just could not be, you know, I know exactly what you mean and, you know, that it almost became more than just adjective. You know, feeling overwhelmed or, you know, that something is overwhelming. And it just became to me, I saw it that it is a state of being. Well, it is just so intense that you can't see your way out. That you don't even see that there's a possibility of living a different way. That's how I really felt at the beginning of the book. It just felt like, well, this is what it takes to be number one in America. This is the choice I made to be a working mother. This is sort of "the price I have to pay" to try to compete in these, you know, work environment. And I think that was one of the most powerful things in reporting the book. It's really quite a journey, that I learned that it doesn't have to be this way, and that actually working this way isn't good for anybody. And that when you looked up international studies or international breakdowns of productivity, we think that we are number one in America based on long work hours or just necessary for maintaining that status. It's really not true. When you divide GDP per hours work to get a measure of hourly productivity, there are countries like Norway that are far more productive than we are per hour. And that all of the other countries like France and Denmark that have short work hours, 30 days of paid vacation, paid parental leave, paid sick leave, you know, all sorts of policies and structures that support not just working families but people having work and life balance, they're just as productive per hour as we are. That was really eye opening for me.

Dr. Dave: So, what did you find out about the effects of the overwhelmed on health?

Brigid Schulte: That was the thing that I wanted to understand. In journalism, I have been a journalist, you know, and a writer most of my life. Every time you write a story, you figure you need to have something in there about "Why?" Why should you read this story? You realized that readers are busy? Why should they take turn on another day? Why should they be bothered with reading this paper story, blog post in the magazine article or whatever. And I wanted to say, that sense of urgency to this book. Why? And I wanted to know it for myself. Why was this important? So often, this issues have been really dismissed. It's like "oh, mommy issues." And I wanted to understand, you know, I guess the journalist, the human in me, wanted to understand why is it important not just for women but for everybody. And I found a lot of research that we know how stress is so bad for our health and it has been related to cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure, diabetes, inflammation and even cancer. And that when you look at stress and anxiety, The World Health Organization actually rates the United States as the most stressed out or the most anxious in the world. So, that was really troubling, but I felt that we knew that, so I wanted to keep digging and ended up finding very new brain studies. We're just beginning to look at how stress and feeling overwhelmed and that sense of time pressure how that's affecting our brains. And what they discovering is I spent up some time at the Yale stress center I've been doing this fascinating work but they're giving "normal subjects." Most of the brain scan researched today has been done on

people with disorders. So, struggling with PTSD, or depression, or schizophrenia or, you know, some struggle. They wanted to take relatively mentally healthy people and figure out what is stress doing to their brains. And so they give people a battery of tests to get a sense of how much -- how many stress level they had in their lives? Or had they gone through traumatic events? And how did they perceive their lives? How stressed out did they feel? And what was fascinating and troubling is that they found that those people who both had gone to stressful events and who hasn't, and also who had the perception that they were very stressed out, that they're brain matter, if you will, the actual structure, the physical structure of their brains. They're 20 percent smaller than those who did not feel stressed out. And did not have this to, you know, those two factors. So, that is really something, you know, that stress can actually affect the structure of your brain. And I think the most important thing about that is the structure that was affected is the prefrontal cortex which is the thinking part of the brain. It's the newest or the most recently evolved part of the brain and it controls, what they call, our executive function. What we think and learn, remember and make decisions, and it's the very part of your brain that you most need to figure out decisions when you're stressed out. I found that very, very powerful.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I would say so. Now, a thing that you've alluded to earlier, and once to your book is that when we're differentially impacted by the sense of not having enough time and so, tell us a little bit about that and maybe there is a passage in your book that would be appropriate to read that could amplify that point, as well.

Brigid Schulte: You know, it's really interesting that the very first book that look at -- and the very first study that looked at men and women and wanted to try to understand, you know, the differences in time. And you know, did the women and men experience time differently? Found out that the perceptions on both for parts of time was actually so different that they actually call the book *Divergent Realities*.

