

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 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 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 ([00:53](#)):

Brett Townsend loves all things consumer insights. He has a passion for being the voice of the consumer and promoting all the great things the industry does for companies. He's worked with some of the biggest brands in the world, such as Pepsi, Lays, Electrolux, Jack Daniels, MOEN, Rubbermaid, and Dickies. He's led high performing teams, developed scores of new products and brands, and made companies lots of money.

Tegan Trovato ([01:21](#)):

He's also on the board of directors for Insights Association and is serving as chairperson for 2022. And at his core, he is a relationship builder, a people person, and enjoys his time away from work. Given his background, we are really pleased to have him join us today to learn about his beliefs when it comes to the future of leadership. Brett, welcome to the podcast.

Brett Townsend ([01:44](#)):

Hi, thanks for having me, Tegan.

Tegan Trovato ([01:47](#)):

Yeah. Before we dive in, I'm going to pilfer you with questions today about your leadership experience over the years, and of course what you think the future of leadership has in store for us. But before we do that, tell us a little bit about, in a nutshell, the size and scopes of teams you've led. We've gotten a taste for the brands you've worked for, but tell us a little bit about the scope of your work over the last few years.

Brett Townsend ([02:12](#)):

So it's been very broad. In consumer insights, if it's done correctly, you're really kind of the heartbeat of the company almost where you have visibility to a lot of different areas, whether it's product development, marketing, sales, things like that. And that's been the case with the roles that I've had where a lot of exposure to different parts of the company really learn a lot of different things, a lot of matrix type organizational structures and working very cross-functionally with a lot of groups.

Brett Townsend ([02:43](#)):

So I've worked on a lot of teams whether it's dotted line or just like I said collaborative. And then of course having my own teams with the direct reports. So it's been a nice variety of ways to work within a company.

Tegan Trovato ([03:00](#)):

Yeah. And I will just emphasize as someone who coaches across all kinds of different spaces, what I would consider challenges that you must have had working so interdepartmentally, like it is a privilege seat, because you get to your point. You see so much, you learn so much about the business, but my gosh, getting that many groups to play together is nothing short of art, most of the time, I imagine.

Brett Townsend ([03:25](#)):

It is. It all kind of starts with relationships. If they trust you and if they know that you're really in it for the good of the company, then it usually works fairly well. I think part of it too is understanding where the other people are coming from. Everybody has their own goals and things and their own KPIs that they're judged against. So they're trying to develop work that helps them meet their KPIs. You kind of see that sometimes KPIs don't line up completely.

Brett Townsend ([03:55](#)):

So sometimes you have competing interests when it comes to within a company and it's not like it's adversarial, it's just kind of the way that it's set up. So yeah, I take it is very much an art on how can we help people personally succeed, but then also help the company and the product succeed with what we're doing.

Tegan Trovato ([04:15](#)):

Great. This will lead nicely into my next question about you, because I've heard that you're referred to as the anti-Michael Corleone. So tell us about that.

Brett Townsend ([04:26](#)):

Yeah. I love The Godfather, so it has nothing to do with that. But it's just his whole thing when he decides that he's going to go kill the people that try to assassinate his dad, he just said, "It's not personal, it's business." And that's kind of the mantra whenever you see a mafia movie. I don't subscribe to that at all. I don't think the workplace is a family. I'll just say that right out loud. Adam Grant, the organizational psychologist at Wharton made popular a term that I've been using for years, but the workplace is a community of people that are sharing the same goals and same objectives and all working together very closely.

Brett Townsend ([05:08](#)):

But because of that, it's very personal. I think work is some of the most personal stuff that we do as individuals. We spend more waking hours with our coworkers than we do our own families in many cases. So people put their heart and their soul and their mental and physical and emotional effort into a lot of what they do. A lot of people will spend nights and weekends to meet deadlines and to really put a lot into what they do. And it is very personal for them. So that's really how I approach everything I do from a leadership standpoint is just to have that core understanding of how personal work is for so many people.

Tegan Trovato ([05:50](#)):

I'm so refreshed to hear you say that because I think we have for many decades gotten away with saying, "It's not personal, it's business." We are watching that die away, but I love the fullness of your answer and understanding of that. I could almost feel it coming through your voice how much you care

for people because they care so much for their work. So let's keep going on that. Tell us more about your personal leadership philosophies.

Brett Townsend ([06:17](#)):

So really, if you don't get to know your people on your team, as people, then you're going to be behind the eight ball from the very beginning. It's also important that team members get to know each other a little bit outside the office. I'm not saying you got to be best friends or always want to go have a beer with somebody after work, but just that you know them, because if you keep things sterile in the workplace and all you see your coworkers as is coworkers, then it can become very impersonal.

