

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 ([00:56](#)):

Dr. Deb Loftus and I connected through some mutual friends and colleagues in the leadership development space, folks with whom we share a deep passion for the leadership work we do and ways of doing it that can be described as more whole person than strictly textbook professional coaching.

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

Deb comes into the breadth and depth of this way of working with leaders from a background well-suited to it. She has a PhD from Northwestern University in two areas of psychology, personality and clinical, which she is fond of describing as equipping her to comfortably work across the spectrum from normal to, quote, unquote, more complex personality types, and then spent nine years in various internal leadership and organizational development roles in public and privately-held corporations. For the last 15 years, she's been dedicated to working with myriad individual leaders as well as leadership teams while running her own consulting firm, Liminal Solutions, a name we will get back to in a moment because it was chosen quite deliberately by Deb. She's also served as adjunct faculty at her alma mater teaching leadership courses at the graduate school level at Northwestern.

Tegan Trovato ([02:05](#)):

Deb, welcome and thank you for joining us today.

Deb Loftus ([02:08](#)):

Thank you. I've been looking forward to this conversation, and I think it's particularly well-timed given that we're at the start of the new year.

Tegan Trovato ([02:16](#)):

I totally agree. I totally agree. It's funny how we came to find each other. We have mutual colleagues, but also one of the ways I discovered your work is that one of my coaches sent me an article that you had written on LinkedIn, and I think it's published on your website, I'm sure we'll end up putting this in the show notes as well, about liminal space. You wrote it back in 2018, but, my goodness, is it apropos now? I'd love if you would tell listeners about liminal space. First of all, what is it and why is it important for us as leaders to be aware of right now?

Deb Loftus ([02:52](#)):

Sure. Yeah. Great. Thank you so much. It's a passion of mine. As you know, my company name is Liminal Solutions, and that was chosen very intentionally 20 years ago based on my own journey, but let me talk

about what liminal space is. The root of liminal is limen, which is a Latin word that means threshold, border or beginning, and so what this describes first and foremost is an in-between space. It was originally coined by a cultural anthropologist who was describing the place in societies and cultures and even human development where there are rites or rituals ideally that capture a passage from one state of being to another or one set of norms and epic or time to another. We might think of a so-called vision quest that adolescents were sent out on as a marker of their journey from childhood to adulthood as something a cultural anthropologist would call a liminal space.

Deb Loftus ([04:07](#)):

That was then adopted by others who have kept it alive since then and have spread it through other fields. Our field of organizational development, organizational psychology, leadership has grabbed onto this really, I think, just in the last five to seven years, but really hot during the pandemic. Of course, it caught fire. It has a very, very multi-layered meaning. I think what I would call forward is is it like change? It describes a time of change, but it's much more profound and almost pregnant sense of change because there are many changes occurring, and yet I would say one of the key differences is that it's about being in the very state of liminality that is part of the gift, if you will. It's also part of the suffering, but you are changed by being in a liminal space, not so much when you're going through change, so to speak.

Deb Loftus ([05:12](#)):

A lot of us think, "Well, I just need to manage or resolve the things that are going on in change to get from pre-state to post-state of that change." Liminality is about what happens to you, how you are transformed while you're in this in-betweenness. You're standing on that threshold of no longer being who you were, what you were or a system being what it was before and not yet having arrived at who you're going to be or what the system or the business or the community is going to be. It's that living into that space, allowing the forces that are active during a liminal phase to act upon you and the community or the organization, if that's what we're talking about. That is one of the key markers of liminality.

Tegan Trovato ([06:10](#)):

Okay. All right. I want to play with this a little bit and make sure I'm totally tracking. You and I both, one thing we have in common is we're working in high-growth orgs or orgs undergoing major change, and then also we're coaches, so we're constantly introspecting. It is just part of our nature. I am thinking of all the liminal space that I've been through personally, but then I'm also thinking about all of our teams and organizations and the liminality they experience especially right now, which I'll definitely ask you to talk more about here in a second, as what's going on today, but to really understand the concept. What comes up for me as you describe that is that liminality probably encompasses things like a dark night of the soul on a personal level, maybe also a systemic level, probably could be described as the messy middle. I would imagine all of our norms and agreed upon-behaviors are not intact, and there's probably a sense of not having a full sense of self or identity. Is that right?

