Welcome to the Workplace Forward Podcast, with your host, executive coach Tegan Trovato, founder and CEO of Bright Arrow Coaching. Are you a perpetually busy, always overstretched leader or executive who feels there's never time to keep up with leadership trends in an always changing landscape, much less self-care? Workplace Forward will help you overcome both challenges and gain peace of mind. 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 (00:55):

Hi leaders. Today on the podcast we interview Sangeeta, who is the CEO and founder of Gotara, which is a global career platform for women in STEM. Our conversation today is going to focus on how we create more diverse leadership pipelines, and we'll spend a good amount of our time probably focusing in on women because that is one of Sangeeta's big areas of focus in her work. And what I appreciate is that she is going to bring forward a rich view from her own experience over the years of her own leadership development, from working at companies like Amazon, Nielsen, GE Aviation, and GE Corporate Research and Development. She has a very prestigious academic background herself, having a PhD in Materials Chemistry, and an MS in Chemistry.

Tegan Trovato (01:47):

So it's really fascinating to learn from Sangeeta, how she has pooled her experience in such technical fields, as well as her experience in leadership, into something really meaningful and impactful in the world. So I'm very interested in asking her questions around how all of us can help to create more diverse leadership pipelines in our organizations, regardless of which seat we hold inside of those companies. Enjoy this conversation with Sangeeta. Sangeeta, welcome to the podcast.

D Sangeeta (02:19):

Thank you very much, Tegan.

Tegan Trovato (02:21):

Listen, before we dive in, will you please tell listeners what Gotara is all about, why you started it, because it really is going to inform a lot of our conversation today.

D Sangeeta (02:32):

Awesome. So Gotara, tara in Sanskrit means star, go reach for the stars, is the spirit behind the company. It's a tech platform for career growth of women in a STEM plus data related fields. So we have technology plus human intelligence that works together to help these women, and the employers to help nominate these women to go through these programs. That's what Gotara is about. And the reason I started this was a couple of different reasons. One is growing up in my own career, as an individual contributor, as a team leader, I would've loved this. I did have mentors, I had sponsors, but for sensitive questions, I didn't have a place I could go get good professional advice. And then, as a leader, where in various different organizations I was in, I wanted to ensure that my team was diverse, had diversity of thought, and it required hiring diverse talent, plus it required retention and growth of them. And we always struggled with that, we always struggled with that.

D Sangeeta ([03:46](#)):

My organization did better with on average, but it still was an issue. So as a leader of the organization, I would have liked a platform like Gotara as well. And finally, the third reason is, I just felt like I grew up in very male-dominated industries, like aerospace, energy and technology. And I could write drives to executive ranks and so can other women. I want to support women go up that ladder. And I can do this manually, maybe a few, 10 or 20, but I can't do millions of women in this fashion. So this is the platform that helps provide this and democratizes this to millions of women.

Tegan Trovato ([04:28](#)):

Love it. I so appreciate that you went and created what you felt was missing for you, and that many other women can say are missing for them. And a lot of men that we coach will say it's missing for them too, in terms of not being sure what to do or how to do it. So I'm excited to talk with you more today about how we create more diverse leadership teams. And I think, to start, I'd be curious, what are you seeing in terms of where we're really struggling to get that going? What do you think is often in the way of us creating a diverse leadership team?

D Sangeeta ([05:01](#)):

I think most of the folks want to do that, but they don't understand how. And they also don't understand how may actually it impact. And having gone through that experience in my own career where I was more attuned to it, and the other thing is, as being as a woman, a woman of color, you tend to automatically attract diverse talent. So you have a little bit of benefit from that perspective. However, what I found was, nobody's intentionally trying not to make their teams diverse, they just know what they know. They know how to hire, they have their own network of people, and the network looks like you. And so, as a result, you find people like you.

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

Mm-hmm.