Brett Townsend ([06:52](#)):

But if you know about them a little bit and their hobbies and their families and things, and you're saying, "Well, then you don't just look at James as your coworker." You're like, "Oh, that's James and he's got two sons and his wife, Cindy, who I've met. Oh, and I know that they like to go vacation and these other places."

Brett Townsend ([07:10](#)):

So they become real people to you rather than just coworkers. And it's interesting that there are workplace environments where people spend a lot of time together, but don't really know each other.

Tegan Trovato ([07:22](#)):

Yeah, that's true.

Brett Townsend ([07:23](#)):

So you kind of have this atmosphere of people who are very familiar with you or each other in one way only. So it can limit the way that you work together. I think it's a lot easier to assume positive intent and to not think that people are always out to get you or doing things just to make you mad when you know them more personally.

Tegan Trovato ([07:47](#)):

Yes.

Brett Townsend ([07:48](#)):

I think it's a lot easier when you're removed from the personal side of things to take an offense or to think that somebody's trying to back stab you or is out to get you or something like that. But when you have that kind of a personal atmosphere where people know each other a little bit more, then it does foster a little bit. It makes it easier to work together, kind of fosters more of that community environment.

Tegan Trovato ([08:12](#)):

Yeah. How do you help your team members get to know each other on that level? I think a lot of folks listening would appreciate some new ideas on how to do that.

Brett Townsend ([08:21](#)):

I don't know if I have any new ideas. So one of the cool things I like to say is that I coached a junior Olympic volleyball for 10 years while I was also doing my career because I played and played volleyball and then coached for a long time.

Brett Townsend ([08:35](#)):

Every year, I had very high level athletes, but I always had a new team every year. So the trick was always, how do you get them to play better together on the court? Obviously, it's the skills and the training and everything else, but then there was that trust, that next level of you could all be very great skill wise, but not necessarily trust each other on the court.

Brett Townsend ([08:58](#)):

So every year, I would do things with the team to get them to kind of know each other a little bit better. Again, didn't have to be best friends, didn't want to have to hang out, but just so you had this level of trust. So I've kind of pulled some of those things into what I've done in the business area.

Brett Townsend ([09:16](#)):

Like I said, it's not really new. I don't think I have anything groundbreaking. I think we eat lunch and do a lot of meals type together. We'll go out. Everybody brings a plus one and we'll just go out to dinner. And in many cases I've just paid for that myself because the company won't cover things like that.

Brett Townsend ([09:37](#)):

But it's important to me to do that. We've done team building fun stuff, escape rooms. I mean, any number of different things that we've done. We've gone to minor league games. We've gone to baseball games. When I was living in Dallas, we would do some sporting events. It's one of the big things to do there. And then I would just ask the team. I'm like, "Hey, what are things you guys want to go do? And what are ways that we can..." Kind of get to know each other a little bit and let them say what they want to do.

Brett Townsend ([10:04](#)):

So a lot of things are based around that. I mean, I've gone to a couple movies with team members before. It's like one person hasn't seen Star Wars. It was like, "Oh my gosh, we got to have a movie night."

Tegan Trovato ([10:14](#)):

You got to fix that.

Brett Townsend ([10:15](#)):

We got to fix that or we got to do something. So I think it's just really, it could be anything that gets you out of the office, that gets you doing things that you would do with friends and then just have where it helps people just feel like it's okay to share a little bit about themselves and where you can get to know people outside of the work area.

Brett Townsend ([10:36](#)):

So yeah, nothing new, nothing really groundbreaking, but just it takes effort. I think that's the big thing is you have to plan. It takes effort. It takes time and it takes time that in many cases or after hours from

work or something, which again, you have to want to do that. But I think those are just things that I've done that have kind of helped that over the time.

Brett Townsend ([10:59](#)):

And I will say it comes easier to me because I'm just naturally a people person. I'm naturally a relationship person building relationships and things like that. So it's just something that I enjoy. So it makes it easier for me to do that. But I think just the results that I've seen on my teams over the years of doing that type of thing, it really works and really pays off.

Tegan Trovato ([11:22](#)):

Yeah. So I will kind of point something out for listeners and maybe even for you because you're just like this isn't groundbreaking. And I hear what you're trying to say, right? Escape rooms, not brand new. But what is unique to me, Brett, about your presence as a leader that we could all learn from is the intentionality that is so clear that you are intentional about making sure the opportunities are there for folks to know each other personally, and that is often a box checking exercise that's done once a year, maybe twice a year.

Tegan Trovato ([11:54](#)):

I especially appreciate that you've dug into your pocket so the plus ones could come because I've even learned over the years, how much more I learn about my colleagues when I see them as mothers, as fathers, as spouses or partners. There's a whole other side to experience of the folks we work with when we have that privilege of seeing inside of their lives a little.

