

Intro ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to The Workplace Forward Podcast with your host, executive coach, Tegan Trovato, Founder and CEO of Bright Arrow Coaching. Are you a perpetually busy, always overstretched leader or executive who feels there's never time to keep up with leadership trends in an always changing landscape, much less self-care? Workplace Forward will help you overcome both challenges and gain peace of mind.

Speaker 1 ([00:25](#)):

Through Tegan's conversations with executives, experts, authors, and innovators about their leadership journeys, you'll get quick hits of two things, you need the most essential insights to help navigate the future workplace and best practices on the more human side of leadership so you're empowered to take care of yourself while leading others. Enjoy some well deserved time for yourself to learn and recharge. Let's get started with today's guest. Tegan, take it away.

Tegan Trovato ([00:56](#)):

Esther Choy started teaching leadership storytelling in 2010 before it was a thing. Over the years through her firm, Leadership Story Lab, she's worked with clients and industries as wide ranging as healthcare, engineering, investment, tech, airlines, and consumer packaged goods. Esther has combined the science of persuasion and the art of storytelling to help her clients find more meaningful ways to connect with their audience. Her business storytelling book, Let the Story Do the Work quickly shot to number one as a new release on Amazon.

Tegan Trovato ([01:30](#)):

She's currently a contributor for Forbes Leadership Strategy Channel and gets quoted frequently in leading media outlets such as the New York Times and entrepreneur.com. Esther is an adjunct faculty member at the Kellogg School of Management, and in partnership with Kellogg's Ward Center for Family Enterprises, she hosts The Family Business Podcast. Every Monday morning, you'll find Esther beginning her week with a 1,000-meter swim and a raw jalapeno. She's a mom of two trilingual girls, wife of a German who's not very punctual and is a very humble student of kite surfing.

Tegan Trovato ([02:08](#)):

Esther, welcome to the podcast.

Esther Choy ([02:10](#)):

Thank you so much for having me.

Tegan Trovato ([02:12](#)):

Listen, I have to dive right in and we have to talk about a couple things in your bio before we get into your book and other things leadership-oriented. What's with the jalapeno every morning, the raw jalapeno? Please enlighten me.

Esther Choy ([02:25](#)):

I think you're referring to my LinkedIn bio. I start every Monday with a 1,000-meter swim and a raw jalapeno. I actually swim more than once a week, but Monday has been my favorite day of the week for the longest time and it signals a new face of this seven-day unit. And you can reset, you can refresh. And for me, I like spice, I like physical workout, and I like to start a new face.

Esther Choy ([03:02](#)):

No matter what happened in the past immediate or longer past, every seven days, you get a renewal. So I like to start it with a bank, and for me is swimming and a raw jalapeno.

Tegan Trovato ([03:16](#)):

That is a spicy life. I love it. And I love how you're reframing for lots of folks who are listening, what Monday could look, feel like and mean to us, right?

Esther Choy ([03:28](#)):

Yeah. I understand TGIF, I understand that we all need breaks, nobody can keep on running forever. And for me, the fact that we get to restart and have a fresh start relative to speaking every single Monday, it's a gift.

Tegan Trovato ([03:50](#)):

Yes.

Esther Choy ([03:51](#)):

And I take it seriously and I do what I need that works for me. I don't recommend it to everyone, but I do recommend that everybody should find what refresh and rejuvenate them. And then start their beginning point of the week with just that.

Tegan Trovato ([04:12](#)):

Yes, I love it. And maybe even every day, I just recently started doing my workout first thing.

Esther Choy ([04:22](#)):

Amen.

Tegan Trovato ([04:23](#)):

By first thing, I mean, we get up, we get going, we have a two-year-old right now, so we get our routine with her. But before I start my workday, my first hour of my "workday" is devoted to bringing up my energy and tending to my health. And that's new for me. It used to be I'd fit it in where it worked.

Esther Choy ([04:44](#)):

And what do you notice that the difference since this is a new routine for you?

Tegan Trovato ([04:48](#)):

Interesting, it balances out my energy for the rest of the day, and I end every week, nailing whatever my, my goal was for the week. Whether it's minutes, lifting a certain amount of weight or a certain number of times. Just back to the point of balancing my energy, there's no afternoon crashes, so it's something it does for my personal physiology that it lifts me and it keeps the energy even all day. Where before I would fit it in wherever I could, and I didn't have top energy for that workout, and then sometimes afternoon crashes.

Tegan Trovato ([05:20](#)):

It's very much in line with what you're saying though, so you can start your week with what's important. You could start your day with what's important. What you share just resonates deeply for me, so, love it.

Esther Choy ([05:33](#)):

The fact that you start your day with what's nonnegotiable, and if you have a two-year-old, a lot of things are nonnegotiable.

Tegan Trovato ([05:40](#)):

Most days, these days, yes.

Esther Choy ([05:43](#)):

But then as soon as that's over, you take care of yourself first.

Tegan Trovato ([05:47](#)):

Yes.

Esther Choy ([05:48](#)):

I love it.

Tegan Trovato ([05:48](#)):

Yes. Well, I want listeners to know, one of the things we're going to talk about today is your book, Let the Story Do the Work. And I want to emphasize, it's a business storytelling book. And Esther, I want you to know, I have read a lot of storytelling books. As an executive coach, I do a lot of talking about stories that inspire. We work with leaders a lot who are often thinking through their own story and rally the troops and get people energized.