D Sangeeta ([05:49](#)):

And so it takes a little bit of an extra hurdle to identify talent that looks different from you. I have always felt that that was very important thing to me as a leader. When I went to build my teams in each one of the organizations I worked at, I wanted them to have complimentary skills from me. I did not want to clone myself. I wanted them to challenge me, I wanted to learn from them, and that created a great learning environment for all of us and made us all curious. I just finished a meeting right now, and that was the case. People with very, very different background and some of the ideas they came up with, I would've never thought of that.

Tegan Trovato ([06:30](#)):

Right.

D Sangeeta ([06:31](#)):

And that is an awesome thing. This is where true diversity of thought comes in. Diversity of thought comes from different sex, different genders, different race, but also different education, different levels of experience, 5 years, 2 years versus 25 years, where you grew up could be also a diversity of thought, what field did you get the degree in? All those things are diversity of thought. And what I've found is, the

more diverse your team is, the better performing the team is. I have seen this firsthand happen. And in fact, some of the folks on my team would tell me it's more fun to be in diverse team.

Tegan Trovato ([07:14](#)):
Yes, it is. Then you don't hear the same ideas over and over again, right?

D Sangeeta ([07:19](#)):
True.

Tegan Trovato ([07:19](#)):
What comes up for me too, as you share how much you've welcomed and sought out diversity on your own teams, is the skill that we really have to have as executives to be emotionally intelligent, and to be able to appreciate healthy conflict and dissenting opinions. And I would say in the world, we're doing that not so well. In fact, we may all agree that we aren't agreeing well or disagreeing well anymore, maybe even worse than ever. So just came up for me, I thought I would call that out because I appreciate that about you. And I think it is part of our work as executives to keep growing our capacity, to hold space for dissent, differing opinions and healthy conflict. But it's uncomfortable.

D Sangeeta ([08:06](#)):
It is.

Tegan Trovato ([08:06](#)):
It really is, mm-hmm.

D Sangeeta ([08:07](#)):
Yeah, it is, Tegan. I think it's a very important point. And when we become leaders, obviously there are certain skills we have that make us be opinionated. And we have confidence in our opinion and which are all great things to have. But great leaders also have the ability to be open to challenges.

Tegan Trovato ([08:30](#)):
Mm-hmm.

D Sangeeta ([08:31](#)):
And I have been through this a few times in my career, not few times, several times. And I tell my folks, I'll always be opinionated. So don't think that I want to go this way, I am actually challenging you to come up with some new ideas and you can challenge me. And in many cases, I have done 180 degrees from where I was going. And I said, "You were right, this is a better idea." And to accept that at first feels like, oh my God, your IQ was challenged, somebody else. But soon after, you feel so good that you now have a team that can challenge you and you can come up with a better idea than what you had. Your idea just got better.

Tegan Trovato ([09:13](#)):
Yes.

D Sangeeta ([09:14](#)):

And that's the way we should all look at it, no matter which leadership in which organization in which field we are in.

Tegan Trovato (09:20):

Yes, love it. How can our listeners start activating the creation of a diversity pipeline and especially for women?

D Sangeeta (09:28):

Women as leaders or women individual [inaudible 00:09:31]?

Tegan Trovato (09:31):

Yes, yes. Thank you. Yeah, so women leadership teams, or sorry, executive and leadership teams. But how can we create a better, more diverse pipeline of talent for those, especially including women, since I think anyone listening probably knows that we have very few women in the executive space? And then the diversity from there is nil, right? So what can our listeners, as executives, start doing to create more diverse talent pipelines for executive and leadership teams?

D Sangeeta (09:58):

Yeah, so the data shows now that as college graduates coming into the workforce, we can actually have, in some cases, 50 to 60% women. So employers are doing great job recruiting from colleges. And in some cases, they're doing a great job of recruiting at the executive level. So they're kind of stealing other talent from the organization and they're there for a couple of years, then they move on. What is most critical, and very few companies in the world have figured this out, where they actually create a talent pipeline that fills those positions, so you don't have to steal other organizations' leaders.