And why that's important is that, for a number of reasons: First of all, men have typically always been expected to work, and they have had more access to sort of uninterrupted, concentrated time to focus on that work. Women's time has a historically been fragmented, always been interrupted. Women have been historically been responsible for children in home. And so by definition, it means, you are always available. And if someone's scrapes the knee, or you know, the stove blows up when you make dinner, you're always interrupted by whatever the next sort of very time-intensive, or time-sensitive tasks is, in a way that men are not. And now, in the modern era, you're at work on top of that. We've only progressed so far, in terms of shifting gender roles. We've sort of agreed that it's okay for women to work for 2 reasons both because of the women's movement and because women are more educated and opening up opportunities that had once been only open to men, but also going back to that sense of rising costs and stagnant wages for working costs families, the women have to work in order to keep that same standard of living. So there's different pressures that have been pushing women into the work force, but the workplace hasn't really changed. So now what you got is, all of those very heavy care giving responsibilities and layered on top of that, very heavy responsibilities on demands of the work place. And so women tend to feel much more stressed out by these competing demands, often competing demands of work and life, and trying to balance it all.

But I will say, there's a newer finding that is very interesting as these younger fathers, as their attitude changed as they want to become more involved fathers, and more full partners and they want to pull back from work, lean out, if you will, in order to be more present at home. They're beginning to feel just as much or more stressed about this work-life conflicts than women are. There are some very interesting studies that have come out of Boston College and The Pew Research Center, Families and Work Institute that showed of that men are becoming much more stressed by work and life balance as well.

Dr. Dave: That's fascinating, you know. I'm a grandfather at this point with 4 grandchildren and I found that, you know, I love my grandchildren and I love hanging out with them in small doses of time, and I find that there is a different sense of time. I mean, I have to slow down. They're fast and they're running around and so on, but there is a way in which to be there with them, I have to slow down from the demands of my work, of even podcasting and being on the computer and so on. It requires a kinda shift of time that's a little bit hard.

Brigid Schulte: Yeah. Children live in a timeless era. They live in a timeless state that I think psychologist Csikszentmihalyi would call Flow. Well, they're not slaves to the clock. They're not looking at, oh my goodness! It's time to go to preschool. It's time for the playdate. You know, they live very much in the now, in the sense of present. And there's a lot we can learn from kids. The Greeks call the time we live in, the time of the clock. They call that *Krunos* time. And you get all caught up and started to gaze at the clock if you will. And that what you're in the time pressure. When you live in that, comes the eternal now, or you just fully surrender to the moment if you will. They call that time, *Kairo's* time. The time of the spirit. The time of being connected to the very beauty of the ordinary moment.

Dr. Dave: Do you have a passage in your book that would be appropriate to read in here?

Brigid Schulte: Well, I was wondering since we were -- I could read about *Let Us Play* which is about a play in women's time has been fragmented and by women have hard time playing. It is very hard to just do it. So, to speak, he would say I could also read from the chapter about new dads and about this changing gender roles when father's beginning to feel stressed, you know -- or I could read about *Kairo's* time. It's really up to you. What would you think would work for your broadcast here?

Dr. Dave: Well, it's your choice, but since you've given it to me, let's have you go with the first one that you've mentioned.

Brigid Schulte: *Let Us Play*?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Brigid Schulte: Okay, alright. Let's set this up a little bit. I wanted to understand why playing was difficult in the United States but also for women. And I think Stuart Brown who runs the Institute for Play where they accept the science of play, and so, there is some of that in this chapter. He suggested that I reached out to the script in New York called *Mice at Play*. And there are group that really follow his research and his science. And He is trying to bring play back to women, in particular. And so, I start off

the Chapter is this Mice at Play where Nadia and Sara are the founders. They were trying to get me to come on what they call a *playdate*. And I kept putting it off and putting it off for all the very reasons that women and frankly, all Americans putting it off that don't seem important. And so finally, I did. I went to the playdate. So it starts:

"I stand with my toes curling over the edge of a slip of a platform twenty feet in the air. I had climbed a narrow steel ladder to reach this platform, my head getting lighter and my arms weaker with every reach. As I grabbed on to the platform support and stepped through the air from the ladder to the platform, I had no time to remember how terrified I am of heights. How I hate amusement park rides and hitting turbulence on airplanes. How I have spent most of my life holding other people's combs and pocket change while they ride the roller coaster or Ferris wheel and I watch safely, timidly from the ground.

