

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



EPISODE 79

*Candid Conversations with
Phenomenal Executive Women:
Whitney Sullivan*

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HAPPY EXECUTIVE WOMAN

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### Candid Conversations with Phenomenal Women: Whitney Sullivan

#### Anita Charlot:

Hello, everyone! Happy 2023! I want to welcome you to the first of the candidate conversations on The Happy Executive Woman Podcast™. I am your host, as you already know, but I'm going to introduce myself anyway. I'm Anita Charlot, and today I have with me Whitney Hinshaw Sullivan. Okay, so let me... let me take a moment. I'm going to do a sidebar here because we were talking about this and I just have to let you guys know, Whitney lives in Bozeman, Montana. And for those of you that have not watched Yellowstone, you have to watch Yellowstone. So I've asked her all these questions about Bozeman and she told me that people don't wear as many Stetson hats or cowboy hats, as you know, we saw in the show, and they mostly wear Patagonia. So yes, I was asking about Montana. You know, this Black girl has questions about Montana.

#### Whitney Sullivan:

But it is as beautiful. I assured Anita that there might not be as many cowboy hats, but I assured her that the views were authentic.

#### Anita:

See? And this is what you've come to expect, right? These are candid conversations. We are just two women hanging out, having a candid conversation, and you just happen

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to be in the room. So before we get started and before we dive in, let me give you a little bit about Whitney. I'm going to read her bio to you, but you know, throughout today's podcast, we're going to share a little bit more so you'll get to know more about her. So Whitney Henshaw Sullivan is a leadership coach and keynote speaker with a heart for beginners with a background and leading fitness, wellness, and student leadership programs and higher education, she learned the hard way that transitioning from individual contributor to leader requires a lot more than a change of title. And if you heard that I emphasize that. Okay? I'm gonna... let me read that again. She learned the hard way that transitioning from individual contributor to leader requires a lot more than a change of title. Whitney offers the coaching she wishes she received so that emerging leaders can show up with clarity, confidence, and resilience. She currently lives in Bozeman, Montana with her husband Tim, where she is also an avid reader, outdoor adventurer, and cycling instructor. Welcome to the podcast, Whitney.

Whitney:

Thanks, Anita. I'm so excited to be here.

Anita:

You are welcome. I am too. So as you and I have already discussed, I'm gonna let everybody else in on our private conversations here. I was going through and reading. I was going through Whitney's website. I've been cyber-stalking her. I've been on her

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Instagram. I've been on her LinkedIn page, and you know, just reading about Whitney and what she does and how she does it. I am so like, I'm just so excited for you guys because you are in for a treat today. We're going to kick off today's podcast with Whitney sharing a bit about herself, how she got into this line of work, and what you can do if this is your first time stepping into a leadership role so that you don't make the same mistakes that she did. So with that, Whitney, why don't you share with the audience today what caused you to get into this line of work? What was the personal experience that led you to be the dynamic coach that you are today?

#### **Whitney:**

Absolutely. Well, thanks for having me here, Anita, and I need you to know that I was stalking all of your websites and podcasts and LinkedIn and so you know, the cyberstalking was mutual. But like Anita said, my name is Whitney. I'm a leadership coach and motivational speaker based in Bozeman, Montana. And I got into this industry as a result of my experiences in higher education where I was a part of student development, leadership development, fitness and wellness, programming, and holding leadership roles in higher education. And, you know, I've always been an educator at heart, and I've always been really passionate about teaching people new things, helping beginners learn new things, and helping people along that vulnerable process of being a beginner and especially in higher education, you know, my favorite part was always working with students because they were encountering so many new leadership experiences for the first time as a college student. And then, you know, I also had the

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opportunity to do a lot of staff leadership training on campus as well. But it was always those students going through things the first time that I really valued those experiences. And I decided somewhere around 2020, 2021, that I wanted to kind of expand who could be a student. And so I was part of the great resignation, as they call it. I resigned from my full-time job, and I went full-time into entrepreneurship and my coaching business in October of 2021. And so, the mission is still the same as when I was in higher education, just helping, you know, when I was there, it was helping students figure out what they wanted to do with their lives, and helping them along in their first ever leadership experiences. But, you know, along the way, I also learned a lot about, you know, how I lead others. And, you know, we were kind of talking in our private conversations about how, you know, those first leadership experiences can be kind of an awakening process, right? And, you know, so not only did I have this experience in teaching others had to lead, but I was also getting my first experiences in the tougher aspects of leadership as well. And so that's a little bit of background as to how I got here. And so I'm running a program, I created a program called five to thrive. And that trains new leaders the five core skills that they need in order to thrive in their new leadership roles. So whether you own a small business and you're leading a team for the first time, or you get promoted into a new role, and you know, there are five core skills you need to really lead with your head high heart open, and your feet on the ground.

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**Anita:**

Yeah. Well, that's great. Congratulations on full-time entrepreneurship. That's amazing. Okay, so tell us, when you quit your full-time, and you went, you became an entrepreneur full-time, did you go through all the feels?

**Whitney:**

I went through all the feels, absolutely. I actually opened my business as a side hustle in early 2021. And, you know, there have just been a lot of things that led up to that decision to leave higher education. You know, I always thought like, oh, maybe someday I'll be an entrepreneur. But I think I had some mindset blocks around entrepreneurship. And you know, maybe you can relate, but I thought being an entrepreneur meant you had to have this like mystical ability that was just granted upon you. And up an entrepreneur, you know, I had never really thought about it. I was like, oh, that's for those special people. You know, that is, but you know, there have been some situations, some crises that had happened prior to the pandemic, and the department I was working in, and then the pandemic happened, and then post-pandemic, and you know, life just changed so much in 2020. Right? And not just like, change, but just like, foundationally changed, I think, for a lot of people, and I definitely experienced that. And so yeah, eventually, it was like, you know, I think the right thing to do is to move on from this role, and, you know, my next step being going full-time into entrepreneurship. So I never would have thought that I would have done it

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full-time at this time. I think I maybe thought maybe someday. But it's definitely a surprise, but it's, you know, it's a grieving process to move on from a career that you've dedicated, so much energy and time and effort. And, you know, so if anyone's going through that, like that change is hard, like changes messy. They can take time, you know, to move on from one career to the next.

Anita:

Absolutely, yeah. And I totally agree with you. 2020 was the year that I believe a lot of people started to do a life review, and said, you know, what, it's just not worth it, you know, the great resignation from at all levels, you know. I mean, we're still looking at, when you go to a restaurant, it could be a fast food restaurant. McDonald's is, you know, toting \$17 an hour just to get people to come back to the door. My question is, what are all these people doing now? Did everybody start their own businesses?

Whitney:

Yeah, yeah.

Anita:

It's like with everything that we had to deal with, with all the loss and you know, dealing with drama and a nine to five, or you know, whatever time whatever hours is just not worth it. Right? The quality of life has now trumped the quality of the workplace and people are no longer standing and sitting around for being mistreated, being

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overlooked. You know, any of that going through trauma in the workplace. So we'll get we'll talk about a little bit of trauma in the workplace. But before we do, I know you and I or you had shared with me your first leadership role and how you said that you know, it was not a good turnout. You said you failed because failure's when you know...

#### **Whitney:**

Oh, I failed! It's okay, failure is not a dirty word. Right?

#### **Anita:**

But you learn something from it, right? And from that experience, you know, you learn enough to the point where you're now able to teach what you learned in your coaching practice. So it was absolutely a necessary failure. Explain this. Explain it to our listeners so they get the benefit of your story, just like I did.