Deb Loftus ([07:08](#)):

Yes, that, I think all of that, and I want to just latch onto that last piece, and I want to start with individual, but also scale through team and to the full organizational identity part of it. Liminality is also associated with Jungian thought and, in particular, that's where this whole idea of individuation, of forming of identity, one's own or an organization's own identity comes into play. There are three stages

of liminality that can be talked about. The first stage is separation from whatever was before, and then the second stage is standing on the threshold of whatever is to come, and then the third stage is an integration or reintegration into whatever coming into these.

Tegan Trovato ([08:01](#)):

Oh, that's helpful.

Deb Loftus ([08:03](#)):

Yeah, so dark night of the soul, being without norms, being in an organization that is... I mean many organizations right now are completely adrift and are managing, trying to be very agile, to use one of our buzzwords in organizational circles, managing their protocols for return to office and how to manage different forms of working. I think that could very aptly be described as being a liminal space right now, how we're getting work done, because we are all being transformed. Our organizations are being transformed in the ways we're getting work done as we're trying to codify this, to formalize, to make rational decisions about how work needs to get done, and it's a little bit arguable what's leading the decision-making? Is it the rational processes we're going through, or is it the more emotional, intuitive, almost sort of the shadow element, if you will.

Deb Loftus ([09:06](#)):

We need to honor both sides of that in these, again, these phases of detachment, this threshold or in-betweenness and then reintegration. All those examples you gave are good ones as long as, again, I'm just going to return to as long as what we are attuned to is, yes, I'm in the middle of something that's not just about shutting my eyes and getting through right now.

Tegan Trovato ([09:36](#)):

We would miss the opportunity, it sounds like.

Deb Loftus ([09:38](#)):

Yeah. It's about allowing the transformation that is in many ways talked about and, this is my own experience, it's there to guide us. It's an emergent, reliable, trustworthy, age-old process that has forces both light and dark, both those that are going to feel comfortable and those that are going to feel deeply uncomfortable.

Tegan Trovato ([10:06](#)):

Right. Okay. You talked about or you touched on the idea that we can't be sure, we can't tell what is leading what at this moment, the light or the dark, the shadow side or innovation, if you will, or growth, so what else do you see when it comes to this liminal space concept playing out today during this time we're in?

Deb Loftus ([10:27](#)):

Well, I think what I see, and it's really heartening actually, I've been having the gift of a lot of conversations with individual leaders recently for some processes I'm involved in, and I have been moved to hear in conversations with a number of global and domestic leaders when I asked them the question, "How have you been changed or challenged during these 22-ish months of the pandemic, if at all?" I always have to lead with that qualifier "if at all". I haven't had one person yet. I'm in the 40s to 50s

in terms of these number of interviews at this point just in the last two months. I haven't had one person say, "I haven't been changed at all."

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

Haven't changed. Yeah. Right. Thank goodness. We might need a different line of questions for someone who's not feeling changed by these times, so that's good to hear.

Deb Loftus ([11:24](#)):

Right, and I also am not hearing, "I'm just hanging on for dear life, and I'm doing everything the same and waiting for the former way that we used to do things to reemerge." I'm also not hearing that. I think that that's heartening because I think that is an available response. We all would recognize that inclination in ourselves and in the systems that we serve.

Tegan Trovato ([11:49](#)):

Yes, to cling to the old for comfort. Absolutely. I am a little surprised you haven't heard that out of dozens of interviews. That's wonderful news though.