Tegan Trovato (10:37):

Bring the leaders up inside of the organization instead.

D Sangeeta (10:40):

Exactly.

Tegan Trovato (10:40):

Yes.

D Sangeeta (10:40):

Exactly. And to do that, there are some intentional things that you have to do. It's not one time you send somebody to a leadership course and assume everything is going to get fixed. A lot of training that happens, it's hard for it to stick. So you need to have some continuation and some metrics that you measure your leadership team with, is what is going to create the pipeline. And that is what is going to give the trust and the respect and the value to the women in your organization to hang out with you for a longer period of time.

Tegan Trovato (11:14):

Mm-hmm. And what actionable steps could they take?

D Sangeeta ([11:18](#)):

So from the actions perspective, they can do a lot of things. They can...

Tegan Trovato ([11:21](#)):

Yes, give us as many as you can think of, Sangeeta.

D Sangeeta ([11:27](#)):

As you can think of. So there are lots of things you can do in hiring, and I'm not an expert for hiring, so I'm going to skip that. And I know you are, you've done that for a long time, and maybe you have some ideas. But I'm going to talk about retention and growth. And in retention and growth, there are things that you can do, we have talked about metrics, you can create metrics of promotion, of retention, of movement, of the women. Are they in line with the rest of the population or not? In addition to the KPIs, you can also make sure you're communicating to the organization what you care about. In fact, most organizations follow the leader. If they think that she cares about diversity in her team, they will care about diversity in her team. So those are the two things you can do. And the third thing that I would say is always look for opportunity to recognize them.

D Sangeeta ([12:22](#)):

And recognizing them, I mean, obviously can recognize them with cash, but recognizing them with learning opportunity, is something like what we offer and other companies offer, actually gives a boost to that individual. And what we call in our programs career sprints, they will actually do something very fast, that we can actually see impact of that. So I think these are some tangible things that they can do to help accelerate women's career, to become the pipeline of those leaders.

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

I love that you pointed out the opportunity to give experiences, and that's part of why you and I are both in the coaching space, as part of our approaches to development, because science has proven that is the best way people learn, is by actually going and doing and practicing versus just conceptually learning in a classroom, to your point about these often leadership programs. So I appreciate the thinking of being able to create experiences that produce measurable results and impact. When we think about creating more diverse middle manager pipelines and to the executive space, what are the business impacts or how might we consider the impacts to business metrics?

D Sangeeta ([13:35](#)):

Yeah, so when I think about my own career in corporate America, and now in Gotara the stuff that they care about, any business, my current business, or any company I work for, they care about the top-line growth and productivity and net profit. Those are the basic things. And if your teams are high-performing teams, your top line will grow and your profits will grow, right? And the data has proven that when you have more women leaders in the leadership role in your organization, financially, you have better outcomes. And second, you're actually closer to the customer, your relationship is much better. So why not have that? Why not have that? And so those are some of the things that I would say is how we measure. And then just measuring, in the same flow, the retention, the growth of promotion of these women is also critical.

Tegan Trovato ([14:40](#)):

Great. Ooh, so we're challenging the talent programs out there. You heard it here, there's lots of ways to prove our concepts and our theories here. So Sangeeta, as I was preparing for our interview, I did, of course, a lot of research, you know how I am. And there were two programs that stood out that I wanted you to tell listeners about. One is Ally Stars, the other is North Star Program. So they look like cousins, tell us what each of them does and why we might need to know about them.

D Sangeeta ([15:12](#)):

Yeah. So when we thought about this problem that we just talked about, of not having the pipeline of leaders, and to create that, you have to address this in a holistic fashion. It's empowering the women to grow in the roles, but also addressing the environment where some of the male colleagues and customers have come to me and said, "Hey, I need you to help me just like you're helping the women. Tell me, am I saying something wrong? Or I should be saying something I'm not saying. I want to learn."

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

Right.

