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Transactional To Transformational: Being Human At Work

Shannon Waller: Do you or some other team members or team leaders have some behaviors that are killing your culture? Stay tuned to learn the difference between transactional and transformational behaviors.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, we are going to talk about the difference between being transactional, when you're working with other people, versus transformational. And this was inspired by a good friend of mine telling me a story of when she had someone with whom she works ask her for something, which she promptly delivered—that's who my friend is—and never got a thank you and made kind of like several overtures to kind of like, hey, you know, did this for you, it's done. And the other person was oblivious to the point where my friend actually sent a GIF saying you're welcome, wink, wink, hint, hint, to which the other person still did not send a simple thank you. And I was like, oh dear, some people need some very explicit coaching on what to do, and more importantly, what not to do.

So why is this important? We're busy, we're focused on results, we want to get stuff done. So why is it important to actually take a few extra seconds and treat other human beings as human beings? I have a bias here. Well, it's for this reason. Transactional communications or behaviors, and often it's what people are not doing as well as what they are doing, is basically communicating, what can I get from you? You are a thing. You're not a human. You're not a person. You're something from which I can get stuff. And that's all that matters. You're a cog in a wheel. Transformational communicates something very, very different, which is how can we grow together? That is different. That implies partnerships and collaboration and input, and we're in it together.

So let's go into a list of exactly what I'm talking about. I'm going to assume, if you're listening to this, that you are much more invested in being a great human and treating other people as though they're human beings, because after all, they are. I even treat my AI like a person. Apparently, it costs way more because it uses more energy, but it makes it way more fun for me. So, I treat my AI like a human. ChatGPT is wonderfully friendly, just so you know, as is Perplexity. But to me, it's how I want to be in all ways. It's a little bit like stopping at a stop sign even when there's no one else around. I want to keep the habit. I do not want to, A, break the law, or B, I don't want to get out of it. I don't want to ever become transactional. That is not my commitment.

And so I am conscious about making sure I do it as much as I can possibly be aware of. And do I do it every single time? Probably not. But I am conscious of it and I try and do it most of the time. So what are some examples of being transactional? And I think all of us are guilty of these at some point, but I want to let you know the impact and then what you can do about it. And a shout out to some AI to expanding my list because I had some examples and then it gave me some wonderful ones more.



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So what is the transactional behavior? Number one is ignoring people in passing. I've seen this happen. It bugs me. Occasionally, if I'm in my own head too much, I can ignore it. But it's walking by someone's office where you see them to make eye contact, say, hi, good morning. You might be walking fast. That is completely fine. But there are other people there. It's not just a piece of furniture or a machine or a desk. It's a person. Say hello to the people. It is not that hard. I don't care how busy you are. And the more senior you are in the company, the more important this is. And not even senior, the longer you've been around. Never mind. You know what? It matters for everybody. No one gets to be a jerk. There you go. So do not ignore people in passing.

Number two, only reaching out when you need something. Sometimes we feel like this about our children. They only call or text you when they want money or want something from you. And that doesn't feel good to us, so why would we ever do this to other people? So check in just to check in. Show interest in their world and what's happening. Remember what people like for their birthdays in terms of what kind of cake they want. Send a little note.

I was talking with my really good friend Sandra. And I just was reflecting on the conversation and just going, oh my gosh, she's an amazing human being. So I just sent her a note and just said, hey, I was reflecting on our conversation. I want to let you know how much I appreciate you. Well, that made her day, right? Because she's just a great person. How she was approaching a very difficult situation was with grace and restraint and clear-headedness. She was amazing. And I just really appreciated her and who she was being, not just what she was doing or what she could do for me. So letting people know, sending those little notes.

My good friend and client Kelly Knight posted a really great clip that said, spread kindness around like confetti. I was like, oh my gosh, that just made me smile and laugh. I was like, there's a generosity to that that I just love. So when you're reaching out just to say hi, or on a Zoom chat to say, hey, you're looking great today. Lovely to see you. I've missed you. Whatever it is. Like in a big meeting, you can just say, hey, great to see you. Oh my gosh, that means you're not just reaching out when you need something.

A big one, and this is one of our referability habits, is skipping please and thank you. One of my clients related a story, and this goes back to how I kicked off this podcast, but one of our clients, my team clients, actually goes, it's really important that the entrepreneur especially is genuine. When they say please and thank you, I'm like, okay, but why would you not think it's genuine? Because her entrepreneur would write P-N-T-Y at the bottom of all written requests, which was short form for please and thank you. And it was like, oh my gosh, the person may have thought they were meaning it, but you can't even take the time to spell out the word, then it's not coming across as genuine. You're just doing it because you think you're supposed to.