Deb Loftus ([11:58](#)):

I would say I haven't heard it as a prevailing position or attitude. I mean, there certainly are people who will say, "This is really hard," and it's even scary. I've had some really brave folks who said, "We just need to have some really open, courageous conversations even as a group of leaders about how everyone is doing because this is tough stuff. This is a tough time." We're having lots of great business conversations right now about how the business needs to change, and we've been altering our ways of doing business or trying to keep our processes and systems up and running, and we've been trying some cool, innovative ways to meet customer needs, for instance, through technology that's changing, et cetera, virtual ways of conducting business, and yet the way in which we're connecting from a human level has not adapted as much. Yes, we're on a screen. That's adapted, but our ability to connect in a way that I would find most meaningful, I would love to see that change more, and so that connection is the second thing I want to share about.

Deb Loftus ([13:11](#)):

What I'm finding really lovely about these conversations is, when I ask many of these leaders how they've changed or been challenged during this time, one of the key themes I hear is, "I have recognized how important other people are to me." I used to know that people are important to get things done," or, "I had relationships in my personal life that were important to me, and then work was this whole other thing, but I've really been... several folks use the word humbled, really been humbled through this time that I just really need... that some of the highlights of this period of time have been the brief breaks that we've all had in the pandemic when it seemed like we were merging, things were getting safer, we were newly vaccinated, whatever it might have been that created that, and there was a little flurry of activity and people could be together with their workmates.

Deb Loftus ([14:09](#)):

I can remember a couple of people just speaking of the joys that they felt and then getting back to the places where they were working from home or even their offices which were more isolated and feeling the loneliness of that. I think, this liminal space that many leaders are in, what I'm hearing is this recognition of the importance of connectedness with others. That sounds like, "Oh, yeah, well, aren't we

all learning that because I think we're having this universal experience of loneliness?" and yet we're talking with a group of folks who are carrying the weight of major operational decisions on their shoulders every day. I think that, to hear them say, "This is about the emotional value," they don't say it exactly that way, but that's how it sounds is it's the emotional nurturing and the feeling of being fed by the time together and the quality of conversation that would be met by, "How are you doing? How has this time been for you? What's been really hard? How are you growing and changing?" Yeah, so that's sort of the things I'm hearing.

Tegan Trovato ([15:28](#)):

I love that. It's so interesting. It just takes me back to the old adage, it's work, it's business, it's not personal. Remember when that used to be said all the time?

Deb Loftus ([15:38](#)):

Yes. Yeah.

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

People still try to throw that out there on occasion. I'll hear it. I still will hear it at the executive level, and I think that that is dying. I think that old way, especially with what you're describing, it's going away. There is no longer the claim to stake that it's business, it's not personal. Everything is so integrated. I love what I'm hearing here from the leaders you've interviewed, that they are really feeling their own need to be connected, but also it sounds like the interest in helping to create that connection at work.

Deb Loftus ([16:12](#)):

Yeah, and think we could probably throw in here to what you're describing and the shift in the way, I know it's almost like a tagline, and we could put over certain leaders, I think the great resignation, what we all call the great... Now, at least the great resignation is also helping to shift that because I am also hearing leaders who are anxious about the people holding onto the people they have, valuing the people that they have, yes, but also wanting to hold on to them and anxious to find the right ways to foster a meaningful set of sense of connection through these, for many of them, virtual workplaces. Some folks are back in their workplace in various forms, so, yeah, it is a liminal time.

Tegan Trovato ([17:08](#)):

It is very liminal. The first point you started to make in this area is, if I caught this correctly, so tell me if I didn't, it sounded like you said that it seems like there's another way as humans to connect in these times. Did I hear that correctly, or something like that? It sounded like something we're missing, that's still missing in the recipe is what you're picking up on, if I heard you correctly.

Deb Loftus ([17:38](#)):

Yeah, perhaps, or you might have just heard a wonderful lead to a next section of our conversation which is terrific. I do think that, particularly in the kinds of roles that you and I have and others to do this sort of work where we're entrusted to ask questions that help to create a pause for the leaders with whom we work and then the groups of leaders with whom we get to sit, that there is an opportunity when we hear expressions of the need to connect differently or the need to drive more connectedness among their people. Even I'm interested in the way I just said that, drive connectedness. I mean, isn't that sort of paradoxical? A paradoxical energy is there.

