

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

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

Suzanne Coonan joins us today to talk about crucible leadership moments and desirable difficulty. Suzanne partners with high performing, high achieving leaders to navigate challenging and complex environments, advance their careers, manage their energy, and find more meaning and balance in work and in life. She has been in leadership development for the last 20 plus years, most recently as a senior executive coach for one of the world's largest global technology companies. She's passionate about helping leaders develop strategies to build resilience and thrive in these evolving times and loves connecting with people, possibilities and the outdoors. In addition to Suzanne's professional bio, I can personally tell you that what it doesn't truly capture is how highly sought after she is as an executive coach, how very many interesting life and professional experiences she's created for herself, and how huge her passion is for both her family and for helping leaders. Suzanne, thank you for joining us today.

Suzanne Coonan ([01:53](#)):

Thank you, Tegan. So good to be here.

Tegan Trovato ([01:55](#)):

Yeah, thank you. I want to start first as a coach, I must ask you about your values. I mean, values are fundamental to everything we humans do, whether we're conscious of it or not. Given that we're going to talk about crucible leadership moments, desirable difficulty, and in general what it's like to work in leadership development. What are the two values for you that influence your work, like your top two values?

Suzanne Coonan ([02:23](#)):

Good question. So for me, it really comes down to connection and possibility. And as a coach, we often do a lot of values exercises, and there may be those common ones, health and happiness and family and achievement. And I was recently inspired by a podcast from Brené Brown interviewing Jim Collins, the author of Good To Great. And she asked him, "What are your top two values?" And I was really, really struck by that conversation and very much influenced by it. So Brené, she's very famously known as saying, "My two values are faith and courage." And I was wondering what Jim Collins was going to say, and he said, "Mine are curiosity in relationships."

Suzanne Coonan ([03:09](#)):

And in this podcast they explained why, if you can boil down the essence of your values into two words, it can really guide all of your decisions, and really help you make choices as we're navigating this really incredibly unprecedented time and use those values as an anchor. And so for me, connection is really

about connecting with people, and connecting with nature, and connecting with the ones that I love most. And if I can connect with myself, then that could lead to things like health and joy and possibility. So for me, it really does come down to those two things.

Tegan Trovato ([03:54](#)):

I love the idea of being able to summarize it into two anchors. That's powerful. Okay, homework assignment for Tegan, number one, after this podcast, boil down my top 10 values into 2 buckets. I love it. So how has navigating the challenges over the last two years in your experience, brought out the best in leaders? So if you're seeing connection and possibility as anchors for your work, this is all about possibility. So what good have you seen come from the last couple of years?

Suzanne Coonan ([04:23](#)):

I think what we've been experiencing has really pushed us to the brink of questioning what really matters. And that's why values are such a key part of it. And leaders are taking a step back and saying, wow, we're experiencing this pressure, this pace, it is really unprecedented. So how do we navigate it in a sustainable way, especially when so many people around us are struggling and maybe are even unhealthy and they're just not able to keep up with it. And so what I feel is happening is it's really creating this opportunity for reflection. We now have more time and space for reflection than we haven't had because we're not sitting in two hours of traffic commuting, or on an airplane in the airports flying overseas for a business trip. So there's more time and space for reflection.

Tegan Trovato ([05:28](#)):

If we consciously choose it is the key, not just fill that time with more work, which is pretty common. So love that you're bringing that opportunity forward. Okay. Yep.

Suzanne Coonan ([05:38](#)):

Yeah, so reflection. I also think what's happening is this importance of connection too, and where it's causing leaders to have more empathy and compassion because they see the people on their teams who are struggling with being working parents while working remotely, when the demands and intensity are going up. So this notion of empathy and compassion, which is being much more integrated into the workplace more than ever today. And it's actually leaders are being asked to step up and really understand and connect with what their people on their teams are challenged with and faced with. So the importance of having that empathy, having compassion, and ultimately being self-aware, recognizing what's going on in themselves and what's going on in others.