Tegan Trovato ([12:14](#)):

So I think there's more to this than you're given yourself credit for about the uniqueness of it. So I would encourage our listeners to really think about as we think about our own leadership philosophies. What is our approach or our thoughts on how we can help each other know the fullness of our lives and personalities.

Brett Townsend ([12:33](#)):

And I think the word you use there intentional is really good because I think we all know naturally charismatic people. They just kind of have this presence and this charisma about them. But to be a good leader is very intentional. I know very few people that can just wing it as a good leader. You can have leadership qualities, but to be a good leader, it takes a lot of effort and a lot of intentionality into doing that. So I think that's a good way of putting it.

Tegan Trovato ([13:04](#)):

Totally agree. On that note, how has your own leadership evolved the last couple of years? I ask about the last couple of years because of the volatility of our systems, our social structures, our economies politics, right? So how's that impacted you and what's prompted any changes you've experienced within yourself as a leader?

Brett Townsend ([13:23](#)):

Yeah, I would say early on let's even go pre-pandemic. I think when I was younger, like a younger leader, my thought was, "Oh, I want to be that cool leader. I want to be the one that everybody likes." So you're

more interested in being liked, I think. So this giving feedback wasn't necessarily something that I did very well or I was always encouraging, but not always giving great constructive feedback when something was wrong because I wanted everybody to be cool, but then it was, of course, as I got into it, you realize that people crave feedback.

Tegan Trovato ([13:57](#)):

Yes, they do.

Brett Townsend ([13:57](#)):

And they really want to know how they can get better and grow and stuff. So we can talk about some of that later. So I think that was one of the major shifts that I made is to realize that giving very good, constructive, honest feedback is not just a good thing, but it's really craved by people on the team. So I think that's one thing people can learn or one part that people can get over that uncomfortable feeling of having to give constructive feedback because just know that your teammates really want that.

Brett Townsend ([14:28](#)):

So I think that was the first thing. In the pandemic, again, this came a little more naturally to me just because of who I am, but it's flexibility. Just being okay with it. I mean, I remember just the very first call where I had a team member and their kid was home from school, just like we all were working from home and came into the Zoom shot and just kind of stood there in front of the camera. And she was so embarrassed and like, "Oh my gosh. Wait, hold on. Let me get this." And I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no, he's fine. Just let him stay there. It's okay."

Brett Townsend ([15:02](#)):

And then it was in subsequent meetings where he'd be sitting on our lap or we'd have pets in the call. Everybody knew this, but I think just the whole thing was flexible. Just realize that everybody was trying to do the best that they could and trying to manage things and just working moms with young kids. I mean working parents, but especially as we know, a lot of the burden fell to women during the pandemic.

Brett Townsend ([15:26](#)):

I just don't know how they did it. I mean, my kids were older so I didn't really have to worry a lot about it. I just had to worry about a bored teenager at home. But I mean just the Herculean effort that so many people were putting in to still work, but yet try to manage things at home just required a lot of flexibility and understanding and just extending grace to people, which I think is good in relationships anyway.

Brett Townsend ([15:52](#)):

But just allowing people to figure it out and not try to come in with all these rules from the beginning. And I think just that one little bit... And it wasn't just me. I know a lot of people who were that way. It made all the difference while people were trying to navigate the reality that's been the last couple of years.

Tegan Trovato ([16:13](#)):

Yeah. I love that. I heard being flexible, being understanding, extending grace and allowing people space to just figure it out.

Brett Townsend ([16:21](#)):

And I could argue that all of those traits are good to have even when we're not in the middle of a pandemic, because when people join a new company or join a new team or given a new job within the company they're already in, there is that adjustment. There's that period when people are trying to figure it out.

Brett Townsend ([16:39](#)):

And I think just having leaders understand that and be able to extend that courtesy to them and extend that space for them to be able to do that. This is so funny. I think we all know people who we used to work with or who used to be one level above us who then elevate into a senior executive role. And then they just seem to become totally different people.

Brett Townsend ([17:06](#)):

A lot of times everybody else is asking, "What happened to him? What happened to her? Don't they remember what it was like to be us? Don't they remember what it was like to be at this level?" So I think, again, that's so important that as leaders move up in an organization that you don't lose that, that you remember the people, that you remember what it was like to be at that level and how you felt.

Brett Townsend ([17:32](#)):

It's like you hear this all the time in sports when a former player becomes a coach and it's like they're trying to straddle both sides of the fence a little bit. And the coaches that do really well are the ex-players who are good coaches are the ones that can be the coach like they're supposed to be, but also remember what it was like to be a player and be able to relate to them on that level as well.

Brett Townsend ([17:56](#)):

So I think that's part of that as leaders move up in an organization, just remember what it was like and try to relate to, and remember what it's like to be in that position.