Tegan Trovato ([18:23](#)):

A little, but I understand that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I understand. I understand that.

Deb Loftus ([18:30](#)):

Right? It's like invite connectedness might be the better term, but I think that the opportunity is to help shift the conversation, and so I find myself structuring different conversations with groups of leaders with whom I'm getting the opportunity to work during this time, and it is more personal in nature. I mean, personal versus impersonal is an artificial depiction I think of a continuum that we're talking about. Maybe it's just more the person.

Tegan Trovato ([19:04](#)):

Right. Instead of leading with the business objective, you're leading with how are you as a human doing, for example. Great. Yeah.

Deb Loftus ([19:10](#)):

Yes. Yes. Yeah. How has this time been for you? Again, what are you learning about yourself individually and as a leader? What are you learning about this team? It's almost like just turning on a tap like a faucet that has a lot of pressure built up behind it and the water just comes gushing out in terms of the quality of conversation. It might take a little, one brave soul to venture forth, and there's almost always going to be that wonderful, brave soul in any team.

Tegan Trovato ([19:46](#)):

Always thankful for them. Always. Yes.

Deb Loftus ([19:48](#)):

Right, but, gosh, great, great, great conversations. Another thing I've noticed during this time is the leaders who are coming forward to me in coaching or in thinking about team sessions to ask how do we help people have different kinds of conversations with each other, how do we bring more emotion into the conversations, how do we do a check-in with everybody in a way that still can feel appropriate for their business setting, but is different than what we usually do which might just be a quick go-around the table and do a check-in on what you've been working on.

Tegan Trovato ([20:31](#)):

Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. It seems like organizations could get trapped in repeat cycles of liminality. Is that a fair assumption, they keep falling back into liminal spaces?

Deb Loftus ([20:46](#)):

Well, organizations and people.

Tegan Trovato ([20:46](#)):

Yeah.

Deb Loftus ([20:48](#)):

It's so funny you say that, because I'm going to borrow from one of the interviews I did recently. I love this guy's way of describing what I think many of us feel has been happening and living through this pandemic. He said, "It feels like the Lucy and Charlie Brown scene where Lucy keeps holding the football out. Charlie Brown runs with all of his might to kick that football, and she snatches it away the last minute, and then, a minute or two later or a scene or two later, it repeats itself."

Deb Loftus ([21:20](#)):

I think, yes, any of us or organizations can get caught in cycles of liminality, but I also want to be careful about potentially suggesting that that's a typical dynamic. Again, I think liminality emerges as a reliable phase that's occurring in the development or just the lifeline of an individual or a team or a relationship or an organization, and so, to the extent that it might keep emerging, we have some great questions to ask about, first of all, are we noticing anything? Does it feel like we keep falling into liminality, or are we in change?

Deb Loftus ([22:04](#)):

I think that distinction is important, and then, secondly, if we do feel we are, why is that? Is it a natural evolution or a natural dynamic rather than evolution that, therefore, needs to be honored and is reliable and we should let it guide us and, in other words, not resist that we continue to go through some cycles of liminality, and I'm going to return to that because there's a great HBR article on that, but, alternatively, I think of the answer to, "Are we going through liminality not because it's some sort of meaningful cycle that we're going through periodically?" Instead, it's because we're not paying enough attention to the lessons that are available to us through the transformation that is trying to occur here.

Deb Loftus ([22:57](#)):

It is like Lucy pulling the football away in some sense because we just aren't getting that effort to kick the ball in the most conscious, attuned way. I'm not even going to use the word right. It's more about being conscious, being attuned, working with what needs to happen. Then I think those are different mechanisms, if you will, that can cause us to go through multiple cycles.

Tegan Trovato ([23:25](#)):

Okay. What is the work to be done in the liminal space? I heard you hinted one, which is look for the lessons, let's not overlook the opportunity, but if someone individually is leading a team or an organization that is in that liminal space, how do they turn that into a moment or an opportunity? What should they be doing?