Suzanne Coonan ([06:35](#)):

And then finally I would say just the importance of managing your energy. Because given everything, given the pace, and the pressure, and the complexity, we can't keep going 24 by 7. It's just not sustainable. So how do you really take care of yourself and manage your energy so that you have energy for the people and the projects that matter most to you?

Tegan Trovato ([06:58](#)):

I had the great fortune of having you on our previous podcast, the Life and Leadership Podcast to talk about resilience. And I know that you are just in a master's level study constantly on resilience. You coach leaders on this topic all the time. And when you just said manage your energy, that came back up for me. Okay, we're getting back to some of the core pieces of resilience, which you identified some of

them here I think, the importance of managing your energy, even practicing empathy and compassion. I think you've told me before that those are sub components of resilience. So if we go back to that topic for a minute, what strategies are you coaching leaders on lately for building resilience?

Suzanne Coonan ([07:39](#)):

Yeah, so one of the things that I'm seeing right now is that leaders are being put in situations they've never been in before.

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

For sure.

Suzanne Coonan ([07:50](#)):

It's novelty, it's new. It's these challenges that are at a scope and scale they've never seen or never experienced before on top of a global pandemic, on top of working virtually from home when your team might be scattered all over the world. So it's this incredible volume and layers of complexity, and challenge, and magnitude with novelty, something they've never seen or experienced, and lived or led through before. So that really requires you to tap into resilience. And one of the first steps, I believe, is to really embrace change. So it is about radically accepting, instead of wasting sort of your energy, resisting or rationalizing, or being frustrated or angry or annoyed, I mean it's healthy to experience those.

Tegan Trovato ([08:44](#)):

You have to experience those sometimes. Absolutely.

Suzanne Coonan ([08:46](#)):

Yeah. You want to experience them and process them in a really balanced manner and then really quickly get to acceptance. So radically accepting what is. And we may not like, or appreciate, or agree with what's happening or the circumstances we're faced with. And the sooner we get to acceptance, the sooner we can take positive action and move forward.

Tegan Trovato ([09:08](#)):

Absolutely.

Suzanne Coonan ([09:09](#)):

So I think that's one of the major strategies for building resilience. And then it's about having a clear vision and a roadmap. And this is something that the company I'm at recently does really well. How do you look to the future, two to three years down the road and build a roadmap? And leaders, this is something that most leaders are really good at. It's coming up with a vision and a strategy and a roadmap for how to get there. And then you work backwards. You create a plan for how am I going to get to where I want to be two to three years from now? And often when we're in really difficult circumstances, you're so focused on the present because you're in really survival mode. And it's hard to not just be looking at what's right in front of you. So the value of picking your head up and saying, not only getting a broader, bigger perspective of what's happening, but saying where do I actually want to be a year or two from now? And then what's my roadmap for getting there?

Tegan Trovato ([10:16](#)):

I love that. I want to point out, when you used the word novelty, I felt the ickiness deflate out of the situation we're all in right now. And I simply want to call that out for listeners and please respond if there's anything here for you on this too, Suzanne. But just the language we can use to describe what we're in has so much power. And I even am real sensitive in my own life about that. I could always be more sensitive. I try to reflect that back to my clients too, because we don't want to Pollyanna what's happening, we don't want to bypass the pain of what we are in or have been in.

Tegan Trovato ([10:53](#)):

And I know, because I felt it, even in that moment of you describing, yeah, the novelty of all of this. You could have chosen a different word. You could have said the craziness of all of this or the intensity of all of this, but you used the word novelty, and novelty is inviting the very experience you're talking about when it comes to resilience, of embracing change and just radical acceptance and gosh, that really stuck out. And I want to call that out for folks listening too.

Suzanne Coonan ([11:21](#)):

I love that you picked that up. So that is awesome Tegan. And if you think about it, words do matter in language matters 100%. And one of my favorite professors from grad school, David Cooper [inaudible 00:11:34], talks about our words create the worlds we live in. And so the words we choose really do matter. And what I love about novelty is that when we're going through new experiences. That by the way may be very challenging. If we look at it as novelty and embrace it as an opportunity to learn and grow, then that's when the possibilities emerge.

