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The Freedom To Be Yourself Is A Strategic Advantage

Shannon Waller: Do your team members know and trust their strengths, or are they trying to prove themselves? Stay tuned to find out why the freedom to be yourself is actually a strategic advantage.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success.

I had a conversation with a fabulous leader the other day that really inspired me, and I wanted to share this idea with you. One of the things that she said was that for her leaders, a lot of them are trying to prove themselves. And I was like, Aha, that is actually an issue. And you wouldn't think so because someone trying to prove themselves, often we take it to mean that they're going to work hard, they're going to be striving—which by the way is fabulous, you definitely want that from your people—that they are going to be, again, working really, really hard and trying to be successful. What could possibly go wrong? Well, as it turns out, quite a lot.

There's something that happens when people are trying to prove themselves. And the problem is their vantage point. They are looking at themselves. They are evaluating their own behavior. Now, I'm a huge fan of self-awareness, and if you've been listening to this podcast, you would know that to be true. However, to be, I think, really, really successful, you have to know yourself, be confident in your contributions, honest about what your gifts are and what they're not. And instead of being focused on yourself, you need to be focused on the results that you are trying to accomplish and your teammates with whom you are working. It is the attention outside of yourself that is far more valuable and far more productive, in terms of producing effective action, than focusing on trying to prove yourself.

People go into the Gap. They're measuring themselves against an ideal. The matter of head trash that people have when they are trying to prove themselves is brutal. And you know this, you know this for yourself when you haven't been confident, whether or not you're capable of doing something yet, you're focused on you. But you also know that when you're confident and clear, or at least, even if you haven't done this particular task before or project or attempted this result, you know what you can count on yourself for. That means you know who you are. That is the value of the self-awareness. Again, you know your strengths; you know your non-strengths.

So as soon as she said this to me, I'm like, Aha, I know exactly what I want to focus on, and that is with people getting really clear and, I'm going to say, confident on what their strengths are and also what they're not. And as I was thinking about talking to you about this today, one of the terms that came to mind to me was freedom. And I'm someone who, through upbringing and through my Kolbe profile and through my PRINT profile, I'm a pretty transparent person. What you see is what you get. A bunch of different things validate that.



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And I remember even when I was 24 years old, and I was applying for this job, and there was an administrative role available—this was way before Kolbe, way before anything. I just had my upbringing and my own sense of myself. And they said, oh, would you like to apply for this administrative role? And what I said to them was, no, you don't want me for this role. And they were like, excuse me? They'd never had a 24-year-old talk to them like this. And this is a very competitive job market. This is back late 80s. And they were kind of like a little bit nonplussed. And they said, well, we also have this other role. I'm like, "Oh, that would be a much better fit. Yes, I would really like that one."

And I can't believe how cocky I was back then. I'm like, seriously, what was I thinking? I should have just taken anything that was offered to me. Anyway, I didn't, me being me, and it turned out brilliantly, by the way. I was much more successful in that other role. Lord only knows what would have happened with the first one. And that was the stepping stone for me to meet Babs and Dan and join Strategic Coach. And the rest is history.

So, that freedom to be yourself, and I really do consider it to be a strategic advantage, to know what you're great at and what you're not great at. It keeps you from trying to prove yourself. It keeps you from being self-focused. It keeps you from being in the Gap, to be perfectly honest. And again, I work with people even at very high levels who are trying to prove themselves. These are managers who had reached one level, they were desperate to get to the next level. And it was really tough to work with them because they were focused on themselves.

What I really wanted, I wanted to be working with someone who is focused working with me to focus on the end result of what we were trying to accomplish. I didn't have, I just didn't have the time, the mental energy to try and baby this person's ego, to be perfectly honest—to say, oh, no, you're doing great, you're doing great, blah, blah, blah. It's like, no, this is the project that we need to produce together. What's your contribution going to be? How can we pull in other people? What are we missing? What do we already have? What are some creative ideas? But no, that was not the angle that this other person was coming at it from. It was really, really frustrating and it feels like a very narrow path. It feels like a small game to play. It doesn't feel like it's expansive. It feels scarcity-minded rather than abundant, if you look at it from that perspective.