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So when we talk about please, please is acknowledging that someone else is choosing to contribute their talents, their expertise, their mental and physical and emotional energy to support your cause. That is worthy of an ask. And then a thank you is an acknowledgment that that's in fact what they did. It means you are not taking people for granted and their activities and their results and their contribution for granted. This is huge. I think it's important to do with kids. I think it's important to do with your spouse. I think it's important to do with your friends. I think it's important to do with your teammates. I really think it's important to do with your clients. So it's not that hard. Saying please and thank you is being polite. Hopefully this was drummed into you as a child. Do not drop it now.

Next one, being all business all the time. One of the things I love, love, love most about entrepreneurial companies is people bring their whole self to work. I was relistening to a podcast that I had the pleasure of interviewing Cy Wakeman on about no ego. We'll link it here too. I can't believe how much I forgot of her wisdom. I will quickly be putting all of that stuff back into place. But one of the things she talks about is don't just bring your whole self, bring your most evolved self to work. I was like, bam, this is kind of what we're talking about here. Bring your most evolved self to work, which means bring your humanity, bring the caring and not just your head, like there's heart involved too.

So ask personal questions, care about people as individuals, remember what their hobbies are. I got to see my friend Paul the other day, and he's a brilliant photographer, right? So it's just fun to kind of catch up on some of that stuff. So just know people's names, know about their cats, their kittens, their dogs, know whether or not there's been an event in their life. So just so that you see the person, not just a role, that is really important. And share of your own self too. I share, perhaps overshare, some of the things that I'm up to, but I am a whole person at work, and I do like to bring my most evolved self. But that means, you know, I have a family, I've got a dog, which I can hear right now. You know, I've got stuff going on, there's places I want to travel to, there's challenges I'm having. I share that because I want people to see and treat me as a whole human, not just as a transactional deliverer of blah, blah, blah. That does not feel fun. That's not why I'm at work. So very important.

Another one is evaluating people only by their outputs. So it's really important that we acknowledge people's efforts, their learning, and their growth, not just the results. Oh, thanks for this report. Instead, again, this is kind of how to say thank you as well. It's like, wow, it is clear you were so thorough and you put a ton of effort into it. You did a lot of research. You talked to a lot of people. Thank you. I have a lot of confidence in what you've given me because I can tell how much you put into this. Bam, they feel very, very appreciated. So you're acknowledging not just the final result, but what it took to get there. Guess what they're gonna give you next time? The same or better.



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Now, if you just go, oh, thanks, they're gonna feel completely not acknowledged and like, oh, they didn't really care how much effort I put into this. I'll do less next time and see if they notice. This is how people think. So it's really important that you acknowledge that. And then ask them, you know, what did you learn? Or how'd that feel? There's someone that I'm really excited about her career. I'm just wanting to build her up and help her just lean in and embrace this new opportunity. I'm like, it's okay to make mistakes. So let's talk about what you're learning. That's a fun conversation for me to be having with her. People love it when you are engaged in their future and in their success and that you give them some freedom and permission to do that.

Another one is acting like hierarchy means superiority. This is so interesting to me. As someone who, as of this year, has been working with Strategic Coach for 34 years, I have been around a long time. Yes, I'm senior in the organization. I have a lot of things I've done and things I've created, long history, all the things. So technically, I have status. Now, I tend to think I'm as good as my last podcast, my last book, my last workshop. I do not want to rest on my laurels. But at the same time, I'm very clear that I don't know everything. There's a Donald O. Clifton quote, and I'm going to do a separate podcast on this, but I was coaching CliftonStrengths the other day, and he goes, people are sharp. It's teams that are well-rounded.

So I know I'm only really good at a few things, and I count on other people to, A, help me get better at what I'm good at and contribute everything else, because there's a lot. There's a lot that I don't do well, can't do, shouldn't do. You name it, I'm on the pointier end of the stick. So I need a lot of help. So this for me means treating everyone like a peer and a partner. It means inviting ideas, asking for opinions, giving credit freely. It's really important to me to give credit because it's important that, you know, if I have an idea from a book that I'm sharing, I will share the book with you. Did that in previous conversation.