#### **Whitney:**

Well, you know, the beauty of working in higher education for so long, I was there in 10 years, is you had just so many opportunities to gain leadership experiences. Things were always shifting, you know, opportunities to lead teams or to lead people or to be a mentor here and there always presenting themselves. So, you know, in my first professional level leadership role is where this, this failure came from. And I preface that because, you know, we talked about failure, and I think, before I tell this story, is that,



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you know, failure isn't this, like a one-time event. You know, failure tends to stem from like little things, little things, little things that often like build-up, right? And success is the alternate... happens that way as well. Now, I'm not saying that we can't just have one big failure here or one big success there. But I found like, in my professional life, and, and work life and leadership life that, you know, failure tends to stem from our habits more than anything. And, you know, in my first professional leadership role, one of my employees was actually transferred to another team because I failed to lead them. And it resulted from a bad habit, as an emerging leader and all of my other leadership experience I had before this professional level one that, you know, I just overused empathy. And I just had a bad habit of prioritizing other people's feelings in a way that wasn't helpful. And I think as a younger leader, gaining those, you know, all those experiences, I thought that, you know, I didn't realize that empathy didn't mean that I can't set clear expectations or set boundaries or give critical feedback. And, you know, what I mean is, is that failure can kind of tend to build or, you know, those when those bad habits follow you around, you know, eventually they're going to come to the surface, and, you know, those bad habits of, you know, overusing empathy to the point that I didn't set clear expectations, I didn't give critical feedback, I didn't set boundary resulted in a situation where I failed to lead somebody. And the best thing that we could do is say, you know what, we got to transfer this person to a different team, give that give everyone a fresh start. You know, and it was one of the most, you know, challenging, it was probably the most challenging leadership experience I had and 10 years. Yet, like I said, like, failure isn't a dirty word, and like, the lessons I learned from that one situation

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then fed into future successes I had, and I felt like I learned years' worth of lessons from that one situation that then you know, fed forward into positive experiences moving forward.

**Anita:**

Okay. So for our listeners, when we say that you overuse empathy. What does that look like? So, so for the new leaders that we have listening, how will they know? How would they know if they are committing the same act?

**Whitney:**

Well, I have a little list of when empathy goes too far. Do you want to hear it?

**Anita:**

Okay. Yeah, of course! Yeah.

**Whitney:**

So I, you know, I identified four things that I think leaders can take away. And there's one of them that I want you to add your expertise to in particular. But the first one is, I think empathy goes too far when you avoid giving critical feedback, for fear of hurting feelings, for fear of being disliked, or for fear of upsetting somebody. And, you know, the reality is as a leader is that you're gonna have to make some difficult decisions, and

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you're gonna have to have some awkward conversations. And it's more important to focus on how you show up in a really clear and kind way. And that empathy is how you show up to the conversation, it doesn't mean that you avoid making somebody else uncomfortable. But, you know, empathy is your stance, it's a form of curiosity. It's a skill of perspective taking of that person in front of you, you know, but we have to give people critical feedback as a leader, it's our duty, you know, in order to lead the team forward. So, you know, there are just three questions that as a result of that experience I help leaders start asking that one, it helps to have performance conversations often, and that's something that I encourage leaders to do so that way it doesn't feel so intimidating every time you need to talk about somebody's performance, and there are three questions that I asked so much that the people that worked with me, they just knew that they were coming. And that, you know, I learned that this is how, you know, I don't want to make... It's normal to fear being disliked, right? Like, it's normal to fear upsetting someone. But I think that there are some tools you can use to show up those conversations with a little more courage. And so, you know, I just started to ask, Hey, you know, what's working? What's not working? What ideas do you have for change? And you can ask whatever three questions you want as a leader, but they have three key points. It's 'tell me what's going well, tell me what you're good at. What's not going well? Tell me what's challenging you?' And tell me... the third question is the learning question. You know, what are you learning? What are what changes are you going to use moving forward? And most of the time, Anita, I'm sure you found this in your experiences, too, that if you put that self-reflection out there, they'll address the things

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that needed the critical feedback, right? And if they don't, it'll also give you some sense of self-awareness, their level of self-awareness, and whether or not that person's ready for that critical feedback. So Right.

#### Anita:

Yeah. Yeah, I like that. I like those three questions. The avoiding fear of being disliked, I think, I noticed that a lot of new managers, and even officers, you know, depending on how the organizational structure is, want to make sure that they're liked by the majority of the people in the organization or the people that matter, right, versus being strong enough, within their own character to recognize that, okay, this is not the place for me to want to make friends at all levels, there will come a time when I need to make a decision that everybody is not going to be okay with. And I need to be okay with everybody else not being okay. Right?

#### Whitney:

Absolutely.

#### Anita:

I like to compare corporate America with the military since I spent 14 years in the military as a sergeant in the military. And when we look at, like the critical activities that we have to do when we're out, and we're doing trainings were out in the woods, right? And we call it bivouac where out of bivouac, and we're having to move in the dark, right

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with flashlights and all our gear from one campsite to another campsite. I don't have time to ask you, how are you feeling about this? I don't have time to say, you know, I want everybody to come with me if you don't mind. It's okay. You know, it may be a little dark. And you may get bit by a bug, but I'll give you some.

Whitney:

Right, it's the wrong tool for the wrong time.

Anita:

Right? Exactly. Yeah, we have a mission. And the mission is we need to get from point A to point B safely. And I am in charge of all of these lives. So you may not agree with what I'm doing. But I'm the one in charge, and I am in this position because I earned this position. So that meant that I knew, I know just a tad bit more about this situation, and so I need you to trust me to get you from point A to point B. Just follow along. I think in order for a leader to build that trust, right, because you don't just get it just like in the military. Just because you have a rank doesn't mean that you have earned respect. You've earned a title, but that doesn't earn you respect. You gain respect by your soldiers, or your unit, or your company, whatever your what, wherever you are in the military, by them recognizing that you are a person of your word that they can trust you to lead.

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**Whitney:**

Absolutely.

**Anita:**

Then when you're in a corporate situation, and maybe you throw your team members under the bus, and you side with the client because you want to make the client happy, but your team members are looking at you like well wait a minute. You don't have my back? You're the manager, and you don't have my back. And so you have to be willing to stand firm at times when appropriate, right? You have to be willing to not be liked by everybody all the time so that you are making the right decision not just for you, not just for the company, but for your team as well.

**Whitney:**

Absolutely.

**Anita:**

And most of the time when you make that decision and they will be grumpy. They'll complain, they'll moan all the way there, and then once they get there like oh, that was bad, right? But instead of stopping every 20 minutes trying to make people feel better about it, you'll never get there. Right?

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Whitney:

Absolutely, absolutely. And, you know, I just want to point out something that you said there that I think is so insightful is that, you know, that Sergeant that's out in the woods for them that situation, right, like, you know, that person has that clarity in their role, like it is my duty to lead these people here. And also you mentioned, like having that clarity of character that like that sense of self of like, you know, what, they're gonna, they might be mad at me, and that's okay. Because this is my role, you know, to make this decision, and like, I have to have that confidence from within that says, you know, I'm not going to be swayed by fear of being disliked. And so that clarity of character and that clarity of role is just so important. And one thing I like to ask my clients is, you know, like, what are you willing to be criticized for? Because you're gonna get criticized no matter what. Right? Right. So when you're in a decision, it's difficult like that, you know, like, choose the one that you're willing to stand up for? Right. And I, that's something I think that helps add that little bit of clarity to that moment. And I also love what you said about like, they're gonna be grumpy, and then they're gonna be fine. Right? And I think sometimes, like leaders that when we overuse empathy, it's because oh, I don't want them to be upset. And I'm like, you know, it's human to be upset, like, if anything, just create a safe space for them to be upset if that's the right moment. You know, and that's more important than trying to manage or control their reaction because you can't control what they're going to do.

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**Anita:**

Right, you can't, nor can you control how people feel all the time. I am loving this.

**Whitney:**

So that was number one.

**Anita:**

Yeah! See, we can talk all day long, and that's just number one.