Tegan Trovato ([06:19](#)):

I have never seen a book so perfect for the work and business landscape though. It has been missing.

Esther Choy ([06:27](#)):

Oh. Thank you. Thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([06:27](#)):

I think there are formulas in there that make this... Any leader could pick it up, identify the kind of story arc they want and go to work on the story. And I think that a lot of these storytelling books are really conceptual and not as easy to just plug into and come out of it with a story. So I applaud this body of work. It's amazing. I've already sent it to several clients.

Esther Choy ([06:51](#)):

Thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([06:51](#)):

Yes. So I can't wait to dig in a little bit and give listeners a little bit of insight into the book, and then they'll have to just go read it to get the rest. So let's start there. You talk about three levels of

communications mastery in the book. Will you give us a little sneak peek about what that's all about, what those three levels are?

Esther Choy ([07:12](#)):

Yeah. I'm so glad you picked that one to start off with, because that's how I started the book with, to give my readers an orientations of the evolutions of communication mastery. And if you think about when we first graduated from school and we're done with our formal schooling, we got a lot of knowledge, but then those are mostly book knowledge and not quite yet directly applicable in the workplace. When it comes to communications, what we had to do when we first started out is, you look around you observe, you listen.

Esther Choy ([07:49](#)):

You do maybe a little bit of research and reading yourself, and you're mostly repeating, regurgitating, and maybe paraphrasing what others have shown you and taught you and whatnot. That's the first level and to the best of your ability to be clear and preferably concise and retaining knowledge and being able to transmit knowledge. Those are good hallmarks of level one communication mastery.

Esther Choy ([08:22](#)):

But then over times, and hopefully we become more and more of an expert ourselves. And that is not only because we have deepened our knowledge, but we've also formulate a point of view. And oftentimes, as the knowledge grown, the urge to share that breadth of knowledge also grow with it. And level two is where most people are stuck, because they become more and more "entrenched" in a good way because they've truly become an expert.

Esther Choy ([09:01](#)):

And that the more they become entrenched in what they know, the more they're world view can also sometimes shrink. And so then when you combine those two elements, you know a lot in a very narrow domain, and oftentimes those are hard one, hard earned expertise. And so naturally we're proud of it, and when we're proud of it, we like to share it. But the urge to share a lot and especially without the perspective of others or in my case I call them audience, then it can become easily and quickly overwhelming to our audience.

Esther Choy ([09:41](#)):

And so that's why you see most people, especially including your audience will have experience. They go to meetings, but they don't quite understand what the presenters are saying. Or maybe what the point of the meaning, why are they there and what are they supposed to do? They just know that there's lots have been shared. And so that's where most people are stuck in level two.

Esther Choy ([10:06](#)):

Level three is what I hope my work and the book, including the book can help get people out of level two and into level three. Where although your expertise and your domain knowledge continue to grow, but then you begin to get out of this entrenched knowledge and then going and really experience and sample a set of perspectives that are important to your work. And so much so to a point where you can... I think most people have encounter people who seemingly being able to have this supernatural power to reduce a complex or something simple-

Tegan Trovato ([10:51](#)):

Yes.

Esther Choy ([10:51](#)):

... but yet very memorable and understandable if not inspiring. That's what I hope people will get to eventually. It's the level three of mastery.

Tegan Trovato ([11:04](#)):

What does it take for a leader to get to a level three of mastery? Because the person you described, and I imagine you dedicated the book to your dad, the best storyteller you've ever known, right?

Esther Choy ([11:15](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([11:15](#)):

I imagine he was one of those people then if you describe them that way. It's part of their DNA or so it looks to us, but there is some level of practice to mastery. I'm not sure what the question is here. Maybe it's, how have you seen people go from two to three? Does it tend to take each person something similar a similar recipe or is it super different for everybody?

Esther Choy ([11:43](#)):

That's a great question and really what it comes down to, and I think what you are gathering from the book is, most people get it that storytelling is important, important to the work of leader, their own development. The real question is how? How do you get from two to three? I don't need to say anymore about, it would be nice to get from two to three, but how do you get there? The process isn't too different from my experience of having done this for 12 years, but each person's journey with it can be very different.

Esther Choy ([12:21](#)):

I'm sure because you do a lot of executive coaching, you can certainly relate to this, and that is awareness. Self awareness. Self awareness in what? That maybe how they communicate isn't really getting the message across. Maybe that they have all the credentials and competence that anybody could ever ask for, dream of, but their audience, the followers, the teams, people they need to persuade don't really get them, don't really understand their character.

Esther Choy ([13:00](#)):

And then maybe they need the self-awareness that something needs to be changed. For me, everything start with an awareness, self-awareness, and then oftentimes what helps is that there's an event. And what I mean by that is an event with a deadline. And it can be as simple as I will get to present to the chairman of the entire group, not just the CEO, but the CEO and the chairman. Oh, actually, a group of owners, they're interested in this too.

Esther Choy ([13:37](#)):

"Holy cow. I better, better whip up my game." So there's an event, there's an impending event, there's a deadline. And so when you have awareness, self-awareness, and when you have an event that they know that they're going to be in the spotlight with high stake, and then this event has then a clear deadline, on April 5th, 2022, I will have to make this presentation of my life.

