**Wake Up Eager Workforce Podcast, Episode 87**

**Grow Strong Leaders with Meredith Bell**

**Produced by KWells Podcast Services**

Transcript

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**Suzie Price** 00:00

How do you know when you're being a great listener? In today's episode, Meredith Bell of Grow Strong Leaders gives the perfect answer. Here's what she shared, you will know by how the other person responds to you. Because when I'm being a really effective listener, people can feel my attention and my presence, I make a real effort to bring love to the conversation, a loving spirit, so that they feel safe and open and that my questions encourage them. Curiosity is such a key aspect of listening. When you are really curious with someone and you're seeking to really understand them. Curiosity is what you bring. And love is what is felt. Imagine that to show up in a way that someone will feel loved by us, appreciated, valued and cherished. All of those words, even in the workplace, are so important because that's what leads to not just engagement, but passion and excitement about work when people feel that their leader or team member takes a genuine interest in them. So as you can tell, we have another inspiring and informative conversation for you today. I can't wait to share it with you. Michael hit it.

**Intro** 01:04

Welcome to the Wake Up Eager Workforce Podcast, a show designed for leaders, trainers and consultants who are responsible for employee selection and professional development. Each episode is packed full with insider tips, best practices, expert interviews and inspiration. Please welcome the host who is helping leaders, trainers and consultants everywhere Suzie Price

**Suzie Price** 01:34

Hi, this is Suzie Price and you are listening to the Wake Up Eager Workforce Podcast where we cover everything related to helping you and the employees and the organizations you work in. Build a high commitment, low drama, and wake up an eager workforce. Bottom line, we help leaders and organizations make good decisions about their people. And so when you're making good decisions about people, putting them in the right seats, giving them the right support and onboarding, team building, development, succession planning and conflict resolution we create a bigger workforce. And so that's what we cover here on our podcast. And that is the work we do. If you have any questions you can always reach out to me at pricelessprofessional.com/Suzie Suzie i e pricelessprofessional.com/Suzie. I'd be happy to answer any questions. And if you have suggestions for the podcast or questions about anything that we have any of the information that we share, please reach out. Today's topic is about growing strong leaders. It's episode number 87. This is what we cover. We talk about secrets and myths and common misconceptions about what it takes to become a strong leader. We share the top interpersonal skills that most increase awareness, appreciation and compassion and the benefits of peer coaching and how it changes behavior. I had a great discussion today with Meredith Bell. She is the co-founder and president of Grow Strong Leaders. Her company publishes software tools and books that help people build strong relationships at work and at home. She is an expert in leader and team communications, the author of three books and the host of the Grow Strong Leaders Podcast. We talk about her books, and we have links to her books in the show notes. And you can find the show notes and those links at pricelessprofessional.com/growstrongleaders. pricelessprofessional.com/growstrongleaders. And that is all lowercase and one word. All right, let's go to the episode now. I know you're going to enjoy it.

**Suzie Price** 02:54

Meredith is so good to see you. Thank you for being here and taking time to chat with us and share your wisdom.

**Meredith Bell** 03:37

Well, Suzie, you know, you have been one of my favorite people for all these years that we've known each other. So I'm excited to have this conversation with you.

**Suzie Price** 03:46

Long overdue, long overdue in my opinion. We have known each other trying to think, I think since 2006 is when I think that's right. More than 15 years. Yeah, such a great person with great insights, I'm going to jump right in so everybody can benefit from you. And let's talk a little bit about misperceptions about what it takes to grow communication skills. I was looking at some numbers and people forget 80% of training, I think I don't know if that's still accurate 80% of what they've learned in a class or on a coaching call one month later. So a small percentage of take home here. Yeah. And we don't think that a lot of leaders think okay, I'm going to hold a course they're going to go through some leadership training and they gotta, they're all better. Talk a little bit about all that.

**Meredith Bell**  04:34

That is one of the big misconceptions that organizations or people in organizations have, send someone to training, introduce them to the skills and now when they come back, they're expected to perform it in a different way and our brains just don't work that way. It's a I'll call it an innocent misunderstanding, because we don't know A lot of people just don't know any better, you know, they can spend a lot of money bringing in a very entertaining speaker, or a very skilled instructor. But you're right. And I think the percentage is actually higher than that, that people forget, it's probably closer to 90%. And believe it, because of how our brains are structured, you know, we have these, we don't come to work with a blank slate. Over the years, we have acquired certain ways of saying things, of doing things, of approaching how we listen, and how we give feedback. And those are actually hardwired in the brain. So just getting exposed to information or even practicing it in a classroom is not enough to have a new pathway laid down that's stronger than the old one. So it takes a lot of practice, reinforcement, reflection, after you've practiced it to, you know, think about how it goes and learn lessons from that. And, of course, it really helps to have a coach, someone who, whether it's your manager, or a peer, or someone who's been hired from the outside, an individual who is behind you, you know, they're in your corner, they're supporting you and holding you accountable. So that combination of elements is what it really takes for training to stick.

**Suzie Price** 06:28

So this perception of okay, I've had his leadership course, it was really good. Everybody liked it, which is a good thing. But it doesn't really, you know, bring it home.

**Meredith Bell**  06:37

And it's not enough. It's not enough.

**Suzie Price** 06:41

And do you think it's with all skills? Or do you think it's more particularly through communication and leadership? Because of the hardwiring, what do you think? I think it's all skills, but maybe harder?

**Meredith Bell**  06:52

Well, here's the thing, when somebody is learning a, quote, hard skill, like a technical how to do this, they often have guidance and repetition in that that's truly over time. So those same principles simply don't get applied to a lot of leadership courses that are geared to these other kinds of leadership skills. And it's unfortunate, because, you know, think of someone doing something on a shop floor, a machinist or electrician, those kinds of skills. People have to get trained extensively, and they practice and they are supervised, if you will, to make sure they get them. Right. And those same principles don't are not often not applied to the software called softer skills.

