

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?

Intro (00:21):

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.

Intro (00:41):

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):

Listeners, I'm so pleased to have Sherianne James, join us on the podcast today. I often spend quite a bit of time thinking about how I want to introduce each of these guests to you. And sometimes we use their really formal bio and they're always very distinguished and impressive and Sherianne's formal bio is no doubt all of those things as well. But what really stood out to me as I was thinking about her, is that one of my colleagues introduced me to Sherianne, and I thought it might be interesting for you to hear what was included in that introduction. So, here's what my colleagues said, "Tegan. I have known Sharon for 20 years, she is no doubt one of the most curious, smart and funny people I know. She lights up every room she enters, you just want to be around her all the time. She has had an impressive career and how she leads has always been one of her strongest assets."

Tegan Trovato (01:56):

Needless to say, I was all over that introduction, then yes, a big yes that I wanted to meet Sherianne. And so, as we've prepared to record this podcast today, I've so enjoyed getting to know her. Our mutual colleague was spot on with all of the way she described who Sherianne is how she lights up the room. And wow, her leadership stories are really a gift to all of us to hear. So, a bit about her formal background, in addition to that really lovely personal intro, she's been a C suite leader for a multibillion dollar global brand, and has had also decades of experience and leadership for companies we all know like Kraft Foods, and Russell Hobbs, whose portfolio includes brands like Black and Decker and George Foreman. She, in addition to serving inside of organizations at the C suite level, also serves as an experienced board director.

Tegan Trovato (02:49):

So, she served on both public and not for profit boards, and is currently on the board of spectrum brands. She is a multi award winning CMO and she still somehow makes time to mentor others and bring that business acumen into communities and rooms that also benefit from it outside of the corporate space. Sherianne James, is going to really take us on an interesting journey of her career and

some really strong lessons throughout that career as well as especially the last couple of years of focus. So, enjoy!

Tegan Trovato ([03:27](#)):

Sherrienne, welcome to the podcast.

Sherrienne J. ([03:29](#)):

Thank you so much for having me.

Tegan Trovato ([03:31](#)):

Yeah. I'm so excited to talk with you today about a topic that... We're going to go through several topics for listeners to know. But one of them that came through so clearly as something you're really focused on is listening.

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

And I want to go ahead and tell listeners, we're not talking about basic listening. We're talking about something much more sophisticated. And we're really thinking about how senior executives listen. And so the first thing I'd love to know from you is, why does that feel important right now?

Sherrienne J. ([04:00](#)):

Well, because what got me here may not get me there. And I've always been very confident, driven, I know what I want, and that doesn't necessarily lend itself to listening. But what I've learned as I've gotten more and more senior is that, your whispers literally matter. That everything you say, there's a reaction, there's a response.

Sherrienne J. ([04:31](#)):

And so someone who is as intense as I am, who is very confident saying, "This is what we're going to do," I have to realize that I have to create space and opportunity to listen and to be heard. And that very subtle things are sometimes much bigger.

Sherrienne J. ([04:53](#)):

So even when you ask people what they think, and they appear and say verbally that they're okay with what you're proposing or they're okay to do what you're asking, you have to respond to subtle cues. Body language, a small comment of, "I'm not sure," to be so much bigger than maybe it's intended.

Tegan Trovato ([05:19](#)):

Right. So as you were sharing that, what I imagine is, just coming into the room as a senior executive, your title carries some presence regardless of what you've said you want to hear or listen for.

Tegan Trovato ([05:32](#)):

Do you find that the title, just on its own, gets in the way of people really being honest with you and allowing you to hear what's being said?

Sherrienne J. ([05:40](#)):

Yeah. The title and your own inability to recognize your power. It's something that you have to be always aware of, because you will hear people reference your name and say, "Sherrienne said..." "Sherrienne said..." And sometimes when it comes back to you, you have to even stop and pause and think what was it that you said, and you see how much it reverberates the organization.

Sherrienne J. ([06:10](#)):

I feel like the exact same person that was a brand manager all those years ago, who was able to be successful because I was so confident in saying my opinion and having a point of view. Or being the person who would ask a question even when there was the most senior leaders in the room. And I had to recognize or I still have to, I'd say it's a deliberate practice thing. I have to recognize that not everyone has that same bravado and confidence to be able to do that.

