

EEP 123- Esther Weinberg

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SPEAKERS

Esther Weinberg, Maria Ross

Esther Weinberg 00:01

I've had people say to me during the pandemic, I'm not a therapist, you're asking me to be a therapist, I got, I don't want to come in and hear people's emotions. And, you know, I always say to them, take five minutes, and just do it. Because at the end of the day, that's what's going to engage people, not anything else. So, it's also helping leaders measure the ROI. If they're actually putting in, let's say, touch points of the beginning of their meetings, what's something we want to celebrate? Getting people to talk about how they're feeling as a result of certain changes, and then absolutely taking a look at their performance visa vie the quarter before within into any event, that's a way to also have proof in it.

Maria Ross 00:55

We've been through some serious business and culture shifts the last few years. But this is the way things always are. If it's not COVID. If it's not social unrest, it will surely be something else in the future. Remember, the only constant is change, even if you don't ask or plan for it. How can you examine design and measure your organization's ability and your own leadership ability to build trust so you can more easily adapt to change and bring your people along? My guest today is Esther Weinberg, founder and chief Leadership Development Officer of the ready zone. She's the author of better leaders better people better results, six eye opening strategies to thrive through change you didn't ask for which is a perfect subtitle. We talk about how issues start off as a profit problem, but are actually people problems. How to create cultures where trust, respect and safety are valued and measured as they impact the bottom line, and what questions you should really be asking about how to make hybrid work successful. First, a little bit more about Esther, she's a business growth accelerator that equips executives in high growth industries to create big pivots big impact and big returns. Esther's innovative strategies have assisted clients to grow, scale and thrive in the worst and best of times, including Netflix, NBC, Universal, Microsoft, CNN, Adobe, Disney and IMAX. Esther is a member of the Forbes coaches Council and a contributor to Forbes. Today Esther shares six zone performance indicators or ZPI's that are paramount to profitable growth. We also had a rich conversation about how emotions, body and language impact performance in a real way. How emotions are signposts that should not be ignored, and how to look at complaints as commitments. And we offer some tough love advice if you're a leader struggling to get comfortable with dealing with emotions. If you want to achieve high performance, we both have some choice words for you at the end of our interview. So take a listen.

Maria Ross 03:47

Hello, Esther Weinberg and welcome to this episode of the empathy edge to talk about how to grow scale and thrive in the worst and best of times. Welcome.

Esther Weinberg 03:59

Thanks so much for having me. I love when you say the the best and worst of times. It's true.

Maria Ross 04:07

Isn't that how the Tale of Two Cities opens up? I love it. Well, you know, you have such a wealth of experience and knowledge around helping companies in high growth industries to pivot to have big impact and you know, pivot. I think that's been the word of the last two years. Yeah. So, let's talk a little bit first about how you got to this work. What is your what's your origin story? As my friend Elisa Campbell for Paige would say,

Esther Weinberg 04:36

I was born in a hospital of Brooklyn, New York. Well, you know, it's, it's, um, you know, my, my career started off actually in marketing and publicity, I think when it was interesting when I was if we're really gonna go back I remember I was, I was a student at New York University. I'm a New Yorker, born and raised very proud. Yeah,

Maria Ross 05:00

Hey, girl Queens girl right here.

Esther Weinberg 05:01

Oh, look at that Brooklyn. So, um, I remember when I when I was at NYU as I was trying to figure out my major and I took a media class and they were talking about how this group of people come in and talk to reporters and, and talk to them that story ideas, and they're called publicists or public relations professionals. And I thought I have to be one of these people. I just thought it was unbelievable. I was journalism major. And I thought it was fascinating. So, I was always fascinated by the human condition and very highly curious and always very curiously engaged. And I was in marketing and publicity for quite a while. That was my original background, I worked at a small agency starting off, but then I wound up working for big brands like Fox and Disney. And I remember when I was at a turning point for me, I was an executive, a senior executive at Disney. And we were sitting around one of those very, you know, old world oak. Oh, yeah. And the CFO said, I Oh, yeah, he's just giving an update. And there was a management consultant in the room. She was really interesting. And she said, he said, Oh, I just want you to know, a third of the workforce have left. And I remember, both myself and the head of sales were floored, and I thought, what do you mean, a third of the workforce have left? Why are we not getting this? Why are we not? I mean

Maria Ross 06:31

It's like a Colombo moment. Like, by the way.