Tegan Trovato ([14:05](#)):

I love that, and I love the idea of an event as a catalyst. I appreciate that you're encouraging us to begin with self-awareness. I think of a client who early in the pandemic, a CEO who had been sharing numbers and the numbers were okay. They were definitely good for their industry, given what was happening economically in the systems. And he kept getting feedback from the "field." So frontline employees who actually do all the work that everyone was terrified that layoffs were coming.

Tegan Trovato ([14:37](#)):

And the CEO kept going, "What are they talking about? The numbers aren't like that." So he was just not in the awareness of, this is high six-figure plus earner who can't remember what it's like to make 50, 60,000 and not be sure what would happen if your job went away. So he had this whole journey of becoming more aware of his station as compared to other employees and needing to tell a different narrative, which your book talks about with that data.

Tegan Trovato ([15:10](#)):

But to your point, it began with him going, "Okay, what am I not understanding here?" How am I so different from them that they're seeing this differently?

Esther Choy ([15:21](#)):

And to his credit, there's clearly a discrepancy, the picture he saw versus the feedback that he's getting. I can think of countless example where people don't understand why people see things, feel things differently opposite from them. And that can be easily dismissed as, "They just don't get it. There's not smart enough. Or they don't care, or they just don't have the experience." You can fill in the blank as the reason that you assign people as they don't get it. So I think to your client's credit that at least he's willing to ask, "What am I missing here?"

Tegan Trovato ([16:03](#)):

Yes, yes, absolutely. He cared a lot. So the awareness interestingly was the catalyst too at the same time.

Esther Choy ([16:11](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([16:12](#)):

What's the difference in your mind between proving and persuading when it comes to telling stories?

Esther Choy ([16:19](#)):

That's one of my favorite questions. I can talk for hours and hours about that.

Tegan Trovato ([16:25](#)):

Let's put 10 minutes on the clock on this. Okay, let's go. Tell us everything we could know in 15 minutes or less on this one.

Esther Choy ([16:32](#)):

Very simply, to me, proving is amassing all evidence to support your position, your point of view, your answers to any single question. Persuading on the other hand is getting someone to change their mind to do what you know, what you think and what you feel in your heart is best for them.

Tegan Trovato ([17:05](#)):

I can almost feel that difference. Yes. Wow.

Esther Choy ([17:10](#)):

The reason why I joke that I can talk about it for hours and hours, that there are a lot of technical nuance differences, but this question is best actually being felt. Because I can prove all sorts of things to anyone like eating well, like taking good care of yourself, like being good to the environment, the list can go on. But it does not mean at the end of the day that people will do anything about it. On the other hand, and especially even if you take a cursory look at history, time and time again, people have been persuaded to do all sorts of things without needing much of any proof.

Tegan Trovato ([18:02](#)):

Whoa.

Esther Choy ([18:05](#)):

That's the best of my ability that I can explain the difference between the two.

Tegan Trovato ([18:09](#)):

Whoa, that last point just blew the lid off. That's really powerful and so true. So true.

Esther Choy ([18:16](#)):

You don't necessarily need one to do the other or have one to achieve the other.

Tegan Trovato ([18:22](#)):

Which is so antithetical to what we think about business. We think proof first, and sometimes proving only, right?

Esther Choy ([18:31](#)):

Yes.

Tegan Trovato ([18:32](#)):

The point you just made that a lot of people are persuaded without any proving oftentimes without any fact. And ouch, that hurts because I think we can all relate to that at some point in our lives where we found we'd been persuaded and really should have looked for some proof. That's fascinating, fascinating point and distinct. Thank you for that. And leaders, if you're listening, really think about what you're doing more of if you're doing more of one versus the other and how to balance those out. And to, I

would assume, Esther, just be more strategic about which you really need to do in each situation predominantly, is that fair?

Esther Choy ([19:07](#)):

Yeah. And I really appreciate you bringing to at point home for leaders, is that I am not saying one is better than the other or more needed than the other. But it is important for me to point out the distinct differences between the two so that we know when to do what.

Tegan Trovato ([19:30](#)):

Great. Thank you. As I was learning more about you, Esther, something really interesting popped up in the information I found, which was that-

Esther Choy ([19:39](#)):

Oh-oh.

Tegan Trovato ([19:39](#)):

Your organization's done a recent research study on it's I think the title was transforming partnerships with major donors and it ended up being featured in the New York Times. Congratulations.

Esther Choy ([19:51](#)):

Thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([19:51](#)):

It's a big deal. Tell us how you went from... Well, you haven't left storytelling, but how you started out in storytelling really to wealth creators and moving to wealth creators. It's not a pivot, what's the right word? Why did you integrate that into your work?

Esther Choy ([20:09](#)):

It's like when you start storytelling in business, okay, I most people get, but wealth creators, how did that fit into the big picture of what I do? I think it's why some people have asked that after the publications. There's a bit of a context. Because I teach the application of storytelling in business, that got me into program, teaching storytelling for major gift fundraisers. And I sit on a couple board myself, and my husband and I fairly active in the philanthropic world, so I'm not unfamiliar with that world.