Sherrienne J. ([06:41](#)):

And that's where the deliberate practice of listening is something that I'm constantly trying to master, because the other thing that makes listening very difficult for executives is we're very results oriented. And, sometimes we're three, four, five steps ahead because of the information that we're privy to and the desire to get things done.

Sherrienne J. ([07:05](#)):

And that's where you are so focused on that, that, that's where you're missing what people are saying. And then it's compounded by the dynamic way we work now. So it was, gosh, two years ago, that we were all doing meetings across the room from each other. You can see body cues so much more easily.

Sherrienne J. ([07:34](#)):

Now, many times you're on a Zoom call, but people aren't even using their camera often. I try to encourage my team to do that, but there are times where, for many reasons, they don't feel comfortable doing that. And those are just even more complex situations that make it hard for you to hear. And that's why I think listening as an executive now is probably the most important skill that we can have in a more complex dynamic work environment.

Tegan Trovato ([08:05](#)):

Yeah. That lends itself then to having the right mediums, I suppose, for listening. We're moving from being in the room together to potentially being on Zoom. But if we're not conscious to get on Zoom, we may only do a lot via phone. So I'm hearing that need to rebalance our resources in this new state of not being together live.

Sherrienne J. ([08:26](#)):

Yes. Yeah, sure. Or just be aware that now you have even more complexities because, you can still practice very much listening, but you have to create even more space for it in today's environment. So definitely, I think the more, if you're not going to have the full four dimensional experience, then making sure that you try to use video as much as possible, and really encourage your people on the importance of that.

Sherrienne J. ([08:58](#)):

Little things. Again, one of my strengths therefore, if you overuse it as a weakness, is I'm very quick to, "Okay, here's what we're doing. Here's what's next." And I've had people on my team that I've learned that it sometimes literally feels like the call has frozen to me, that their video isn't working, and it's because they just need that minute to think.

Sherrienne J. ([09:22](#)):

And I give them that space. And I'll even say, "Okay, I know what's happening now, you're thinking. You're processing what I said." And I create that space for that. And also, to your point about using the medium, I will be very deliberate in my request of when I want, for sure, to non-negotiable for a video call, because if I know that I'm going to either bring complex news or I need my team engaged, I'll say, "Let's really make an effort to get on video here." It can make such a big difference.

Sherrienne J. ([09:58](#)):

And I think that's where hybrid working comes in. I'm very much a fan of the efficiency that's come from digital ways of working. And I also think for a lot of women, it's allowed them to have a different level of engagement with home as an executive. That is a privilege that we haven't always been afforded. So I very much support that.

Sherrienne J. ([10:23](#)):

But I love the fact that now I get to see my team once a week, sometimes twice a week. And I reserve that time for the more complex conversations where I know that if I don't have myself in a room where they can communicate with me in multiple different ways, with the way they're sitting, with the way they're looking, that it's helpful for me to be in that dynamic, so that they are not so caged because, coming full circle to the weight of the title, it's intimidating even if you don't intend it to be.

Tegan Trovato ([10:58](#)):

That's right. Yeah.

Sherrienne J. ([11:00](#)):

And when you layer on the style that I personally have as a leader, very driven, very intense, very demanding, that shuts down communication, unintentional. That's where you have to constantly look back and play conversations back and say, "I know what they were saying, but what were they really saying?"

Sherrienne J. ([11:26](#)):

And that's been very helpful for me to lead teams. And I've been in global roles, I've been in roles where I have teams, therefore, all around the world. And that's where, even before we were all working this way, that complexity and nuance was so important, just because of that interaction.

Tegan Trovato ([11:51](#)):

Yeah. I will just, for listeners, reiterate this whole thing around the perception of title where we started. Bright Arrow will go in and interview, the stakeholders of C-suite teams were coaching, and hear from essentially the next line of leaders that report to the C-suite team, their perception of the leadership from the C-suite team.