**Suzie Price** 07:44

Yes, yes, that is so true. That is so true. That makes a big difference. Interesting. Yes. So you have materials and programs and things that help make this easier, because I think that's why it doesn't have one, we're not thinking about it. It's an innocent misunderstanding. And so it's like, well, how do we do it? You know, we know how to do it with your mechanical stuff. But how do we take that same model and put it over here? What is your answer to that question?

**Meredith Bell** 08:14

Well, there are a combination of pieces that I was mentioning before, there's, there's an expectation that in advance that you're going to be practicing this, you know, you're expected to practice this, we're going to be checking, and it isn't like holding a you know, whip over somebody, it's it's in from the context of supporting you, as you're working on this, because we know it isn't something you can change overnight. And so putting in place the expectation that they're going to be using this in specific situations at work, and then checking in with some other person on how they're doing, how it's going, what they have done. So there is that accountability piece. You know, Suzie, we all respond well to that. Whether it's having a trainer we hired to work with us at the gym, or a walking or running partner, somebody else that cares about how we're doing in this area, because we're all so busy, it's easy to set that aside and forget about it. If we don't have it in the front of our minds, oh, I'm gonna need to be talking to Suzie about this next week. I better make sure I apply this. So I think that's a really key part. And like I said, having time to either write down answers to questions like, Well, how did it go when I applied this, what happened? And did it turn out the way I hoped it would? And what have I learned that I can do differently in the ultimate success of applying a new skill?

**Suzie Price**  09:52

Yes, and you know, it's setting the expectation is something that gets left out of this puzzle. So having the accountability A partner coach, but prior to that the expectation and whoever's running the program, particularly the leader of the program, or the CEO, or whoever needs to say this is, we expect this from you. And so that's something that gets left out a lot in a lot of places in the work environment. Because once you hear that, oh, I'm expected to follow up. Okay, you know, just don't even state what we're thinking just because we're busy again, I think it's an innocent misunderstanding. You know, it just gives me this, or they think they have it thinks they think it should be obvious. That's the other thing that I hear sometimes, you know, they know it's obvious, like, yeah, maybe not.

**Meredith Bell** 10:41

Yeah, that follow up is just so critical. I can remember years ago, a fellow that really loved one of our programs, had been an executive with one of the Fortune 500 companies for many, many years. And he told me, when we were talking about this, the need for follow up, he said, you know, not a single leadership class that I ever attended in my entire career, had any follow up to it, we were just exposed to information and then expected that we would use it but no one ever checked in to see if we actually did. And it's when you think about it, it's a waste of money to spend half of your time away from the job attending a class. And then there's no follow up afterwards. I just think it's unfortunate that they don't get the results they were hoping for. That's the key, there's not that return on investment, if people aren't having some kind of follow up activities that they're involved with.

**Suzie Price** 11:48

It's the return on investment. And then, in addition to that, the outside of the bottom line is it lets down the participants because we're not really setting them up for success. Yeah, not showing them the way us as the facilitators or the leaders of the trainer's showing them the way to make this change. Because it is hard to change interpersonal skills, I think about the way back when you were teaching me all of this. When I first started with your work and with you and your company, with the software and the surveys and such, we called it train to ingrain. And I always thought that was such a good, because it's about the new, you got to help people make new neural pathways, whether you're learning machine, or even harder when you're changing how you've been communicating your whole whole entire life, or maybe don't have to change everything, but there's habits that we have that are blind spots, that they're hard to change, because they're, they're part of our strengths, you know, and we overdo them.

**Meredith Bell** 12:42

Yes, exactly. That's it.

**Suzie Price**  12:44

So I really enjoyed two of your books, I ordered them on Amazon, and we will have them in the show notes. One is to Connect With Your Team. And the other is Peer Coaching Made Simple. So we're going to talk a little bit about both of those, Connect With Your Team. And it's so clear, as you always are very clear in your communication, you and you end any and you'd cover 10 interpersonal skills that are most empowering. How did you pick those skills and these skills are in the book I talk about them being they're the ones that on a team will help increase awareness, appreciation and compassion, who doesn't want that awareness, appreciation and compassion. With leaders, we're always talking about putting people first. And so these skills are really related to that. How did you pick 10? Out of all the interpersonal skills, I was like, man, they did a good job. But how did they decide?

**Meredith Bell** 13:35

Well, you know, it was a practice over years going way back, even more than 30 years ago, when Danny and I were both, you know, solo consultants working with organizations and seeing where people struggled the most. And so we had a list of all kinds of skills and just kind of prioritize this, this, this. And so it was looking at where are the gaps? Where are the areas that create problems for people? And how can we present some concepts and not just concepts, but practical strategies of what to do to be effective. Along with those scenarios, we give some conversations, the before and after of what in the Connect With Your Team book on what it looks like when that skill, like listening is not done well. And then what is it like in the exchange when it is done? Well, so people don't have to imagine, well, what is that really like? We've made it clear and then given very clear steps on what to do to make it as concrete as possible.

**Suzie Price 14:44**

Yeah, I liked listening, because that's one of my favorite skills. So I'm way better at it than I used to be. And it's always an opportunity for growth. But I really do want to hear you know what everybody says And so if I'm being the facilitator or the podcast host, I'm better. Are they just regular Suzie out in the world? Isn't that funny? You know, and I've got my hat on. I'm better at that. But I think one of the tools was to decide it like I think of the listening one. I think the starting one probably won't get exactly right. But it was very simple, but so helpful, where it said, decide that now is the time to listen or something like that. Yeah. Recognize

**Meredith Bell** 15:19

Yeah. Recognize the listening moment? Yes, yes. Because sometimes when somebody comes to talk to us, we just assume it's going to be a regular conversation where we both give and take, but there are times when someone needs to really convey something to us. And we need to have our radar up to recognize that so that we can give them our full attention.