Tegan Trovato ([18:06](#)):

Yeah. And further to that, like just one little multiplier on that, that we may not be able to relate in some cases to what it's like, because the conditions or the identities, or the stigmas or whatever, all the things that an employee or a group of employees may have not going in their favor, sometimes we can't relate to that. So the ability to even step further beyond to part one is, "Here's what I remember of what it was like to be in that position." And part two is, "I also can't imagine what else it must be like for them." Never forget that part, right?

Brett Townsend ([18:42](#)):

And I think it's too, like you said, with not only the pandemic with a lot of the social issues that were going on. I think what happens is that good leaders are known by their team as to who they are and what they stand for before crisis hits. And it was really interesting because there was a person on my team who when a lot of the social justice things were going on, I reached out to him and I said, "Hey, I really apologize that I've not reached out more proactively and told you how much I support things that

are going on, and how much..." And he just said the coolest thing to me, he said, "It's okay. I know where you stand, and I know who you are."

Brett Townsend ([19:23](#)):

It was because we had established that before the social justice thing started happening and before people started going out of their way to say, "This is what I stand for." The fact that he said, "I already know you, I know what you stand for," that was a really cool moment for both of us to just be able to say, "You know what, it's already there and you don't have to try to scramble when something happens to figure out who you are as a leader, or to try to help your team know who you are as a leader, because they already know."

Tegan Trovato ([19:58](#)):

Yeah. Justin Seamonds, the CEO of Roti said something to me along the lines of, "We can't start operating with new leadership practices under crisis. We're not going to be good at it, so we have to go into the type of leadership and the practices that are innately ours already." And I was really struck by that. And that's very much what you're talking about. Leaders already, to your point, they're already known for what they stand for. Now, these crisis opportunities, or these crisis moments are opportunities, right, to really exemplify it and embody it even more. But it's a really powerful point and I totally agree.

Brett Townsend ([20:36](#)):

It's like what we said about the pandemic. The pandemic didn't start any new trends, it just accelerated trends that were already happening. And I think it's the same way with leaders during crisis. When you're in that crisis, you don't establish new leadership capabilities. It just enhances what you already have or magnifies what you already have. So leaders who don't focus on people, leaders that are only focused on results, they're more focused on the what than the how, then that just comes out even more during crisis.

Brett Townsend ([21:08](#)):

So positive and negatively, however it is, it amplifies during crisis. So you want to have established something already as a leader that when that crisis hits, then your team already knows who you are and how you're going to respond and help you get through what that crisis is.

Tegan Trovato ([21:25](#)):

Yeah. That's a great point. What are you noticing employees are expecting of you or the organizations you've worked for as an employer that seem new or different as a result of the times we've been in? If anything. I may not put any facts out there.

Brett Townsend ([21:44](#)):

I don't really know if I can speak for companies. I think everybody, other than just what the general things are, there were a lot of communication about be understanding. Let people kind of go through this transition as we're working from home now and try to figure things out. There were those kinds of things that went on. But I really think that what I've noticed that employees are looking for is they want empathy.

Brett Townsend ([22:10](#)):

And I think in many cases, corporations don't practice organizational empathy the way that they should. I think you can find empathy on individual levels and on individual leader levels. But I think companies can be far better at having organizational or institutional empathy. And we talk about that from a consumer insight standpoint from my industry is that when a company or a brand has this organizational empathy for the consumer then it really shows in everything that they do with that brand.

Brett Townsend ([22:44](#)):

And then same thing goes with the way you treat employees. If you have that organizational empathy for people then it really comes out in the way that you treat them, not just on a day to day basis, but when crisis hits. And then I think the other thing too is just an awareness of people's mental health and creating a safe space for people at work. I think that probably is the biggest one even more than empathy is that there's so many people are dealing with so much and people are dealing with things that they don't even know that they're dealing with.

Brett Townsend ([23:20](#)):

Just a personal experience. It turns out that I was suffering from anxiety. Not severe anxiety where it's debilitating or anything, but that I was suffering with anxiety for years. And I didn't even really know what it was. When my doctor finally said you've got some anxiety and it's likely you've been dealing with this for a very long time, then it just made so much sense to me like all of the things that would happen over the years that I could remember.

Brett Townsend ([23:44](#)):

I'm like, "Oh, wow, that makes so much sense and things like that." I mean, the personal experience has helped me, but I think just in general just being aware of the demands that are placed upon people with work and with family and everything else and the stress that people feel and just being aware of that and being very concerned and very aware of people's mental and emotional health is a big thing.

Brett Townsend ([24:12](#)):

And having people feel safe at work that they can express their feelings and express their needs at work, I think that's very important.