D Sangeeta ([15:48](#)):

So then you get allies like that who are willing to learn. So as a result, we created Ally Star Program, and North Star Program is for women who are from anywhere from 1 year experience to 15 years plus, and we give them a combination of mentoring, coaching, and upskilling, on a goal that they may have for a short-term goal that they can actually focus on, and the skills that they need for that. So we address them both in a nano learning format. So 15-minute bite-size training and application. So we very much care about how they're applying. And our content is so much like the use cases that they experience, so these are real use cases that they've experienced, so they can pretty much take the content and apply it tomorrow or day after.

D Sangeeta ([16:38](#)):

And so it's very, very action oriented. They're really not taken out of work, they are in work and making the work more productive and in a very quick fashion. So that's why we call them career sprints. And same for the Ally Star, essentially the same application, just in time, any advice they need in a reactive fashion or content they need in a proactive fashion, we provide both of them. And then we provide insights at the end of any observations and trends and recommendations.

Tegan Trovato ([17:11](#)):

Oh, I love it. In coaching men privately in our practice, so many of them have kind of, I'll just say, have awakened, are more just curious about what it means for their daughters and their children to help create a more equitable workplace now. And privately, a lot of them will admit, "I'm just so scared to say something wrong or to screw something up. I don't know the language, I don't know the boundaries. I don't know." And so it causes some paralysis, and understandably, no one wants to get this wrong and we should care that much. But then there's this gap between moving past, being afraid and scared and finding the resources to help us unstick and move forward. I'm curious, in that vein, what might you tell listeners each person could do from their seat today?

D Sangeeta ([18:04](#)):

That's actually a wonderful question. I have to give it some thought, but when I think about what they could do from their seat, I think for the senior most leader, I think they need to be very clear in

communicating that they care about this topic, and they care about this topic because it impacts the business results. That's why they care about it. So I think the senior most leader need to say they care about this topic, and it needs to actually filter down almost unfiltered to each one of the leaders, where they should know that their leader cares and they should know that they're going to get measured on it. So it's almost no different than you have a vision and strategy for your large organization, and then as a second-year leader, or the third-year leader, you need to continue to narrow down that vision to your organization. So you can take the same thing and talk about your organization. So two different organization can be actually different. One could have diversity, another didn't have any diversity.

D Sangeeta ([19:12](#)):

So they could actually focus on hiring, whereas this organization could focus on retention and growth and other things. And as individual contributors, we all have a place to make sure that we are contributing in ways that we have the voice at the table, we make sure that we have the voice at the table, and we make sure that if we make any observations, in these interactions where somebody is being ignored, we bring them in to the picture. And it is much easier for another person to do that for their individual than to do it for yourself.

Tegan Trovato ([19:49](#)):

Yeah.

D Sangeeta ([19:49](#)):

So if you can help another colleague, you'll get that back in return in big, big way.

Tegan Trovato ([19:56](#)):

Yeah. Oh God, those are a couple of amazing ideas. Thank you.

D Sangeeta ([20:00](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([20:01](#)):

I want to personalize this even more now. So you told us at the beginning, in essence, that you created Gotara and its programs to fill a void that exists. I'm curious though, what crucible leadership moments you have had leading up to the genesis of Gotara, that you might share with leaders by your own personal journey?

D Sangeeta ([20:22](#)):

Yeah, so I think about my personal journey and there are lots of twists and turns in my personal journey. But a couple of things that I would definitely highlight is, as a leader, you got to be bold. You got to be bold. And sometimes to be bold, you have to break the rules. And I actually do not call them breaking the rules, I call them changing the rules because the rules are made by people, they're human beings. And sometimes they make wrong rules, and we got to fix them and we got to change them. So know that at some point in your career, you hit inflection point, where you're truly empowered, you don't have to ask for permission. If you feel like you have to ask for permission for everything all the way to the top of your career, you're doing something wrong because there is an inflection point. I felt it. And I leverage it to the fullest. I did things, I did not ask for permission.