**Suzie Price** 15:45

Yeah, essentially, I had an interview with a gentleman who wrote the book Connectable, and he said, communication is dealt with. So yeah, you and I act back and forth. That would be me being regular Suzie, how high? Are you like that? And then so communication is dealt, connection is felt. I love that. So recognize them. Okay, I need to not just communicate words right now I need to communicate, my whole body is in it with you. And this is what you say: recognize the listening moment? Yeah, let's talk about that skill for a moment. Since we're on it. Oh, yeah. The number one? Yeah. The first one to understand. And I remember with Kobe, he always talked about seeking first to understand and that was such a lesson. Yeah. First graduated from college, I read that book. And I'm like, listen to understand. And I've been learning about that, ever since talk about that like?

**Meredith Bell** 16:38

Well, you know, most of us, unfortunately, most people think I'm a pretty good listener. I don't interrupt, right. But listening is one of the most energy intensive activities when done well, because it requires us to focus exclusively on this person, and block out distractions. And I will encourage people to test themselves because if you try to do something else, while someone is talking to you, let's say you're on the phone, and you glance at an email that came in or a text message that came in, I guarantee you while you're looking at that message, you're not hearing what that person is saying in that moment. And so the idea of setting aside all distractions, the physical ones that are around us, but even more important, or as important, our own thoughts, because we can be distracted by how we are thinking about what the person is saying, instead of being fully present and just absorbing the message they're delivering to us. And so one of the things that I think is that it's an ongoing process is that we never get to the end of learning how to listen. In fact, all of these skills, that's why we use the subtitle, mastering the top 10 communication skills never arrived. And with listening, there are so many layers to it. Because if I'm really listening, with my heart, my mind, my spirit to someone else, I am not mentally judging or criticizing or preparing a rebuttal, or even preparing a response to them. I want to make sure first and foremost that I am understanding what it is they're trying to tell me. Because especially if it's someone we have an existing relationship with, we've got all this sometimes baggage, maybe not negative baggage luggage.

**Suzie Price** 18:49

Walking with our suitcases. Yes, that is true. That's a good visual.

**Meredith Bell** 18:55

So it's, it's this idea of taking a fresh approach, and getting them and why this is so important, is one of the fastest ways to create trust with another human being is to have them feel that they are being heard and understood. And that's why I loved Covey's principle of seek first to understand because when someone feels they have been understood by you, they are going to be much more likely to be open to hearing your perspective, even if it's not in an argument setting, but just another point of view. And so taking the time to pause, ask if this is what I've heard so far. Tell me if I've got it right as somebody's talking so listening isn't being passive and just letting somebody go on and on. It is being active and interjecting at different points, kind of summarizing what you've heard, asking them Um, if you've heard them correctly and giving them an opportunity to clarify if you didn't, because they'll appreciate all those efforts that you're making to get what it is they're trying to tell you.

**Suzie Price** 20:15

Yeah, that's absolutely wonderful. I think every time we talk about listening, and people hear about the lesson of listening, we recommit to it. I guess what gets in the way is just busyness and maybe thinking we're already really strong in it's not necessarily being as strong as we think. That's sometimes what a 360 Feedback Survey could be good for because we think we're, you know, our intention is to really listen. So how do you think somebody will know when they're really getting closer to mastery in this skill? What would you sa**y,**

**Meredith Bell** 20:50

Oh, how the other person responds to them. Because when I'm being a really effective listener, people feel that they can feel my attention, my presence, I make a real effort to bring love to the conversation, a loving spirit, so that they feel safe and open up. And my questions, encourage them. Curiosity is such a key aspect of listening. And, you know, I have one of my favorite authors, Steve Chandler, in one of his books, he talks about being curious with other people. And this sentence that he had in there just leapt out at me because I realized this is what I do. When you are really curious with someone, and you are seeking to really understand them. Curiosity is what you bring. And love is what is felt. Imagine that, so how do i Who do I need to be to show up in a way that someone will feel loved by me, appreciated, value cherished, you know, all of those words, that even in the workplace are so important, because that's what leads to not just engagement, but passion and excitement about work is when people feel that their leader or team member takes genuine interest in them. And listening is the way that we do that. And as part of listening is also empathy, where we really try to get in that other person's shoes. And one of the ways we can detect a listening moment is when we're paying attention to someone's tone of voice. And even if they're not saying, I'm really upset right now, but you can hear it in their voice, things are not going well. And so we need to slow down and not not ignore those signals that we're getting. And give them a chance to talk about what's bothering them, and then be able to reflect back to them. What is that emotion? I'm picking up on that feeling? It sounds like you're really disappointed that you've got to start all over with this project, or, you know, and then you give them the chance to say, yeah, I really am, no, it's not so much that is, is something else. So that connection with them, where we're, we're sensing where they're coming from in their feelings goes a long way to forming that connection you're talking about?

**Suzie Price** 23:27

Yes, yes. And we can't ignore that some leaders say, well, there's not a lot of room for emotion at the workplace. Well, you better make some room because they're ever given a seat at the table because it's taken over. If not, it'll get bigger and bigger until someone leaves or shuts down one of the two. So it's really a time saver. And not that you want to be efficient. Yet get. You know, it's hard of everybody's juggling so much. It's like, oh, okay, so now I gotta be really calm and zen like and listen, and oh my gosh, you know, but if we don't, it's gonna blow up some way or another. Hmm.