So, I'm just kind of intrigued with this thought and with this way of approaching things, because I think it's really important that people get grounded in what their capabilities are. And there are a couple of ways to do this. I just had a blast recording the latest book with Dan called Growing Great Leadership, which is all about helping people expand their capabilities through The 4 C's. So you might be familiar with the 4 C's Growth Formula. If not, I will refresh your thinking.

But it's really getting clear on your Commitment to what it is that you want to accomplish, then being willing to go through the Courage phase. And one of the insights from this latest book



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that came out is your Commitment is actually to be willing to experience Courage. That's the Commitment, not even to the goal that you want. It's actually to be willing to experience the Courage, because guess what? Courage feels crappy. It does not feel good. It feels the opposite to Confidence. But that's how we grow, if you think about it. And that's why it's the 4 C's Growth Formula.

But it's also a leadership formula, and that's the take for this book, is that when you yourself are always demonstrating your Commitment, being willing to go through the Courage to develop the Capabilities—that's the third C—and that gives you that new higher level of Confidence. And then us being us, we just do it all over again. And we make the Commitment and scare ourselves all over again at another level and develop the Capabilities and then the Confidence.

So when you're doing this as a leader, you are demonstrating that. And that's what's really necessary, as Dan puts out, in this much more networked world. We're no longer in a hierarchical, pyramidal structure. Yes, they still exist here and there, but honestly, in our entrepreneurial companies, it's much more networks. And we need our networks to grow; each node in it, each person, each team, each capability needs to be constantly getting better. How does that happen? Through the 4 C's—through constantly growing our Commitment, our Courage, our Capability, and our Confidence. That's how your company expands. So that's one way.

And my other way of growing is to lean hard into my strengths, which is, again, why I'm such a fan of all the profiles. Because it's a shortcut. It gives language to those things that we know instinctually, we know intuitively, we know through experience, we throw ourselves at life. Some things we do work brilliantly, some things not so much. And there's incredible freedom to be able to say, "Hey, you can count on me for this. I will promise you I will deliver. I've got a ton of experience to back it up. Yes, I love doing this. I can't wait!" And then also the freedom to go, "No, you do not want me for this. I suck. It's terrible. And I could try, and I'm a smart person and all the things, but frankly, that was not factory installed."

And that honesty, as I was saying earlier, that's where the freedom comes in. Everyone I personally hired and really went on to have great working relationships with has had that level of self-honesty and self-awareness about what their strengths were and what they weren't. And the thing that is cool about profiles, as I mentioned, is that they just give you that language really, really quickly—that shortcut. Otherwise, it can take a while to get to know somebody. And when you've got validated instruments like CliftonStrengths, like Kolbe, like PRINT, DISC is another one that's great, Working Genius—I love Working Genius, so useful for teamwork.

And you know what you can count on people for. It might be a new project. And frankly, as entrepreneurs building entrepreneurial companies, we don't know what we're going to be doing next. We're making it up as we go along. So when you don't know, when you haven't



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laid out that process five or ten years ahead, and you're figuring out as you go, what do you have to rely on? Your capabilities, your strengths, your talents, your God-given gifts, however you articulate that, that's what it is that you have to lean on.

I'm a nine in QuickStart—3295 is my Kolbe profile—and I throw myself into unknown situations on a regular basis. But I have so much confidence in my QuickStart, and I know my stuff. You know, I'm not unprepared. But do I know exactly how I'm going to set out something at the beginning? Do I know exactly what stories I'm going to tell? Nope. I do not. Because I'm also very present and I'm able to read my audience, and I bring out the most useful, relevant information that I have in that moment.

Now, that prescription for some people is absolutely terrifying, and that might not be your success strategy. But I know if I were to predict what I was going to do too far in advance? Well, put it this way: I'm stale, I'm boring and not interesting. Not who I want to be as a presenter and a speaker.