Tegan Trovato ([12:01](#)):

Absolutely. I'm also laughing to myself because we have a 22 month old at home and nothing will help you choose your language like a little parrot child sitting at your dinner table. So we have certainly upleveled our language a little bit in our house to choose very specific words, we care to hear repeated back 20 million times in the same day. So that's a nice way leaders could practice as well. What if I'd hear this word repeated back to me 20 times today? Did I use the right language?

Suzanne Coonan ([12:28](#)):

Love that. What a great tool for awareness.

Tegan Trovato ([12:30](#)):

Oh my God. Absolutely. She's our little teacher in this house for sure. Well, let's talk a little bit about crucible leadership moments. And I just want to give you the floor on this. I know this is again one of your areas of just deep study and thinking. We're in a place where all the things we just mentioned completely fold into that, but also not even just temporarily, this is what the leadership journey's all about. So tell listeners how you would define crucible leadership moments.

Suzanne Coonan ([13:02](#)):

Yeah, that's great. Well, so I was influenced by a Harvard Business Review article that was called Crucibles of Leadership from Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas. And this was actually originally published in 2002, and they defined crucible experiences as intense or traumatic experiences that have the potential to transform leaders for better or for worse. And really struck by this. So while this may

not be a new concept necessarily, I've seen a lot of research and iterations on it. And what I can tell you is that because of the circumstances that we're living and leading in today, this notion of crucible leadership moments to transform us is incredibly relevant and powerful. Particularly when we can tap into them intentionally as an opportunity to navigate through these novel experiences and to grow and learn in a healthy and sustainable way. And so I love this concept and so I will ask you this, Tegan. I get to ask questions too.

Tegan Trovato ([14:16](#)):

You sure do. Bring it on.

Suzanne Coonan ([14:20](#)):

When you think about the moments in your life where you've grown the most personally and professionally, and I see that smile, is there anything coming to mind for you? That, like man, that was a crucible moment for me. It transformed me, it tested me, and it maybe was a fiery place. That's the term, crucible, by the way, comes from those medieval times, is the vessel that was used to turn metals into gold.

Tegan Trovato ([14:48](#)):

Okay. So yes, the intensity of that is clear.

Suzanne Coonan ([14:53](#)):

So do you have something that comes to mind for one of the experiences?

Tegan Trovato ([14:56](#)):

Okay. Oh yeah. Do you me to share?

Suzanne Coonan ([14:57](#)):

Yeah, I would love to if you're open to it.

Tegan Trovato ([14:59](#)):

There's two. There's one that I felt I got to choose, which was working in a high growth organization and creating their first learning and development program. And it was intense, and highly visible and a wonderful stretch of my capabilities.

Suzanne Coonan ([15:18](#)):

Yeah. What made it challenging or difficult for you?

Tegan Trovato ([15:21](#)):

What made it challenging was I'd, one, never done it before. It in its pure form.

Suzanne Coonan ([15:26](#)):

Novelty.

Tegan Trovato ([15:27](#)):

Novelty. There it is. There it is again. And boy, was it novel? Yeah, I'd never done it before. There was a lot of visibility, a lot of visibility. There were financial expectations, which are really tough when you're creating something new and there's no P in the P&L. You're just overhead. So I think those were three key pieces. And the executive team, and this is why it was high growth, they said, "Tegan, the end result needs to be X. What we do to get there is totally up to you." And even when you're given those, that's a huge opportunity, especially for someone like me, the way I'm wired, I'm like, yes, that is a gift. But you do still question yourself constantly on, I know they said that I have this much autonomy, but are they really going to like it when I do X? Are they really going to like it when I do Y? So there's just this kind of constant uncertainty. Constant uncertainty about how you'll be received.

Suzanne Coonan ([16:26](#)):

Yeah. And so how did you navigate that uncertainty when you were in it, when you're in the moment?

