Shannon Waller: This one single word drives me crazy. Stay tuned to find out what it is and what to do about it.

Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to Team Success. Something happened the other day that I thought, "Oh, I cannot wait to record an episode on this," because it drove me crazy and I'm super-curious to see if it drives you crazy as well.

What happened was I was in a conversation with a very trusted colleague, one of my very best friends. We were having a debate about things and it wasn't going quite the way that she wanted, so then what she said at the end was, "Sure." I've learned that I hate the word 'sure', which, why do I hate it? Because it implies agreement without actual meaning agreement, so it's kind of fake.

I realized there's other words than just 'sure', there's this like, "Okay, whatever you say." Oh my gosh, I realize those words now are so triggering for me because I know that they are pretend. Someone is saying that to get out of the conversation because they're tired of what they perceive as being arguing or going back and forth and they're just like, "Whatever," and they're kind of giving up.

So it's a "Note to Self" to never do this myself because I don't want to drive anyone else crazy or myself, but it was interesting, I thought, "Okay, why is this happening and what's my contribution? What can I do to shift the circumstance?"

We're going to get into some strategies in a moment, but here's why it bothers me so much, it really is passive-aggressive behavior, something I'm kind of allergic to, you probably are, too. It's why I love living in the entrepreneurial world so much is that people are not passive-aggressive. I find this far more in what little corporate or bureaucratic experience I've had, is people say things and they half-mean it, don't mean it, say the right thing to get along, it's just a bit pretend. And I'm someone who, even part of my Unique Ability® Statement is "aligning people's thinking with what's real," so I am not good with pretend, I am not good with fake, I'm not good with inauthentic. I need to know that what you're saying is what you mean.

When people say, "Sure, okay, whatever you say," they don't mean it, it's not true. Without truth, you don't know what's real and what you can actually do. As Dan Sullivan says, "All progress starts by telling the truth." If there's no reality to a situation, how can we actually make progress when we're not dealing with what's real?

So that's why I don't like it, but just because I don't like it doesn't mean it doesn't happen, so I have to get a little bit more strategic, a lot smarter, about how not to have the conversation

devolve to that point. As I'm talking, I'm hoping you're thinking back to your own experience and where have you said, "Sure, okay, whatever you say," and where have you not really meant it?

With friends and stuff, you're like, "Sure, I'd love to go out." That's different. But I'm talking when someone just has a full sentence of, "Sure," I'm not sure I would 100% trust that if I were you. I'm curious to know if you've done that, if you've experienced that in conversations with you, especially if you're in a leadership role, especially if you're the person with more authority in the situation, are people saying that to you? To me, it's a massive red flag that things are not on track, they are going awry. I only had this insight after I had this conversation.

By the way, I did not let our conversation end on sure. I'm like, "This isn't working. You don't actually mean that, so what is actually true," and we kept going until we got it sorted, so just to let you know, that's how my story ended up.

But I realize that it happens a lot and it means that people aren't really taking ownership and they're frustrated and they just don't know where else they can go in the conversation. I know some people who are not confrontational, who tend to have more peace and harmony in their relationships and their communication and they will say this a lot and a lot more frequently than I would ever do personally, because I don't have those things in my personality. I realize, "Oh my gosh, people are just going along with so much to keep the peace in the moment," but I really want to question whether or not it's helping things move further ahead.

Anyway, this is why I'm super-curious to hear about your experience and to see whether or not this resonates with you. If you have any comments or thoughts, please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. This will get to me. I want to know if you've experienced the same thing that I have.

If you are in this circumstance, then what's happening and what can you do to change it? If you're committed to progress, if you're committed to actually taking effective action, if you're committed to teamwork and hearing other people's points of view, if something ends up in this— it's kind of like an off-road, not a good one. If something ends up in a little eddy and it's not going to go any further, how can you get things back to mainstream? How can you create an environment where people feel free to go, "Okay, I'm not 100% aligned with this, but I don't seem to be getting my point across"? That would be pretty clear communication to you. I would ask myself, "Am I open to hearing that?" Because clearly, that's what's happening. I'm now going to be totally tuned to listening for that. If someone says, "Sure," I'm like, "It sounds like we're not quite on the same page, but you're getting frustrated trying to get your point across. Is that true?" When I say it that directly, a lot of people would have trouble saying no. They'll be like, "Um, actually, yes," I'm like, "Good. Let me listen more generously."

That's also what occurred to me in terms of a strategy is our fabulous coaching from Collaborative Way, brilliant book, highly recommend you have it on your bookshelf and read it, because step number one is "Speak straight," number two is to "Listen generously." If someone is trying to speak straight and I'm not listening generously, it will end up with "Sure." I realized I probably need to listen more generously, so that's a great strategy.

You're actually addressing the communication, not just the issue. It means taking that step back and go, "Oh, we're actually not in a good communication situation right now," so back away from the issue for a moment and then go, "Oh, okay, it sounds like we're not on the same page, aligned," whatever language you like to use, "How can we go about this differently so we can actually have a creative, productive conversation?"