Deb Loftus ([23:46](#)):

Yeah, to recognize that it is a liminal time. There's something that feels more powerful, a deeper sense of dislocation, if you will, that we absolutely can't hold on to or go back to significant ways of being or doing or running our business or leading or identifying our brand or who we are as individuals, and we're very unsure, anxiously unsure or even sterilely unsure what's going to happen or needs to happen to get together side of things. I think there's that piece of things, and so the work there is to identify, and then I also think, secondly, it is to both be attuned to the lessons that are emerging and that, I've already described, are reliable, will emerge over time and harness the energies that are available there, human system.

Deb Loftus ([24:51](#)):

I'm a Meg Wheatley fan and, for those who aren't familiar with Meg Wheatley, she is a wonderful organizational thinker and she borrows from biological systems with a lot of her thinking, and so her advice in a lot of different forums is trust human systems to puzzle their way through needed evolution or through needed... I've not seen her use the word liminal, liminality or liminal space, but I think she easily could, that like biological systems like our bodies are adapting to over time fight off the virus that's coming. It's getting to a milder form, but we hope, we think, so biological systems, human systems will find ways to get to this new stage. We as individual systems, we have an innate drive toward individuation and moving on to our next developmental stage unless we resist or block it.

Deb Loftus ([25:51](#)):

It's about being attuned to what's happening and then latching onto those small lessons and medium lessons and large lessons, insights, innovations that are occurring and trust that they will show up. I think of, what's the book called, is it Shift, the book about change where they talk about hotspots basically going into human systems or organizational systems and finding the positive examples of what's needing to change, that in any system, usually there's something already happening that is an example of the change at work, the liminality at work and the new needs that needs to occur, so there's that attunement to the next stage already occurring and happening.

Tegan Trovato ([26:42](#)):

I love that, because in a time of change, we're so uncomfortable where our brains are wired to look for the sources of discomfort, which are often the things that are, I won't call it broken, but it may be the old way that we're leaving behind, so we keep looking backwards at that. I love the idea that we look forward at what has already emerged in that small little hotspot to help us all integrate into the new way. That's beautiful.

Deb Loftus ([27:10](#)):

Right, which means we have to have this spirit of inquiry. Like you are pointing out, we have to notice. We have to put our energy toward what is being invented, what is changing, what is growing, what is different, and sometimes that's uncomfortable, too. You were talking about getting stuck on the discomfort of the suffering or what's no longer true for us, but also there can be that discomfort for some of us with what's new and unknown and uncertain, but doing that work to notice the difference. Oh, this is uncomfortable because I'm not sure about this yet. Okay. Well, that's different than, "I'm grieving. I'm sad because this can no longer happen anymore. I can't go into the office and work a hundred percent of the time anymore. I can't see all my people in person all the time anymore." There's still a lot of grieving around that, and I don't mean to sell short the need to grieve. It has its place. In this little space, we will be led really to when it's time to let the grieving go and move in this direction.

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

It's worth noting we don't stop and grieve. Grief can be processed while we have forward momentum. The image that came up for me as you were describing this, which is hilarious, is you can be dragged behind the truck or you can be at the driver's seat of the truck that may not have a windshield. How's that?

Deb Loftus ([28:39](#)):

That's great.

Tegan Trovato ([28:40](#)):

Both are messy, but you get to choose the discomfort. Awesome. I would be curious, and I'm sure our listeners would, too, to just get a peek behind the curtain with some of your clients in terms of what the hardest conversations have been lately with your leadership clients and some of the most powerful ones. You're constantly talking with leaders, but you've had a very interesting last couple of months where you've talked with almost 40 now, so what's emerging from those that you're noticing?