Esther Weinberg 06:36

Today, we use a lot of buzzwords around it, why you would say workforce engagement and, and things like that. But it was like people left you kidding, you know. And I think I was just so floored that we weren't investigating it. And there was this, this feeling that we're a big brand will always be able to attract people, which is interesting. We are present day with with pretend talent retention.

Maria Ross 07:02

Absolutely. That idea that like, people want to be here. People want to come here. We don't have to try.

Esther Weinberg 07:08

Yeah, yeah. It's like, you know, we are we are in such a problem. And I just thought, oh, wow, that's, that's, I don't know if that's helpful. And so, I remember there was, there was a moment in time, though, where I was, we're shifting gears as a brand. And I was going to be head of all of corporate communications for this suite of services that Disney offered. And I had rich reached the point where I didn't feel like I really had respect for the person I reported to. But I didn't know that at the time. And I just had this real turning point. And it was interesting, because I thought I have to have a mentor of mine said, you know, it's time for you to devise an exit strategy. If you feel disillusioned, then are you going to stay in a job like that I was sick, I was 30, I was a vice president. I was like, you know, you look back, you're like, I'm young and scrappy. Like, I can't leave a job. You know, and, and so I designed my exit. And it was interesting, because when I designed my exit, the day that I went in to resign, my boss, also let me go, which was just I guess it was for both of us. So, what I would say from there is I, I started to really inquire as to what was really true for me and what I was really passionate about. And I stumbled on this whole concept around leadership development, talent development, executive coaching. And so I became certified, trained, certified, and executive coaching and started a leadership development business. And it really took me I would say, across the globe, I mean, not only quite done work for big brands, like Netflix and Warner Brothers discovery, State Farm Insurance, National Geographic, CNN. But also I've done work in the Middle East, I've done work in, in Africa, in Botswana. And I also moved myself to Uganda, Africa, because I, I had reached a point in my life where I really wanted to do children's rights work and had the opportunity to go in country and to do an organizational assessment for a project that was funded by the US. Well, there were several things one was doing a, an assessment for an organization that was the largest child rights membership-based organization, all of all of Africa. And I was a part of a, a three-person team to Ugandan men and me and they affectionately called me the Masoom goo, which was an affectionate term for a white person. And so we went around Uganda, and we, we did this profound assessment for the organization and we also did an assessment of children's rights, and then in the state of children's rights in the country. And then at night, I ran my business, doing organizational change with a have a high growth companies in the United States. And at that time, that was that was an unheard of thing. And so, Dennis,

Maria Ross 10:07

Is that when you start was that the ready zone that you're running now?

Esther Weinberg 10:10

Yeah, well what happened when I came back not to make a long story longer, but I had had this kind of like this aha moment in Uganda, when I was doing this project for the US government around AIDS,

malaria, tuberculosis analysis. And I just thought that I needed to come home. And after a while coming back to the United States, I really realized I think I had this turning point in my career where I was, I think, people either whether you're an entrepreneur or just an executive, you get to we're just like, what am I doing? What am I doing it for? And where am I going? At the moment, and I really realized that I had dived deep into what my I want my legacy to be, and really saw that was around human dignity. And from there, because it was really an extension of all the work that I had done. And and what I saw was when I looked up and around, like, you know, executives really want to feel ready to powerfully take on all the opportunities and challenges that their feet, they just don't know how, but the real secret sauce to doing it is creating workplace cultures where trust, respect and psychological safety are not just, you know, talked about, but there are doctors valued, but there is measured as the bottom line, that's when we created the red zone, because that was like, Okay, how do we get people ready, create a framework and a formula for how people do it practically and pragmatically. So, it's not just theory that people can go ahead and do it. Because, you know, as you know, that the challenges that people are facing today, or opportunities that people are facing today, they're real people want answers now, not tomorrow, today. And this meant really.

Maria Ross 11:48

Absolutely. And so, let's let's dive into that. Because what a fascinating journey you've taken and I just before we move on, I want to not let it slip by that you talk about human dignity when you're talking about organizational culture, when you're talking about leadership development and leadership capability. And I think that's been the missing piece in so many industrialized organizations, if you will, in that we have forgotten that human beings are working for us, it's, you know, we sort of threw out this term human resources, as if they were just another asset on our asset list. And there is so much wrapped up in the human experience about how we show up at work, how we're treated at work, what we're enabled to achieve at work, that really gets down to this fundamental right of human dignity. And that might sound really lofty to maybe a CEO going I'm just trying to sell software, right. But it fundamentally is what it's all about.