Esther Choy ([20:51](#)):

But because I taught that program for six, seven years, I work with a lot of major gifts fundraisers, and I hear over and over again how it's hard, getting harder and harder. And the needs are always there, and in terms of at least major gifts, there are this trend of a smaller player having size impact on the entire industry. But then one thing really caught my attention, and that is even for those whose work very much on a set of audience, so in this case, major gift fundraisers very much dependent on understanding their audience, the major gift donors.

Esther Choy ([21:36](#)):

I realized the paint elephant in the room at the end of the day was that they actually don't.

Tegan Trovato ([21:43](#)):

They don't know.

Esther Choy ([21:45](#)):

They don't know-

Tegan Trovato ([21:45](#)):

... their donor.

Esther Choy ([21:46](#)):

... donors. Mm-hmm (affirmative). They have cursory knowledge, they have superficial understanding, but they actually don't know who they are. So I set out to do the study myself.

Tegan Trovato ([21:58](#)):

And what did you find?

Esther Choy ([21:59](#)):

Well, interestingly, at least in the U.S., up to 80% of what would be consider high net worth or ultra-high net worth, so this is not just your 1%, this is your 0.5%, your 0.1% of the populations. Up to 80% of them are first generations wealth creators. So just think about that, they didn't inherit money. They created their wealth themselves and our great majority of them came from middle class or even lower middle class. And so in other words, they don't know the world of wealth at all. It's new to them.

Esther Choy ([22:36](#)):

It's their immigrants, in fact, and they don't know the language, they don't know the customs. They don't know the handshakes, so to speak. And so, although they're wildly successful in one aspect, everything else is new to them, including philanthropy. Another thing that most people don't know is that a lot of them don't know what to do about their philanthropy. They know they want to do it. They want to be involved. They want to be generous. They want to share their wealth, but they don't know how.

Esther Choy ([23:13](#)):

Things like that goes on and on. So imagine then you are the gift officer. You assume that donor X live in this fabulous house, is just one of their many houses. They're wildly successful, they're very well respected. They actually have of a lot of doubts about where to best direct their philanthropic dollars. Imagine that. And then how would that change your approach, your conversations, as well as your call to vision process.

Tegan Trovato ([23:45](#)):

If I remember correctly, I read... Because I read some of this research that was online, which I think people cannot find on your website.

Esther Choy ([23:52](#)):

Correct.

Tegan Trovato ([23:53](#)):

So I want to well be sure to include the link to the research there, that these are folks who as first generation wealth, they haven't upgraded their homes. They're very much not flaunting their money. And so I would assume further to that they have maybe different values than someone who is generationally wealthy. That makes sense to me if that's the point that fundraisers are just missing the mark on what motivates these new generations when it comes-

Esther Choy ([24:26](#)):

Correct.

Tegan Trovato ([24:26](#)):

... to philanthropic endeavors. Okay, very interesting.

Esther Choy ([24:29](#)):

Correct. One I remember very clearly, he said lives in the same house for 40 years. Very proud of it. He has one bathroom, the same toilet this whole time and he's very proud of it. And then you think about them, Oh, the fancy gala, oh, the expensive wine and food. How would they think about that?

Tegan Trovato ([24:51](#)):

They're not interested in that. I wouldn't think.

Esther Choy ([24:54](#)):

No. No, no, no. And so this is bring back to why I make this connections, is that how do you persuade your audience if you don't know who they are? And I value, respect philanthropy in such a way that I feel like I need to do something to contribute to the body of understanding of, especially given our societal perceptions of the wealthy. Because the ones that caught our attention, the Paris Hilton, the Kardashian families, or they tend to when they get in... Certain bad actors get in trouble and they're all over the news. Think about the mission scandals.

Esther Choy ([25:40](#)):

What you hear about the wealthy tends to skew extremely negative. And so I feel like I need to really bring in the humanity of this group of people who very much can escape our radar anyway, because they don't flaunt their wealth, most of them. And because they don't fit into those popular stereotypes, that is really easy miss them. Or even if you have one in front of you is really easy to miss the mark when you're trying to persuade them.

Tegan Trovato ([26:17](#)):

What's coming up for me as you share this is, I'm going to zoom out of the context and the content of this particular body of your work and just point out that you have spent a lot of your career storytelling and helping leaders tell stories. You also just casually mentioned how you're also very into philanthropy and serving on boards. What I love about what you've created with this research and this program is that you've integrated your work streams in a way that is so of service to the charities, to the future philanthropists, these newly acquired wealth or created wealth.

Tegan Trovato ([26:57](#)):

I'm pointing that out just to high-five you Esther, but also for our executives who are sitting here listening. I think so many of us feel like we want to give more and we're not sure how to... And I'm not talking about money. I'm talking of our skill, of our time, and sometimes also of our money. And what you've done is it looks so seamless. You saw the intersection and you created the program, product, experience that we need to move forward and catalyze a whole group of people.

Tegan Trovato ([27:31](#)):

Listeners could learn from that and potentially also scan their own boards, their own lives, their own skillsets to think, "Where does all of this intersect in a way that could mobilize an entire group of people."

Esther Choy ([27:43](#)):

Thank you

Tegan Trovato ([27:44](#)):

It's amazing.