**Whitney:**

We can talk all day! Yeah, yeah. But you know, another time I think empathy goes too far is when it becomes in I would love to hear your perspective on this. Empathy goes too far when it becomes an excuse for bullying, toxicity, and discrimination bias, microaggression. Have you seen the movie *Don't Look Up*?

**Anita:**

No!

**Whitney:**

It's on Netflix. Okay, well, it's a riot. It's a really funny movie. But there's, you know, it's satire, it's a parody, you know, and there's a character in there, that's just, he's older and misogynistic, biased, you know, just all the things, right? And it's always countered by



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someone in the movie saying, well, it's just that generation, or, you know, it's just that age. But like, that's not empathy. Right? Like, empathy is saying, okay, so what does support look like for me and making a change in your behavior? Right, but I just like, I'd love to hear your experience and your perspective on that.

Anita:

Yeah... Girl...

Whitney:

I know, I was like, how long is the podcast? Hey, you already planned for part two.

Anita:

It's like workplace trauma, you think about it and you don't realize... and I'm going to talk because this is the area that I specialize in. But for Black and Brown women, how many things are brushed off, right? And it's like, oh, well, you know, this just him. So for example, let's say, I'm just, I'm throwing something out there. Let's say if, as a Black and Brown woman, you know that another like a manager, male manager in another department who happens to be a White male has a tendency to talk down to or be condescending to women of color. And then when you mention it to either management or another coworker, they say, like, oh, that's just how he is. Well, no, that's

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not acceptable.

**Whitney:**

That's not empathy. Right?

**Anita:**

No, no. That's not, you know, that's not... For me, in that situation, if I was the manager, and someone brought that to my attention, then, you know, first and foremost, as a manager, I think it's my responsibility to let the person know that okay, well, you know, I'm really sorry that you know, this person was that way, and that is not our values, right, our mission and our values, that's not what we speak to. What can I do? How can I help you to feel either comfortable in this situation, what can I do to remove you from... Is there a way to remove you from having to deal with this person? Not because you need saving, but because I want you to understand that while I may not walk in your shoes, and I may not look like you, I may not experience the world as you do, what is it that you need? What can I provide for you, so that you know that one, I'm here to support you, and two, I recognize that this is unacceptable. Right? There could be, depending on the politics of the organization, there may be an opportunity for, you know, me as a manager to go and speak to the other person. There may not be, but what I can do, I can't control the other person, but what I can do is I can look at and understand what my employee or my team is saying to me. And that can make I can focus on my team member and making my team member feel supported.

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Whitney:

Absolutely. And beliefs, like you believe them. You believe the experience that they shared with you. Absolutely. Those are great tools.

Anita:

Yeah. So that, you know, this is, it's nothing new. It's something that we, Black and Brown women, we deal with, and we've dealt with for, for years for decades. Right. And this is part of why I after 2020, I think we've talked, we may have talked about this. But in 2020, I started looking at my business from the dating and relationship, and marriage coaching standpoint to... this is not enough, I have to do something else. Everything just blew up in our faces in 2020. And now, you know, it was even more things became more obvious in corporate America because people who don't look like me felt more comfortable standing in their racism, standing in their comments, and, you know, their microaggressions or their aggressions period, right, and voice notes. And so when I saw this, even as being, you know, having experiences in the past is blowing it off because I needed to do what I needed to do. Now, it's like, you know what, that's just not okay, anymore for me. That's not okay anymore. And so now that then I shifted the focus to helping Black and Brown women heal from corporate trauma. And then also going into organizations and talking about, you know, conscious DEI programs. If this is what you say you want to do, then let's talk about doing it the right way. Let's talk about doing it so that we have and that you understand, as you mentioned, empathy, what that looks like, and how that plays out because the manager could have, I could have easily as a

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manager have said, you know, just oh, well, you know, just ignore him. But no, that's not like you said, That's not empathy. Empathy is letting that person feel seen, valued, and heard, and then also, as the leader, protected.

#### **Whitney:**

Absolutely, absolutely. And it's amazing that you're working to put these DEI services out there because part of empathy is having the language to understand, right? And that's why it's so important for leaders to educate themselves. And all of these things, because the more language you have in your brain to pull from, you know, the more that you can approach somebody with that empathetic stance, and with that sense of curiosity, and so, I think it's awesome that you've been shifting your energy because the world, I mean, the world needs it.

#### **Anita:**

Yeah, yeah. Well, talk about what the world means. You know, even in corporate America, where I tried to as a metaphysician, right, I'm working, currently working towards my doctorate in metaphysical psychology. So it is important for me to look at not just the person, but look at the spirit of the person, look at the personality of the person, and accept the whole person, who they are a part of that means I need to be self-aware as an individual, and then if I'm in a management position, I need to be self

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aware as a manager. Talk a little bit about how, or why it's important as leaders to recognize the limits of one's own self-awareness.

Whitney:

Mm-hmm. Well, I think if we don't recognize the limits, they're going to leak out. Have you experienced that or seen that? Like, you know, and the more self-aware we can be, the more conscious we can be of how our actions and our decisions will impact other people. And my sister's a leadership coach, as well, and I think she puts it in one line, you know really well, is that the limits of your self-development are going to be limits in your leadership and you can't develop others any deeper any bigger than you've developed yourself. And so, you know, especially when it comes to understanding other people, that's a key part of empathizing with them in a way that's effective. But if you don't understand yourself, it's really hard to translate that knowledge into practice. And so Brene Brown, her most recent book, *The Atlas of the Heart*, there's an amazing quote in there that says 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. And you know, so as a leader, just that, that self-awareness is so important to just the intelligence required to lead a team. And also, I mean to lead yourself as well. I mean, you have to have a really high level of self-leadership, in addition to your skill and leading other people.

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**Anita:**

Yeah. John Maxwell is great at his leadership books. Absolutely loved them. I was in the bookstore, and I was just browsing, and I have the audiobook. And then there was another book, which was... it was the workbook. And what it did is it took you through, I have it right here. It's called *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.

**Whitney:**

I've never heard of that one.

**Anita:**

Yeah, I absolutely love it. And as you can see, you guys can't see it because we don't have the video going for you. But I'm going to show it to Whitney. But it's like a workbook. So it's going through, it's giving you the highlights of that particular law, and then it's asking you, you know, questions that will help you dig deeper, right within yourself to uncover where you are in terms of leadership. In the beginning of the book, there's like a quiz. And you answer these questions, and then you get rated between one to 10. And based on where you land, it tells you how, how effective you are as a leader. And so one is at the beginning, and then when you're done with everything, then you take it again at the end. But you are absolutely right. You know, I totally agree with you, if you aren't self-aware, you don't realize, in my line of work, if you don't realize that you have privilege, right, you don't realize how your privilege shows up, you don't realize how your privilege will, can turn off someone else, even if that's not your

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intention, you still need to be aware if you want to really connect authentically with your team member. So if you have Black and Brown team members, like you said, you have to educate yourself on those things that you know, the differences between, you know, maybe your life experiences and their life experiences so when you're creating programs, or you're creating projects, you have projects, and you are wondering who you're going to assign, having that intimate knowledge about, you know, just what your team members may... what their life experiences may or may not have been the things that that they consider to be microaggressions the way that they feel like they are not being honored. That helps you to be a more conscious leader, right? And you can then your team still... it's all about connection. If you can't, you can have the biggest title in the world, you can be a CEO, but if no one's willing to follow you, you're not gonna last long.

Whitney:

Amen, Anita! Amen!

Anita:

You're not gonna last long. So I am totally with you, right there.