On command, I cautiously begin to thrust my hips forward I realize that I am so precariously off balance that were it not for an instructor's firm grip on the back of the safety harness cinched around my waist, I would certainly plunge headfirst into the billowing air mattress below. My knees tremble. I can't breathe, Sweat bleeds through the chalk I had generously applied to my palms just seconds before. With my right hand, I reach for the surprisingly heavy trapeze bar. With my left, I hold on to the platform support behind me with every fiber of strength I have left.

"Time to let go," the instructor behind me says gently.

"With my left hand?"

"Yes"

"Let go and grab the trapeze with my left hand?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now."

I am standing on the tiny platform high in the air at the España-STREP Trapeze Academy in Brooklyn because Nadia Stieglitz and Sara Baysinger asked me to come with them on a playdate. The two women run an organization they call Mice at Play- as in what the mice do when the cat's away. The organization started in Nadia's living room in 1998 when, consumed by work, the drudgery of keeping house, and the hard joy of raising young children, she felt the life draining out her. She had grown up active and playful in France. But she felt lost. I found myself becoming boring and sad. My life had shrunk to these two areas & work and care giving she told me in her soft accent. "I realized this is not how I want to live my life. A big part of me was missing and I wanted to find it again." When her three girls were asleep - her husband was often traveling - she carved out time on Monday evenings... or painted their toenails wild colors. As the group's children got older, the women began to venture out, going to lectures, art galleries, classes, daring themselves to try anything new, whimsical, or fun that struck their fancy. The idea at first, Nadia

said, was just to keep their brains stimulated. But they soon discovered that by making time to play, it was their souls they were saving. “.

Dr. Dave: That's great! I love the way that gives the sense of the narrative style of the book and which you really put yourself fully into the whole story combined with the factual reporting that you do. And just hearing you read that passage, I started to feel kinda fearful up on that high platform myself. I know what it's like.

Brigid Schulte: (Laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's great!

Brigid Schulte: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: As a Californian, I was surprised to learn that California is one of the states leading the way towards solutions that work well for men and women and children and business, how so?

Brigid Schulte: Well, that was another bright spot I wanted to find. I wanted to understand why United States was really at the bottom of the bill when it comes to family and life-friendly policies. We are the only advanced economy without any kind of paid parental leave. One study found that it was US, Papua New Guinea and Switzerland. So, not really great for a forward thinking company. We are really the only advanced economy without any paid vacation policy. If you get vacations, it's up because of the goodwill of your employer. Most people tend to get 2 weeks and we give up the most days. We're leaving on the table and we take work with us. We will also have no paid sick days. And so, I was looking around for places where things were changing. It was interesting. Everything has been really frozen on National level. The first and only piece of family friendly legislation we have is the Family and Medical Leave Act and that was passed at the very first act that Bill Clinton signed when he became President back in 1993. It was one of his first acts after he was inaugurated and sworn in. And it took 10 years to pass. It allows both men and women to have unpaid medical leave for a 12-weeks a year but you have to be healthy working fulltime, you have to have been there at least a year, and it doesn't cover 40 percent of the workforce. So, the ironic thing, is everybody thinks that this is a law that is maternity and paternity leave policy, but the study has been done that showed that the people would take from the medical leave really get taken care of themselves. It's really more sick time. So as I was looking around, I ran into different groups who were really working on the state and local level and that's what California is the real leader. Over 10 years ago, there was a movement to get a paid family leave, and what's really interesting is that a number of businesses got involved. It had sort of division, the Local Chamber of Commerce was very against it, but smaller businesses and other businesses, we had the chair of emeritus of Kinko's, Paul Orfalea, who is very supportive of it saying, you know, it's time that we have a humane society who will understand that our workers also have families, and that it's important to raise the next generation right, and that to have time to bond as a family, to recover from child birth, or to have time with an adopted child or foster child. It's just a good thing to do. It's good for families and it's also good for business. So, California passed to be the very first paid family leave that was available to both men and women, and it's not paid by tax dollars, it's not even paid by employer funds. Initially, the bill wanted to have both employee and employers paying to a pool, but they dropped that provision when businesses protested. So