Esther Choy ([27:45](#)):

Thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([27:46](#)):

Just amazing. Which brings us to another body of work you have, Esther because like most entrepreneurs, you're not just dabbling in one little thing. I know that you also work with Family Enterprises and you share their stories on your own podcast, which will link to Family in Business. How are family-run businesses different from the non-business owning families out there?

Esther Choy ([28:09](#)):

This is another populations that's really near and dear to my heart. And in some way, some obscure way, it's almost similar to the first generation wealth creators, that they are not very well understood by the general public. If you have HBO and maybe you've seen the show, Succession it's-

Tegan Trovato ([28:32](#)):

Or are addicted to it. Maybe.

Esther Choy ([28:37](#)):

The dynastic family, the generation struggles, the backstabbing and all of that really made for great TV dramas. And I applaud the shows and that's why it's so addicted. But I think again, the general public's perception of the wealthy, I think family-owned business maybe also have been a bit misunderstood by them.

Tegan Trovato ([29:01](#)):

Oh, I imagine. Sure.

Esther Choy ([29:03](#)):

Majority of the families I've worked with and speak to first and for most was never about themselves. It was never about money or was never about their share of things, whether it be money, power, positions. Majority of family-owned businesses, the owning families, what they care most about is their employees. What they care second most is about the community, the environment. Just last week I read on NPR about Dollywood, the theme park. It actually was owned by a family enterprise called the Herschend Enterprise.

Esther Choy ([29:48](#)):

But the employees of Dollywood and a whole host of theme parks that the Herschend Enterprise own and operate, their employees now and their children in fact, they're eligible for complete tuition, post-secondary tuition support.

Tegan Trovato ([30:05](#)):

Wow.

Esther Choy ([30:06](#)):

And that is phenomenal and I applaud them. And that is truly coming from collections of nuclear families that really care about their employees. And their orientation, when you speak about family versus non-family, especially non-family public companies, is that they not nearly as beholden to the quarterly reports. The orientation is multiple years and usually the measurements in the decades, not quarter. But the interesting ironic about family businesses is that they do tend to be more private.

Esther Choy ([30:51](#)):

Isn't funny when you mention my podcast, that's actually for the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. I have a hard time getting my guest to help promote the podcast. They're just not into it.

Tegan Trovato ([31:06](#)):

They don't want to come across as bragging maybe, or-

Esther Choy ([31:09](#)):

They don't.

Tegan Trovato ([31:09](#)):

... they don't share too much of their story and publicize it, or what do you think it is?

Esther Choy ([31:14](#)):

That's just the nature, is-

Tegan Trovato ([31:16](#)):

Private.

Esther Choy ([31:16](#)):

They're very private. And so I think that is likely one of the contributors of a lack of true understanding of family businesses because they tend to be more private. And many times for good reasons, but I think where we try to talk to guests who are very open and very vulnerable. In fact, I think I read from a couple of comments on one of the podcasts sharing platforms that they call it, Uncensored Business Stories, which actually I do edit.

Esther Choy ([31:53](#)):

But is interesting how candid they are to a point where people aren't used to that level of vulnerability. Just describe it as uncensored completely.

Tegan Trovato ([32:06](#)):

Interesting. Wow.

Esther Choy ([32:11](#)):

It's an interesting segment to work with because they oftentimes ironically don't think about their story as much as they should because it started by mom and dad or grandparents, great-grandparents. Their stories could be better understood.

Tegan Trovato ([32:32](#)):

But it has to feel so personal. We have this comfort level for those of us in non-family-owned businesses of telling our story and it feels a little detached. Just not too close to the vest because it's all about the business. But when your business is run by your family, it has to feel like there aren't as many emotional boundaries, it has to feel deeply vulnerable. Because you're not just talking about an interaction with the CEO, you might be talking about an interaction with your dad and how you portray that or your mom.

Tegan Trovato ([33:05](#)):

Maybe very careful how that comes off, right? Wow. I'm just really humbled by thinking about that. Never thought about that way.

Esther Choy ([33:12](#)):

Yeah. And you probably are familiar with the Little Red Wagon Radio Flyer. So the third generation CEO, Robert Pasin, he was actually my very first guest and he talked about this argument that he with his dad about, I think it was the 75th anniversary of the company. And he wanted to make this big PR push and make a big splash and put Radio Flyer back on the map and whatnot. And then dad just told him, no. He does not like PR, he didn't understand what that was for and he's also an extremely private person.

Esther Choy ([33:55](#)):

So him describing that argument with his dad, man of few words, puffing cigarette or cigar in the office and then just dismissed this idea that he eventually won him over and it became this big splash and they had very, very positive feedback for that. But when family members talk about, "Yeah, I disagree with the CEO. Oh, the CEO is also my dad."

Tegan Trovato ([34:24](#)):

That's a whole different animal. It's a whole different business animal. So listeners, we have to tune into The Family in Business Podcast and acquaint ourselves with the uniqueness of family-owned businesses.

And also I think take some really important inspiration from them in the non-family-owned businesses, because we can all inspire each other from those different sectors. So thank you for that.

Esther Choy ([34:48](#)):

Totally agree.

