Shannon Waller: Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to *Team Success*. Today, I want to talk about something probably a little unexpected, and that is the downside of having a great company culture. Now, when I say that, you're probably like, "What? There's a downside to having a great company culture?" And there are very, very few, but there is one that I've noticed, and this is an interesting aspect of Who Not How—it's an interesting aspect of *Multiplication By Subtraction*.

Because what I've discovered is that when you have a really, really great company culture, people may no longer be a fit for their role, but if they love your company so much, they don't want to leave. And unless you have a very rigorous, systematic way of keeping people super current with their roles and contributing, this can go on for a while. Especially if you have a really nice company culture where people assume positive intent, and they know each other really well, and they care about each other a lot, and they probably worked together for a long time.

This can happen. I know lots of companies where this is the case. Ironically, having great company culture is fabulous for encouraging the best in everyone. But when someone is past their best-before date, if you want to put it that way (my husband uses that term), then how do you gracefully exit them? That's really the challenge. If you don't have a good system for keeping current, then it can actually become an issue.

Why does this happen? Why is it that a great company culture can keep people when they really shouldn't be there anymore? Well, I totally appreciate the expression "People don't fire themselves" because that is true, and especially if they can't imagine being anywhere else where there are people there that they like, and maybe they are still connected to what you're doing and the impact that you make in the world.

Maybe they just really enjoy all the perks. Maybe they are really comfortable in their role to the point where their role has become a rut. And it's interesting because the plus side, the upside of this is that a really great company culture can protect a team from someone who actually is on that downside. Now if it gets too, too far, they can even become toxic, and a great company culture actually provides a little bit of protection for the rest of the team against that particular human.

However, it's like a bur under a saddle, and at some point you have to deal with it or you will create sores—people will leave or they'll get frustrated, or if they see you not handling something, they'll be like, "This isn't tolerable anymore. I need to go and leave because you're not making this other person leave." And it's hard, by the way. It's really hard to make this assessment, especially if that person's someone you care about that's been around for a long time.

But again, they're comfortable. They're not going to make that move. They are settled. As far as they're concerned, this is their home, and they may have lost touch with their effectiveness. They may have lost touch with their capabilities, they may have lost touch with the fact that things used to work better than they are now. Maybe there's probably a decrease in teamwork. There's probably a decrease in communication. There are probably some questions that they're uncomfortable dealing with, but they often have a way of just making excuses to themselves or rationalizing it. But really, it's not really working anymore.

Now, from a leadership standpoint, this is one of the hardest things to deal with. If you're a caring person, if you love your team, if you come from a heartfelt place, it is really tough to see people that you have cared for and worked with and who have contributed in the past not contribute any longer. Often, we've given them a ton of latitude. They have domain, agency over their responsibilities, and we're trusting that they're handling those things.

It can be really hard to look closely and go, "Oh, that's not happening." We may not want to hear messages from other people saying, "Mayday, mayday. This isn't working anymore. Please do something about it!" And you're like, "Oh no, that can't be true." Now, a little note to self—and I learned this a lot when I was having conversations when I wrote *Multiplication By Subtraction*: by the time leadership knows, it is a full-blown issue. Leadership is the last to know. If it's reached your airspace, you can really count on the fact that people are not making it up, because your team is so reluctant to speak up.

No one wants to be a tattletale. No one wants to be seen to be the problem person. But the truth is, if it escalates to you, you need to take it seriously. You cannot sweep it underneath the carpet, you cannot ignore it, you cannot pretend and hope it's going to get better. It ain't. It is not going to do that. You need to have a system and a process where this doesn't happen. I'm all about EOS, EOS's structure—Entrepreneurial Operating System.

Just finished reading *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott; genius, brilliant book on accountability and how to be radically candid, which is when you both care personally and challenge directly. You might need to increase your chops on the "challenging directly" part, especially if you tend to err on the "care personally" side, which, if you've known someone for a long time, you probably do. But here's the term that Kim Scott uses—it's a little quadrant [unintelligble]. On one axis, you have care personally and the other axis, you have challenge directly. If you only care deeply and do not challenge directly, she uses the term "ruinous empathy."

I read that and I was like, "Oh my goodness. Could we have a very nice company culture?" There's so many examples from our past. We were like, "Everything's fine, everything's fine, everything's fine, everything's fine, and then finally, you're fired." That's ruinous empathy. Tell me that this hasn't happened to you. Okay? Now the other could also be true, which is if you just challenge directly and don't care, so don't care personally, that's called "obnoxious

aggression." Probably, we've all had moments of that. And by the way, we've all done all of these things.

When you're both of those things, it's "radically candid." If you only care personally without challenging directly, it's "ruinous empathy." If you only challenge directly without caring personally, that's "obnoxious aggression," and if you do neither, if you're checked out or someone else is checked out, that's called "manipulative insincerity." Just paying lip service. My friend Justin called this a skilled politician, and I'm like, "Yes, such a good description."

It's really important that we all strengthen our capabilities to be radically candid, and I have learned so much from this book. I'm actually hoping to get her on this podcast because I just found it so phenomenal. Recommend the book, recommend the audio. It's incredibly useful. It was very easy for it to sink into my brain; I've listened to actually most of it twice.