right now, employees, everybody who get the paycheck, a few cents out of your paycheck goes into this pool, this temporary disability insurance fund, and so that, basically anybody who is on disability, you now have the ability to apply, just open one more category of clinical disability, if you will, and that is to have time off to bond with a new child. And so, that's been in effect for more than 10 years. And even though there were great protestations when the bill first passed that this would lead to fraud and people would take time off but they didn't have coming to them. What they found in the studies they have done is that there is really virtually no fraud, that employees are much happier and more loyal. There is less turnover. They tend to be more productive. And that business on the whole, says that there's either been, you know, a neutral effect or a positive one. So that's been incredibly powerful and that then spurred other states to do the same thing. So New Jersey few years later, they also follow the California's leave, and they have a paid parental leave program. Rhode Island just passed them. It just took one session and it beginning to effect just this January. Washington State also has a paid parental leave policy that's passed, but they haven't figure out how to fund it yet, so, that's still in limbo and several other states have taskforces looking at it. Studying what California did, trying to figure out if they could do the same. You know, the same -- California, San Francisco is the place where the local city had passed paid sick days laws. And they also have this new Right to Request Flexibility Policy that's model on what's been done over in the United Kingdom. And what they did in the United Kingdom is that they've given workers the right to request flexible schedule. You could have put the plan and show how you can get your work done in efficient and excellent manner, you know, doing it sort of in a flexible way, and your employer has to take your plan unless they can prove that it's gonna hurt their bottomline. And it has been quite successful in the UK and now, they're opening it up starting in June. It just going to open up to workers with young families but to anybody. So, it's becoming life-friendly not just a family friendly policy. And so, San Francisco is one of the only places in the United States that 's trying to do something similar.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's wonderful. I hope that it does spread from the UK over to here. Now, one of the things you write about in the book called ThirdPath Institute. What can you tell us about their work?

Brigid Schulte: Well, The ThirdPath Institute actually plays a very critical role in the book in a number of reasons, in a number of ways. I was really looking at what they call the gender division of labor. And that goes back to the fact that women even when they're working full time still tend to do twice the housework and twice the childcare. Even though men are helping more, and even when they do "help more," the women still tend to be in-charge. They have all of that responsibility: logistics, planning, organizing. They have all that to keep track in their heads, and so, it's a heavy physical labor, and also a heavy mental labor. And so, you know, when I was looking at research, at studies, what I was finding is that a lot of groups and study of the workplace and workplace flexibility and tele-work and workplace policies, but there really wasn't a whole lot about what was happening at home, other than noting just how unfair it was. And that certainly something that I noticed in my own own marriage of 20 years, that we have been much slid into traditional gender roles without meaning to after our children were born. And that was both my husband and I kinda, you know, watching the movies, if you will, what we thought men and women "should do" and just accepting that without question which we both thought that I should do more because I was the mom. You know, aren't the moms the one should be responsible and so, I was looking to see well it's that true? Is there anything you can do about it? And that really allowed me on some very interesting path. And one was to find Sarah Blaffer Hurdy who also lives out in California. She