D Sangeeta ([21:25](#)):

And for majority of the staff, leaders actually appreciate you doing that. So being bored, taking risk, doing and especially in this whole DEI space, experiment. Some experiments will fail, it's okay. [inaudible 00:21:43] more experiments, you will actually win and will be successful. You'll find new ways to make this more effective than you ever thought it would be. And one of my jobs, when I got the role, I had about 17 direct reports, and none of them were female. And I assume, just like any other tech field, it is because there are no women in the leadership role. Lo and behold, I find out that this organization has 50% of women of the population. And so I literally took three women and kind of double-promoted them to report to me. And I said, this is an experiment. If it works out, great, if it doesn't work out, I tried. And guess what? A year later, these women were my top five, they beat out 15 other guys.

Tegan Trovato ([22:34](#)):

Amazing.

D Sangeeta ([22:35](#)):

So we got to give them a chance when they don't get a chance, or they're afraid to ask for the chance, we got to give them a chance.

Tegan Trovato ([22:43](#)):

I love it. And it so resonates with me that some human made the rules, some other human's going to make the new rules. So you might as well be the leader. That's making the new rules. I love that.

D Sangeeta ([22:53](#)):

That's exactly right.

Tegan Trovato ([22:55](#)):

Love that. Sangeeta, the last three years have been nothing short of volatile, sub whatever other words you want for chaos. There's a million ways we could describe it. I've been asking leaders when I have the opportunity, and I'd like to ask you too, how your own leadership has evolved over the last few years in light of some of that volatility and instability in the markets, and socially, and economically, you name it. How have you noticed your own leadership evolving, changing, or adapting to respond?

D Sangeeta ([23:28](#)):

A couple of things that I would say, that I have noticed some changes or I'm hitting on those specific skills much more than I did in the past. So one thing that has stood out, that a lot of people have been fearful about, leaders or individual contributors, is working virtually. And even I was fearful, fearful about that. When I had quit Amazon and I was going to start Gotara, I knew that it was going to be a virtual organization for a while at least, before any brick-and-mortar could happen. And I was afraid, I've never worked from home, how am I going to do that? I'll feel so lonely and all that. And then the pandemic hit and everybody started, so everybody joined me so I didn't feel lonely. So that was a good thing. It didn't feel lonely from the experience perspective. However, since I had run global organizations, truly, truly global organization where my team members could be in 40 different countries, so I wasn't seeing them daily.

Tegan Trovato ([24:28](#)):

Right.

D Sangeeta ([24:29](#)):

And so I had to motivate them, get them to deliver on their goals. So communication was very key, and I did travel, I traveled a lot. But I could see them maybe once a year, or twice a year at the most, but we felt really connected because of our weekly calls and our metrics, our goals and objectives, and the way we made the team feel that they were connected. They had the pulse of the organization. And so as a result, they rose to the occasion and they delivered like crazy. And they themselves grew as leaders. So really that part of the stuff came in really handy for me because my whole team is totally virtual, nobody is in the same city. Well, I have somebody in Seattle and Cincinnati where I spend a little bit more time, but majority of our folks are all over the country, in fact, international as well.

D Sangeeta ([25:23](#)):

That is the change I have felt where we are 100% virtual. I mean, since we are a startup, we have met only twice in person and which feels awesome, we should do that definitely.

Tegan Trovato ([25:38](#)):

I know.

D Sangeeta ([25:39](#)):

[inaudible 00:25:39] more value time. It becomes much more value time. And the second thing that I would say that I have learned is be ready for the external environment to change on you. You cannot predict pandemic, you cannot predict the market downturn that we have just seen, you cannot predict what Supreme Court is going to do. So you got to be ready with the actions that you can take. And you'd be caught off guard at times, but it should not phase you. That's what I feel like. It should just not phase you, you should say, "Okay, you've been handed a lemon. Let's figure out how to make margarita out of it."