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

And sometimes feedback will come back that we share to the CEO and the other CXOs thematically. And they're so surprised because they will have literally asked their people about these points and thought that everything was fine because they'd opened the door to the conversation and got a bunch of head nodding like, "Yes, yes. Everything's good. We'll do that. We're all bought in." And then they find out via confidential interviews, they weren't bought in. And I have seen the frustration. And I don't blame these C-suite leaders.

Tegan Trovato ([12:41](#)):

And so I also hear there's a two way street here that I want to emphasize here for listeners. Like Sherrienne is talking today about how CXOs and senior executives own the need to listen and to listen deeply. And then likewise, we've got to grow up, some of this next level of leadership, to be brave and courageous and receive and act on the invitation to share, honestly, because that is what benefits the business for sure.

Tegan Trovato ([13:07](#)):

So it's not just on the CXO, it's on the next layer down too, but we have to grow them.

Sherrienne J. ([13:13](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah. And I think where we can help that, is of course as I said, we have an incumbency to listen. But also exactly what you said, to tell your staff that when you have that opportunity, when you have that seat at the table, be brave. One of my caricature phrases is, I say, fear less, so you break the word into two. A lot of times what's causing that inability to say your truth, which may be wrong by the way.

Tegan Trovato ([13:47](#)):

Sure.

Sherrienne J. ([13:49](#)):

It may not always get the response, but if you're coming from a place of, "Based on what I know, this is what I want to share," and you're fearless about it, then the outcome will be the right outcome. But when you're letting fear motivate you, a lot of times the most difficult conversations with leaders are the ones we don't want to hear.

Sherrienne J. ([14:09](#)):

And sometimes we don't want to hear it because it is a team not pushing themselves to the edge. Not pushing themselves to the vision that you know we can get to as an organization, but they're not ready yet. And still, it's good for us to listen, to know how much work we have to do to pull the team where we need them to go.

Sherrienne J. ([14:32](#)):

But it's also really, the fearlessness is what gets the team members to the next level. Their ability to explain why this is difficult, why you're not able to get what you want as a leader, what the barriers are. That's where you start to learn as a leader, the complexities and the things that you need to remove out of the way to get where we need to go.

Sherrienne J. ([14:56](#)):

And if people are so caught up in their own personal stake of, "I'm just afraid of what will happen to me," then it becomes very self fulfilling, because they don't end up having the seat at the table. They don't end up having the influence. And if they just let their truth motivate them...

Sherrienne J. ([15:15](#)):

Again, you may literally be wrong because you're not privy to what the leader is privy to. But by opening up the dialogue, you even create a space for them to share in an appropriate way why you're wrong. And then in doing so, now you're able to maybe change, evolve, move forward. Or, in the best case scenario, you're able to shape the leader's thinking, because you gave them information that they weren't privy to.

Tegan Trovato ([15:43](#)):

Right. Which you rely on as a senior executive for sure. Great.

Tegan Trovato ([15:48](#)):

So I'm going to recap what I've heard you say on a few things in terms of what it takes for senior executives to really listen and really hear what's being said. And then I want to come back to one of your points and expand on it a bit.

Tegan Trovato ([15:59](#)):

So I've heard so far, we have to overcome the perception of our title in the business. That includes also transcending our ego, operating with self-awareness. I heard your clear point that, we have to balance our own drive so that we don't miss what's being said.

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

And having the right mediums, as we talked about, and being deliberate about which ones we use depending on the complexity of the conversation. So one of the pieces you touched on was how you really, I'll paraphrase, are trying to create the right culture so that listening is welcome. And I wrote this quote down from a previous conversation you and I had. By the way, this is all over the internet, get ready.

Tegan Trovato ([16:41](#)):

"Leaders have to listen to the whisper, period. Discontent and resistance can be really subtle."

Tegan Trovato ([16:49](#)):

What can you tell listeners about that subtlety and what you've seen over the years with that?

Sherrienne J. ([16:54](#)):

So one of the biggest challenges I've seen is that, when we're at times of pushing the organization to hit the numbers, to drive results, which is usually what all of us are trying to accomplish, people can be overwhelmed. The workload can be overwhelming, especially during the last few years when you're stimulated by multiple things.