Tegan Trovato ([16:32](#)):

I think there was a ... These are such good questions. Are you going to send me an invoice? Are we like going to be square? So I think some of the things I was able to do was call on previous experiences. So even though I'd never done this before, I was obviously using a mix of skills I'd developed over time. And so I was able to kind of reflect back on moments that gave me confidence before I took this role. There was a real commitment to the outcome. And I was working, I won't even say the hours I worked because they were ungodly and I don't encourage people to do it. But I did. I worked insanely intense time every week because I was so excited to see this thing through and I knew it could change lives and it did. So there was just a real commitment to that purpose, I think.

Suzanne Coonan ([17:25](#)):

Oh, I love that. I love that. And so what did you think you learned the most about yourself from that experience?

Tegan Trovato ([17:30](#)):

You heard me talk earlier with such conviction about this was the perfect job for someone like me. I didn't know that at the time. I know that now as a result of that experience. So I feel like that was such a great thing for me to come to understand about myself. I don't need handholding. I need space, actually am much better. That's why I'm an entrepreneur. I need the sky to be the limit and us to be focused on purpose and outcome and I deliver. And so that was a really great thing to learn about myself because it changed the trajectory of my entire life a few years after.

Suzanne Coonan ([18:06](#)):

Ooh, that's big.

Tegan Trovato ([18:08](#)):

It sure is it. Sure is.

Suzanne Coonan ([18:11](#)):

And it sounds like that experience, that crucible moment, that was difficult and energizing and a huge learning for you led you to where you are today.

Tegan Trovato ([18:25](#)):

It absolutely did.

Suzanne Coonan ([18:27](#)):

And that's what I love about these experiences. And so when you think about that connection, and that's what I would encourage everyone listening to think about. What were those times in your lives personally or professionally, where you learned and grew the most? And how did it lead you to where you are today?

Tegan Trovato ([18:48](#)):

Love it. Yes.

Suzanne Coonan ([18:50](#)):

Because when you're in it, it can feel difficult and crappy. And you may remember the 1:00 AM in the morning working and just how tired and exhausting it is and depleting and thinking I can't go on. And I also believe it's helpful to implement some strategies for managing your energy during these crucible moments so it is sustainable in the long run. And I think that is what the message is, that these moments can be incredible opportunities for growth and accelerated development. And if they're done intentionally in a healthy, sustainable way, it's literally the formula for how we can thrive when so much around us is changing so fast and so complex.

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

So let's poke at this. I don't need to share the second example that I had because of course it will take forever. But I will say this, it was not a positive one. Like, the first I signed up for it. I had to put my hand up, I was selected, yay. Everybody was happy. The second one was horrific. It was traumatizing almost from a work experience. It was hard. And I did not choose that. I felt like it happened to me, and yet it also changed my life for the better in the long run. I'm curious though, when you hear those two versions of crucible moments, you mentioned something like intentionality in how we kind of manage ourselves through it. How do you tend to coach leaders through the second version of that story, which is, I did not sign up for this. This hurts, can I do this? Where do you take leaders then on that journey of crucible moments?

Suzanne Coonan ([20:33](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. Well, here's what I've come to learn through really researching and collecting data and information on this topic. And even being asked to speak at one point, this was one of my personal crucible moments when I was asked to speak at a Fortune 100 company in a TED style talk about how do you really thrive in involving times from a positive perspective. Not just how do you overcome adversity? And by the way, that was something that really pushed me out of my comfort zone. And through that process, I identified this really interesting framework, which was to say that ultimately we can grow and build resilience from negative experiences just as much as we can from positive experiences. And what we know is that often those negative unplanned times, that's sort of the wake up calls. Gosh, there are some people who not only survive, but go on to excel and even thrive from those circumstances, but not everyone does, not everyone can bounce back.