You probably know I'm a huge fan of Patrick Lencioni, and one of the most important stages of development for a team is that they don't have fear of conflict, they can have a healthy debate about the issue, not about one another. There's no name-calling, there's no making anyone feel bad or wrong, it's more like, "Oh, with this idea, don't agree. I see it differently. I have a different perspective. I think there's more context here," whatever it is needs to be said.

It's critical that you leave space for that and that you create enough what is called "psychological safety." This means you make it not-scary to talk to you. They're a little bit nervous around you. They can get a little bit tongue-tied, a little bit withheld, unless you make it super-easy for them to be clear, direct, and state their point of view.

But you don't have to agree with it all the time. You can say, "Appreciate you saying that; I don't agree," that's fine. You're not slamming the person, you are just saying, "I don't agree with that particular idea." You want to be able to have that productive conflict on a team. Again, if you're clued that it's not happening, like passive-aggressive "Sure," then there's something to work on there.

The other thing I was thinking about in terms of the strategy is to say, "I think there's something I'm missing here. Clearly, I'm not hearing you completely, so would you mind trying again and just making sure I get your full point of view?" That's an invitation that you're backing down, you're not forcing your opinion, you want to hear what the other person has to say, so I think that's clear. And then dig deeper, and that's what I actually did in the situation. It's like, "There's something else, tell me more about that. What am I missing? What am I not hearing? Why are you so convinced about this other point of view?" And then we ended up working it out, which was awesome.

Now, I also want to address the issue. If you are the person who says "Sure," this is a little bit of reflection for yourself: How are you thinking about things? How are you feeling in this situation?

Are you owning your own seat? Are you owning your own position? Are you distracted? Are you committed to making something happen or are you just putting in time, warming your seat? However you want to articulate that. If you do, and I'm going to strongly encourage you to own what you're up to and the conversations that you're in, then speak up and say, "Hey, could you listen generously, because there's some things that I want to get heard on. I just need to know that you hear me. You don't have to agree, I just want to know that you hear me." And then any, frankly, decent leader is going to go, "Oh, okay. You want me to listen generously. That's my clue to shut up. That's my clue to listen and to ask questions and to make sure that I fully understand."

All good leaders that I know do this and do this well and they take.... 'Pride' isn't quite the right word. It's important to them that they operate this way, so that's another good clue.

But I also want to make sure that you take responsibility for making sure that your point gets across and you're looking for the long-term good, the long-term peace and harmony in this situation, not just the short-term, because at least I know this is how to bridge personality difference. Some people are very, in DISC, it's called "dominant/driving/doer" personalities. They're not trying to run roughshod over you or your ideas, but they just want to get stuff done. And if you're quiet or you're sending out subtle signals and they're missing them, it's true, they're missing them, so you might need to throw up a bit more of a flare to say, "Hey, I think there's something else we might want to take into account here." They're like, "Oh, what?" And then tell them. They're good with direct communication. What you think might be harsh is, for them, just clear, and they appreciate that. I know I do.

Some people have been so subtle and they've said things and I'm like, "What? That's what you were thinking this whole time? I had no idea." Now I have tried to expand my bandwidth and widen my antenna, and I'm pretty good at it, but I still miss stuff, especially when someone's very different, so I look and listen for all of those clues and those cues, but it's not easy. If you can do your 100% and they do their 100%, you will at least meet in the middle.

If you're someone who is in that position of you find yourself saying "Sure" or going along with things, just realize that something's amiss, something is awry. You're not fully expressed, you're not feeling heard, and there probably is something you can do to say, "Hey, put your hand up, get counted," as opposed to just settling. I'm violently opposed to settling. I want us to hash out the right answer, the commitment, the action that we can take that we all feel confident about. It's not always comfortable, but that's okay. If we're always comfortable, we're probably not growing.

I'm just really clear, as a communication issue, this is one word, it's one word, but it is a really big clue that there is more work to be done. The problem with "Sure" is it implies agreement, but

it doesn't mean it. It's inauthentic, it's fake, it's not real. And what I know is that things have to be real to be able to make progress and to move ahead, which means we can all accomplish what we're up to.

So I want to put a big red line through the word 'sure', eliminate it from conversations, at least in the context that I'm talking about today. Anyway, I'm jokingly saying why I hate the word 'sure', sort of joking, sort of not, but it was a fun realization in my own mind to realize, "Oh," and this doesn't happen very often.

First of all, I try not to run roughshod over people, 'try' being the operative word, and I have a great teamwork and communication, I work at it. It's important to me that people feel comfortable to be honest and clear with me, but occasionally stuff happens.

Anyway, just wanted to raise this as a flag to see if it's a trigger for you, to see if you've been noticing this. Again, if you're committed to results where everyone's on board and makes it happen and really owns it so you don't have to, a really important part of being a self-managing and self-multiplying company, I think this is an important thing to pay attention to.

That's your thought for the day. I hope you've enjoyed this conversation. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know **questions@strategiccoach.com**, I am super-curious. As always, here's to your team's success. Thanks for listening.