Sherrienne J. ([17:25](#)):

You're on a call, and you're getting the text, and you're having the slides open from the other thing that you're having to get done. It's why working from home turned out to be much more efficient than I think any of us ever anticipated. But it's also why it's so intense. That's where nobody wants to be that person on the team who says, "I'm too tired," or who doesn't recognize, "Hey, we're not performing the way we expected to, so we need to step up."

Sherrienne J. ([17:58](#)):

And yet, if your team is exhausted and overwhelmed, you're still not going to get the result you want. So just because you're pushing, doesn't mean they just have the capacity. But again, no one wants to be the one who says, "I can't. I'm failing. I'm drowning. I'm overwhelmed."

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

That's right.

Sherrienne J. ([18:18](#)):

And so it is the lack of joy sometimes on their face. It is the frustration. It is the, you calling out where we need to go and seeing not an energized, "Attaboy," from the team, but a slump, a down trottleness. Those are cues. And when I describe them, literally, they don't seem that subtle. But in the intensity of just driving to your goals, you can easily miss them.

Sherrienne J. ([18:53](#)):

But you cannot because, again, when you need to get the job done, this is where I think for me, I'm constantly striking the balance, I don't want to say to my team, "Good enough is good enough," because it isn't. But I also want to make sure that if I'm seeing that they're struggling, that I'm stopping, pausing and understanding, because sometimes it could be as simple as, "Well, I didn't know you were doing that, that's that's not relevant anymore in the context of where we are. Put that aside so we can focus on this.

Sherrienne J. ([19:28](#)):

"Ah! I'm hearing you." This is because you still felt you needed to not only do the new task I asked you in the context of what's happening in the business, but some of the old irrelevant things. And the more senior you get, sometimes you're just not aware of all the little tasks, your team is doing.

Tegan Trovato ([19:47](#)):

Of course.

Sherrienne J. ([19:48](#)):

Especially when you get down to the more junior levels. And everybody wants to feel busy and everybody wants to feel that they're helping. And so you see what's being presented to you, but you don't understand all of the many little steps to get there. And learning that, is where you can clear a path for them to be really successful and help us achieve what we need to achieve.

Tegan Trovato ([20:14](#)):

Yeah. Great. One of the pieces that comes up for me is related to the discontent and resistance we may not notice, is the quiet and the silence, which, it's easier to hide now that we're remote. And I don't

mean that in a negative way. I mean, our employees aren't literally trying to hide, but it is easier to be quiet and for the quiet to go unnoticed.

Tegan Trovato ([20:37](#)):

And that's one of the things we've been seeing in leadership teams is that, like I'll ask an exec, "Well, how is so and so doing over in sales? How's your sales leader?" "Oh, I think he's doing all right. We haven't been connecting as much. I assume everything's fine."

Tegan Trovato ([20:52](#)):

Red flag. Let's not assume. We used to be able to assume because we could see someone in the office, we could check the face every couple of weeks and know that someone's doing fine. And I think now we really have to seek people out and really ask how they're doing.

Tegan Trovato ([21:06](#)):

But not in the box checking way. I have to ask in a different way now to really know. But I have noticed that's another way that discontent is going undetected. Our bodies are there, we're in the meeting, but we're able to hide any subtle discontent. So it's a challenge.

Sherrienne J. ([21:22](#)):

No. And I think that's where, when you're very fortunate and you have trusted advisors, even realizing that just because they're trusted advisors, they're still going to be caged. So I've been in situations where some of the people who have that confidence, who built the trust with me, that they're able to carry the difficult messages to me, have come to me and shared things.

Sherrienne J. ([21:54](#)):

I had to even learn that, just because they're coming to me and sharing things, they're going to be tempt because I'm still this C-suite individual. And so I have to realize that if they're saying, "Hey, the team is struggling with," or "Hey, the team is afraid of this," or "The team is yearning to know what's going to happen with this change," or "What does this new organization mean?" That, that probably means there's massive panic.

Sherrienne J. ([22:25](#)):

And even though they've said something so subtle, "Hey, you might want to talk to so and so," that probably means that they've been saying a lot to get that person to feel that they need to break the trust of their peers and come to you and say, "Hey, I'm a little bit worried about..."