Whitney:

Well, and I think one thing that, you know, you kind of said there is part of self-awareness is being open to things maybe you don't want to hear, right, or things

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that are different. Like I think that like true self-awareness, kind of, like, kind of is uncomfortable, right? Like to like really dive into your blind spots to dive into the things that you don't understand takes openness, right? And an openness to discomfort about how maybe those blind spots negatively impacted other people. And so I think true self-awareness really requires a willingness to get uncomfortable with things that you might not have known about yourself or understood about yourself and other people.

#### Anita:

Yeah. Yeah, that is so true. When I'm having conversations with managers, that don't look like me, business owners that don't look like me, you know, the key is, one of the main things is even being open. Some people are open, but they're open to hearing it. They're not open to receiving it. So there's a difference. You can hear me say something to you, and not recognize at all that that you, this applies to you. But if you are going to and I like to... people like to throw the word ally around, if you're going to be an ally, then you really have to understand what being an ally, what it means. And if you are putting yourself in a position and you say that you're open to receiving feedback or information on how your behavior or comment that you made may have affected someone else. The last thing you want to do is get defensive.

#### Whitney:

Yep. That just shuts down the connection in general.



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Anita:

Exactly because the person is opening up and sharing with you and your defensiveness even, even though it's hard to hear, you know, the thing to do is to be able to be comfortable enough to sit and listen and take that in. And if you have to say, you know, something, I never thought about that. I'd like to process that, or I like to think about that, and can we have another conversation later, versus that's not, I can't believe you said bad, that's not what I meant. Don't get defensive, because then it shuts the other person down, right, it's no longer about the other person sharing their experience with you. But now they have to make you feel better about yourself because you've taken defense to what they've said. So it's no longer you know, it's shifted once again. So things to be aware of, for those that you know, are listening now and really want to be an empathetic leader. With empathy comes the ability to listen and to receive, knowing that you may not be comfortable with it.

Whitney:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you for sharing that.

Anita:

Oh, you're welcome. You're welcome. So for the new leader, that is just starting out, and is making that transition from let's say, from a listing manager to officer, right, or employee to the manager, what are some of the small ways that they can start to build their leadership skills?

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**Whitney:**

Yeah, absolutely. You know, one thing I would encourage new leaders is always to find ways to practice skills when the stakes are low because if we're not taking opportunities to give critical feedback, or set expectations, or set boundaries, in smaller situations, when the stakes are lower, it's going to be much harder to transfer that when the stakes get to be a lot higher. And you know, there are plenty of opportunities each and every day, even outside your leadership role, to set an expectation, to clarify a boundary, to give critical feedback that can at least get you accustomed to how that might feel or what it might look like for you, what words are going to be authentic for you, and just get a sense of comfort with, you know, it's a form of assertiveness, right? Like you can be empathetic and assertive. And then that way, when those kinds of higher stakes moments arise where someone might get upset, right, or is going to be a really difficult decision, it doesn't feel so foreign. It feels like you already have a pool of skills and tools that you can draw from. Another I would just say is like, to make sure you're asking for help. And then, you know, having that I always encourage leaders to find a support network, and people that they can reach out to and just be really honest with because leadership is lonely, like, you know, and it's just... it's a different role than when you were an individual contributor. So we need to have people that we trust that we can reach out to, and at least one of those needs to be someone that's a little bit of a critic, right, like someone that's gonna give you that, you know, kind of tough feedback and help you see blind spots and challenge you to think a completely different way. And so

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those are a couple of things I definitely encourage and of course, I'm biased Anita, but like hire a leadership coach. I think that's something I wish I would have done. I think you know, my five to thrive program is based off of things that I wish I had known or the support that I wish I had. Especially as I navigated that first professional-level leadership experience, and just to have somebody that wasn't even in my context, you know, to come in and just be completely nonbiased and kind of give those tools to help me navigate some of those tough conversations or those tough moments.

Anita:

Yes, that is great. That is definitely a great way to look at things and when you mentioned that you need assistance, hire a leadership coach. I think it is so important. A lot of times people think that reading books, even though there are great leadership books I just mentioned, John Maxwell, even though there are great books out there when it comes to putting those things into practice in our own lives, there are a lot of personal feelings and previous experiences that come up, and it helps to work with an unbiased leadership coach, a leadership coach that is not a person... It's great to have work friends, right, or peers at work that you can confide in. But it's also nice to be able to talk to someone that doesn't have a history with you, you know, that wasn't, you know, didn't know you as the person that you were as an individual contributor five years ago, and still looking at you with the same eyes, right?

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**Whitney:**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Anita:**

Working with a new person helps you, even if you are reading a book, that person helps you to apply those principles and principles that you like in that book, or in that workshop that you attended to your actual day-to-day. And you know, whether you're meeting on a weekly basis, or biweekly basis or you're communicating through Voxer or email, whatever that is, just knowing that you have that support is going to make whatever challenges you're going through with throughout the day even more, you can bear than that because you're like, oh, you know, I'm gonna talk to Whitney. I'll just talk to Whitney about this on Thursday, right? Or just talk to me about this at our next session. And that gives you a place to put it. It gives you someone that's going to challenge you that's going to ask you that put you in a position where they can ask you the deeper questions or get you to pull those questions out of you so then you can sit with those questions, and be like, huh, I never thought about it that way. But a lot of times, especially if you're anything like me, I am a bibliophile till the cows come home, right, so until the horse is getting back in the barn. I love books, and I will bury my head and the book and the audiobook, all day long. But at the end of the day, having actual conversation about the things that I've learned in the book, not only helps me to understand how to apply it to my life, but it also helps to bring those principles that I learned are those those things that I learned that's going to help me or help me with my

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leadership or help me with my coaching, whatever that is, it's going to help me help those things get ingrained in my system and allow me to when I'm not in conversation, be able to pull on that information on my own. Right?

Whitney:

Absolutely.

Anita:

So when working with someone like you and working with someone like me, we have those conversations with our clients. And then we're equipping our clients with the ability to be able to coach themselves the next time that moment pops up, right?

Whitney:

Absolutely.

Anita:

Yes, and if you're a coach, this is a thing that I say all the time, if your coach doesn't have a coach, there's a problem, right? Because your coach should always be looking to grow so that they can continue to grow as an individual. So they can also continue to help you if they're not learning new things and being pushed, challenged in different ways, and how can they learn and push and, you know, challenge you in different ways? So...

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**Whitney:**

Absolutely. Preach it, Anita.

**Anita:**

So, thank you, um, the next question I have for you, and I get this a lot, right? Especially for new coaches, or new leaders. Sometimes there are times when we have to be the leader and step out in front of our team. Say yes, we take ownership of it, and then we go back to our team, and we talk to our team, hey, tell me what happened, what went wrong. But then there are also times when we need to understand, you know, that the way that we... no matter how we give information to some people, they're going to receive it, how they're going to receive it. So is it our responsibility to be concerned, or worried about how a person is going to receive constructive feedback if we know that we're delivering it not from a place of, you know, being mean or talking down to that person or being condescending, but we're coming from a constructive place. We're giving feedback that's going to help them grow, it's going to help the team. Should we concern ourselves with how that person feels about it on the receiving end?