Tegan Trovato ([24:23](#)):

It's so fascinating to me when I just scan back over all the notes I've taken while you're talking. Everything you've talked about so far really does fold into creating a culture of psychological safety, which is what you're talking about. But they could each be such big lifts on their own, right? Like intentional leadership intentionally getting to know the people you work with, the empathy factor. Especially institutional empathy as a leader trying to help create that or influence that in your organization. These are big lifts.

Tegan Trovato ([24:54](#)):

But at the end of the day, you're also talking about being a really good human with other humans. What else would you say you do as a regular practice in your leadership to help create that psychological safety where people do feel safe at work?

Brett Townsend ([25:10](#)):

First of all to me, I think is you just said the example that you can be vulnerable as a leader and that you can be open as a leader and that you can have this judgment free zone. I'm quick to admit where I'm wrong. I'm quick to admit my own frailties and joke about myself or just like you just not take yourself so seriously. I think when people see that I'm willing to be vulnerable and talk about my own weaknesses or talk about things that I can improve on or I can say, "Look, this is something that's going on in the company and I don't think this is right. Here's how we're going to fix this or here's how we're going to work with it."

Brett Townsend ([25:55](#)):

They still see you as a leader and maybe not necessarily that you're on their side, so to speak, but that you understand them and you get it and that they feel that they can come to you or that they can say things in a meeting and not be criticized or be condemned for anything that they say. And so just creating that, I can't even describe the many different levels of things that people have been able to say over the years in a team meeting or in a one on one and even they would admit, they're like, "Wow, I didn't think I'd ever feel okay to say something like this, but I'm going to." And then they just say it.

Tegan Trovato ([26:34](#)):

I love that.

Brett Townsend ([26:36](#)):

That's where it starts for me is just setting the example, letting them see my own humanity and seeing that I'm not perfect and that I don't ever expect to be. But that I'm just trying to be better. I think that's really what it is, is just as long as we're all trying to be better, then we can totally accept weaknesses. And then I think with that, it's making... So there's the setting the example of with yourself and exposing your own humanity and vulnerability at times. And then there's also just creating the space and the time.

Brett Townsend ([27:07](#)):

If every interaction you have with your team as a leader is strictly business, business, business, then that's not going to create an atmosphere. Even if you're really good at that. I think you have to create time that allows people to be able to speak freely where it's not just about business. But again, kind of going back into that intentional amount of time. So when we have team meetings, a lot of times I don't like to dive right into the business.

Brett Townsend ([27:36](#)):

I'm like, "Hey, how was your weekend? What do you got coming up or what's going on with the kids?" And again, if you know everybody already by this point then you can ask, "How's sally doing? How's little Jimmy doing?" You can ask about partners, you can ask about kids, you can ask about things, and people can tell you, "Oh yeah, hey, we went out to the lake and we did this." So I like to have the first 10, 15 minutes of my team meetings just kind of be, "Let's just talk. What's going on? How are things?" That kind of thing.

Brett Townsend ([28:05](#)):

Then you kind of get into the business of it. So again, it's just kind of incorporating those little times and those spaces to allow people to do that. And then I think the other big thing is when you do is having regular one-on-ones with your team. However, that is. I don't advocate necessarily for a certain amount

of time period. So you can do them weekly, twice a month, once a month, however it is. But in those one-on-ones, what I feel is important is that you let the team member control that one-on-one.

Brett Townsend ([28:39](#)):

So I've had people that I've reported to where I go in for a one-on-one and I have things that I want to talk about, but yet the one-on-one is dominated by my manager. And they're talking about all these other things, and I'm like, "Well, we talk about projects and we talk about those other things in other meetings. Why does this house have to be that way?"

Brett Townsend ([29:00](#)):

So I tell everybody my team, I say, "Hey, when we do those one-on-ones, you're in charge of the agenda. I may have one or two things that I'll bring up if there's nothing going on, but I said if I don't get to anything on my list in the one on one, then I consider that a victory, because that means you're doing the talking and you're doing the asking, and you're sharing things. How is your career going? Are you happy where you're at?"

Brett Townsend ([29:23](#)):

I kind of give them a list of things that they can talk about. But I said, "That one on one time is yours. You bring up and you talk about whatever you want to talk about because that's why I'm there." So that helps them, again, feel that they're in control and that they can talk about things without worrying about, "Oh, my manager is going to try to slip all this other stuff in."

Tegan Trovato ([29:43](#)):

Yeah. Well, this is another thing that on its face, we might go, "Well, yeah, of course have one-on-ones." But step one is often not checked. I can't even tell you how often I see as a coach one-on-one's not happening. So much less the quality that you're talking about or the empowerment that you're extending to your employees. I love, love it. I've worked with teams where I have watched as a team coach. I've seen team members end up on performance plans that I know ended up happening because the boss got blindsided by things that weren't going well, because they weren't having their one-on-ones. Right?