Sherrienne J. ([22:43](#)):

That's the thing that I'm talking about, is that when you hear any feedback, just process it. And again, that doesn't mean you have to literally act on it, but you process it. And you may use it to then probe further to create a dynamic.

Sherrienne J. ([23:03](#)):

To say, "This is where I know we're going on a live business trip. And I was going to maybe spend time with them, focus on this business environment. Instead, I'm going to have dinner with that individual. And I'm just going to talk freely."

Sherrienne J. ([23:22](#)):

And this is very difficult for me. And I'm not going to have an agenda because, for the type of person I am, very results focused, very compartmentalized even when I'm going to have a dinner with someone who I've gotten feedback that they may be struggling. I want to have a beginning, a middle and an end. We start, we warm up, we start to get into questions. At the end, I've solved everything. You now go back to work and you're happy.

Sherrienne J. ([23:47](#)):

And I've had to realize, "No, I have to soften the ground. So step one is I'm going to have dinner with them. I'm going to humanize myself. I'm going to let them realize that I do care about them as individuals. And if that's all we accomplished, that's what we've accomplished."

Sherrienne J. ([24:07](#)):

If I'm very lucky, they may open up. But I need to create that safe space. And I think in today's environment, the reason it's so important that we listen as leaders is, we're hearing it from everybody about staff turnover, especially at the middle of your bench.

Sherrienne J. ([24:23](#)):

There was a time where I'm very fortunate with my staff, that I have 15 years, 12 years long tenured individuals. But you see at the N-minus three, N-minus four level, five, three, two, they're just churning. They're out. The slightest unknown, there are options for them. And in today's environment where employers are allowing you to work virtually.

Sherrienne J. ([24:50](#)):

And so people live in Austin and have employers in California, you need to be paying attention even more. That's where this type of listening is so important, so that you can keep engagement even in times when you're pushing your team to drive forward and drive change.

Tegan Trovato ([25:11](#)):

Yeah. I'm going to hit you with a softball question here about this dinner. This humanizing experience, because I just want to validate, this is very much what we hear at the C-suite level. That frankly, the other side of it, from C level clients for us is, "Do you know how few dinners they get to have with people they want to in their lives?"

Tegan Trovato ([25:34](#)):

There's just so much work. So I understand the resistance to just going and having a dinner when it's work related. We might rather be doing that with our daughter or our family, right.

Tegan Trovato ([25:44](#)):

So I just want to share that, for those listening, to just personalize that, that feeling is also, it's about drive. And then it's also just about low bandwidth. And I'm not speaking for you, Sherrienne, I'm very much generalizing when I say that.

Tegan Trovato ([26:00](#)):

I do want to ask you though, when you find that you've taken the time to slow down and to go into your humanness and just really connect with someone, forgetting the agenda, what is it like for you?

Sherrienne J. ([26:12](#)):

That's such an insightful layout that you did. And maybe for the people who get access to have dinners with their CEOs, I think it's even uncomfortable for me to say, but I know that the most joyous experience that I have with employees are the ones who can see the humanness in me and empathize and recognize that I want to be with my daughter, I want to be with my family, I want to be with my husband, but I'm here.

Sherrienne J. ([26:43](#)):

That being said, I enjoy when I have that. So it's empowering for those who may be listening to recognize that and have that empathy because leaders are human. And when they can have people in their team who are able to put their feelings first, it's naturally endearing to them. But conversely, talking to fellow leaders, there's a reason why they say it's lonely at the top. It is for all those reasons. You said.

Sherrienne J. ([27:16](#)):

It is for all those times where we're doing things out of the obligation, out of the service that we have to do as a leader. Motivating a team is complex. It requires them to trust you. It requires them to know you. But you can't be so casual and peer like in your interactions, that they're not able to have a separation of you, the human, and you, the leader.

Sherrienne J. ([27:47](#)):

So it's all caught up. So there are times where you want the heaviness of that C-suiteness and the power that it wields, but you really have to strike that balance in making sure that they see you as a human and you see them as human. But that's where it's always work. It's always work.