Suzanne Coonan ([21:40](#)):

So you, Tegan, because of your skills and how you navigated that and because of your past experiences, you had a strong base and a foundation and you had capacity built that helped you to climb out of that experience and come out even better and stronger. So the idea is how can you extract what you learned from that negative and unplanned event, that wake up call, and bring that forward with you intentionally and put yourself in what we call a desirable difficulty. And this actually comes from David Peterson. He was the former head of coaching at Google. I've heard him speak a number of times, and he talks about the importance of putting yourself in a plan or a positive situation, like a desirable difficulty to be able to get out of it.

Suzanne Coonan ([22:33](#)):

If though you find yourself in one of those negative, unplanned, unexpected situations, that's then where you can pull in those strategies for resilience. And it's really tapping into embracing change, and having a vision and a roadmap for the future, and using your values to guide your decisions, getting help and support. And then ultimately in the end, being able to take care of yourself and others. So if you're in that negative situation, and it's unplanned and it's really difficult, that's when you intentionally draw on your strength and the strategies for resilience to navigate it.

Tegan Trovato ([23:16](#)):

Tell us more about desirable difficulty. I heard you slip that in there. So let's talk even more about that, especially maybe what the benefits are of intentionally putting yourself in those situations, especially during the times we're in right now. I want to ask that question, but then also say if you're listening and you're having the toughest of times already, we may learn something here in the next few minutes about what it might look like to put your hand up for more even right now, which may sound unimaginable given how taxed we are. But sometimes I think that's what leaders, especially very talented leaders, actually need to get out of their funk, is to sign up for the more that is strategically good for them. So tell us about the benefits of intentionally doing that.

Suzanne Coonan ([24:04](#)):

Yeah, so giving yourself a desirable difficulty is really saying, hey, you know what? I have something to contribute here. I have some strengths and I have a vision for what is possible and I'm going to say yes to it. And so it's really interesting, Tegan, as over the last two years, I had the opportunity to be a coach and facilitator for our leadership program. And we did an exercise where we had each of the leaders actually share a crucible moment story. So I've heard hundreds of leaders share their stories. And what I've learned from that experience is a couple of themes.

Suzanne Coonan ([24:47](#)):

First of all, what's super interesting is people walk away from the experience hearing each other's crucible moment stories and saying, "Wow, I can't believe everyone else has faced amazing, incredible challenges as much as I have. I'm not alone. I'm not the only one who's been through it before."

Suzanne Coonan ([25:09](#)):

The second insight has been, "Wow, I never realized until stopping, and pausing, and reflecting and talking about these experiences, how valuable they were. They may have been incredibly difficult but they were also incredibly valuable."

Suzanne Coonan ([25:26](#)):

And the themes that I picked up is exactly what you said. The circumstances that created the crucible moments were either something positive, an unexpected opportunity, tap on the shoulder, "Hey Tegan, can you head up this new L&D function, leadership development function, or learning and development function." Or "Hey, we want you to take on this new big project that has never been done before." So it was sort of either something new and never been done before, or it was managing a crisis. Very, very serious crisis where in some cases, life and death. Or it could have been a really, really difficult, challenging project that was a mess that needed to be taken over and really, really difficult. But the common theme between both of those: novelty, So something new, never been done before.

Tegan Trovato ([26:27](#)):

The word of the day.

Suzanne Coonan ([26:28](#)):

Exactly. Either brand new opportunity, like big challenge being tapped on the shoulder or huge problem to solve, massive crisis or a challenge. So those were sort of the contextual circumstances around the situations. So could be perceived either as something really negative or positive. And it also reminds me, Tegan, of the word challenge. Because I think challenge is the word that bridges both of those two that we just talked about. So challenge is one of those words that sits on the fence and can be either negative or positive.

Suzanne Coonan ([27:07](#)):

So a challenge could be something that if it's just enough, at just the right level, can be really energizing. It sounded like the story you shared with us of your crucible moment was one of those positive healthy challenges. But when it gets too much and it's beyond maybe what you have the capacity for or the resource for, it could tip it over to be a negative, whoa, that was really challenging. So it's how do you find that balance between a challenge that is healthy for you, that pushes you versus a challenge that takes you under?