And it's vital to me. I don't want to be seen as someone who's greedy, who takes stuff that isn't mine. I don't want people to take my stuff without giving acknowledgement or credit. That bugs me. So it means just recognizing that we're in this together, as I talked about at the beginning. Just because I've been around a long time doesn't mean I'm better. I mean, I may have more experience, more skill, but it doesn't mean that I'm better. Other people have lots to contribute. So that to me is absolutely essential. Be a partner is definitely one of the 12 entrepreneurial attitudes, so totally in line with my thinking.

The other one is focusing on tasks, not purpose. If I see a company devolve, it's often for this reason. It means connecting the dots. Remind yourself, too, as to the why. Why are you doing what you're doing? I think that's really key. We can get very focused on tasks, and we have to ask ourselves, is this really forwarding everything for the company, or is it just making one person happy? It's really interesting. People lose perspective and context really quickly, and I think it's vital that we, if we have that perspective as a team member, as a team leader, that we



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put that forward. Do not let people forget. You know, watch Simon Sinek's "Start With Why" TED Talk. It's amazing.

So, the connecting the dots, and Babs was even saying this to me the other day, because she's brilliant at connecting the dots. It's like, people need to connect the dots more. I'm like, yes, let's talk about how to do that. So, you can help them do that, and that means people understand why something that they're doing is important, why it matters, and that's vital.

Now, this is another one, dropping tasks on others without context, so very similar. So, making sure that you communicate the why. One of our tools, The Impact Filter, is phenomenal for this. It is, what is the purpose of this project? What is the importance? That means, why? Why are we doing this? It's like, oh, we're doing this, is not sharing the why. Here's the difference it will make. That is sharing the why. This is why we're going to change course, do something different, add, subtract, what have you, is because there is a why behind it.

If you do not share it and you've made the decision and you're happy but you forget to communicate that, you leave everyone stupid. You do not educate them as to why things are important, which means they cannot make decisions. Maybe this project that you thought was so genius and so fabulous is completely going off the rails. Maybe the market's not supporting it. Maybe there are no resources. Maybe it's going to cost 10 times what you thought. But if they don't know the why, they cannot make good decisions. And especially if you tend to abdicate rather than delegate. Oh my gosh, the messes that happen for this reason are crazy.

So very critical to make sure that people have the context so that they can execute on your plan with intelligence, with knowledge, with expertise, with good judgment. That for me is one of the main reasons for doing it. Treating people's time is expendable. Ooh. Business owners, love you, we tend to do this. This is a bit challenging. So be on time, be prepared, and end meetings when you say you will. Respect is shown in how you manage time. Yes, if there's one I fall down on, could be this one, although I'm getting better. Just took 60 years, but there you go. So making sure that I'm not wasting other people's time. I am very conscious of that. I hate it.

And Dan Sullivan, same deal. He hates wasting people's time. So that's why he uses The Impact Filter most of the time and comes in prepared. I have never shown up to a meeting with Dan where he hasn't done a Fast Filter. It just doesn't happen. That's how he preps. That's how he prepares. And he's awesome. So all the interviewing I do with him is always predicated by that, unless it's inside The Strategic Coach, in which case I need to show up prepared because I have captured cool thoughts that he said, that he's articulated, that I've grabbed, and then we chat about it. He doesn't have to be prepared for that one, but I do. But that's kind of how that works. So that means ready. Not five minutes after the meeting, but at least five minutes before if you're deadline driven like I am. So do not take advantage of people's time. Be respectful of it.



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Being performative or fake. How much do I detest this? A lot. Be real. This means owning mistakes. If you messed up, you messed up. It's okay. Not a big deal. What is a big deal is if you try and blame somebody else. If you don't acknowledge it, if you don't learn from it, how else are we gonna grow as a company if we're not all getting smarter? And half the way we get smarter is by making mistakes and learning what not to do next time. We had a situation where, not that long ago, I thought it was a mistake on someone else's part, and then I double checked some of the communication back and forth, and I was like, this is our mistake.

So when we sent the email back to the company that was helping us, the email was titled, we messed up. And we did. And what happened was we took ownership of it. I'm not going to say blame. We just took ownership of it. And we asked for help for how can we get this resolved as quickly as possible. Oh, my gosh. Everyone rallied. It was handled in a few days. Could have been much more complex. And no one had to spend any mental or emotional energy defending themselves and how it happened, which was very powerful. I actually drafted the email and I wasn't the one who added the incorrect language. I wasn't the one who made the mistake, but it was so easy for me as a company to go, yeah, we screwed up. I have no problem with that.