Deb Loftus ([29:10](#)):

Really it's, paradoxically, some of the same conversations are the hardest and the most wonderful, and the paradox is, I haven't touched on that yet, so often a part of liminality and liminal space is holding the light in the dark, holding as we were just talking about what's new and uncertain and that we might be excited about and a little scared about and also while grieving and letting go of, as you pointed out. I think some of the hardest conversations are people who are feeling a great sense of dislocation, folks who are expressing that they just don't feel good or confident about the way that they're leading right now. I so appreciate the candor and vulnerability that any of us would demonstrate in making what might feel like a confession like that. "I just don't know. I don't feel very confident that I know what I'm doing very well right now. I used to feel like I had it figured out." Those are some of the hardest conversations because I can see the pain and suffering that those individuals are feeling.

Deb Loftus ([30:24](#)):

I don't have, because I will feel the desire myself to fix that if momentarily that part of me rises that wants to soothe and fix, and I don't have the ability nor the recipe to fix that. What I can be is, and you can be right, any of us can be [inaudible 00:30:45] to witness to the humanity that's showing up, and I can be fellow journey person and say, yeah, I get it. I get it and, by the way, I'm hearing lots of other leaders talk about that, too, so let's talk about how-

Tegan Trovato ([31:04](#)):

You're not alone, dispelling the loneliness.

Deb Loftus ([31:06](#)):

Yes.

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

Yes.

Deb Loftus ([31:09](#)):

Again, so how do we even have that sense of connection be felt through our storytelling that we can do? Yeah, thank you for pointing that out. I think those are some of the hardest conversations just because of the vulnerability and pain that is being expressed and, yet, those are also the most wonderful conversations in the sense that I trust as a psychologist, as a human being, as a person working in liminal spaces, passionate about it for all these years that it's that vulnerability and candor and openness to the experiences that are coming to leaders who are talking like that, that that is the growth coming.

Deb Loftus ([31:51](#)):

It's just the early stages or the messy middle, to borrow your phrase. It's being in the front seat of that vehicle with no windshield. I don't know where I'm going. I don't even know that I have a firm grasp on the steering wheel. I used to feel like I was in a Maserati driving a hundred miles per hour down on a highway in a lovely urban area. Now, I'm out in the fields and I'm bumping along a tractor with no windshield.

Tegan Trovato ([32:24](#)):

It's such a good image, bugs in your teeth, I mean dust in your eyes, no clue.

Deb Loftus ([32:30](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, so I think that-

Tegan Trovato ([32:30](#)):

Yeah, and I... Yeah.

Deb Loftus ([32:32](#)):

I think the second I would just add is the extension of that to their people, hearing folks who are really worried about and care deeply about how their people are doing and don't feel as able to put their arms around their people both because of the virtual ways of working, many of them are still engaged in, also because the solutions to the hours that are being worked and the blurred boundaries between work and home that are almost endemic in those places I'm traveling.

Tegan Trovato ([33:10](#)):

Way to slot in the word endemic, Deb, right now, I'm going to say, maybe end up in a different endemic very soon, but I want to maybe have you punctuate that a little bit more, because you and I privately before we started, hit the record button, we were just talking about how we have both been noticing that over the holiday, the Christmas and other holidays at the end of the year, no one slowed down. Typically, this is a time of rest and businesses are going a little slower and leaders are taking vacation and their people are resting. I did not see that this year. You told me the same was true for you. You brought that up, that point that there's a boundarylessness at the moment. We had to integrate work and life in a way that's never been done, never, but now we've moved all the way to a different end of the spectrum perhaps. Could you talk a little more about what you're seeing when it comes to that change?

Deb Loftus ([34:08](#)):

Yeah. One of the things I described to you that I am seeing is people, and these are leaders, who are describing that even in their own work lives they are feeling like there's a pace that continues that early on in the pandemic felt more understandable, almost, I don't know how to say it, joyful is not quite the word, but fulfilling, almost fulfilling earlier on because-

Tegan Trovato ([34:40](#)):

Purpose-oriented maybe, right?