**Meredith Bell** 24:05

That's such a good point. You are so right, that this small investment because it doesn't have to take a lot of time doesn't you know, and I think being honest with someone, if you are in the middle of a, of a deadline, it's okay to say, right, I want to hear what you have to say right now. My mind cannot be fully with you because of this that I need to finish. Could you give me 15 minutes, an hour or whatever? And then let's circle back. I think that's important. Rather than pretending to be with somebody in your mind is still here. While I get rid of hair or something. It's important to be honest, because if you can't be present for the person, it's more respectful to them to just let them know this is not the right time for me.

**Suzie Price**  24:56

So I think some of it is the worry about efficiency and a lot on our plates. But I think there's another flip side of that, maybe it's the same as the other big half, which is that I'm uncomfortable with it, you know, people can be uncomfortable with it. Okay, so I'm gonna really get one to one with my employees. And that's what you do if you're a great coach and leadership is coaching, but the comfort zone can be a little funky. Do you notice that? And how do people kind of shift out of that? Yes.

**Meredith Bell**  25:23

And well, it goes back to Ron, the other communication skills in the book around asking questions, if you realize you don't have to be the answer person, right solution provider, to the person that they have that inner wisdom they can draw from, and you are actually long term, developing them as a professional by asking them questions that cause them to think and come up with their own solutions to toe the truth, Suzie for people who are uncomfortable with asking questions, that I think it kind of goes hand in hand, sometimes with being a micromanager and telling people I need to tell them to do this, and creating dependency. Whereas if we teach people to think for themselves by questions we ask, then they can handle situations that do not come to us and feel okay about making decisions that we probably shouldn't be involved in any way. And so learning to let go of that, by instead of when somebody says, I don't know what to do about this. And instead of responding well, you could do A, B or C, you say, Well, what have you thought about so far? Or what options? Are you considering? So that you toss it back to them? And don't make it something that you have to take on? I think that learning to be a good question, answer can help a leader relax into this situation. And just ask a simple, natural question that emerges based on what the person is saying.

**Suzie Price** 27:07

Wonderful tip. And when you move from being the I've got to know it all to understanding it to your facilitator or coach and realize that role, that's exactly what it is you don't want them to find their answers. And that certainly is a switch for folks sometimes. See, there are great questions in here, too. I noticed that and what a really good thing it is, easy to read, easy to grab questions that will help people be a great questioner and get comfortable with this really quick.

**Meredith Bell**  27:35

And you know, Suzie, something else, leaders are sometimes hesitant to admit to someone else, I'm a little uncomfortable in this situation. And if they'll simply admit that, you know, like saying, you know, I'm so used to giving you answers to questions, when you come to me, it's been a disservice to you. And to me, for me to take on that role. And I want to get better at having you feel free to come up with your own solution. So I'm going to be practicing asking you questions. And so just being open with people and letting them know, here's what I'm working on, helps them relax more, because then you won't feel as awkward or tense up. Because they can pick up on that now, like, what's wrong with this person? Or why are they if we just own it upfront, then they'll be in it with us, they are going to be on our side, you know, cheering for us because this is probably something they've been wanting you to do anyway.

**Suzie Price** 28:43

So that was a good question. Like encouraging. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah, it has to, the leader has to be willing to take on the role of student and teacher and facilitator and coach and leader have made me think of yes, this week with the 360 Feedback Project that y'all have been helping me with is, one of the things was you get your feedback, let's create a summary report. And then you're gonna go back to your team and tell them what you're working on, you know, and everybody's a little mortified at that. But we practice. We did some feed forward things where they got used to seeing what they were working on and getting feedback. But if you don't tell people what you're working on, they're gonna assume you're still doing the thing that they maybe gave you some orizon on the 360. And because they can't see it through new eyes, unless you say, Hey, I'm working on this. Yes, he's for the feedback, a little bit, like even feedback, and he's not doing it any different. Like, yeah, I'm trying, you know.

**Meredith Bell**  29:39

Well, you know, that is such a great point. Anytime someone gives us feedback, whether it's, you know, formally in a 360 process, or they bring up something to us, how we receive that feedback and respond to them, has everything to do with any feedback we're going to get in the future because if we are gracious And we do thank them. I love that you brought that up whether they're meeting with their team after getting feedback and talking about what they learned or in a one on one conversation or sharing, thank you. And that says another important skill receiving feedback gracelessly. So people will be feeling it's safe and okay to share what they're observing in the future, if something is getting in the way of their performance or, or just how they interact as a team. So I think being willing to thank people, and then look at what you might do differently, and let them know, I'm going to be working on this. So I need ongoing feedback from you about how I'm doing, tell me what I'm doing well, right. But also hold up your hand and let me know, hey, you just did that, again. Whether it was interrupting or dominating and discussion, or whatever it might be, that these are people that you think of as your supporters, then it has a whole different feel to it, than if you think, Oh, I've got to really watch out what I'm doing and saying here, I'm being reserved, whereas if we're all in it together, it has a whole different feel to it.

**Suzie Price** 31:17

Changes just the whole dynamic. Everything about it. That's amazing. Now on the personal skills, I will put the link to the book in the notes. And we'll also put the 10 skills in the show notes too, because I think people are saying, is there one that we haven't talked about that has the biggest impact? Or that people you know, maybe have a hard time growing out of the 10? That really comes to mind?

**Meredith Bell** 31:40

Well, we've talked about a number of them while listening. And I think giving feedback is another one where folks struggle, how to and this is on the positive as well as the constructive. Because sometimes people withhold positive feedback because they think I don't want it to go to their head or, you know, they're I'm paying them for doing this work. Why do I have to acknowledge them? Well, it's important for people to understand what behaviors you value and want more of, because the behaviors that get rewarded get repeated. And so if you acknowledge them, specifically for something they've done, well, then they have an understanding, oh, this is what she wants from me. So they get that clarity about the expectations and the desired behaviors.