Tegan Trovato ([30:24](#)):

So it is a disservice to all that quality one-on-ones aren't happening. And if I recall you said there's a pretty particular model you like to use in those, or maybe it's for performance feedback. The four and two method. What's that about?

Brett Townsend ([30:38](#)):

Yeah. So that can be, however, often you want to do that. But basically, every company has their own structure on how they evaluate their employees. Some type of a competency thing or some kind of a leadership model or something. Everybody's got one. So I think within that leadership model, you give your employees every time... I wouldn't do it every one-on-one. I would do it once a quarter where I would say, "Here are four things from our competency model that you are doing very well and that I am very pleased with how you're doing. And then here are two parts of the competency model, which I think you can continue to work on."

Brett Townsend ([31:22](#)):

What I always stress to people is those two things don't mean they're your weaknesses. It just means it's something that I think you can continue to work on. So just having them have that. And I didn't make that up by the way. That came from Electrolux, which I thought was a really good way of doing it. But it's really grabbing onto that and, again, doing it and making sure they know. And then they can see at any given time where you feel they're doing a good job and where you feel they can continue to work, and it gives them something to continue to work towards.

Brett Townsend ([31:55](#)):

It doesn't have to change every quarter. There were times where the four strengths would stay the same or the two things to work on would stay the same. Hopefully though over the course of the year, things are changing where they're doing things better. So you acknowledge that by moving it into, "Hey, here are four things that you're doing well." Especially if it was one of the two things you asked them to work on. And if they're really putting in the effort and they're doing a good job, say, "Hey, I've now moved that into one of the four strengths that you have. I'm now giving you something else that you can work on."

Brett Townsend ([32:25](#)):

So as long as you're updating that and doing that, and it doesn't have to be that particular model, but just something where you're letting people know, "Here is what you're doing. Here are things you can work on." And it's ongoing feedback rather than kind of only twice a year at midyear and at the end where people are getting feedback. I don't think that works. People kind of need that constant feedback.

Tegan Trovato ([32:47](#)):

It does not work. You are correct. That's right. I totally agree. I love that. I also see the intentionality of this too that you're really thinking throughout the year about how your employees are performing and yes, competencies take a long time to develop sometimes. Sometimes entire careers, right? Depending on what it is. So I love that you kind of extend some runway for that. You and I, when we talked before recording, one of the things that came through so clearly is the importance to you of being a good boss.

Tegan Trovato ([33:22](#)):

You referenced some of the data about why people leave or stay at their jobs which we all know it's often because of a boss that they'll stay or go. And you gave an example of people will stay in some really bad environments if their boss is really good. It's unreal how true that is. So tell us about some more of the things that you think fall into making you a good boss?

Brett Townsend ([33:47](#)):

Oh, I don't know. I don't even know how good I am to be honest, but I'll say on the flip side of that too, you'll hear people that work at these companies that everybody thinks is so amazing, and they quit. They're like, "Why did you quit that job? I've heard that company is amazing." And they're like, "Oh, the company is fine. I just couldn't stay my boss." You have the flip side of that. So I think that's been proven over and over again that people stay at jobs or quit jobs, and the number one reason for both is the boss that they have.

Brett Townsend ([34:16](#)):

It's just so important because that is your world. You can work for this broader organization that organizationally may be great, but if you're working for a boss, you're miserable going to work every day, it doesn't matter what else is going on at that company. So you can do that. But I think the things that I just try to be is really all I can say is that the things that we've mentioned. I don't want to repeat-

Tegan Trovato ([34:41](#)):

Right, creating a safe place.

Brett Townsend ([34:42](#)):

Right. But I think there's two things that I haven't mentioned that I can add to the list is that I always try to show gratitude. I always make sure that my team knows how grateful I am for their efforts. I think that's one thing that companies in general, just again, from talking to people and we all have networks, we all have friends and everybody always talks. I think the one thing that I hear a lot is that my company just never said, "Thank you. They never showed gratitude. They never acknowledged my contributions to the company."

Brett Townsend ([35:13](#)):

I think everybody likes money. Everybody likes vacation time, things like that. But you can only pay so much that your company will let you. You can only give so much vacation. What are the things that employees crave or that we all crave on an ongoing basis, whether it's in relationships or at work.

Brett Townsend ([35:31](#)):

And it's just knowing we're appreciated, knowing we're valued, knowing that people are grateful for our efforts and just expressing gratitude is I think such a big thing. People love hearing a thank you or you're doing a great job, or I'm grateful for what you're doing and grateful for your efforts. That goes such a long way. So I really try to express gratitude and show gratitude.