Sherrienne J. ([28:07](#)):

You go and you're having breakfast or coffee or whatever with employees, and you're never able to just completely let down your guard. So it's lonely because it's not the same as being with your family, but also for what we have, the privilege of leadership, it goes with the territory, right?

Tegan Trovato ([28:33](#)):

It does. And I'm not sure I've ever heard someone spell it out so eloquently. So thank you for really breathing life into what that experience is like.

Tegan Trovato ([28:42](#)):

And what came up for me as you shared that is just, the inability to ever get it right 100%. I mean, what you described is the opposite of black and white. It is not even a ball of yarn, it's much more integrated than that, how complex those relationships are. And I just think listeners are really going to benefit from having heard you articulate it that way, so thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([29:04](#)):

You mentioned, really, well, we talked a minute ago about training up the next level of leaders. And one of the things that comes up for me and that we hear from senior execs a lot is, the need for the people who do communicate with us to be strategic and concise and deliberate. All of those words. There's a lot more ways I would describe that.

Tegan Trovato ([29:25](#)):

But how do you go about helping the next level of leaders develop that quality of communication so that they can be heard, so that they are delivering the messages in the way the C-suite needs it?

Sherrienne J. ([29:37](#)):

That is an area where I did learn leadership empathy, because I see how, sometimes, especially I would say even more so at my N-minus two, there is a need when they communicate in an email to tell you everything.

Tegan Trovato ([29:58](#)):

Yeah.

Sherrienne J. ([29:59](#)):

So I'll get emails that are pages long. I think maybe it's still that fear. I don't want to leave anything out.

Tegan Trovato ([30:08](#)):

That's right.

Sherrienne J. ([30:10](#)):

And it's so gratifying when I have a person who is so curated in how they tell a story. No, it is a leadership style thing. I've heard many leaders say that they don't like facts. They don't like information being withheld from them. But I can say, I think there's a lot of power in employees who are able to give the right messaging to their leaders, so that they can have a partnership.

Sherrienne J. ([30:45](#)):

I always say to my team, "I want us to finish each other's sentences." "And I need to know when I'm not in the room, that there's nothing for me to worry about," because where that wrapped up. That requires proper communication. And if you just tell every minutia detail, first of all, you're not playing your role. You're not thinking.

Sherrienne J. ([31:10](#)):

You're putting everything back up there and saying, "You're the sole decision maker. There's not a partnership between you and your team anymore." But this is the coaching that I'm pushing down. It's like, "I want you to tell me what to think. Don't worry. I'm going to think for myself rather, you know that about me. So stop worrying. Stop worrying that you telling me what you think, is going to stop me from thinking. You should know me better than that."

Sherrienne J. ([31:35](#)):

I've said that to people. But there's this over-communicating. Sometimes I say, "You're vomiting. You're just vomiting it all." I'm like, "I want you to think like you're writing a newspaper article." "What's the headline. Start with that." "And then work down into the details from there."

Sherrienne J. ([31:58](#)):

But it's a lot of times, even when I... I remember once having an employee, called me in a panic. And I was in the airport trying to get through security. And they're just starting at the bottom of every ticky-tacky detail. And I'm trying to get my suitcase on the thing and they're screaming as they do at the airport. And I finally just said-

Tegan Trovato ([32:23](#)):

You must have been at O'Hare in Chicago.

Sherrienne J. ([32:25](#)):

I don't remember which airport it was.

Sherrienne J. ([32:29](#)):

And I said to them, "Here's what I'm going to do," I said, "I'm going to take my AirPods off because I have to go through security." But I was like, "When I call you back, you need to have thought through how you're telling me this story."

Sherrienne J. ([32:40](#)):

I was like, "I've been listening to you for 15 minutes, albeit in a very distracted state, but that is the reality of what you have right now. You have full access to me, but in an airport. So if you don't think through how you're going to use the next 10 minutes before I board that plane, we're both not going to get what we need, because clearly there's something you need to tell me, but you got to work it out."

Sherrienne J. ([33:04](#)):

"So contain that emotion, get to the headline. That needs to be a, 'Why do you need to know this right now?'" I think it was like 6:00 AM too. And then, "Bullet, bullet, bullet." And I was like, "If you start there, you're going to break through my confusion and then I'm going to digest the detail with you."