Similarly, on the constructive feedback side, this is where a lot of people hesitate, because they're not sure how to do it. And I think if you just bring to it, because you know, for every one of these chapters, we have a moment to recognize when it's needed, and then the mindset to bring to the occasion. And so the mindset for this is, I want to be clear with this person where they fell short, and let them know I'm with them, I am here to support them as they work on improving this going forward. So structuring that conversation in a way that you set the context, and affirm other things they've done that are good, and then being very specific about what they did. And the consequences of it, you know, who was negatively impacted by that? Either something they said or did? And what is the behavior that's desired for the future? And then this is so important, getting their agreement? Yes, I agree.

That is what I want to do going forward. So if they don't make that commitment, then you're not done. You still have some conversation around this, because there's behavior that is needed that hasn't been agreed to, and you need to find out what's holding them back from saying yes, I will commit to doing this in the future.

**Suzie Price**  34:01

That's excellent. Excellent. You know, what I see happens is that they hold off on the feedback because they do not know how to do it effectively, so they hold off and then now there's a big laundry list. So my coaching has always been like so I will try to say okay, let's talk about everything that's not working like if they're with me and they're trying to get ready to have a conversation or sometimes calls and so there's a big laundry list and I let them go through because it's helping them the leader you know preparing gonna like range falling is Okay, so let's look at all of these you know, if there was one area to change that would make the biggest leverage or one behavior to to attack or address not attack as far as feedback for that person to attack and really focus on Well, right. It takes a little bit in the conversation for people to get there but once they land on it, and then I help them word it a little bit because they're tired and they have the innocent misunderstanding. Maybe they should just figure it out or, you know, whatever is the history of non address. Yeah, that's all.

**Meredith Bell** 35:06

Exactly, yeah, and this is the thing we can rationalize by saying, well, they'll see that they need to do this, we hope they'll discover it right and change. Unlikely it, especially if it's a repetitive behavior, that coming to meetings, like, for example, that, you know, just one small thing or not turning in reports on time, there's, you know, any number of things that we just hope, or, or we let it build up, like you say, there can be this laundry list, and then we explode one day and the person's gone. Where did that come from? So it's managing our own feelings, and, and sensing when we are being frustrated, and then looking within and saying, Where have I not been clear, with this property ownership as a leader, right, and taking responsibility. So it's not a blame game? It's all on, you know, how can we work together to make sure this doesn't happen again, or this does happen in the way it's supposed to happen? So that they sense you're in their corner, and they're not out there hanging, you know, out to dry, with you watching to see if they're gonna make a mistake again.

**Suzie Price**  36:23

Yeah. And it's interesting to once people actually, like, come up with the one that and have the conversation and follow some of your guidance and any help that they're getting. They're like, okay, that worked. Because it does work. It works every now and then. And then it's like a big sort of comment, you know, they become a ninja master at it, you know, like you could see, I mean, all they have to do is do it like five times, do it five times for five different people. And then they're like, I got this now I get it. It's not that hard. But somehow, I think it may go back to, you know, like, for me, personally, that's been a skill that I have gotten better and better at over the years, but I grew up with none of that. Right? It's really, you know, not to go into your childhood stuff. But that was something we just didn't talk about. So I don't think that's pretty common. You know, but so you have to change that in your little person's head, you know, that, you know, get the practice.

Yes, yes. That's awesome. That's awesome. Okay, so get the book so you can get the insights on what I want to talk about. Now a little bit about your coaching, because we talked about giving what it takes to help people change behaviors. This is the book Peer Coaching Made Simple. The concept, I introduced it to the group that I did the 360s with and by having them, we just called it a mastermind partner. And so they picked a mastermind partner, and they picked three times that they were going to check in, it wasn't nearly the full program, but it gave them a taste of Oh, you're like we're gonna these are like we're going to coach each other. And as we are, you're going to check in, you know, when I said, here's the things you're going to check in on, you know, things that you said, you were focusing on, see how you're doing, it can be a call, it can be a text, it can be emails, but you can check on in on these specific days. So that's one way to help this organization that I've just worked with, carry it forward, and it doesn't leave the room, there's more that needs to happen. And you have a bunch of systems that help with that technology wise, but just talk about this peer coaching and how it ties into everything we've been talking about and how it helps.

**Meredith Bell**  38:17

Sure well, we realized this was an important element after we wrote the connect with your team book and looked at this whole issue of, well, it doesn't do anybody any good. Just read that book, you know, and then get this head knowledge about what listening is like, so how can we help bring it to life. And the idea of peer coaching just popped up because organizations often hire coaches for, you know, higher level executives, and sometimes, you know, lower than that, but they can't really economically bring in a coach for every person. But everyone needs coaching, because we need to be able to talk it out and get support for what it is we want to work on.

So we thought these are two really good companion books. Because if people have been exposed to through our book, they connect with your team book or through a course about communication skills. Peer coaching can be a natural follow up just like you put in place with the folks in that particular group. And the whole idea is having someone that's going to both hold me accountable and support me and so they don't have to have credentials and coaching they don't have to get certified. It's just they need to care about that other person's success and how they're doing. So yes, we have a kind of formalized it but it can be as unstructured as you want it just needs to be some kind of structure in place where the there are two people or you could have three you know, it's flexible how you want to set up this idea but come chain partners simplifies the scheduling.