**Whitney:**

I feel like this kind of draws together a lot of things that we've talked about so far, right? Having that sense of character, that sense of clarity. You know, when it comes to giving

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somebody communications that you know, are likely to accept them. So I think your question was, you know, is it our job to control their emotions or manage their emotions? And you know, one thing I work with on leaders a lot when they need to deliver a difficult decision, or they need to deliver critical feedback because it's nerve-racking for the leader, right? Like I haven't had a client yet, but we haven't spent a session on how do we deliver this news or how do I deliver this feedback without this person getting really upset. And my favorite question to ask is, well, what's your responsibility in this situation, what is yours to own? And I, you know, we tend to come up with three things, and you've said a little bit already, they can own being clear and being kind in the delivery of the message. And I would say, that's really important because when we start to focus too much on how they might receive it, we started to water down the message, right? And I think even to the point, and we think that that's empathy, we think it's nice, but it's not nice, like Brene, Brown says, clear is kind, right? So, you know, leaders find in that situation, okay, I can focus on being clear and kind on, like, what that message is. The second thing that they can control is creating a safe space for the person to receive it, and just letting that person be upset if they're upset. Like if, you know, if you're a leader, and you have to tell an internal candidate that they didn't get the job that they really wanted, the person is going to be upset, and that's okay. Like, that's disappointing for them. Right? And that's empathy is saying, Here's your space, what can I do to support you, instead of like, Oh, don't feel bad, don't feel bad, don't feel bad? Or don't cry? Or don't be mad? No, no, like, let them be. Empathy is just letting them be in that moment, and asking, what can I do to support you? You

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know, what can I do to help moving forward? And then the third thing that leaders find that they can do, and we have this discussion is that they can circle back with that person. And eight times out of 10, that person will come back after hearing the news and maybe being a little upset, eight times out of 10, that person is going to come back and say, thank you for just giving it to me clear and kind. You know, that might not be their exact words, but they usually thank the person, and thanks for just creating that space for me. I totally understand. Like, eight times out of 10, people are gonna respond in that way. And then you might have some situations where that's not the case, but that's where you kind of get into like, you can't control the emotional maturity of somebody. You can't control how somebody is going to respond to you, but at the end of the day, you can say like, Okay, I was clear and kind as possible. I created this space for them to just be human at that moment, and I circle back, you know, I think you focus on what you could own. So what is yours to own is a very common question and coaching.

#### **Anita:**

Yeah, yes, absolutely because we can't control you know, the way that the other person is going to receive it whether it is in a professional or personal setting. But like you said, all you can do is just be clear and kind. I think the double-talking, the trying to be - I call it corporate speak - it's so annoying to me. It's so annoying to me. It waters down the conversation, it waters down the effort, it waters down the project. It's like, what is it... just tell me what you want to happen in this moment. Tell me what the end goal is, of



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this or that. Don't water it down because when you start to hemming and hawing and trying to soften it up now the person is bracing themselves, Oh, here we go with the BS. So they're getting angry at the delivery, you know, the process before the delivery before they even get the news. So by the time they get the news, they're already upset, just be clear and calm, like you said, and then you know, allow that person to save space. I really liked that. I think being able, the maturity and you said emotional maturity, the emotional maturity comes in for the leader when you can sit with the employee that is having a difficult moment, and not feel the need to overcompensate, and not feel the need to tell them don't feel that way, don't respond that way or not feel the need to get defensive. Right? Yeah, in those moments when those things happen because they happen, you know, to me, and in my coaching as well, in leadership positions, when that happens, I just sit back and just relax. And I think about it as being in a therapist's office, right? You may be having a bad day, and there's a moment when depending on what you're working on, you may project, you know, onto your therapist, the anger that you have, and your therapist just calmly sits there, you know, lets you get it all out and doesn't take it personally and then come back next week. The therapist doesn't have an attitude about it, you know, they're not saying 'I can't believe you said that to me last week' or 'I'm here listening to you every week and I can't believe...' you're not getting that.

Whitney:

There's no righteousness, yeah.

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**Anita:**

No. So from a leadership standpoint, I think it's important that leaders recognize that their role is not just about leading the projects or leading the people to complete the projects, but it's also about leading themselves to be a more conscious leader. They have to be that. They have to recognize like you said, they have to recognize their own limits. They have to understand what they can control, but then they also have to be emotionally mature enough to recognize that sometimes in a heated moment with an employee, they are the ones that have to be the bigger person. And, you know, once the person leaves out, they can close the door, pull out the drawer, have a bourbon.

**Whitney:**

Call their support network, right? Call your coach, call your support network like that's when you could do that. But yeah, your duty in that moment is to be in service to the other person.

**Anita:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. So for the new leaders, how do they go about identifying what boundaries they need? So if we're talking about a specific scenario, like from... this is a great one because I used to hear this all the time, coming from an employee role being promoted to manager, now you're in a manager role, and all of your friends are reporting

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to you. They used to be your friends, and now they're reporting to you. And so how are you going to set those boundaries between we may be friends outside of the office, right? But in this moment, I am your manager. How do you set those boundaries?

Whitney:

First of all, I would just, I really want to validate that that's a really tough experience, you know, to go from being friends for like our work friends, colleagues, and then being in that leadership role where you're managing somebody, you know, maybe they're even a direct report. You know, I just want to validate that if you're, if you're a leader out there in that position, like, just that's a very difficult experience, you know, and it might take time, right? And it might take some trial and error to kind of figure out, you know, what's the boundary? How do I approach it? How do I set clear expectations? But, you know, I had a few things kind of pop from my brain as you thought that. You know, first and foremost, I think you need to know the definition of a boundary, right? And so there are three authors that I really like to pull from with this that I recommend for any leader. First of all, I've talked about Brene Brown a ton, but she defines boundaries as clearly and kindly communicating what's okay and what's not okay, like really simple, kind of catch-all boundary. But then another book I'd really recommend is by Nedra Glover Tawwab. And she wrote *Set Boundaries, Find Peace*, and she defines boundaries as you know, the wants, needs, and expectations that you need in order to thrive. The third book I'd recommend is *The Book of Boundaries* by Melissa Urban, and she says that

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boundaries are the limits we put in place to feel safe and supported and that those limits are limits that we control. So we can't control other people, but boundaries are the limits, we uphold and we maintain to feel safe and supported. So now that we know the definition of a boundary, I definitely recommend those three authors, those three books. How you can notice a boundary might be violated is your emotional experience, and this is where I'm a big believer that emotions belong in the workplace. Emotions are useful tools to understanding ourselves and to understanding others. So if you notice that, maybe something your colleague did that you used to be colleagues, but now they report to you, if you start to feel some resentment, or some anger, or some uncomfortable, like tension or frustration, or uncomfortable feelings, that's a sign that maybe a boundary was violated. You know, I just can't say enough, as a leader, you need to take time for self-reflection. You need to have time, every day that you can connect with yourself so that you can stay grounded to your inner voice, to your vision, to your values, and just connect to your emotional experience, otherwise, we're not going to notice these points that we set boundaries. So that self-awareness, we talked about a time that self-awareness of a troublesome emotion is where the boundary setting actually begins. You know, and in terms of the leader that was maybe promoted or their colleagues, you know, my, of course, if I was coaching a person, I would say, you know, what feels most challenging about setting a boundary, and I'd stay curious with them, you know, kind of figuring out, but just as a catch-all, you know, a suggestion that I like to teach leaders on is just using the power of transparency. Just call it out. Transparency is so powerful. Hey, you know, let's say I'm the leader, and you used to be

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my colleague: Hey, Anita, I need to have an awkward conversation. Like it's just being transparent. Hey Anita, I just need to put something out there. Right? And I think using language with like roles, right? You know, hey, it's my role now to do x, y, z. And I think it's really important as leaders that we're not putting the relationship before the role in certain moments. And at the same time, like, if you're, you know, you're dating and connection or relationship experts, I think it's also human that like, as leaders, there's gonna be people you have stronger connections with, right? But it's those moments that you need to be really cognizant that when you reach the context of a leader-employee relationship, you're not putting the relationship before the role. So I think transparency is a powerful tool, and then another, you know, another kind of language to put in your back pocket is contrasting, and a future focus language. So hey, Anita, you know, moving forward, what works for me is, and what doesn't work for me is. Or, Anita, moving forward, what's okay is and what's not okay is... and it's just, it's hard, right? Like, and you have to have that, like 30 seconds of courage to just start talking. Right, right, you know, but those are some tools that we can use when it comes to setting boundaries. But you know, I can't say enough that if you're not aware of a boundary being violated, then also the boundary is: make sure that you're willing to follow up with it with action as well. So if you set a boundary, you know, you have to set a boundary that you can uphold and that you are willing to pull because we can't control other people.