Tegan Trovato ([34:50](#)):

Esther, I'm going to pivot in a minute to step outside of your work and have you zoom up a bit and speak more holistically to leadership. But before we do that, I just want to make sure, is there anything else you'd like to say, whether it's about the book or any of the other couple of work components, work streams we talked about that I don't know to ask you today that's important that you get to share?

Esther Choy ([35:13](#)):

You have asked the question of all questions. I think what I want to say about acquiring the skill of bringing a good storyteller are two things. One is that you can't possibly become a good storyteller without becoming a good story collector. So I think your listeners, especially your loyal listeners will basically just learn it by osmosis, by just listening to how you ask questions. It's how you can collect stories. It's just like writers cannot be writers without being ferocious readers. Storytellers have to be story collectors.

Esther Choy ([36:00](#)):

And how do you collect stories? One easy way is by asking great questions, just like the way you've been doing. That's one. Two is that if you feel that it might be a bit daunting, perhaps you had a lot of great storytellers in your life, in your family, at work, they just somehow know how to do it. They just roll out of bed and roll into a boardroom and somehow yeah, start telling stories. How do they do that? Don't be mystified by that because that's exactly why I wrote the book because there's a process.

Esther Choy ([36:38](#)):

The process is the same really, more or less for everyone, maybe everybody's journey with it is different. And so I just encourage everybody just get started. Don't get mystified by it.

Tegan Trovato ([36:50](#)):

Great. Esther, your firm teaches classes too, right? That's a big part of how people can access and practice, is through hands on work with your group, right?

Esther Choy ([37:01](#)):

Correct.

Tegan Trovato ([37:02](#)):

And you work with organizations, you'll come in and work with organizations as well with leadership teams?

Esther Choy ([37:07](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([37:07](#)):

Okay.

Esther Choy ([37:07](#)):

Yes, yes I do. I do. As well as if you just want to try it out, dip your toes in. We host a monthly Story Lab. It's completely open, but we have very limited number of seats, it's done virtually. And so this is truly a lab. You bring a story, a working draft. No need to be perfect. And come in and is facilitated by my colleague, Reena Kansal, and test it out, try it out, get feedback.

Tegan Trovato ([37:36](#)):

Fantastic. Thank you. Before we move too far from storytelling, I want to ask you one more question, but this is more from a leadership, more holistic perspective of leadership. When it comes to telling great stories, looking beyond the framework, what do you often see senior leaders struggling with when they go to tell a story? And I'm thinking about things like is it overcoming the discomfort with being vulnerable, for example, is it tapping into a motion? What is it that you see leaders often struggle with?

Esther Choy ([38:10](#)):

The irony that although you're in the spotlight, it is so not about you. So yes, people are there to listen to you, what you have to say and having certain expectations of whatever you have to say will enlighten them, educate them, help them. So it's really not about you.

Tegan Trovato ([38:32](#)):

Right.

Esther Choy ([38:32](#)):

So I think the sooner people can come around to it, embrace it, it helps with the nerves. It helps with your own point of view about your content. And it really helps you almost quite literally put yourself in their shoes. And so maybe what you have to share is a personal story or the latest recently launched product that really is going to revolutionize what X, Y, and Z, that's yours, that's your company's. But at the end of the day, it is so, so not about you.

Tegan Trovato ([39:15](#)):

I'm laughing because it seems obvious, but I know from trying to tell good stories myself, the literal practice of sitting down to write a story, I've been there and done it. It is so much harder than it sounds. Because we start with us most often and a lot of storytelling framework teaches you to do that. And I love that you're flipping it on its ear. No, it's the opposite, it's the audience we think of first, right?

Esther Choy ([39:41](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([39:42](#)):

That's great. Thinking about leadership, Esther, you lead a company, you lead on these boards. You embody leadership. You're doing it all day, every day. You're doing it in your family with your few

daughters. How has your own leadership evolved over the last couple of years in particular? And what's prompted that change?

Esther Choy ([40:05](#)):

How has it evolved over the past two years? I think where I tend to do better at work than I don't do as well at home is that at work, I maybe have been trained and conditioned better than there's so much I can do. So going back to that, it's not about you the leader. I'm better at that than I'm at home. The past two years, because we've all gone through the lockdown, my oldest during that time was in sixth grade, turning 12. And then since then turned 13.

Esther Choy ([40:49](#)):

It's a very pivotal age, lots of struggles, personal, social, academic. And she hopefully soon will find out where she's going to high school. And we live in the city, so we have to apply. It's not an automatic thing you go to your neighborhood school. So all of that, I just have to in my personal parental role remind myself that to have more faith in the people entrusted in me to care.

Esther Choy ([41:24](#)):

That I may not see what I think I should see, the growth or development or change, but I'll go so much as go far beyond where the eyes can see and have more faith, I guess is the end of the day of what I brought to the table. Or say it another way, just stop being so darn hard on myself.

Tegan Trovato ([41:53](#)):

It's a message everybody listening could afford to hear. And I appreciate your vulnerability in answering the question that way and reminding all of us that there is not as much separation from the leader we are at home as we are at work, if we will allow it. Both of those environments can influence the other so nicely. But I think it's as a fellow parent, I completely identify with that, being harder on yourself at home.