Suzanne Coonan ([27:47](#)):

Yeah, those are some of the themes, but then what I saw is how people navigated those situations and the resources they tapped into getting the help and support, the importance of relationship and communication, and trust and having a shared meaning and purpose. And that's something that I heard in your story too, was how much this mattered. And that's what it's all about is finding the meaning, finding the shared purpose, and really using that as an anchor to guide what you do and how you navigate it.

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

I love it. I have to go back to the beginning of your explanation and we'll keep moving from there. But I just want to reiterate, I mean, the power of you taking leaders through this exercise together for them to just understand they're not alone. Like the phrase you said you heard a few times was I'm not alone. And gosh, that's so important right now. It will forever be important in leadership. I think that's the thing we do not understand about leadership until we are a few years into our leadership journey. Yes, it's lonely, but it doesn't have to be. But wow is it, until we figure that out. We think we're the only ones. It's such a vulnerable place to admit we're struggling or we don't know what we're doing. And then you find out a few years in, oh, everyone's struggling. No one knows what we're doing. We're all just doing the

best we can. That's what leadership is. But gosh, until we make that connection, it's a lonely spot. And I think that's why CEOs probably always feel that way because they don't have as much comradery.

Suzanne Coonan ([29:31](#)):

Exactly. Right.

Tegan Trovato ([29:32](#)):

To transcend that lonely place. So what a beautiful gift you gave those leaders to just find out I'm not alone.

Suzanne Coonan ([29:42](#)):

Well, a couple of things. I mean, first of all, you are so spot on about the isolation, and I think it is magnified even more because of what we've been operating in the last two years.

Tegan Trovato ([29:53](#)):

I agree.

Suzanne Coonan ([29:53](#)):

And everyone is kind of isolated in their home offices if you're in the corporate world. And so it is intensified, it's magnified even more. And so the value of having people share their crucible moment experiences out loud and hear each other's stories, and then extract the themes, both the actions that happened, the results, the learnings, really, really powerful. So one thing I would encourage leaders to do is say, "Have you shared that story with your team?" Because wow, that's a vulnerable moment often. These times bring out the best and the worst in us.

Tegan Trovato ([30:41](#)):

Naturally.

Suzanne Coonan ([30:41](#)):

So to be able to share that with your team, it shows vulnerability. And as we know, vulnerability builds trust. So the opportunity to share these stories with your teams and then to hear their stories, it kind of makes you feel like, wow, this is what brings us together, this is what connects us is that we've all been through experiences like this before. And so it makes you feel like we're in it together, we're not alone. And gosh, if I've been through that in my past, I have the resources in the capacity and the capability to handle new challenges that come my way.

Tegan Trovato ([31:25](#)):

Yeah, I love it. And I love that you're encouraging them to go share these stories with their team Suzanne, because that's how we develop future leaders. That's how we develop our talent, is for them to hear our journeys. It stops that perpetuation of that loneliness cycle because we're teaching other future leaders they don't have to keep everything a secret, that we should share these things and talk about them together. So I love that. You also mentioned that a lot of these leaders, it sounds like hadn't taken the time to really reflect on their journeys and understand the value of the experiences until you gave them that opportunity. So assuming that most of the people listening are not in a large global tech firm with an awesome exec coach like you at their disposal, what might you, and this may be a very

simple instruction you give. But how can leaders listening reflect so that they can have some of these same aha moments about their desirable difficulties?

Suzanne Coonan ([32:25](#)):

I love that. And really it is about creating a structure or a process for reflection. So what I would encourage leaders to do, if you can daily, some type of journaling, whether it's at the beginning of the day or the end of the day, what's my intention for the day? What do I hope to get out of it? And or what did I learn most from my day yesterday? So really building in a process and structure for reflection, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly. We're coming up at the end of the year. I have an annual process, which you may be aware of, Tegan.

Tegan Trovato ([33:03](#)):

I know and I love it too.