Tegan Trovato ([26:20](#)):

Mm-hmm, yeah. And drink them because you're going to need it. What is so interesting as you say that is it hits me, it's a pretty traditional executive competency to be able to act even with ambiguity, with so much ambiguity. But I think, as you're talking, it's even clearer to me how you're asking us to normalize that. Yes, you will need to act from greater ambiguity than we've ever had, unexpected ambiguity. And I'm just appreciating that so much because that was certainly part of the conversation for leaders and executives for many years, but now it's like table stakes.

D Sangeeta ([27:00](#)):

Exactly, that's the point. Yeah.

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

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Brilliant.

D Sangeeta ([27:04](#)):

New normal has shifted.

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

Yes. Yes, indeed. I love that. And you said something along the lines of, I can't remember the words, it shouldn't feel...

D Sangeeta ([27:14](#)):

I shouldn't feel like what...

Tegan Trovato ([27:16](#)):

When you have to act, it shouldn't feel... I don't know, maybe you're trying to say it shouldn't feel abnormal to have to act from a place of ambiguity.

D Sangeeta ([27:24](#)):

Yeah. And the situation is handed to you, so you have to deal with it.

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

Yeah.

D Sangeeta ([27:32](#)):

I don't know exactly what word I use.

Tegan Trovato ([27:34](#)):

Yeah, I'm sorry. Well, listeners probably already know because they just heard it, they'll have to tell us. But I do think what also comes up for me there is how just by acting, even if it does feel like a stretch or it feels uncomfortable, our nervous systems will adjust over time to being able to act without all the information or data we usually have. And so it will feel less scary over and over as we do it more and more. So just some encouragement for folks who feel like, "Ugh, I don't want to act without all the info." But it'll become normal and safe eventually.

D Sangeeta ([28:05](#)):

Yeah. It's okay not to know everything. A good leadership actually is where you don't have all the data and you have to make the decision without that data. It's no different here.

Tegan Trovato ([28:17](#)):

Absolutely. Sangeeta, I feel like you and I could talk for hours and I may call you back and do that just for fun. But for now tell listeners how we can find you online and learn more about Gotara.

D Sangeeta ([28:28](#)):

Yeah. So you can find me on LinkedIn as D Sangeeta, and you can also find me on gotara.com, G-O-T-A-R-A.com. And you can message me and get connected to me. I'd love to talk to you.

Tegan Trovato ([28:43](#)):

Thank you. And we'll be sure to include the links for your profiles in the show notes as well. And listeners, you have to go and read Sangeeta's bio. It is nothing short of impressive, so we'll be sure to include her full bio in the show notes as well. And in closing, Sangeeta, I want to ask you our signature

question that we love to ask all of our guests, and as a reminder to you and our listeners, the whole point of us creating this podcast was to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills that leaders of the future need so that they can lead these systems that seem to never stop changing. So to get your read on what's required of leaders in the future, finish this sentence. Leaders of the future will...

D Sangeeta ([29:23](#)):

So leaders of the future will have as much EQ as IQ. I think the pandemic has taught us that, and the future of work has arrived today. And if leaders do not have that, they're going to have a hard time. And there has been a study shown where women who have stuck out in this pandemic as leaders have done a great job of holding this team together, and really providing that emotional support there. So from that perspective, I will say to all the women leaders, don't quit in this pandemic, this is your opportunity, since World War II, to shine, as women leaders.

Tegan Trovato ([30:11](#)):

Sangeeta, I got goosebumps from every point you just made, which means it felt true for me at a soul level. So thank you for those parting words. Thank you for setting aside time for us, as busy as you are, and really appreciate your candor in sharing your journey as well.

D Sangeeta ([30:28](#)):

Thank you, Tegan. This was an awesome conversation. You can tell that I'm really passionate about all the topics you talked about, and I would love to learn about you in another setting.

Tegan Trovato ([30:38](#)):

You've got it.

D Sangeeta ([30:39](#)):

Thank you, thank you.

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

Thanks.

Outro ([30:41](#)):

Thank 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 & Leadership Development? Visit the website at www.brightarrowcoaching.com. See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.