Esther Choy ([42:19](#)):

It's hard to disassociate yourself with what's happening at the home front. It's almost always that the good attribute should attribute to you, but maybe it shouldn't be 100% attributed to you. But then the same goes with the bad, but not as good that maybe it has something to do with you, maybe it has nothing to do with you. And so keeping that perspective and that balance that you mentioned so much, that it should be rightly, just keep pounding on people over and over again is that we need to have balance.

Tegan Trovato ([43:03](#)):

Well said. What have you in your work as you get to hear leaders' stories, and I would have to assume people love to overshare with you given the work you do. What do you see leaders struggling with the last couple of years? What are you observing thematically?

Esther Choy ([43:20](#)):

I think it's hard, especially the further up you move, the harder it is. So the further up you move, the higher the stake, the harder it becomes for people to delineate the difference between sharing what is personal versus what is private. Perhaps what I would say is that being a mother of a 13-year-old during the pandemic is really challenging. That's something personal to me, but I stop right there. There's no more private things that I would share beyond that.

Tegan Trovato ([44:03](#)):

Got it.

Esther Choy ([44:03](#)):

And I share that because is obviously something that I have been doing a lot of growing in, and growing usually involves some pain, at least some. And I decide to share that because I am rather sure that most of your listeners one way or the other can relate to that. That's when I decide that it is personal, but it's okay to share. I think I hope to that it will serve some purpose, some good purpose for the listeners. But then I know where the line is when it gets from personal to private.

Tegan Trovato ([44:40](#)):

That is a great distinction.

Esther Choy ([44:42](#)):

People appreciate personal touch-

Tegan Trovato ([44:45](#)):

Yes.

Esther Choy ([44:45](#)):

... but they don't need to know your private business.

Tegan Trovato ([44:48](#)):

Oh, I really love that. I think you're giving a lot of leaders permission to take a little ownership back. Because one of the things we are also observing at Bright Arrow is that leaders are being asked to be more emotionally available in both ways. Be there for me as the employee, but then also tell me how you're feeling, be a human with me. And I actually very much appreciate that shift in movement. But to your point, it's uncharted territory at work for most senior leaders. The more senior, the more uncharted that experience is generationally.

Tegan Trovato ([45:24](#)):

And I think it's natural that leaders would be unsure where that line is. And I don't think I've ever heard anyone point that out, Esther. That is so brilliant and so true.

Esther Choy ([45:35](#)):

Thank you. If folks want to look up a couple of good examples that I've come across, Robert Pasin of Radio Flyer would be good. If you just Google him in YouTube and whatnot, there will be lots of speaking that he had done over the years that have that perfect balance to me, between being personal but also guarding the private. Another good example would be Scott Kirby, the CEO of United. Totally different company, one family-owned, one publicly traded.

Esther Choy ([46:10](#)):

And Scott also just has this very amazing ability to be personable sometimes, a bit personal without ever treading anywhere close for being private. And he's a CEO of this major airline company that is under

heavy regulations and it's in the news a lot because flying, the health of our aviation industry and so forth. So if they wanted learning by osmosis, again, watch how people who are really good at that, how to do it. Those two are the top of minds that I can think of. They're really good at it.

Tegan Trovato ([46:52](#)):

Brilliant. Thank you for that. Last question for you before we get to the question I like to ask all of our leaders that join us on the podcast. What in your opinion might leaders be doing in their personal lives that would impact how they lead at work, positively impact their leadership at work?

Esther Choy ([47:11](#)):

This might sound really old and cliché. I-

Tegan Trovato ([47:15](#)):

Or classic is another word. It's classic, whatever you're about to say.

Esther Choy ([47:20](#)):

It just really depends on how I say it. It could be cliché or classic, it's up to you now.

Tegan Trovato ([47:26](#)):

Yeah. Let's see what you do here, Esther.

Esther Choy ([47:29](#)):

A while ago, I started doing those warmup questions with my podcast guest and the warmup asked to do with a couple of questions. And one of them is, what is your favorite way to waste time? I purposely don't tell them the questions ahead of time.

Tegan Trovato ([47:46](#)):

Sure.

Esther Choy ([47:46](#)):

I just want to get whatever is top of mind. And people have this strange... I guess not strange, but it actually is understandable relationship with this whole idea, "Oh, I can't waste time." Especially if your time is definitely at a premium at work, most likely with your family, how can you waste time, let alone your favorite way to waste time? But it is in that paradox, that's why I want to hear what people have to say. And so inevitably what most of the time I get back is their hobbies.

Esther Choy ([48:28](#)):

And so I would really encourage people to set aside reasonable amount of time to pursue their hobby, but even better, if they would allow it just set aside reasonable amount of time for them to waste time, just do something unproductive.

Tegan Trovato ([48:51](#)):

I love it.

Esther Choy ([48:51](#)):

And I won't get into it. There's a huge body of research work that points to how good it is for your body and mind and relationship to do something unproductive regularly.

Tegan Trovato ([49:05](#)):

It's the wealth work of creativity. It comes from that space we create, it really does. Okay. This is brilliant too, I love it. And I feel like I skirted around having to answer the question, because I think I might be embarrassed if I told everyone how I wasted my time.

Esther Choy ([49:20](#)):

Oh, do tell, do tell.

Tegan Trovato ([49:21](#)):

Oh my God. Well, I'll tell you mine if you'll tell me yours.