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**Anita:**

Right? I like that. I like that a lot. I wrote down, stay curious. And then you said an inner voice, vision, and values. And I mean, we could talk specifically, or an entire podcast about self-awareness as an individual first, and then as a leader, because you have to be, you really have to be self-aware in order to be in a leadership position. Because if you are not, and you think you're hiding, all of your insecurities will show. Everybody will see they will leave you with your insecurities, they will leave, or they will not respect you, you know, it's just it's not a pretty picture. So I have two scenarios for you I also have experience with... I think about an employee who's now promoted to manager. But this manager is also an employee of a higher-level manager. So they are not only required to manage their subordinates, but they also still have their own full workload that their manager is expecting of them. How would you support that manager? Because the challenge was that while the employees wanted to look to that manager for support, for coaching, for guidance, that manager was too busy trying to do their work for their manager. Right? And so I have my own thoughts and comments about that, but I would love to hear what you would tell that manager in the middle.

**Whitney:**

Middle management, right? It's a tough role. It's a tough role. You know, I spent 10 years in higher education, which is just one big bureaucracy, and you know, just a whole host of middle management. So, you know, I can definitely empathize that that's a difficult position to be in. And, you know, again, we talked about staying curious. And I

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would be really curious about what's most challenging about that. What is the biggest problem that person is trying to solve in terms of being a leader, while also, you know, being an employee of the next step up? And, you know, so there's a lot of things that could be most challenging about that. Some of it is managing varying priorities, right? And some of it too is like, when we make a shift, when we're in a leadership position, we have to make sure that we're creating time to lead and we're not, I don't want to say wasting time, that's not the phrase I'm going for, but like, we got to be willing to delegate. Right? Like we have to free up time in our calendars, to delegate and trust the people on our team, because Arita, I'm sure that you found that like, that's actually a really common experience that even when you are a leader, you're still reporting to somebody else. So I would be really curious about like, what's the specific challenge of that person when it comes to their time management. Is it that they're not delegating? You know, is it that they're not clear on the rules, goals, and expectations that the person above them has? Is there a value misalignment between what they have to give to their team that's coming down from them? And so I would say, actually, to sum of that up, number one, I would ask that person like, what is the biggest problem here? What's the most challenging? What problem do you need to solve? Because until we can kind of get clear on that specific problem that we're having, it's really hard to solve the problem.

Anita:

Yeah. Yeah. It was in this particular case, it was a really tough situation to be in. And the

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biggest challenge at that time was that upper management was still expecting 100% work from the manager, which didn't leave enough time for the manager to set aside time to focus on coaching those that were behind. And so it's, you know, we're looking at middle management, but as we talk about being leaders, coaches, for leaders, we also want our top tier leaders are C-suite to think about that. You have these people that are under you, but based on what you're asking these people to do, are you leaving enough time for these people to effectively manage and coach the team members that they have under them? Because I don't think it's fair to the employees who are looking to the leader for leadership, but the leader is too busy to provide leadership because of their leadership.

#### **Whitney:**

And that's just not a ripple effect you want to have! So, what I'm hearing is that this person needs to have clarity, and roles, goals, and expectations conversation with their boss... or tell me where I'm wrong. I think the best thing that that person can do is take a moment to find the space for yourself to reflect, what does support look like for me right now? What do I need moving forward to be a good employee for the person above me and to be a good leader for the person below me? And then we have to start that conversation with the person above me of saying what I need in order to do this job well, is XYZ, and that is a lot easier said than done. And if I was coaching, you know, and if I was coaching any leaders, the question we need to be asking constantly is what does support look like for me to meet these initiatives, and give that person that space



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to say, I don't have time to do this, and this. But I know that that's such a hard phrase to say because we don't want to make it appear like we're not succeeding. We don't want it to make it appear like we can't handle it. Right. So I think but I think we instead of saying that, we have to say what does support look like for me? Pick up two or three bullet points, and we have to start that conversation with the person above us. But the hardest part of that is the vulnerability of showing what someone might perceive as a weakness, right? But that's a risk to take in order to be a good leader in order to be a good employee. But I'm really curious what you would add to that because that's a tough situation.

Anita:

It is definitely a tough situation. I agree, you have to have that conversation. In having that conversation, though, what I've found is that if you are a person that is not used to speaking up for yourself, advocating for yourself, let's say you were a star individual contributor, which got you promoted, right? But you're not used to your thing as you're used to focusing on process, not people. Now you're in this people role. And you have to still do the process, but now you have to learn a whole new set of skills by dealing with people, right? So when we look at the ideas, when you look at your leadership, when you look at who you're promoting, you have to look at what role did they fulfill initially. Were they a start individual contributor? Were they like, sometimes you have people who just naturally take ownership or have a leadership position, even as an employee, right? They're the person who always gets everybody together and the

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person that always makes sure... so that person has natural leadership abilities. Now, it doesn't mean that you don't hire that person as an individual contributor as a leader, but you as the... we'll call it the senior leader, you have to make sure that that person has the support that they need in order to grow into the leader that they need to be in position and you have to provide them the space and the time to do that.

#### **Whitney:**

And the training. You know, I think that middle manager position doesn't get that level of development that it deserved. And that's exactly why I created the program that I did.

I'm so passionate to share it because, you know, executive coaching is an amazing thing, but I saw a stat recently that it's the senior-level leaders that are getting it. Yet it's the middle managers going through this beginner's process, right? They have to learn how to be a leader and still do many aspects of their job at the same time. And that's no small skill to learn. It's like that leader needs support and training and how, and honestly, this leader would benefit from coaching and from having a mentor to sit down and say, how do I show up for myself in this conversation? Because yeah, you're totally right, Anita, like advocating for yourself. And that is really hard. And, you know, a phrase that if I could go back to younger Whitney, a phrase I would teach myself to use more is just simply saying, you know, this isn't working for me. Just to start the conversation, right? Like, I'm always obsessed with, like, how do I do this? I'm like, you know, I just see it as just be honest, and say, This isn't working right now. I'm committed to fixing it, and what support looks like and that is XYZ. Would you be willing to talk with me about

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this and have more frank conversations? Right? But I think as women we're talking about in private conversations as women, it's like, well, I don't want to seem needy or not strong enough. Right? Or that I can't do something, you know, and that advocacy and that middle management role is definitely a challenge and a skill set.

Anita:

Yeah. And you need support. Right. And a lot of times, it's, it's what... For me, when I'm working with clients like my clients have, I don't know exactly how your coaching programs are set up. For my one-on-one clients, they have access to me via Voxer.

Whitney:

I use Marco Polo. Similar.

Anita:

So when they're in the middle of it, right, when they're about to hyperventilate because this happened, or they have to go into this meeting, it's like, reach out. Okay, and it's like, in the moment, they have a support system right there, right? So they have someone that's going to help them, be able to talk them down, off the fence, right, or talk them down off the top of the building, have them stand in their power pose, and, you know, tell them a joke to make them laugh, right, and remind them just how, how valuable they are. And most of the time these women have the words, they're just so

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frustrated in that moment, they can't find them. Or when they get ready to say them without support, you have practiced everything in the mirror. And then without someone you know, teaching you how to calm yourself down in that situation, providing you with roleplay, so you know, we roleplay the situation, and then, you know, we provide feedback. So when they get to the actual situation, they know. I mean, we look at, if we're running an organization, we're hiring consultants, we want the consultant to show us how to do XYZ. If we're a sports player, we hire coaches to teach us how to do XYZ, and we go through drills, and we practice. That is what we do as coaches. We go through drills, and we practice, and we push when we need to, and we support when we need to, but that's outside of the workplace. And that tends to help when they know they have that support that tends to help them be able to be a lot more open a lot more vocal. I got a phone call today after five o'clock, it's like I get a text. Do you have time for a two-minute praise report? I'm like, absolutely. So I get the calmness like I stood up for myself today. You go! I'm so proud of you!