Suzanne Coonan ([33:05](#)):

Of really kind of taking a look back in the year and what did I learn? What are things that I'm proud of? What didn't I get to that I wanted to get to this year? Who were the people who had the biggest influence on my life? And what do I hope for next year? And so there's a lot of power in taking the time to reflect, and leaders who are so busy and who are operating in such a fast paced environment often don't make it a priority. And what we know from the science is that our learning deepens and accelerates when we capture our reflections from what's happening. So being able to have the time and space to reflect on our experiences that happen will make us better leaders.

Tegan Trovato ([33:57](#)):

Love it. And to use your words then, really looking for the novelty and the challenge as they're reflecting.

Suzanne Coonan ([34:05](#)):

Yes.

Tegan Trovato ([34:06](#)):

Love it. I just want to say back for listeners, just to highlight it. You mentioned a few things that were really important for leaders to feel supported through their desirable difficulty, and that's really setting up resources that support them, leaning on relationships, communicating, having trust and having shared meaning and purpose on their journeys. Again, no need to respond again, Suzanne, unless you have more to add there, but I just want to call that out because I think you gave just this amazing recipe and it was so fast. And I just wanted to go back to it and say, okay, when you put up your hand and you are ready for that desirable difficulty, remember that. You don't have to figure it out. It has been figured out. Those are some things that you can put in place for yourself. It will make the journey a little bit easier, it sounds like.

Suzanne Coonan ([34:54](#)):

Absolutely, 100%. And I feel that not only can we put ourselves in desirable difficulty as a way to learn, and to grow, and to accelerate our impact in a positive and planned way. We can also create the conditions for others who are on our team to be able to give them intentional crucible moments. So

those stretch experiences or exercises that you tap someone on the shoulder on your team, someone you believe has potential that you can see in them, that you know they're ready for something else. Maybe you see them as a potential successor to you. So be thinking about, wow, if I've grown and learned so much from my own crucible leadership moment, how can I in turn provide that to somebody else with support, with a specific learning in mind? And that is how you can support someone in their own growth and development journey.

Suzanne Coonan ([36:03](#)):

So it's not only doing it for yourself, And by the way, my takeaway for you and me, and for everyone listening, is to think about a desirable difficulty for 2022 that you'd like to put yourself in. And something that is new, that the results matter, that it means something to someone, and maybe it's even a bit uncomfortable. So think about what that might be for yourself. And then you can also think about how can I create that opportunity for someone in my world, whether it's in your family, in your team, a friend, someone that you're coaching or mentoring. Really, how can I create those conditions for them? Because then you're supporting someone else's growth and development.

Tegan Trovato ([36:56](#)):

Oh my God, I love this. You know I love good homework assignment. So challenge accepted. Thank you. So think about a desirable difficulty for the year that I want to put myself in where results matter. It's something new, and it also matters to someone else, maybe not just to me. So thank you. Take in listeners. Can't wait to hear what you come up with. You'll have to let Suzanne and I know, yeah, Suzanne, what came up for you there.

Suzanne Coonan ([37:18](#)):

Yeah. Well, what I was just remembering was, as I was thinking in my head, what's going to be my desirable difficulty for 2022, is it reminded me of Adam Grant's talk on languishing. So I don't know if you saw he did, he wrote this article that went viral on languishing. It's sort of that in between place where you're not crazy like depressed, and you're not also feeling a lot of energy and joy. You're in the middle. You're in that languishing place. Well, the article went so viral that he ended up doing a TED Talk on it, and I don't know, did you see it? Did you see the TED Talk?

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

Yeah. It's so good.

Suzanne Coonan ([37:55](#)):

Yeah. Okay. So he talks about actually a formula for overcoming languishing. And I think it's really closely connected to a desirable difficulty, because he talked about finding something. There's three components to it. Mastery, something that you're doing, that you're getting better at. Mindfulness, something that you have to do that really causes you to be in the present, and so that you get into that flow state. And then something that's meaningful or that matters to you. And so I think as people are identifying their desirable difficulty for next year, if you really come up with something that can give you a sense of mastery, that you continue to do it over time, and it builds your skills and capabilities, it matters to you and it's meaningful, and it's something that will help you be mindful and present. Those can be some criteria that you can use as you consider your desirable difficulty for next year.