Brett Townsend ([35:54](#)):

The other thing that I can attribute is, and I can thank my dad for this. My dad was a PhD educator his whole life and an entrepreneur. And he came up. He developed one of the many personality tests and systems that are out there. It was color based and it was four colors, blue, orange, gold, and green. It's based on the theory that we all have all four colors in us to some level, but everybody has a dominant color and then a secondary color.

Brett Townsend ([36:28](#)):

And then the other two are in a lesser area. And working with him, doing trainings with him, I would facilitate some trainings with him on the side. I got to know that system so intimately and very well. So what I do is within a few minutes of meeting someone and talking with them, I'm able to identify in most cases what their primary color is.

Brett Townsend ([36:53](#)):

So what that does is when I understand, "Okay, this person is a blue, so here's what I know about blues. So how do I relate to the blue? Oh, this person I can tell is green. So how do I relate to them? And this is the attributes of that color and so we do that." So what it does is what we would always tell people is that there's a color that you are. This is like who you are, but then there are things that you can do. It

doesn't mean you have to be somebody or not, but it means there are behaviors that you can do that are within a certain color.

Brett Townsend ([37:27](#)):

So what I try to do is that I'm a certain primary color. And then when I am working with someone who is not my primary color, but is another color, I don't have to become that. I just have to do the behaviors that relate more to that color. And again, it takes effort and it's intentional and things. And it's even the language you use. You would talk to someone who's more emotional and feeling, you would say, "How do you feel about that?" And then they can tell you about that. But someone that's a little more analytical, you would say, "What do you think about that?"

Brett Townsend ([38:01](#)):

And just even little words like that, that relate more to them than that, but it's just doing behaviors within those four colors that I know can relate to the other people. And again, that is something that is unique that I know it's something that I've learned and developed and honed over many years. So it's not something that's just easy to do, but it is something that has been so valuable for me.

Brett Townsend ([38:27](#)):

I mean, there's so many out there. It's not like my dad is the only one or the best one, but there's so many out there that if people learned those and did that then I think that would really help them relate to people on their level.

Tegan Trovato ([38:43](#)):

What is that one called?

Brett Townsend ([38:45](#)):

It's called true colors.

Tegan Trovato ([38:46](#)):

Okay. I know listeners are wanting to know what you're... We're going to put that in the show notes, so thank you.

Brett Townsend ([38:50](#)):

It was Daryl Townsend. Dr. Daryl Townsend is my father.

Tegan Trovato ([38:54](#)):

Very nice.

Brett Townsend ([38:54](#)):

And you probably find it both. I'll add one other thing is that I am a firm believer in playing to people's strengths. When I read the book StrengthsFinder a number of years ago, it just resonated with me so much because I'm one of those ones that understands what I do well. And the whole basis of it is that we spend a lot of our lives working on things we're not good at. We love the underdog story about someone who overcomes things to do something that they're not really that great at.

Tegan Trovato ([39:30](#)):

Yeah, right.

Brett Townsend ([39:32](#)):

So they give the example of Rudy, the football player at Notre Dame, who was not athletic, who was not a good football player, who spent years getting the crap kicked out of him and practices. He made one tackle in one game and all of a sudden he is a hero. And it's like, "That wasn't really your strength. Being an athlete was being a football player." And the point that the book made was what could he have done with his life if he had identified early on what he was really good at. And it's taken all of that effort that he put into trying to just be a low level football player put into that.

Brett Townsend ([40:08](#)):

So I think that's really what I like to do is... And that's one of the first things that I ask team members when I become their manager, when I start a new job, it's like, "What are you good at? Tell me what you like doing. What part of this job gets you out of bed in the morning?" And then you allow people to do things wherever possible to do what they're good at and to feel like that they can come to work and not have to constantly be focused on things they're not good at.

Brett Townsend ([40:39](#)):

Because that is draining to people. But if people can say, "Oh, wow, I enjoy this part of my work, and now it's the main thing that I get to do. It's awesome."

Tegan Trovato ([40:50](#)):

Yes.

Brett Townsend ([40:52](#)):

I've done that a couple of times where I've come into a team, figured out what everybody is good at. And then within the first couple of months that I'm there, reassign the team based on that. And then I've found that people just really enjoy that and that they enjoy the work that they do because they're now doing things that play to their natural strengths.

Tegan Trovato ([41:13](#)):

Yeah, I love that. It's clear to me, Brett, that over your journey and leadership, you have been very intentional about learning. I'm calling that out because I think that... I don't know about you. I was just put in a leadership position one day. Boom. All of a sudden, I'm a leader. I have people that were looking to me for guidance and all the things you told me that you just talked about. Right? And I had zero skill on how to get... I had intuition. I had talent. I had zero development in those early days. We had to just figure it out.

Brett Townsend ([41:46](#)):

And that happens too a lot in a lot of the companies.