is really one of the foremost experts on motherhood and nurturing throughout the world and there's fascinating science that she showed me about how men are just as wired, if you will, for nurture. That we haven't given men is the time to develop confidence in a way that we do as mothers who have the breastfeeding with typical long maternity leaves, and that when you give men time, that immediately sets the partnership on a very different path. So you got countries say like in Scandinavia where having solo parental leave is becoming more and more acceptable. In the partnerships, where the men has that solo leave those partnerships are much fairer in terms of who does what in the division of labor at work and at home during 5 years down the road. So, I wanted to see if anybody doing work like that in the United State and that's where I found the ThirdPath Institute. Not only the only place that I found that's working on both sides on the work-life issue, if you will, and trying to put play in there as well. What they do is they coach couples to try to help them get them a fairer place, to help them share better, that you can share the housework more fairly, that you can share childcare. Mother's can step back a little bit and fathers can step up. So, really, if that's what you value, if that's what you want that you can have more than an egalitarian marriage. It also requires sharing at work. And come questioning that orthodox that men work that you can't interrupt them, and so women has more secondary career if you will. Women tend to take flexible part time work, and so they tend to put themselves "mommy track" because that's so much of what our gender norm still expect. And so the ThirdPath is really challenging this very powerful gender norms at work and at home and I found that enormously helpful in my own relationship, it is still a work in progress, but we have really turned the ship around. It is much fairer than it used to be and my husband now, not only shares more than the physical load but the mental loads. I'm not the one that always just delegating him and telling him what to do, and then nagging when he doesn't and then getting angry when people leave it to me to kinda picked up the mess. It's a lot of work because you're challenging some very powerful cultural norms but it made a huge difference. And honestly, it's a big part of why I was able to write a book.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, well that's great. That is a big difficult ship to turn around.

Brigid Schulte: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Congratulations on doing that. Again in your own personal quest to find ways to adapt to “overwhelm”, you've discovered mindfulness and I'd like to spend some time with you telling us about your experience in mindfulness and going to that, if you could.

Brigid Schulte: Yeah, I want to understand in the book was, you know, how to change things both on the big level, the structural level. I wanted to understand policy on law, workplace, and culture. But then again, I also understand social change, that's a tall order and it could take a long time. You know social change is often several generations in the making. And you know, I don't have several generations. I lived this one life, right here. And so, I also wanted to balance of, you know, in these sense, personal mastery. Okay, so what can I do as one human being on this planet to try to feel like I have more time or not feel quite overwhelmed and panic. But I also wanted to be very careful to not only talked about personal mastery because we live in this larger society where there are there pressures to overwork. There are very powerful cultural norms, let say, dad at work and mom stay at home, so, I really wanted the combination of the both. Understanding these larger pressures and then also learning what could I do, you know, as we

work to try to change on the larger scale. What could I do right here, right now? And I was looking for strategies, I was looking at time management. I worked with coaches, and I did. I came across mindfulness as a very powerful strategy that I found some research at Harvard. It's interesting. They're doing a brain scan as well, and they were looking at -- they took two groups of people again, "normal, not with any pathologies" but you know, just generally going through life trying to make the best of it. And then they divided them into two groups and one group they put through an 8-week long mindfulness based stress reduction program. And the other, they just have them go back in living their stressful lives, and what they found that they did brain scans at the beginning of the 8 weeks of those groups and then brain scans again at the end of 8 weeks. And what they found is that the group that had taken time everyday to be mindful, to be just present. Sometimes it was just meditation, sometimes it was yoga, sometimes it was just being full of present in that sense of Kairo's time, if you will. For as little as 27 minutes a day. They found a huge difference in the gray matter actually expanded, again in the prefrontal cortex which is that thinking part of the brain. So, that's was very, very powerful and I think a very important tool because when you have that sense of mindfulness, you disrupt the cycle of busy-ness. You kinda stepped outside of this automatic functions that you have to work outside like a crazy person, that you have to take on all of the stuff at home, that you should do this because you're the woman, that you have to overschedule your kids because everybody else's. That it gives you the power to pause and starts to see the kind of pressure swirling around you and begin to be able to make those decisions. To say, is that what I choose? Is that what I value or am I just reacting because this is so powerful in our culture? And through that pause, it gives you the ability to change course.

Dr. Dave: And I think I saw you took a workshop with Tara Brock, she is in my to do lists of somebody to interview who has been recommended to me. Tell me a little about what you experience with her.