Suzanne Coonan ([38:52](#)):

And what I love about it is that it makes it more intentional. And it makes you kind of think about, I'm not just going to go out and do something completely random. It says, if I were to do something that has those elements to it, it's going to give me something to focus on. So you were saying, you were asking before, Tegan, why? Why should we do this? Why now, when everything seems so crazy? This is the why. Because if you do something that matters, that's meaningful, that will help you to be really present and build your mastery, that's what's going to build your skills, and capacity, and resilience for navigating these unprecedented and incredibly intense times that we're operating in right now.

Tegan Trovato ([39:40](#)):

And it gives us a sense of purpose and some sense of control, and definitely some meaning to the chaos we're in. I love how it connects so much here. Okay. Wonderful. One last question for you. You mentioned how to make sure we balance our desirable difficulty as a challenge versus something that takes us under. Oh, the line we flirt with on we're about to go under. I guess my question really is, what do you tend to see leaders, where do you see them make a mistake on this? Where do you see them tend to allow this positive endeavor to take them under? Is it simply failing to create those conditions that we talked about, like resources, relationship, communication? Or are there some habits or behaviors you tend to see that derail us from the journey of a desirable difficulty?

Suzanne Coonan ([40:32](#)):

Yeah. I think what's really interesting is that we have a choice when we're faced with these situations. We can either retreat or grow. We can either get to the place where we're just giving up, and in some cases, by the way, that may be 100% appropriate.

Tegan Trovato ([40:57](#)):

Appropriate. That's an act of love, self-care sometimes, isn't it?

Suzanne Coonan ([41:02](#)):

Yes. Exactly. And if you choose to look at this as an opportunity to grow, and intentionally step into that, and do all the things that we talked about, getting help and support, being intentional, reflecting, tapping into your strengths, that's when it can be an incredible experience for you. And it's looking at it from the perspective of, gosh, we're in this right now. We're in it. And just when we thought it was about to go away, this pandemic, it's starting to surge again.

Tegan Trovato ([41:42](#)):

It's a big gotcha moment. Yes.

Suzanne Coonan ([41:44](#)):

So great. This is an opportunity to look at everything we learned from how we navigated the last couple of years, and just use it to really pull up and say, I'm going to take everything that worked and discard what didn't work, and use those skills and resources to move forward. So I'm not going to let this pull me under. I'm going to let everything that happened to me recognize that it's an opportunity for me to emerge stronger, clearer, happier, and really looking at it as an opportunity to embrace the future and see what's possible.

Tegan Trovato ([42:29](#)):

Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you. Oh, Suzanne, so much good information. I have learned so, so much in our time together. If listeners want to find you online, where can they find you?

Suzanne Coonan ([42:41](#)):

You know what? Easiest place to find me is on LinkedIn. Suzanne Coonan on LinkedIn.

Tegan Trovato ([42:46](#)):

Great. We'll include the link to your page as well for that. In closing, Suzanne, the podcast was created to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills the future leader will possess, so that they can successfully lead the systems that have changed and will continue to at warp speed. So to get your read on what's required of future leaders, finish the sentence. Leaders of the future will ...

Suzanne Coonan ([43:13](#)):

Leaders of the future will welcome and embrace the novelty and the challenges that come their way, and step into those opportunities with courage, and strength, and optimism, and the knowingness that they've done hard things before and they can do it again.

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

Wonderful note to end on. I think that says it all. Suzanne, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your years of research and practice and wisdom with us. It has just been a pleasure.

Suzanne Coonan ([43:50](#)):

Thank you, Tegan. I love that you're doing this work and I can't wait to hear about your desirable difficulty for next year.

Tegan Trovato ([43:56](#)):

All right. Coming your way.

Speaker 1 ([43:59](#)):

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