So, each of us has our own personal success formula as a combination of all of the different elements of ourselves: our own experience, our strengths, our talents, our intelligence, our hearts, you name it, that's how it goes. Again, that's partly why I am so adamant about "Know thyself." And that's kind of my first step for any type of success as an entrepreneurial team member, as an entrepreneurial team leader, is you have to know your own composition. You have to know your own strengths. And you also have to know your own weaknesses slash non-strengths, however you want to say that, because then that makes you more open-minded.

You are someone, then, who can be curious. You can be curious about yourself, and then you can be curious about other people. It's like, oh, I know people can count on me for this, but I'm not good for that. Who knows how to do that? This is where Who Not How comes from, right? And so that ability to just have that freedom is huge.

And I have to tell you, for me, it means that people who can talk like this and who are self-aware are so much more trustworthy than someone who tells me, "Oh, I can do anything," or who tells me, "I can do nothing." I'm like, well, neither of those is true. So you clearly are clueless about yourself. Right? You're either boastful and arrogant or you're completely unaware, neither of which I love. So I look for that.

Trustworthiness for me is about openness. It's about transparency. It's about, again, self-awareness. And it means someone's actually been paying attention. One of the things that Strategic Coach is all about is your mindset and thinking about your thinking. If someone has just gone through life and never thought about their experience, never thought about their thinking? Probably not going to be a right fit to work on any team that I'm a part of. And I would highly guess that you would say the same thing.



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So I want you personally to experience that freedom to be yourself. I think it's an incredible strategic advantage. I think it gets you onto teams that are much better. I think they are much more successful. I think they're much more productive than a team where everyone's trying to prove themselves, where people are not clued into what their capabilities and strengths and talents are. And also, who are not willing to grow and make those commitments.

If you think about perfectionists, perfectionists don't take risks and don't try new things unless they're guaranteed success. Not really sure that's part of a formula for entrepreneurial success. We are willing to test, experiment slash fail. We're like, oh, well, that didn't work. Maybe this will work instead. So you want someone who doesn't have a perfectionist mindset, but instead who has a growth mindset. And that growth mindset says, oh, okay, I'm willing to test it out. I am willing to put myself out there and see what happens and learn from the experience. So that gives you so much more freedom. It means you're much more present, much more paying attention to the resources around you, rather than having your attention just focused on yourself.

So I kind of am putting a message out here for you as a leader. Please, please, please encourage your team to know their own strengths. That means you will know what to count on them for. They will know what to count on themselves for and what to count on you for. And I think that is a huge facet for entrepreneurial teamwork.

So really that freedom to be yourself—and this is Kathy Kolbe's definition of success. Success is the freedom to be yourself. And to my mind, it is a massive strategic advantage. I am all about maximizer strategies. And that's why for me, this is an incredible strategic advantage. I want to work with people—and the older I get, the more adamant about this I get—where people are at this level of capability and awareness. And everyone I work with, I try and bring them up to that level. Because that, to me, is where the game gets fun. That's where the playing field is comprised of Unique Ability.

I was going to say it's more equal, but it's not. But it's equal in that everyone's aware of what their uniqueness is, if that makes sense. And that's where we can create magic together. That's where it gets fun. This is where people are leaning into how they can be even more themselves and better, rather than them trying to be somebody else, which is kind of fruitless task anyway.

So just wanted to share this thinking with you, because I love the fact that freedom to be yourself can be a strategic advantage, not just a nice to have. And I think there's some real cost to pay attention to when people are trying to prove themselves, because, again, their attention is in the wrong direction. It's inner focused rather than outer focused. And that's where we need people focused: outward. What are we trying to accomplish? Who's got complimentary talents and strengths to bring to bear? Let's go. Anything else is going to get in your way.



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Thank you so much for listening. I hope you find this interesting and thought-provoking. Any comments, please let me know at questions@strategicoach.com. And as always, here's to your team's success.