And there's way more in the book than just this. There's a lot of great meeting structures, the whole way to give feedback, positive, negative, situation-behavior-impact (SBI)—you might have heard of before. Just a lot of wisdom. Just an aside about the book: one of the things I found so fun is that she's worked for companies like Apple and Google, so if she sent an obnoxiously aggressive email, it was to Larry Page. All names that we're familiar with, which is really fun. So anyway, I think you'd enjoy that book. If you haven't already read it and some of you have, I just could not recommend it enough. I learned a ton.

It's one of my top two leadership management books ever. If you know how much I read, you know that that's saying something. The other one, in case you're curious, is *No Ego* by Cy Wakeman, who I have had the pleasure of interviewing for this podcast. If you haven't listened to my No Ego podcast with her, please do. We'll link it (https://yourteamsuccess.com/taking-control-of-your-ego-with-bestselling-author-speaker-cy-wakeman/) because she's genius. And also, *All About Accountability*. Some of you will like that.

Now the other thing that EOS does, they have ways of handling this, so their scorecards are huge, whether or not someone's accomplishing their rocks is another form of accountability. You don't have a chance to go off track for very long, which is really powerful.

And then they have something called The People Analyzer; so against core values plus the key aspects of the role, they have a very simple rating system. Someone's either a plus, which means they're doing well, they're plus-minus, which is neutral, or a minus, and you don't want too many plus-minuses and you don't want any minuses when you're scoring someone. Plus-minus is where there's room to improve. Minuses, they're failing, and again, in our experience… There's another example that came out of a workshop the other day, and I'm trying to remember where the person learned it—somewhere well known. Oh, it's MDRT, and it was a stop light.

So green, amber, red. And if someone's green, they're green; when someone is amber, they're almost always headed to red and you cannot get them back to green. If you're giving someone an amber, that plus-minus to put it in another framework, almost always, they're on their way out. Which is tough for us. If we like to develop people, if we have ideas, if we can see people's "potential"—I'm putting that in quotes by the way—then that's a tough pill to swallow sometimes.

However, it's also reality. For whatever reason, they're a great person, they're just not a great person for your company any longer if they have been. Really being willing to make that call, and as a leader, I think it's been one of my big growth opportunities. It's not easy; it's hard. I remember, it was funny, I was with a person I interviewed a little while ago, Alex McLean. I had to fire somebody, and this was somebody relatively new, so it wasn't quite this situation. And I was a nervous wreck, and she looked at me and she was like, "Are you going to be okay? Seriously, what's wrong?" I'm like, "I'll pull it together," which I did. But I was a complete wreck 15 minutes before we had to have this conversation.

I have endeavored to get better at it, which I now am. I'm good at having those radically candid conversations. I will give it to you straight, and I will say, "This is what needs to happen," to be super clear about what the expectations are so that people can be successful. I have learned the cost of ruinous empathy and it's expensive and I don't like being on the receiving end of it, and I sure as heck don't like being the one who created it because I'm being too ******* nice. That ultimately is not caring about the person, it's caring about you. It's caring about your ego and not wanting to make someone feel bad because they're failing.

But just think about it: How would you feel if someone never gave you feedback on the fact that you weren't being successful and then you think, "Everything's fine, everything's fine, everything's fine." And then you're having the, "This is a warning and your next one, you're fired." None of us want to be in that circumstance. You may have had that with clients, but no one wants to have that also from an employment standpoint. So if we can put ourselves in their shoes, I think it's clear.

[The] Collaborative Way (https://collaborativeway.com/) is another phenomenal system that really helps you. It's about listening generously and speaking straight, and being for someone means you also give them the straight goods. You don't lie. And lying is also by omission, so when we don't give people that feedback, it is so incredibly important. And it's very costly, again, if we don't.

We have to remember that we are a business. As fun as we want it to be, as enjoyable we want it to be, we still have end results, and if we're compromising on that, we're actually compromising the rest of the team as well. They will ultimately pay the price way before we will, unless there's a high stake result there. But our team members, our teammates will feel that. Again, often because we're the last to know.

So, bet you didn't think there was a downside to having a great company culture, but you can just be really hard to leave. And if you can remember and take away from this conversation that people don't fire themselves, and if you don't have a really great way to be accountable or you don't have people who are willing to speak straight, you're in danger of what Kim Scott calls "ruinous empathy" from the *Radical Candor* book. And that's not healthy. That's not healthy for you, and that's not healthy for the person, and that's certainly not healthy for your teamwork.

So that's my thought for today that I wanted to share with you. Probably unexpected. It was for me when I wrote it down. I'm like, "Oh, this is a different conversation and perspective than we normally have." But I think it's important to appreciate. We work really, really hard to have a phenomenal company culture, but we have to remember that not everyone is a right fit for that. Not everyone belongs in our sandbox, and if they're not, we have to gently pick them up and place them outside our sandbox so they can go find another one to play in because it is not ours.

So please, protect the walls, protect your boundaries with your great company culture to keep it being great. Otherwise, you are sabotaging all of the work that you put in and all the work that other people have put in. It's not fair for them or for you, and ultimately, it's not going to get you where you want to go.

All right. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. As always, thanks for listening and here's to your team success.