Esther Choy ([49:25](#)):

Okay.

Tegan Trovato ([49:26](#)):

Yes.

Esther Choy ([49:27](#)):

All right. We have a pact.

Tegan Trovato ([49:27](#)):

Oh God. Okay. Mine is not hobby-related. It's-

Esther Choy ([49:31](#)):

Okay.

Tegan Trovato ([49:32](#)):

I watch The Real Housewives.

Esther Choy ([49:37](#)):

Ding, ding, ding, ding. 10 out of 10.

Tegan Trovato ([49:39](#)):

It's pretty up there. Isn't it? I have literally had people tell me they've lost respect for me when I tell them that I watch that and I don't even care. But that's a good time waster. My brain is off, there isn't a shred of anything intellectual going on there and I completely dip out of reality for just a little while, so.

Esther Choy ([50:00](#)):

Oh, okay. All right, wow.

Tegan Trovato ([50:00](#)):

Okay. What's your, Esther? You're going to make look bad. Tell me how you waste time.

Esther Choy ([50:06](#)):

I literally waste time, see, so you can tag your value judgment on someone by what they watch. By the way, you just double your respect with me with that.

Tegan Trovato ([50:21](#)):

Thank you. Are you my kindred on the that? Thank you very much.

Esther Choy ([50:24](#)):

But I literally waste time. It's my favorite way to waste time is if I give myself the permission to come in and do an email and then I'll go to my bookshelf and grab a book, I read a page. And then I'll go clean up my mess pile on the other side of my office. But I would only get maybe a few pieces of paper organized. Then I would go get myself a cup of coffee. And then I would remember that I need to make a doctor's appointment and so on and so forth. I think you get the picture. That is literally how I just like to meander.

Tegan Trovato ([51:05](#)):

You putts around.

Esther Choy ([51:06](#)):

I putts around, I like to meander. That's like, I don't know. I feel like I'm mentally swimming in clouds when I can do that.

Tegan Trovato ([51:17](#)):

Love it. I love it. Oh, thank you. That's a super fun question and I'm going to try this on a couple folks. That's great. And I also support the idea of having a hobby. And I will tell you, you probably see this in your work, a lot of leaders don't have hobbies, they just work. And I have been guilty of that. There's this quote by a centenarian. Is that how you say it? Centenarian.

Esther Choy ([51:41](#)):

Centenarian, yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([51:43](#)):

Loosely I'm rephrasing or quoting it. She said, "If I had known I was going to live to be 100, I would've picked up the trumpet at 40. Because I'd be classically trained by now." And that stuck with me. I read that sometime in my early 20s and that's with me. And I too got sick of telling people when they asked me what I do for fun, that I read or work out and set out to play in some hobbies this year. So I appreciate you bringing that forward for us. It's very important.

Tegan Trovato ([52:12](#)):

How can listeners find you online, Esther, if they want to learn more about you, your work?

Esther Choy ([52:18](#)):

The website is probably the best place, leadershipstorylab.com. It's just a central repository of all my research, podcasts, block posts. I do have a Forbes column. If you just Google my name, Esther Choy in Forbes, then you should be able to find it quickly. We try to share Mingly LinkedIn and Twitter, where we have spotted great storytelling examples. There are so many actually.

Tegan Trovato ([52:51](#)):

Good.

Esther Choy ([52:52](#)):

Those will be the good places.

Tegan Trovato ([52:54](#)):

Great. I'll make sure I include all of that in the show notes for listeners so they can easily go look everything up. And in closing, Esther, as you know, the podcast was created to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills that future leaders need to possess so that they can lead these systems that have and will continue to change at warp speed. To get your read on what's required of future leaders, just finish this sentence for us. Leaders of the future will?

Esther Choy ([53:23](#)):

Leaders of the future will have to know their own stories as well as the stories of their audience.

Tegan Trovato ([53:36](#)):

Beautifully said and it's perfectly clear the work we have to do there. So thank you so much for joining us, Esther. It's a pleasure to learn from you today and to be in your company. And I would encourage our listeners to go absorb all your great work out there. Thank you for putting that out into the world for us.

Esther Choy ([53:54](#)):

Oh, thank you. Thank you for this opportunity. It's equally enjoyable for me, if not more. And I just really appreciate having the opportunity to learn by observing how you conduct and guide conversations. And just by your preparations, by your thoughtfulness, by the questions that you design and sequence. Looks like it's effortless as with most things like we are watching the winter Olympians as if it's effortless, but you know that lots of efforts has been put into it. So I really, really appreciate you.

Tegan Trovato ([54:32](#)):

That is such a high compliment. On that note, we're going to end. Thank you, Esther, you're the best.

Esther Choy ([54:36](#)):

Thank you. Thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([54:37](#)):

All right. Take care.

Outro ([54:39](#)):

Thanks for listening to this episode of The Workplace Forward Podcast, where leaders and executives can stay ahead of the curve on emerging leadership ideas and self-care best practices guided by executive coach, Tegan Trovato and her expert guests. Please take 60 seconds to help others discover The Workplace Forward Podcast by going to iTunes to subscribe. Give five stars and leave a comment. Want to learn more about Bright Arrow Coaching and leadership development? Visit the website at www.brightarrowcoaching.com. See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.