#### **Whitney:**

You go, girl! And it's that accountability too, right, that the coach provides of like... man, I really don't want to tell Whitney, I didn't have this conversation today.

#### **Anita:**

I know Anita is gonna ask me about that.

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Whitney:

But knowing that Anita is also going to be stoked when I tell her, you know, and like, yeah, support and that cheerleading, you know, is such a big, such a big thing in those roles.

Anita:

Yeah. So let's flip the script for a minute. I have a question for you as it relates to boundaries. So we've talked a lot about leaders setting boundaries, and how they do that and self-awareness and things like that. How would you handle or how would you coach someone to handle a situation where they feel like, their manager doesn't have boundaries? That their manager is, you know, walking a fine line between sharing things with them, you know, chatting it up like a friend, one minute and then the next minute trying to provide feedback as a manager and it's like, wait, what? What are you doing? Who are you today? Are you my manager or are you my friend? And then in that friend mode, they're saying things that could be deemed inappropriate, but they think they're just being cool. Like, we already know, and I can see it in your face, we already understand what's happening. But this isn't a coaching session for the leader, we're trying to provide, you know, coaching in this moment for the employee, how does the invoice at the boundary with the leader without, you know, worrying about retaliation or things like that? How would you approach this situation?

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#### Whitney:

You know, kind of like the previous situation, again, like staying encouraging that person to stay really curious, you know, and taking time to self-reflect and diving more into that experience? You know, I might again ask them the same question of like, what's most challenging here? Like, what's most significantly bothersome? You know, and getting really clear about where that barrier is being torn down. That's not the right phrase. Where that, you know, where that boundary is being crossed. Being really clear about what you don't want, right? And then I think the next question is, what *do* you want? What do you want this interaction to look like? And those seem like, really simple questions, but especially the what do you want one can be pretty hard. People I've noticed have to, like, sit with that for a second, you know, because we tend to get over-focused on like, Oh, I just can't stand this, which is valid, right? Then it's like, okay, well, you know, what do you want? What is your expectation of your manager? What change do you want to see, and just get clear with yourself as to what that is. So what the boundary is, what you want it to look like. Another thing that I might ask this person is, what are you willing to do to uphold the limit that helps you feel safe and supported? Because we can't control the other person, right? What actions are you willing to take that will help you stay safe and supported, and in *The Book of Boundaries* by Melissa urban, she has a great categorization scale, where she talks about green boundaries, yellow boundaries and red boundaries. And you know, only that person can know how to move forward. Right? And, you know, if maybe the green boundary is just removing themselves from the situation, you know, I'm not totally sure. Maybe the yellow

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boundary is saying, hey, you know what, and like, we need to have a conversation. And then red boundary might be something kind of intense, like finding a new manager. Right? But does that make sense? Like the green, yellow, red? I think Melissa Urban, like that was such a great way to think about it of like, what are the limits that I need to set, and then you know, I'm going to start with green, I'm going to start with the clearest, kindest way to uphold the limit that I can set, and then yellows next, red is next. So that those are just kind of general prompts without getting into like a specific situation as to like what that person might be doing. Also, Anita, I want to point out that like, if somebody is like truly being inappropriate, sometimes it's not a boundaries issue. You know, like, sometimes that's something that needs to be reported. And, you know, unfortunately, we can't always control whether or not somebody is going to retaliate. But I also think in boundaries conversations, we need to know what's not a boundary. And I think there's just certain things that if it's toxicity, if it's bullying, if it's bias, like microaggression, it might not be a boundary situation, that might be something where you need to seek a greater level of support, but I'd be interested. But tell me where I'm wrong. I'd be interested to hear your perspective on that as well.

Anita:

No, I think you're right on the money. I think you are right on the money, right? People tend to have a greater idea and a quick response for what they don't like, what they don't want. Even in relationship coaching, right? Well, you know, my girlfriend this, my husband that! Okay, well, if you don't like that, what do you like? Like I would ask, write

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a list of 10 things right now that would show you that your partner hears, loves, understands and appreciate you. 10! Right now. What would what would that look like? That would take two weeks! Because they're so focused on what they don't like and don't really understand what they do like. So I like the fact that you said, you know, you understand what about the situation that you don't like, take a good look at it. What is it? How would you prefer? For me, I would probably say how would you prefer this situation to play out? What would you prefer your interactions with this person be? Right? And let's say if you realize that a one hour meeting tends to be 15 minutes of business and 45 minutes of BS, then, you know, find a way to decrease the meeting from an hour to 30 minutes.

#### **Whitney:**

Right. And that's a limit that you can control. Right.

#### **Anita:**

So decrease the amount of time spent with this individual, or when you're in the meeting, have a set agenda. Go through the agenda, keep focusing, refocusing back to the agenda. By the time you do that, the 30 minutes is up, and now you gotta go. You got a meeting. Whether you have one or not, that's your out. Right? If you can't move from where you are in a position to another position, right? I mean, you know, just thinking about practical ways, right? Because sometimes when I'm working with women,



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they don't necessarily have the ability to leave or go another job or go to apartment.

They have to be there.

Whitney:

Even if you did, you know, you're still there. Like you're still there. You know, I've definitely been in that position to where it's like, okay, even if I want to move on, well, I'm still here! What are we gonna do right now?

Anita:

Right? Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's true. But just understanding that, and I think, you know, we do a lot. So I work with two different groups. I'm on the board for the Women Impact Network, and then I'm also one of the coaches for the Women in Technology. And we focus a lot on self development, professional development, and personal development for women. And a lot of the times the conversations are, women are so conditioned to be quiet, or not take up space. And having been a domestic abuse survivor, and having been in the military and a single mom, and, you know, having risen up in corporate America without having a degree, I've had to learn how to take up space. I've had to learn how to use my voice, and so these are the types of things the programs, the exercises, the books, the speakers that we bring in to teach women how to do that. But it's not always easy. While we're people are reading books and listening to podcasts, that's great, but there's so many different layers underneath that, that coaches help you to understand and identify by peeling back, okay, well, that happened. And I see

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coaching as complete. I believe that there is a place for traditional psychology, therapy, I have my own therapists. I have my own coaches, right? But the reason why I love being a coach, is because I get to share my personal experience, and you get to share yours as well. When you're in therapy, they're not talking about their lives, or their children, and their husband is all about you. But I liked the conversation, and I also like having lived experience and being able to share that lived experience.

**Whitney:**

Absolutely.

**Anita:**

So in these arenas and my coaching, I've mentored several people, several, I want to say, well, they're not all younger than me, but several women in corporate space, right? And it's all about teaching them how to find their voice, and find their voice and then use their voice, right? Okay, so what could you have said in that moment? What did you want to say? Well, I wanted to say XYZ. I'm like, Okay, well, maybe not that. You know, how can we make that and corporatize that? How can we make them give that a softer landing so that we're not being insubordinate, right? Because we don't want to do that either. But just teaching them how to use their voice, teaching them how to stand up, how to take up space, and how to not necessarily walk in with a superwoman pose in the board meeting like I'm here, right? But the presence just having the professional presence, like, Okay, I am here. I am aware of my surroundings, I'm looking you in the

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eye. I'm not looking down. I'm not, you know, cowering in a corner. I'm not some mouse. No, I am here. I'm a person. I speak up. Right? I use my voice. And then teaching women even in meetings, when because this happens a lot in corporate where a woman will say something and and nobody will respond. A man will say it, and then everyone will say, Oh, that's the best thing since sliced bread. Teaching women how to support other women in that space, saying, oh, that's exactly what Jane said, and that's exactly what Keisha said, you know, that's great. Thank you for pointing that out. Right? And so just teaching them how to support each other, I think by doing so in environments in which more than one woman is learning how to do this so when you're in meetings with these women outside of our individual meetings, you have support. So the more women that get access to these trainings, the more women that go through coaching, the more women that understand how to find and use their voice, the more they do it for themselves, they tend to share that and do that for other women. So this is why I love coaching. Absolutely.