And so you agree on a time, it could be weekly, it could be every other week, it could be as short as five or 10 minutes. It doesn't have to be this one more thing to put on my calendar, onerous task, right? So when they do that the simple structure is, what have you been working on? Which we know from our previous commitment? But if we're doing it for the first time, which of these skills do you want to work on the most? And what aspect of this skill? Are you going to really be practicing this week or these next two weeks? So you share what that is, and agree to it? And then when you get together, the next time you're sharing? How did it go? Give me some examples of when you practiced it, and what kind of results did you get? What kind of feedback or reaction did you get from other people? What did you learn from that? And what would you change? Do you want to keep practicing that over the next week or two? Are you wanting to switch to a different aspect, let's say listening, so it's checking in, getting support, and the other person can share ideas, if they feel like it's appropriate. Or if they work closely with the person, then they've observed them, they can give them some additional feedback or ideas.

So it depends where they're partnering up from, if they're co workers versus from different departments or different areas. But the whole idea is continue working, building that trust over time, so that you really have fun with it, as you're working on a skill, it's not something to dread, it's something to look forward to, to know, gosh, this other person is really interested in how I'm doing. And it just makes such a difference in the commitment to practicing the skill over time.

**Suzie Price**  41:56

And there's, there's I was making a little list like, okay, there's so many benefits to this, like just off the top of my head, what you just said about building trust. So you know, we build trust one to one, we don't build it all collectively as a team, we build it here I build it with you. And then I built it with Danny and I built a poll. And then if we all work together, we'd have some greater trust, but it's one to one built. So you're building trust between people in your company, you're having fun around training, which you said with the development it's like okay, this is not a heavy handed you know, or go to write your lightens it up, your your I was thinking about the Gallup organization, one of the things is I have a best friend at work is somebody who's committed and engaged to the work, and maybe you don't become best friends, but you have this dynamic of trust. And if somebody hears me, I mean, the job description for a peer coach is you care about the person and you want them you want to help them improve. I mean, that's a really good job description. And so there's a dynamic there that looks local, like having a good friend at work, you know, which is that you're more likely to stay in the role and stay with the company, and then something we hadn't talked about. But what is teaching the peer coach and your coaching each other? So you get to take turns? Are you getting comfortable with being a facilitator?

**Meredith Bell** 43:06

Yes, yes, yes. Exactly. Yes, the more you work with a Peer Coach, the more you are building up your coaching skills that then you can use with the other people on your team. And that is such a powerful benefit. Because coaching, I mean, you mentioned this earlier, Suzy coaching is a really key element of being an effective leader these days. I mean, there always has been, but it's even more important now because the younger workers want opportunities to grow and expand and develop. And if they don't sense that from their manager, they're not going to stick around. So I love that you brought each of those up. I think that's just so important. And you know, I'll add one other thing that adds to it being fun and something people look forward to is if they can choose that choose their own peer coach, so that if they get assigned, what you want to do if you're gonna set up peer coaches, you want to reduce the amount of potential friction or resistance. And one way to do that is give people the freedom to say I pick you, Susie, for my peer coach, you want to be my peer coach, so that you are allowing people that freedom as opposed to saying you two are going to be together and YouTube. Yeah, it's a group that's been working together, say a class of leaders that have gone through a program for a year, that's probably not that big of a deal. They all know each other. But if you're just introducing this as a new thing, the more you can let people choose. Even the participants up front who want to participate in something like this, get the people that are always raising their hand saying pick me because they'll be your most enthusiastic participants and then champion of the process to other people in the organization?

**Suzie Price** 45:03

Yes, yes. Yeah, some of the leaders that we were working with said, Oh, they shouldn't pick their own mastermind partner or peer partner, because they'll just tell, they won't tell each other anything they need to hear, I just let it sit for a little bit. And I said, Well, you know, the best partner is somebody they'll meet with, you know, and then it was, I just left it at that. And then the comeback was, okay, if you want them to just make their own partner that'll work. But you know, there is a fear, you know, like, they're not gonna do anything, you know, you just got to just trust the process, they'll talk a little bit about you actually have a technology that helps peep helps facilitate this. So would you mind sharing a little bit about that?

**Meredith Bell** 45:44

Well, we have, actually two new programs in the works. And so our brand is growing strong leaders. So our products are GSL. So we have GLSL, 360, the assessment tool that you were using today.

**Suzie Price**  46:00

Which I use and love.

**Meredith Bell** 46:02

Thank you!

**Suzie Price** 46:03

Based on 30 years, I just plug in, because it's based on 30 years, I think, 30 years, 30 years or one year of product resources from consultants who are in the world and needed to have their own tool. And anybody who's ever used it over the years, has loved it. And now you've got this new updated version of it, which I just used, it was excellent. So keep going. But I just want to make sure that people know the history, thank you. survey items, there's there's they meet the standards that you want, that's going to allow you people to get good feedback. And the way it's set up is great. And you could customize it's excellent. But then talk about the other things. These are yes, on a whim. afterwards.

**Meredith Bell** 46:46

Yeah, yeah. So GSL power partners think of it as kind of a low tech solution for developing a skill where we take those same two books we've been talking about, combine it with 45 videos, that are each just two to three minutes long, that build on the skills from the book. So they give all these different tips that can be used with those peer coaches who are working with each other. We have a facilitator guide for either an internal or an external person to kind of champion the process and get things set up and going. And so folks have those videos as an additional resource to use as they're working on specific skills. And so I'm the headshot, if you will, of the videos, and Paula created some wonderful animations in them. So they're very engaging, and they're short, so people can consume. Yes. So that is one product that can be used. And that's a subscription, a one year subscription, that people get access to those videos, and they keep the books. The other one is GSL Skill Builder. And that is where we have within the program, the ability for the participant to interact with a coach. And that could be someone within the organization who's assigned more as a, let's just say, a leadership coach, or an executive coach, as opposed to a peer coach, they have a community they can interact with. And we have those same 45 videos, but also videos and resources around character strengths. We have 18 pairs of character strengths, like honesty and integrity, so that we're looking at communication skills, but also who am I being? Yes, in the workplace, those are all needed. So that one is in development. And you'll be excited to know Denise working on a lot of the content for those character strengths. So you know, it's going to be just awesome. So that will be coming up. Both of those will be coming in the third quarter of 2023.