Deb Loftus ([34:41](#)):

Yes. Exactly. It was more purpose-driven. Everyone was rallying together trying to figure out how to make all the great changes that needed to occur in meeting customer needs with work occurring very differently and changing customer needs in some cases, how to figure that out and then how to work with each other in very different ways to do that.

Deb Loftus ([35:03](#)):

I think there was a sense of a lot of unification around those new questions that emerged and puzzling through them together, and then also what I've heard described is that, at the same time that there was this unification and this satisfaction of solving these interesting problems, there was also more respect, if you will, given to the fact that we were in an early stage experience. We didn't know. It was early stage at that point, but it was the first-time experience of lockdown for many people. There were kids at home, not in the school environment. They were needing to be virtually schooled, et cetera, and so there was more understanding of the awkwardness of work getting done and maybe needing to step out of things and have shorter days, et cetera.

Deb Loftus ([35:52](#)):

What I'm hearing describe more recently is both the persistence of this pace in a way that, to use an overused analogy, it's like we've been running this sprint so long that it's not even a marathon, it's like an ultra marathon. I mean, we're on one of those 150-mile desert marathons, and is there still as strong of a purpose to it or have we just gotten so mindlessly accustomed to working this way, and then, secondly, there's also, or maybe in a related sense, there's a feeling of not as much respect being given to the boundaries between work and home by colleagues, by the organization, so meetings occurring at 6:00 in the morning, 7:00, 8:00 PM, 9:00 PM at night.

Deb Loftus ([36:45](#)):

I'm not even talking about for global groups who are always dealing with those differences. I'm just talking about people in the same time zone or similar time zones or hearing people describe, "Even while I'm on a virtual call with a certain set of leaders, I'm getting IMs from other people in that meeting," or, "I see people on their phones texting while we're all in a meeting, and we can't be giving full attention to each other if we're doing that sort of things." I think this is really that next stage, if you will, of liminality around how we're working with each other and the kinds of conversations, the brave conversations we need to be having about how can work best be done. Let's accept that, for whatever period of time and maybe always, we're going to be working in these blended ways, heavily virtual ways, and so what's our new protocol, and not just protocol that our wonderful HR people have been helping to define for us, but how are we, human to human, human beings in a leadership team, how do we want to set some boundaries around this?

Deb Loftus ([37:57](#)):

I've heard people describe, "Well, we try to go to no-meeting Fridays or no emailing over the weekend, and then slowly those eroded," all understandable stuff. Again, I think there's a lot of figuring out stuff going on and great dedicated folks who are used to working very long hours, right? If you have some people in a group who are used working weekends and other people who don't like to work weekends, you've got a lot of messiness that's occurring. That's what I'm hearing about, and a lot of fatigue and, like you mentioned, either people limping into the holidays and they absolutely had to take some time off because this was it for the year or they didn't get the unplugging that they normally would.

Tegan Trovato ([38:47](#)):

I'm seeing the same thing. Some of the behaviors you described were certainly a problem before, but, everything, I would describe it as in a crescendo, to use a different system, music. Everything has gotten very loud and voluminous, but the thing about a crescendo in music is that it is a high point. It must come back down. It must diminuendo. This will eventually become something else, but I think our attention is being really called to this because rest is required for humans. It is required, and so I'm curious if you have a call to action for leaders around this lack of boundaries, this crescendo of busyness? We don't get to hand out advice all that often, as you know, in our work, so I'm going to ask you to for a change. What would you call leaders to do about this particular systemic issue we have at the moment?

Deb Loftus ([39:45](#)):

Well, I'm actually going to broaden it to just what do I think leaders need to be doing right now in this period of great liminality in the middle of a pandemic, and I think what it is they actually need to be guides of liminal forces both in themselves, so they need to be awake and alert to what is at work in them. I'm going to go all the way back to that question that I've had the opportunity to ask some individuals, people asking, individual leaders asking themselves, 'How am I changing and growing during this time, and in what form are those changes coming, and what's feeling good or welcome about that, what's not, and then how do I? What's my intention for how I want to carry myself through this time?'