Tegan Trovato ([41:48](#)):

Most of the time.

Brett Townsend ([41:49](#)):

The way that people are promoted is, "You're really good at doing your job, so we're going to now promote you to manage people." And sometimes that doesn't work. Sometimes people can be-

Tegan Trovato ([41:59](#)):

That's so right.

Brett Townsend ([41:59](#)):

... really good at their job and just not be in a position where they can manage people.

Tegan Trovato ([42:04](#)):

That's right.

Brett Townsend ([42:05](#)):

But yet that's really how management is decided in many companies, not by, "Are you a good leader?" It's do your job well.

Tegan Trovato ([42:13](#)):

Yeah. So I had to grow that in myself. You have been very intentional about growing that in yourself. What advice would you give executives about their continued development and growth and the intentionality behind that? Whether it's things you do or it's a philosophy or a belief, what should people be thinking about in terms of how they continue to grow their leadership?

Brett Townsend ([42:33](#)):

I think like you said, it's intentional. When I first started coaching volleyball, I had been a player for a while. And then when I decided I wanted to get into coaching, I knew the game really well. I was one of those typical average players that coaches rather than goes on to have this huge playing career. But when you just kind of... I learned the game really well. So I was able to... But I didn't know how to coach.

Brett Townsend ([43:00](#)):

I think early on I had someone who taught me and who trained me how to coach. She was very good at it. My first job was coaching girls, not boys. So I'd grown up playing boys' volleyball. And then I was coaching girls. It wasn't like I was being hard on them or bad or anything, But one of the other coaches was a woman said, "You have a lot of good principles, but let me teach you a little bit about coaching and specifically coaching girls."

Brett Townsend ([43:30](#)):

I was so grateful to her for doing that because it really then started to have me make that transition from player to coach, and be able to learn how to coach. I think that is true when we're people managing. It's just be intentional and always be learning. A lot of executives I know are doing that. They're reading books and looking and watching speakers and doing things like that. So I would just say continue to be intentional on learning how to be a leader, learning how to be a people manager because it doesn't come naturally to most people. Even if you're a parent, there's a difference between being a parent and being a leader of adults. People manager of adults

Tegan Trovato ([44:11](#)):

And some similarities, in fairness.

Brett Townsend ([44:15](#)):

I was going to say, there is a lot of crosspollination that you could do there, but there are differences. So I think just be intentional about it. Read, find people that you like that have good leadership ideas and follow them. I would say watch other leaders. I mean, I learned so much of leadership by watching my managers good and bad, and asking them for advice and learning things. And some of the things I use today have just received great advice and direction from past leaders.

Brett Townsend ([44:44](#)):

So that's really what it is. Like I said, I don't think I have some secret formula or thing that nobody else has figured out because obviously there's a lot of great managers out there. But it's just never stop learning how you can be a better people person. And then as culture evolves, we need to evolve with it. And that's where it's creating this safe space and allowing people space for mental health and showing that kind of empathy and what people may be going through from a social aspect or whatever else. Just really being on top of that.

Tegan Trovato ([45:20](#)):

Love it. Where can listeners find you online, Brett, if they want to follow you, learn more about your work?

Brett Townsend ([45:26](#)):

So I would say I'm kind of only a marginal social media maven. So I mean, I'm on LinkedIn, Brett R. Townsend. And then my Instagram is @brett\_r\_townsend. I post some work stuff there, but it's mostly just the outdoor stuff that I do here in North Carolina.

Tegan Trovato ([45:46](#)):

Wonderful. Well, we could all use more of that inspiration in the middle of winter. So we'll be sure to link to all of those places that Brett just mentioned, so you can find them online. And in closing, Brett, the question I ask all of our guests is first, a reminder that the whole intention of this podcast was to try to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills that future leaders must possess to be effective as they lead these rather chaotic systems that seem to be speeding up rather than slowing down. So to get your read on what's required of future leaders, just finish the sentence for me, leaders of the future will...

Brett Townsend ([46:26](#)):

One thing is I would just say will be empathetic and will be concerned about the wellbeing of their employees. And that's all encompassing. When you're concerned about their wellbeing, you're going to coach them. You're going to give them feedback. You're going to give them space. You're going to create that kind of safe space for them. And I think it's just going to be more important as time goes on that the people leaders that are more focused on the what they do than the how they do it, they're going to be phased out. They'll always be there, but I think they're going to be phased out. And the leaders that really show that empathy and show that they can create that kind of safe space for their employees, that's what a future leader really is going to be.

Tegan Trovato ([47:16](#)):

Perfection. Brett, thank you so much for joining us today.

Brett Townsend ([47:19](#)):

My pleasure. Thank you, Tegan.

Outro ([47:21](#)):

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](http://www.brightarrowcoaching.com). See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.