Esther Weinberg 12:50

Well, I'll give you a real practical example. I was talking to two executives last week, and, and we were talking about the fact that their organization has shifted massively, which many organizations today have, and they've laid a bunch of people off. And it was the first time that in the organization's history that they've ever laid people off. And this is a multibillion-dollar company, which is amazing. And they were talking about the fact that they're now trying to figure out what kind of leaders they need to be during these times because they're reorient, the work is being reoriented. And what's being asked to them as leaders is different where it was more of, let's say, an egalitarian or autonomous environment. Well, now it's, it's injected with a little bit more of hierarchy, meaning that everybody just can't make everything, something someone's going to need to be a bit be the last veto. And so, we were talking about what kind of leader do you need to be? And what is that insight? And what I said to them was, we have to remember a couple of things. If, if the foundation of what you're trying to create, you're trying to figure this out for you, and then you're trying to figure it out for the people who report to you like what kind of environment do we do we want to make and they were all about, they love the concept of of readiness and human dignity? And I said, well, I want to be clear. That doesn't mean every you're going to want everybody at the end of the day. And I don't mean for that to be the way it sounds. But I said,

you know, it may be that you may need to usher people out. Yeah, because they're not in alignment with where you're growing, which happens, right? You get a job or sign up for a job at a certain point, you're in a job for a few years, culture changes, the business changes. It's not a match anymore, happens all the time. Right. But what I said is the distinction is that you usher them out with as much human dignity as you onboard them. And so and they, they were like, I hadn't even never thought of it that way.

Maria Ross 14:52

Absolutely. And I've talked about this in my empathy work is that sometimes empathy is not just about doing what everybody wants, it's about doing the right thing. But the way that you do it is with empathy. And, and in cases where someone's not in the right job, right, nobody wants to come to work and fail every day. And so it's actually the empathetic thing to do to sit down with that person and try to figure out what could help them succeed, what is going on with them. And if they're still not a fit for the organization, it's actually empathetic to help them let go and help them find an opportunity where their talents and their values can thrive.

Esther Weinberg 15:32

Absolutely. Look, I remember I look, I remember in my career that, you know, everybody always remembers their first, you know, the first time you ever had to let someone go. And I remember when I had to let first person, one woman go. And I remember, like, HR was in the room with me. And, and I was trying to cobble together the words, and it just was a mess, because I really liked her so much.

Maria Ross 15:55

And legally, there's only so much you can say as well, like there's that added layer of complexity.

16:01

And so and then we're, you know, I said, I'll walk you out. And so, we're both in the elevator going downstairs, and there's a security guard with us, which of course, felt very intimate. And then we get to the street, a big hug. And she's like, look, I gotta tell you, I don't think this was a fetch for a while. And I just think my skill sets in another place. And I, I hate that this had to happen. But I actually feel pretty liberated. And I was like, oh my God, this is.

Maria Ross 16:28

Your like, thank you.

Esther Weinberg 16:29

Glad to work. But yeah, I would say to you that it's it. You know, when people hear the phrase human dignity, I really think that they get very lost in it, because it sounds very lofty, but it really comes down to what you're speaking to also is, how do we create, it comes down to how do we create the best workplaces where people can do their best work. So, it's like I was talking to a an executive, senior executive, a media company the other day, and she was saying this a few weeks ago, she was saying that they're there, there have a hybrid work environment. And they're really trying to figure out how they get people back into the office at least two days of the week. And I said, well, what what's coming out of those conversations is on at the senior executive table. And she's like, well, we keep going round