Deb Loftus ([40:38](#)):

I think that's really important. It's not so much to set a goal for who you want to be on the other side of it. I think that liminal space is so tough to say, "This is what I want to be on the other side of it," because, again, there's so much changing. It's really who do I want to be while I walk through this time? What are some key values or principles to which I will hold dear or, asked another way, how do I want to look back on this time three months from now, six months from now and tell this story?

Tegan Trovato ([41:07](#)):

Love it.

Deb Loftus ([41:10](#)):

That's with myself. Now, I think the other piece is to be a guided liminality for the people around you. If you're a leader, that is the work is to bring forth the best in yourself and others in pursuit of meaningful goals, and so that means to ask these great needed questions to structure and invite the inquiries that are needed in your human beings that you've got around you, these human systems that you have. Yes, do you need to get the work done and help to guide and lead the great decision-making and changes that are needing to occur there and all the ways we've already talked about, noticing the hotspots and the emergent, innovative, agile things that are going? Yes.

Deb Loftus ([41:54](#)):

Also, hold hands because there are a lot of nervous people going through liminal times. There's a lot of fear in trying to work with that and acknowledge it and just make space for it while not allowing others or inviting them beyond getting stuck there, but there's also asking these great, brave questions coming from a place of inquiry which comes to us from out of action learning. How do you come in from a place of inquiry, asking great questions that open up a space among people, that invite people in to a dialogue, into a conversation to create meaning together?

Tegan Trovato ([42:36](#)):

I love it. I'm so glad I asked you that last question. What need is just a little bit of guidance on where do we go next with all of this, right? Deb, tell our listeners how they can find you online if they want to learn more about your work. We will be sure to include the link to that article I mentioned at the opening about liminal space so beautifully written, but where else can they find you online?

Deb Loftus ([43:00](#)):

My website is [liminalsolutions.com](http://liminalsolutions.com), L-I-M-I-N-A-L. I often have to spell that word.

Tegan Trovato ([43:06](#)):

Fair enough. Fair enough.

Deb Loftus ([43:12](#)):

You'll see information there on how to connect with me. My bio is there, and there's information on how to reach me. I would love to hear from anyone who is passionate about this topic or has questions about it. It's definitely a lifelong, at this point, nearly lifelong passion of mine.

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

Worthy work, my friend. Worthy work, it's so brilliant. We'll be sure then in the show notes to include a link to your website and you're LinkedIn as well, if that's okay. Folks can connect with you there.

Deb Loftus ([43:39](#)):

Yes, that's great.

Tegan Trovato ([43:39](#)):

Okay. Okay. My last question for you, which I feel like you may have given us some of the answers already, but I'm going to ask it again, and you can just put some bookends on it for us. This podcast was created to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs and skills that the future leader must possess so that they can lead these systems we've talked about, the systems that are changing, that will continue to change at warp speed. To get your read on what you think is required of future leaders, let's have you finish this sentence. Leaders of the future will...

Deb Loftus ([44:12](#)):

Be open to and attuned to the forces of liminality in themselves and others and serve as guides for those that they lead.

Tegan Trovato ([44:24](#)):

Great. Thank you so much. Deb, brilliant work, thank you for sharing it with our listeners and with me. It's a privilege to be up close to the way you're thinking and what you're seeing, so thank you for joining us today.

Deb Loftus ([44:37](#)):

Thank you. I really appreciate the conversation. I will have an extra spring in my step the rest of the day.

Tegan Trovato ([44:43](#)):

Fantastic.

Speaker 1 ([44:44](#)):

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Workplace Forward podcast where leaders and executives can stay ahead of the curve on emerging leadership ideas and self-care best practices guided by executive coach Tegan Trovato and her expert guests. Please take 60 seconds to help others discover the Workplace Forward podcast by going to iTunes to subscribe, give five stars and leave a comment. Want to learn more about Bright Arrow Coaching and Leadership Development? Visit the website at [www.brightarrowcoaching.com](http://www.brightarrowcoaching.com).

Speaker 1 ([45:17](#)):

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