Sherrienne J. ([33:23](#)):

I had to literally walk them through that. And was my desperate need to get the information from them, that allowed me to not be nice, because sometimes I think we feel in this culture of servant leadership, that we're supposed to listen to the details and meander through it. And when I have the time I do it, but I want people who are working their way up to the C-suite to know that the person who's going to get there, is the one who can be very effective with their time with those leaders, and be very clarified on what it is you want them to take away.

Sherrienne J. ([34:04](#)):

"What do you want them to think?" Again, we are going to be pretty confident in thinking what we want. There's always this fear, "Well, am I allowed to tell them what to think?" Yes. You're absolutely allowed to tell them what to think.

Tegan Trovato ([34:17](#)):

Yes. Okay. What a gift you gave this leader. I mean this, if they were listening to your calling them up to another level, they had a life changing, career changing, opportunity in the airport with you on the phone. And anyone who's not in the C-suite that aspires to it, this is something that will keep you out of the C-suite. Your inability to say what it is you need someone, to your point, do, say, think, and where you want their attention and problem solving to go.

Tegan Trovato ([34:45](#)):

If you leave an ocean, they'll just pick which thing they need to work on for you. So well said, once again. Thank you, Sherrienne.

Tegan Trovato ([34:52](#)):

And I want to pivot a little bit. We have the great fortune of having your experience in serving at both the board level and operating inside of organizations. And I think listeners could benefit tremendously from hearing from you, about what your experiences have been like as a woman of color in these leadership roles over the years.

Tegan Trovato ([35:14](#)):

What would be helpful for us to know and hear from you today on that topic?

Sherrienne J. ([35:18](#)):

So one of the blessings that I have is, I actually was raised in Trinidad, which is a little island in the West. And the relevance of that comment is, I was raised as a majority, not a minority. And so it took me a long time to even know the misperceptions of being a Black woman, I just didn't know they were there.

Sherrienne J. ([35:47](#)):

And so that is a gift that I want to always support my other people of color with, but I most definitely want to give to my daughter. It's the gift of innocence. It's the gift of not even recognizing the microaggressions when they're there. That being said, as I've become more senior and gotten access to places that are rare for many and certainly therefore super rare for other females of color, the behaviors sometimes are not subtle.

Sherrienne J. ([36:27](#)):

And that's where I definitely have the privilege of financial comfort, so you're not in a Maslowian state. But I use that privilege. I use that privilege to call it out when it happens. And not call it out in a rage because sadly, that's just going to fill another trope of the angry Black woman anyway. But just say, "I'm not having it."

Sherrienne J. ([36:54](#)):

So if someone tries to say something about me, my team or something that's not true, I'm going to stop you right there. And then they're spun up. There's an indignation that if the same thing happened between them and another White male, they would never have that degree of indignation. So I've literally seen the rage and I'm okay with it. Not okay where I don't feel my palms being sweaty. Nobody likes to be in a room with an individual where you can feel that you're enraging them.

Sherrienne J. ([37:32](#)):

But then I go back to fear less. "You're not doing anything wrong. Don't raise your voice. Don't be disrespectful. Make sure that you can stand in your truth and say, 'There's nothing I'm saying here that isn't completely acceptable. Just because they don't that message coming from me, that's on you.'"

Sherrienne J. ([37:51](#)):

And that's what I try to do, to use my privilege of being in that rare air to teach that person who may be uncomfortable with someone who looks like me, talking to them as an equal, that I'm not going to take it. That's the first thing.

Sherrienne J. ([38:13](#)):

I think the second thing for me was a recognition. And this one's much more joyous. That sometimes me being in the room is so inspiring. And it's joyous, but it's also humbling and intimidating at the same time. So I remember the roles that I've played in companies often have me literally on stage speaking to thousands of individuals.

Sherrienne J. ([38:40](#)):

And I remember one young lady, an African American lady, came to me afterwards and said, "We were all rooting for you." And I naively said, "Who?" She's like, "All of us are their sisters." Honestly, that moved me. It really, it still does. And I had no idea. She's like, "Oh yeah, we have a whole group chat. And every time when you speak, we all are there. And that we feel so proud and we know that we can."