Brigid Schulte: I admire her so much, and if you -- yes, I would highly recommend her to come on your show. She runs a mindfulness session every Wednesday not far from where I live. I try to go to a couple of those, and I heard that she was having a long seminar and you know, I had wanted to do - I have seen the difference in her mindfulness trainings and seminars and I just, you know, it was hard for me to think I had a week to go off and do something or even a weekend, but, you know, a Saturday I can certainly take. And it was really a great experience of learning how to settle into the moment and you know recognizing those external pressures and honestly the human condition of always having that sense of never enough and not good enough. And how common that is for humans to feel that makes us more susceptible to these external pressures of overdoing and overworking, being busy and going. And so it was a very powerful experience.

Dr. Dave: I'm wondering how you've been able to integrate what you learn about mindfulness into your very busy life as a Washington Post reporter, and employee, and a mother, and a speaker. I'm sure doing book tours about your book. Have you developed any sort of discipline or tell us about, you know, concretely how this is being used in your life?

Brigid Schulte: Well, it's really, really important part of my life now. Because you're right, I think one of the most important things I learned is the overwhelm never goes away. That is culture were living and values of overworked, and you have technology that keeps us tether all the time, and that you can get all

so caught up and swept away in it. And so, what's important for me is I do set aside time to pause, whether it's to meditate or to - I had this favorite chair and I like to call it, let's say, chair time. To just be and sometimes notice how beautiful and green the trees are outside the window. To just stop and recognize when it feels overwhelming, to recognize when it feels busy. And you know, to kinda disconnect from those feelings that I have to do. What I know and to get to a better sense of what's really realistic rather than being swept away in making impossible promises or trying to meet up impossible expectations. So, it's just helps me kind of reconnect to what's important and to 'what do I value?'. I've completely changed the way I keep a to-do list. I make sure that on my to-do list, if you will, there's time for pausing. There's time for joy, and there's time for connecting with my family and friends. In a way that is very different in the past. My to-do list was always about all the errands I had to do and all the stuff that's left to do. You know, getting my kids to the doctor. This and that. And now, I make a real concerted effort to have time to just be with them or connect with them. So, at one point, I said I burned my to-do list, but that's really not true. They're really helpful but I definitely keep it in a different way. I flipped it and made sure that there are things on it that are what I really value. I set a handful of priorities that I think about in those pauses. What's most important to me and you know, I keep in mind that life is not long, that I won't be here forever, and that the end of my life, what is it that I'm gonna have wanted my life to have meant. And my work will not be sitting there holding my hand. So, what's important are those human connections and the joy of the meaningful work that I do, that gives me joy that's of service to others. So, it's in those pauses where I can really reconnect with what's important and then I try to find peers who also share those same values, so that together we kinda push back against the sense of always being overwhelmed and busy. That it's important to find a supportive network as you are trying to change and push against this very powerful status quo.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, oh boy, that is so well said, and I was going to ask you, what you'll advise to the listeners for coping with overwhelm. But I think you have just spoken to that. When you say something appendix where I think you sort are aiming at giving your readers something to take away. Tell us a bit about your appendix which you have titled *Do One Thing*.

Brigid Schulte: Right. Well, I knew that writing this book that the people that asked me would most want with people like I was when I was started writing this book, and I didn't feel that I ever have time to read a book. And so I wrote this with them in my mind. And so you can read the whole book. It is a journey. You can read just the chapters that appeal to you or call to you. You can read just about the bright spots to get help and inspiration, and you also can read the appendix which is where I sort of consolidated the best, sort of the pearls of wisdom, if you will that I picked up along the way in reporting, and I've divided into work, love and play. And really, *The Do One Thing* that's so important, if you start off the day with 75 things on your to-do list, you'll never gonna get through it and at the end of the day, you'll gonna feel rushed and inadequate and like the day has been a failure. And that's how I lived for so long. So, if you choose one thing, you know, you take the time to set your priorities. You choose one thing that most important to you, and do it that day, and do it first. The rest of the day it feels like a win. It's a completely different energy. And then it helps lessen that sense of time pressure and overwhelm and it opens a crack into a feeling like there really is enough time in your day to do what's important to you.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's a wonderful close for the interview I think. That was such a wonderful and wise advice. So, Brigid Schulte I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Brigid Schulte: Well, thank you so much for having me. And as long as you remember, I am a work in progress myself. I'm still working on all this and probably, I will always be.
