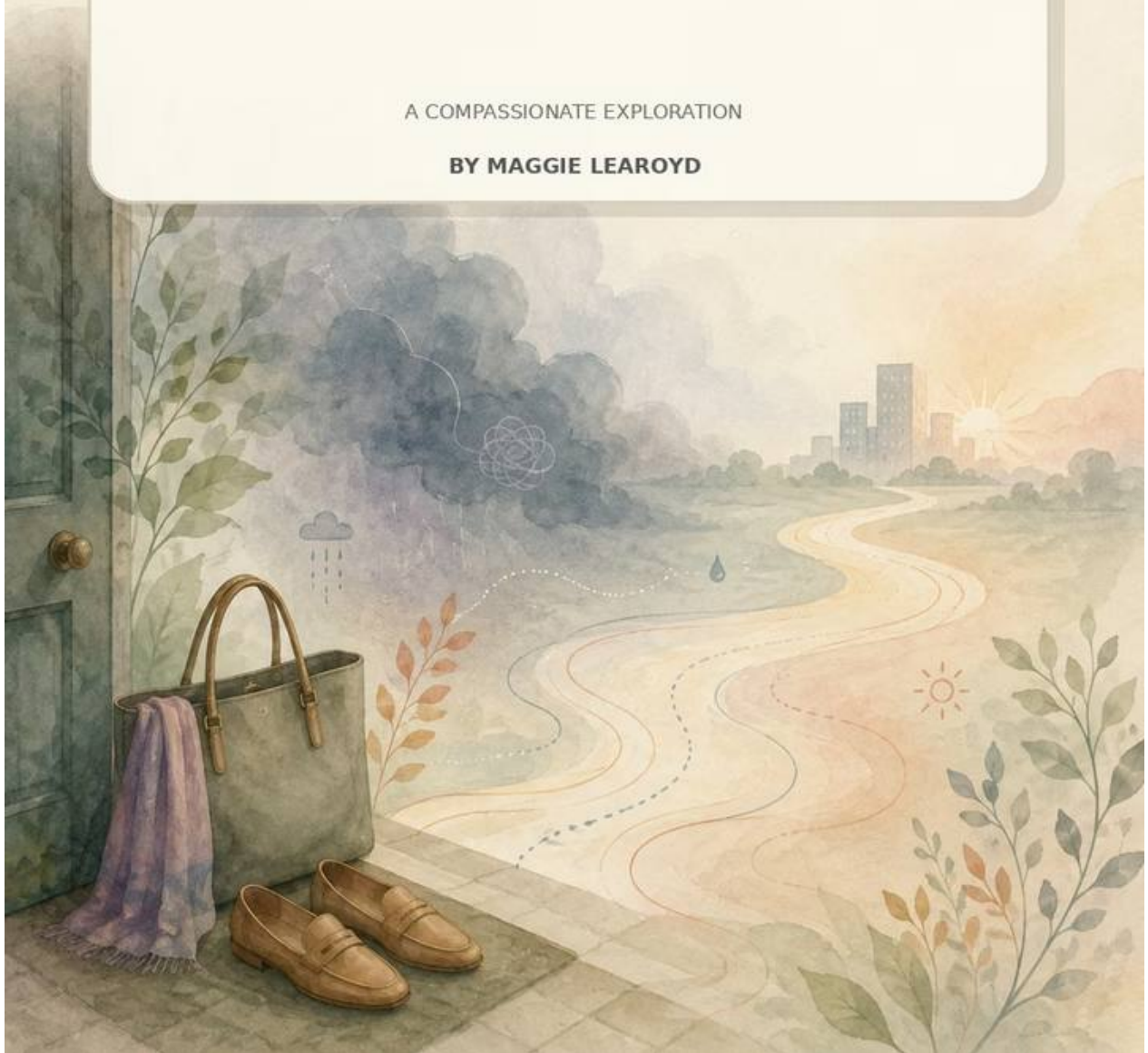


DEPRESSION AT WORK · ARTICLE 1

WHY DOES GOING TO WORK FEEL SO HARD?

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Introduction

There was a time when getting ready for work felt like part of your normal routine. You might not have loved every day, but you could get up, get dressed and face what was ahead.

Now, everything feels different.

The alarm goes off and your first thought isn't about the day ahead - it's about how you're going to get through it. You may lie in bed willing yourself to move, already feeling exhausted before the day has even begun. The idea of answering emails, attending meetings or talking to colleagues can feel overwhelming.

If you've been asking yourself, "Why does going to work feel so hard?", you're not alone. For many people living with depression, work becomes one of the most difficult parts of everyday life. This isn't because you've become lazy, lost your work ethic or stopped caring. It's because depression affects the very skills and mental energy that work often demands.

Why Work Feels Different

Depression changes the way the brain processes information, regulates emotions and manages energy.

Tasks that once felt automatic now require conscious effort. Planning your day, making decisions, concentrating during meetings or remembering simple instructions can suddenly feel exhausting.

Your brain is using more energy simply to function. As a result, there is less mental capacity available for problem-solving, communication and managing pressure.

This is why work can begin to feel like climbing a mountain rather than completing a normal working day.

The Hidden Struggle

Many people with depression continue to go to work every day.

From the outside, colleagues may see someone who is still turning up, answering emails and attending meetings. What they don't see is the amount of effort it takes to maintain that appearance.

You may spend the entire day masking how you're feeling, forcing yourself to smile, concentrating on conversations while your mind feels foggy, and worrying that someone will notice you're struggling.

By the time you get home, you may have nothing left to give.

This hidden effort is one reason why many people with depression feel completely exhausted outside of work.

Common Challenges at Work

Depression can affect many areas of working life, including:

Struggling to get out of bed before work.

Finding it difficult to concentrate.

Forgetting important tasks or appointments.

Feeling overwhelmed by small problems.

Losing confidence in your abilities.

Avoiding colleagues or social interactions.

Feeling emotionally detached from your work.

Working more slowly than usual.

Feeling guilty for not performing as you once did.

Worrying that others will think you're lazy or incapable.

Not everyone experiences these difficulties, but many people recognise several of them.

Why You May Be Working Harder Than Ever

One of the biggest misconceptions about depression is that people stop trying.

In reality, many people with depression are working harder than anyone realises.

They are working to stay focused.

Working to hide their emotions.

Working to stop themselves crying.

Working to appear "normal."

Working to get through another day.

This invisible effort often goes unnoticed, yet it can be one of the most exhausting parts of living with depression.

What Can Help?

If work has started to feel overwhelming, remember that you don't have to solve everything at once.

You may find it helpful to:

Focus on one task at a time rather than your entire workload.

Break larger pieces of work into smaller, manageable steps.

Prioritise essential tasks on difficult days.

Take regular breaks to reduce mental fatigue.

Speak to a trusted manager or HR representative if you feel safe doing so.

Explore whether reasonable adjustments could help you manage your workload more effectively.

Seek support from your GP or a mental health professional if your symptoms are affecting your ability to function.

Asking for support is not admitting defeat. It is recognising that depression is a health condition, and like any health condition, it may require treatment and adjustments while you recover.

Reflection

Think about how much energy you spend simply getting through the working day.

If all that effort were visible, would you still judge yourself as harshly as you do now?

Perhaps you're carrying far more than anyone else can see.

Key Takeaway

If work feels harder than it used to, it doesn't mean you've become less capable. Depression changes the way your brain processes information, manages energy and copes with pressure.

Needing support does not mean you've failed. It means you're experiencing a genuine health condition while continuing to do the best you can with the resources you have today.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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