**Suzie Price** 49:07

And these are things you're not Johnny on the street, you're not new on the street, or whatever the lingo is there. I mean, you I mean, you all have been talking about this. I mean, you were talking about trying to ingrain. And we've changed how it's been, you learn over time, what and the information, you've already learned what helps people understand the points you're making. But you've had it, had been talking about this for a long time, been working on this and yeah, mooning the message, and it's very it's not surface. This is very rich material. Then all that you've info about this character strengths. You've had those for years, too. So yeah, just deepening it and making it even more accessible to people, which is beautiful.

**Meredith Bell** 49:44

Exactly. Yep. Keeping up with the times.

**Suzie Price** 49:48

That's right. That's right, keeping up with the times and the two people you mentioned are your partners that have been in the business with you for the past 30 years. So there's just a lot of goodness with a capital G go on there. So thank you for sharing all about that I want to. We've got a little bit more time and I'd love to have people know more about you. So, learn a little bit more about some of the questions we ask of all guests. So we'll see how many we get through, but who's most influenced you in your life and career,

**Meredith Bell** 50:19

You know, other than my parents and my husband, I would have to say, my two business partners, Paula and Denny who we've just talked about, think about it, when you work closely in I mean, the three of us are three equal partners in this business and have been for 31 years. Amazing, amazing record, it's almost unheard of these days. And we love and respect each other so much, and have been each other's cheerleaders, because as any business, we've had ups and downs. And so individually, personally, as well, as you know, with the company, and through all of that, we have stood by each other, and they have supported me, they celebrate me, you know, they appreciate my strengths, what I bring, and they encouraged me to keep growing and expanding beyond what I've already done. And that has just been inspirational for me over all these years. So, you know, I have to point to them, I'm an avid reader. So there are lots of books and authors that have affected me, and influenced me, but on a day to day basis, those two are it.

**Suzie Price** 50:20

Can't ask for anything better than that, you know, people see your good, you know, and encourage you over that many years. That's amazing. That's amazing. That's amazing. So I'm going to skip to the next item. I know there's more. Here, she's Meredith is a great reader, you're always you have that bookshelves probably only carry on your back, there's probably only carrying 1/8 Of all the books that you've read. You are a big reader, and you're always open to new ideas. So it's very cool. So wake up, eager is what we talk about here. Wake up, eat your workforce. And that comes from each individual, getting up every day and feeling eager for the day, excited about the day and and we tie that to your mind, your body and your spirit. So what are some things that you're doing lately that have really helped you with mental clarity, helped you with physical health and well being and then helped you with the spirit we talked about in regard to your community and your relationships? All things we can do. Wow. hear from you.

**Meredith Bell** 52:26

Yeah. So in terms of how I wake up, I love getting up every day, I love my work. I love the impact we're having in the world. So I start out on a positive note. Yeah, and I do have my private, quiet time in the morning, my husband doesn't get up as early as I do. And I'm glad because I like having that time just to myself where I am reading. And then recently I've been doing a lot of guided meditations from Joe Dispenza, who's amazing at the work that he's doing. And that has, has just centered me beautifully for the day. And so that's helped me a lot just in terms of how I start my day.

I also find I'm much better off if the day before or very first thing in the morning, I map out what my priorities and things I'm going to do for that day and block them out in time because that way, I'm more proactive, not reactive to whatever comes up. I can still be flexible. But the way my brain works, it can get into chaos mode, if I don't have some structure to it, and then it's like I'm pinging to avoid it. Yes, yeah. Yes, that kind of structure is helpful in terms of my body, getting up and walking outside in the morning, especially this time of year when the birds are singing them an avid bird watcher, just walking out and and this sort of feeds my body and my spirit because it has a calming effect, just be present with what sounds are there. And making my own personal declarations out loud as I'm talking is who I am not as who I'm aspiring to be, but where I want to come from for that day. And that helps me also just get into the spirit of who I want to be outside of work.

My husband and I have been avid bird watchers for 20 years now, and I've organized field trips for this state birdwatching organization for 14 years and that really is a wonderful community for me. I am valued there because of my organizational skills. And I get to just be with these wonderful people who love nature like I do and enjoy noticing the birds and just being present for what shows up in the natural world. So that's something I do on an ongoing basis with my husband and also with this group with the field trips I organize and participate in. So all of that keeps me grounded.

**Suzie Price** 55:15

Yeah, it seems like it would be a good balance too because you have so many heavy things heavy meaning thinking things and technology and you know that nature is with people but all night on a subject, and what's the official word? Oh, our aura is not worth the nor the neck.

**Meredith Bell** 55:31

Ornithology Yeah. Birds. Yeah, the group I'm with in Virginia is the Virginia Society of Ornithology. That's the term they used back in the early 1900s. When this group first formed, it was a Science Society of such and such. So that was the term but yeah, I keep it simple and say people who enjoy the birds.

**Suzie Price** 55:59

But I like the technical word, too. Because that word very often means Reno. Yeah, I

**Meredith Bell** 56:04

Yeah, I know. It was about birds. Tongue twister.

**Suzie Price**  56:07

It's a tongue twister as a vocalist. So what advice would you give your younger self?

**Meredith Bell** 56:12

You know, there are a few things. One is to lighten up. And don't take yourself so seriously. Because there are times when I will just get so intense with something. And if somebody else is joking around, it's like what's so funny about this, you know, you're not taking it seriously enough. And the truth is, it should all be fun, there should be ways of having fun and anything that we're doing. And so that's an important piece. Another one is, you know what, you're good enough, just as you are, you don't have to prove yourself. So don't don't force it, don't, you know, allow, allow things to happen. And the other would be your thoughts. And your feelings are what shape how you see the world. So if you want to see the world and experience it differently, and that includes each person you interact with, look at the thoughts and feelings you're holding, then that will allow you to affect your inner world and your outer world. I think that's probably the most important one that took me a long time to learn.