Sherrienne J. ([39:10](#)):

And I had no idea. I was just doing my job. I was trying to motivate the entire sales force, the entire commercial organization, because that was what I was sent there to do. And I didn't realize that in my effort to just do my job and try to do my best at doing it well, that I was sending a message that, "You too can be here." And that is such a privilege, that is such an honor. It's very humbling.

Sherrienne J. ([39:40](#)):

But it's also a joyous prize for getting here. That you can have that ability to just do your job and know that when you do it well, you are creating a mental space for others who look like you in the business. That is such an honor.

Tegan Trovato ([39:58](#)):

That is amazing. I love that. I could feel the emotion coming from you, recounting that. So Sherrienne, thank you for sharing that and for being an example for all of us in it too, it's really wonderful. I'm wondering how your leadership's evolved, in your opinion, over the last couple of years. And what do you think has really contributed to that?

Sherrienne J. ([40:21](#)):

I would say I'm a work in progress. So changes are so small. I'd have to probably take a much longer purview than even a couple of years to maybe talk about meaningful changes. But I know what I'm constantly trying to do and striving to do and I see the progress. And it's things like having such tremendous confidence, that when you know you're being slighted or you know that people's ego are what you're experiencing, to not internalize.

Sherrienne J. ([41:03](#)):

Now it's another subtle thing, because, I just talked about standing in your truth, saying what you have to say and not being intimidated by it, but also sometimes you don't have to react. You don't have to set the record straight each and every time. Sometimes you can play a long. You can know that you have people who are resistant to you and what you're trying to do.

Sherrienne J. ([41:35](#)):

And instead, in every moment you having to stand and say, "You are going to listen to me, I'm right. This is what we're doing," and pounding on the table, to accept that they're not there yet. Have enough confidence in what you're trying to do, to just chip away at it. And I think that's where I'm trying to evolve as a leader, which is deliberate practice because my strength is my get it all.

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

Yes.

Sherrienne J. ([42:05](#)):

Since I've been a baby in corporate America, every review said, "Sherrienne's drive." "Sherrienne's a bulldog." "Sherrienne's pushes."

Sherrienne J. ([42:14](#)):

It's always this... So now that I have more access to influence, it's just leaving the dinner where I didn't feel a major sense of accomplishment, and being confident enough that I'm chipping away. It's deliberate practice, that's what I'm working on.

Tegan Trovato ([42:37](#)):

Yeah. Powerful. Love it. Thank you. Where can our listeners find you online Sherrienne? What's the best way for them to follow you and keep track of what you're up to?

Sherrienne J. ([42:47](#)):

So I'm terrible at social media things. I'm the most active in a place that wouldn't be very interesting to the public. And it's on Facebook. And 80% of what I share is my child and her accomplishments.

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

And I love that idea.

Sherrienne J. ([43:06](#)):

I have a LinkedIn profile, but it's again, not something that I'm constantly engaging in content. It's definitely an opportunity area for me. So I'm on LinkedIn, I'm on Facebook, I'm on Instagram, but I discourage you from going to those.

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

Okay. Then we'll do everyone a favor and just put your LinkedIn handle in the show notes.

Sherrienne J. ([43:26](#)):

All right. Sorry.

Tegan Trovato ([43:27](#)):

Perfect. Listen, I want to ask you our signature question that we like to ask everybody who comes on the podcast. And that's, just first a reminder that, the intention of the entire podcast was to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills that the future leaders need in order to really keep leading these volatile systems that are not slowing down.

Tegan Trovato ([43:48](#)):

To get your read on what's required of future leaders, just finish the sentence. Leaders of the future will...

Sherrienne J. ([43:55](#)):

Fear less, believe more and do things with passion from your heart.

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

I love it. Sherrienne, thank you so much for joining us today.

Sherrienne J. ([44:07](#)):

Thank you. This was really fun. It was a great way to spend my Saturday, so thank you.

Tegan Trovato ([44:12](#)):

Same here.

Intro/Outro ([44:14](#)):

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.

Intro/Outro ([44:30](#)):

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Intro/Outro ([44:47](#)):

See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.