Whitney:

I love what you said about taking up your space. That's like something I would encourage a woman to do. You know, when you're looking to set that boundary with your boss that's making you feel uncomfortable, or you need to go up in a board meeting and make a difficult decision. You know, take up your space, like own your role, and own your power and your intelligence and your talents to do those things. And, you know, I think we've talked a lot about tonight of letting go of what you can't control, like

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and easier said than done. But I think just identifying them. I think, you know, that clarity allows you to show up to those moments with a lot more courage.

#### **Anita:**

Absolutely. Well, this is amazing. I absolutely love talking to you. And I know I'm going to... I'm doing something Q2, I would love for you to come back and have you been involved.

#### **Whitney:**

I would love to be back!

#### **Anita:**

Oh, awesome. So I will share more a little later, but right now, women are so used to doing it all by themselves. Right? We're so used to... I can do it. I can do it. Where some of us are - not me, I'm so far from this time of my life, but some of us are picking up kids, right. And we're dropping them off, picking them up, or trying to get them here. Their music lessons, sports things, friend's sleepovers, all of that, and we're working. And we're wives or girlfriends, and we're caretakers, right? We're trying to do it all, and the one thing that we don't want to do is ask for help because we think it's a sign of weakness. What do you say to that?

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Whitney:

Well, I'd have to go back to my one of my favorites, Brene Brown, and you know, there's a term that I like to use, it's called the vulnerability blind spot. Brene says, you know, we see asking for help as strength in others but weak in me. So when others do things that are vulnerable, we look at them, and we think, Wow, that's so courageous. But when it comes our turn, to do something courageous, were just like, oh, no, no, no, not for us, not for me. And I think like, how do we need to be aware of that blind spot, that vulnerability blind spot of that anytime we come across a vulnerable moment, it's not a sign of weakness, it's actually a moment where we can step into courage and do something that's going to make a decision that's going to serve us. And like, also, we don't need to... it's normal to feel that, right? Like, I think normalizing that emotion that like, you know, that's a normal human experience, you know, to fear asking for help and exposing yourself in that way, it can be very vulnerable. So it's also an opportunity to step into your courage and do something that will serve you.

Anita:

Absolutely, absolutely. I'm going to share this with you. It just popped into my head is as you were talking. There was maybe about two years ago, two, three years ago, it was pre-COVID, I was a part of this group on Facebook, and it was called Black women who decorate. And that was a requirement. You had to be a Black woman to be in this group. The group was like head over 300 and something... 350,000 members. I was like, wow.

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But there was a woman that came into the group one day and she said we need to normalize Black women hiring help. So from a from a Black woman's perspective, for us, it's not normal for us to have to hire like nannies or house cleaners or gardeners or things like that. Those are things that we do ourselves, right? A part of what she was saying the message she was conveying was for us to ask for help, it was a sign of weakness like we couldn't do it. We watched our grandmothers, great grandmothers do it all and so we felt like oh wait, that's a badge of honor. Because Great Grandma did it, grandma did it, mom did it. I should be able to do it. But what we fail to realize is that great grandma, grandma, and mom all had health challenges. They all had bad knees, they, you know, they were all stressed out because they were doing too much and not wanting to ask for help. So her comment was for Black women to normalize hiring help, asking for help because it was okay. It was not a sign of weakness, it was a sign of strength. And it was a sign of self-care and self, what I call self-preservation. I want to be here. And her comment was basically I want to be here to watch my kids grow up, I don't want to be, you know, I want to be able to run around with my kids because I have the energy to do so. Because I've hired other people to do stuff. So delegating, right, whether it's the house cleaning, whether it's the grocery shopping, you can order groceries, and you know, now from anywhere from all stores. So you don't need to be out at the grocery store for two hours. If you don't want to be that's more time you spend with your children or with your significant other, right? So, normalizing asking for help. So I think, in this space, in the corporate space, in the leadership space, we need to as you said, normalize, asking for help. It's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of building

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your character and also giving yourself permission to take care of you.

Whitney:

And you're a leader! You're a leader, be the one that goes first, like model the change that you want to create.

Anita:

Lead by example because I guarantee you when you drop dead, they're just gonna bring somebody else into your office. They're not gonna create a statue, a big monument outside the building because you work yourself 94 hours a week, they're not gonna do that. They're gonna hire somebody else. So you may as well set healthy boundaries, normalize asking for help, understand that help sometimes comes in, you know, that in the guise of you hiring somebody to help at home or you asking a team member to help you in the office. Or it could be you hiring a leadership coach to help you get, you know, pointed in the right direction, help you find your voice, help you understand what it's like to move from one position into leadership, all of those things. And that's what we're here for. Right? That's why we do what we do.

Whitney:

Absolutely.

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**Anita:**

It has been such a pleasure. Whitney, I can't wait. I can't wait to dive into this episode and have the show notes. Meghan is going to put all this stuff together for me. I had looked up and I'm like, oh my god, did I start the recording?

**Whitney:**

You did! You did, yeah. Cuz I gave permission. It would've just been like, Well, we had a really great conversation.

**Anita:**

Like, girl, I've done them before. When I first started with the podcast...

**Whitney:**

I'd be like, I guess Anita and I are talking again next week.

**Anita:**

Yeah, and so we had to do it again. It was so funny, but it was a great time. So you guys, you've heard this story before, if you've been following the podcast. I'm so happy that we connected, and I'm looking forward to getting together and to discuss more leadership tactics and topics. Before we go though, I would like... all of your information



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is going to be in the show notes. So they'll be able to access it there. But for those that are listening, tell them where they can find you. Let them know what free gift we're going to give them today and how they can connect with you if they would like to talk more about your coaching program.

Whitney:

Yeah, absolutely. Well, you can find me at www.WhitneySullivan.com, which will be in the show notes. That's my website. From there, you can find me on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn which I am all active on. And I also have a newsletter, which if you download the freebie in the show notes, the Five to Thrive by Enneagram type guidebook gives you a little preview to the five to thrive program. And if you're into the Enneagram if you're into self-awareness assessments, it's a great tool for that as well. But that puts you onto my newsletter, which I send a weekly newsletter called The Leaders Three, Two, One, three insights, two questions, and one statistic to help you thrive as a leader. And if you want more than that, if you're interested in working with me, you can book a free consult. There's links everywhere to that free console on my website, on my social media, on the free guidebook, and you can ask me or you can also shoot me an email as well, which my email is also all over around there as well if you have further questions.

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#### Anita:

Great. Thanks again, Whitney. And for all of the listeners, this is our first candid conversation of 2023! Stay tuned for more with phenomenal women. I can't even begin to tell you how excited I am about the lineup for this year and the great things coming. So until next time... we will talk to you soon!

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For all coaching, media, or consulting inquiries, don't hesitate to contact Anita at <https://anitacharlot.com/contact>.

To learn more about how to partner with Anita, go to <https://anitacharlot.com/services>.

To join the waiting list for the upcoming For My Black and Brown Sisters monthly membership community, go to bit.ly/formyblackandbrownsisters.

Upcoming Speaking Engagements:

Flourish Media Conference **2/17 - 2/18** Miami, Florida
Topic & Workshop: How To Heal From Workplace Trauma for Black and Brown Women

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IREM Chapter Luncheon **3/30** Oak Brook, IL  
Keynote Speaker; Conscious Transformative vs. Performative DEI Programs and How  
They Impact Your Employees