**Suzie Price** 57:24

Yes, beautiful, beautiful. You show it up. So well. How about the last two questions. If you could put a billboard anywhere for the world to see or whoever you want to see it? Where would you put it? And what would it say?

**Meredith Bell** 57:39

Well, I would put it wherever people drive and you know, people are going fast, fast when they're going by billboards. So it'd be very short. Yeah. Love more. Judge less? Oh, perfect. Yes, yes, that's memorable. If we can only do that, and for ourselves, as well judge ourselves less and love ourselves more, because the inner critic is just, you know, going and doesn't take time off.

**Suzie Price** 58:08

Don't take them. Unless we'd say go have a seat now, please. Yes, yes, you're not. And that's what's so important about what you were saying about in the mornings having a morning routine or quiet time. Because when you do that, it's easier to love more and judge less. And when you set up your day, and you know what your priorities are and all that you don't wake up overwhelmed. If you are then if you're feeling that and that's time to because we will get in the end of the love less and judgment more, you know, because we don't mean to it's innocent. I love how you started it with an innocent thing and see what it's done innocently. No, there's no judgment about it, we all can do it. We gotta create the atmosphere within ourselves in order to have that be dominant. And over a while it will become more dominant. But it's never done. Like you said, with a listening ear. We're never finished. Can't get it wrong, as you've never done, you know, oh, exactly. I love that love more, judge less.

And so closing advice, last bits of wisdom about the team connecting these communication skills. We've covered a lot in a short period of time. That's because you're so eloquent and clear in your conversation. But, you know, out of all that we've talked about, what do you want people to remember or think about as we go forward?

**Meredith Bell** 59:20

You know, this is so important. Every person wants to feel that they matter, every one of us. And so I think the greatest gift we can give to each other is to use the skills that we've been talking about, especially listening to be fully present with someone else and communicate to them through your body language through your words, you're listening, you're caring, that they matter, that what they're saying matters, that who they are as a person matters, and that kind of feeling that you convey to that person can stay with them the rest of their lives. So you may be the only person who has ever brought that kind of caring to that individual. We never know what someone else has gone through in their life. And so if we can be that for someone else will receive it back a hundredfold in our own lives. But if we can focus on giving that to whoever is in front of us, at that moment, we will be giving such a gift to them.

**Suzie Price** 1:00:31

Yeah, yeah, me leaving love, every little love drops everywhere you go, and then letting them fall where they fall and go where they go. But yeah, that's a great, great legacy and great history. And this has been a great, great conversation. Really appreciate you taking the time. Really appreciate what you're doing all your good work, and the fact that over a priceless, we've been able to partner with you all these years. And thank you.

**Meredith Bell** 1:00:58

Well, thank you. I loved our conversation. And I love who you are in the world. You're You're a real gift to the world. And to me, thank you.

**Suzie Price** 1:01:07

Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. So I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Meredith, we go back a long way. I've known her for at least 18 years. She continues to inspire me and help us in our business with our feedback, 360 feedback and other tools and services that we use and work through with them. And the way to get the show notes, what we cover today to get links on how to contact Meredith. And to get links to the books that we've talked about is to go to pricelessprofessional.com/growstrongleaders, pricelessprofessional.com/growstrongleaders.

Now I wonder while you were on this conversation had you heard about peer coaching before, it's something that is has so many benefits it as we talked about, I just want to summarize them because you kind of want to have you keep that in mind and not lose the benefit of how you can easily implement peer coaching within your organization. The benefit is everybody can get feedback and get coaching support and it creates an accountability and support partner for people. There's no credentials needed. It can be unstructured or structured. It's very flexible on when and how long. Overall, it helps build skills while building work relationships. And it's something that people are willing to do because it's fun. And it helps people hold themselves accountable, helps people connect, and helps people learn and grow.

As we know, we can't just read a book or attend a class. 80% of what we learned in a class we forget in a week. So are some statistics like that. So we need some type of tool. And I know every time I do a 360 feedback, we call it an accountability partner, or sometimes it's a mastermind partner. But it basically is pure coaching. And people enjoy doing it. And the format is simple. Basically, you start the conversation with what skills do you want to work on? What are you going to practice over the next few weeks? And then you set up a time when you're going to get back together? And then when you get back together? You talk about how it goes? Give me some examples of what you practice. What kind of feedback did you get? Do you want to keep practicing that? Or do you want to switch to a different aspect? I mean, it's very simple, 10 minutes could be 30 minutes could be done over coffee, but don't lose the benefit of peer coaching.

The bottom line is it allows people to check in, get support and share ideas. And it's how we learn over time. And we learn with support. We can't just go to one class and say, Okay, got it. We need to continually revisit and if we can slot some time to connect with somebody we trust to have those conversations, then we're going to be helping people grow. That's the whole focus of Meredith and her partner's businesses to grow strong leaders and peer coaching is a key aspect. She's got some really good coaching support. And you'll see links to her books and things we talked about. One of them is about peer coaching.

So the last thing I want to do is just remind you of what we started out with at the start of this podcast, which was about listening, and it's Meritus' great words that I want to leave you with. Curiosity is such a key aspect of listening. When you are really curious with someone you're seeking to really understand them. Curiosity is what you bring and love is what is felt. So the whole sentence or section of a couple of sentences there I love but I love the last piece curiosity is what you bring. And love is what is felt. So let's all be curious today. Let's be interested in the person in front of us. Let's put aside the distractions. Let's do some peer coaching.

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**Outro**  1:05:35

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