I did the other day. I apologized to a fellow team leader where I had messed up. I have no problem with that. I do not expect myself to be perfect. I don't expect anyone else to either. What I do want, though, is people to take ownership and to learn and to keep going. That I can work with. If someone's being fake or performative or posing, kill me now. Just can't handle it. I'm like, yeah, you don't belong in any team that I'm a part of. I'm going to move ahead with people who are real and genuine and learning. That is my success criteria. You can tell. I feel passionately about this one. Authenticity is magnetic and disarming. No one's going to fight you.

My friend and colleague to whom I apologize was so gracious. She could have raked me over the coals. She did not. And then she really appreciated and acknowledged the conversation to other people after, which was lovely. Thank you to this person. But it's yeah, I wasn't going to stand on, you know, the fact that I'd screwed up and defend it. I screwed up. That's okay. I'm allowed to and I can make amends. So anyway, fortunately that was very graciously received. Failing to give feedback. This is challenging.

So be generous with recognition and constructive coaching. This is the one that I find challenging. It's great to give recognition. Pretty good at it as far as I'm concerned. Constructive coaching, sometimes I chicken out. This is harder for me. Silence is confusing. Feedback is clarifying. And I do go silent. You know that I'm in a good space if I'm chatty and talking and have stuff to contribute. My husband knows this. When I go quiet, not good. It's really not good. If I cut off communication with someone or I don't respond, that is a clue. It's



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also not helpful. And partly I don't want to overwhelm people with the strength of my ire. However, my personal development is to learn how to clearly and constructively communicate what's working and what's not and see if we can work towards a resolution. And I feel strongly about some of the stuff that I'm dealing with. And so I have to make sure I don't blow someone out of the water. However, I'm an adult and I can figure this out a lot faster than I have been. So that's my own coaching to myself.

And lastly, protecting turf or withholding info. That's an old power play of withholding information. Information is power. Well, these days, the one who shares it the most is actually the most powerful. The withholding information, bleck. If that was ever a successful model, I'd be shocked. At the same time, it left with the seventies, get with the program. And so I think it's very key to share freely, collaborate, build a culture of abundance, not scarcity. We talk about that at Strategic Coach all the time. So it's like there's more for everybody. It's not a zero sum game. Just because if you're winning, doesn't mean someone else is losing. If someone else is winning, doesn't mean you're losing. There is lots to go around. We are creating a more abundant and generous world out there. It's nothing to protect. You're fine. No defense budget.

So I love these because I find it's very important to be specific. But again, it comes down to just being a nice, generous human. Look people in the eye. Say hello. Say thank you. Say please. You know, ask people for their opinion. Don't assume that you know better. Don't be a jerk. That's another one. It doesn't have to be hard. And as task focused and as productivity focused as you are, this is actually how you will get other people on board with you. This is how to connect and engage with your Who's. This is how to make teamwork happen, which means you don't have to do it all yourself. So to my mind, it's just, it's not that it's obvious, but it's not difficult. And this is probably how you want to be treated too, or at least I hope it is.

So I'm hoping that these are clues for you. We'll provide this great list in the show notes, but just really good instructions for how to be transformational and relationship-oriented versus transactional, because I think it's critical. This is the culture that we are building. If you walk by people in the morning, do not say hello, have a grumpy look on your face, have a resting you-know-what face on Zoom. If you do not acknowledge people, if you are secretive, if you disappear off Zoom screens and don't come back, if you don't contribute, again, if you withhold stuff, it's hard to think you're a team player. And especially if you're a leader, that behavior is weird.

So again, if you wanna show up as a great team builder, as a great culture builder, as someone who is building the future of your company, these are things to examine in your own behavior immediately and to take action. I have my own to-do list from this conversation, but I think we can all get better and we can help other people be better too. So just to summarize, please be transformational, not transactional. Transactional behavior is efficient, but it's really often cold



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and impersonal and short-sighted. That's not who we need to be. We want to create loyalty and trust and long-term performance by simply being more human. That is the role.

So I want to leave you with a fabulous quote by Maya Angelou, which also partly inspired this particular conversation. And what she said was, I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. So ultimately, that's what this is about. So go forth, be transformational, be authentic, put forth your most evolved self, and take care of the other people, and they will take care of you. Thank you so much for listening. I know this is a little bit of a longer podcast, but there's some good stuff to follow up on. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. And as always, here's to your team's success.