around and you don't really have an answer. And I said, well, maybe you need to change the question, because the question is not how do we get people into an office? The question is, what kind of environment we created, that people want to actually come. And they feel like they want to come in droves. Rather than feeling like it's a prison, you know, I'm going to write you into these four walls, right? Because what we what in what she and I started talking about is that if your culture is not portable, then that's really where the effort needs to be, is that culture needs to train. And we've seen this since COVID, is that culture transcends the physical office space. And so, a hundred percent, this is a thing. It's like these companies that have fallen back, I've had a few episodes where we've talked about this, I spoke to Rebecca freeze about the good culture book that she wrote. And she talked about the fact that culture is how work gets done. And that is not limited to four walls and a foosball table and free beer on Fridays. Like, if that was the culture, the perks that you were hiding behind pre COVID to help yourself think that you had a good culture. Now it's being laid bare, that your culture actually had some gaps. Also, everything means anything means everything. So, you tell people that we're not wearing the summer Fridays, you tell people, we're not going to do meetings after five o'clock. And then the moment, especially in this environment, you actually flip to the opposite side, you scheduled meetings, you while you have off, you have summer Fridays, you're really scheduling meetings during the summer Fridays, what happens is that trust becomes eroded so quickly. It's so much harder to get it back. And I and I remember I, I read a data survey. I mean, a survey that was saying recently that if employees trust their employers' commitments, their engagement level can increase up to 20%. Now, maybe that doesn't sound so high, but the likelihood that they'll leave their organization increases by 87%. If they trust you.

Maria Ross 19:24

Hmm, absolutely. So, let's, let's dive into that. Because, you know, you have talked about issues starting off as a prophet problem when it's really a people problem. Yeah. So how do peep? I think there's a lot of leaders that are like, yes, we need to create that organizational culture where trust and respect and safety are valued and are measured as the bottom line. But how do we do that? Like practically, can you give us some examples of what that looks like to maybe give listeners a place to start if their culture is you know, or to look at and say, well, we are doing this right.

Esther Weinberg 19:59

Yeah, so so we, we created the ready zone. We created this diagnostic formula that we affectionately call zone performance indicators, there are KPIs that you can actually see whether or not this is happening. And we actually call them, I'll give you some examples within it, but we call it. So, there's six of them. So, there's pivot ready, which is all around that level of shift ability that you have. I know that pivot has been an overused term, but I think it gets a bad rap. Because it's really about what are you baking into the culture that you can shift all the time, action ready is around you'll love this is around your level of emotional agility. It's around what kind of living legacy. Are you breathing into the organization for yourself and your team and the company all the time, the boundaries, you set, also how you, the observer that you are, and how you see the world influence, radius around visibility and influence, connect, ready is around communication, impact, readies around building teams, and culture ready is all around how you create an environment where coaching and mentoring is just what people do. It's just a way that they walk around in the world. So, I'll give you an example of what I'm what I'm talking about. So there was a, there was a founder group, there's a company very successful company.

And they were looking to grow and scale more dramatically. But what was happening originally at the base, is they were saying the founders actually founded the organization. There's some dysfunction within that within that group. So when we looked at the model of the ready zone model, we're looking at the basic place we're starting is we're talking about impact reading, where this this how can you grow and scale an organization if the founders are not doing the work they need to do. But then we also saw as action readies around around the observer that you are and how you look out into the world? And what what do you see? And how does that dictate what you choose to do or not do? So what we did was we did an assessment of the founder group. And we brought them together and actually re united them to the basis and the essence for where they actually created their company, which was at the time around 14 or 15 years old, and they had created this company years ago. And then what they realized is that, okay, you know, we don't have we've been insanely successful. But we do not have a vision, narrative and articulated sense of what the future we want to create. And also, while we've been insanely successful, we also don't have really these bold steps articulated that we want to create that we can rally the whole organization around. So what we did was we created what we call a vision narrative different than a vision, because vision is, you know, people tagline like Nike just do it. But this is like three paragraphs that really paints a picture of a future state of where they wanted to go and grow. And people are semi socialized in the organization. And then we did a and then we got a group of people together from all across the globe. They've never done this before. And we talked about the vision. And now given that, what do they want to create? What are they up to, and people are so excited to be able to put a stamp on what they wanted the future of the business to look like because they are so passionate about the business. You don't know, you don't always find that people are so passionate about what they do.

Maria Ross 23:35

They know they know where they're going now. And this is where you know, our work intersects because as a brand strategist, to your point, a vision is not a tagline. A vision is a narrative. It's the articulation of the future state that you're actually working towards. And sometimes I even challenge my brand clients to come up with a vision that would actually put them out of business, that if this, if this future state was achieved, you wouldn't need our organization anymore. And that is that is a that is longer than a sentence that is longer than a word. That is something where I need to know where I'm going. But you also you know, it's not just, I'm going to Hawaii. Paint me a Picture about what that looks like when I get there.

Esther Weinberg 24:19

Well, and you're right, that it became so inspiring that then an organization that didn't necessarily have strategy, the way that perhaps we would define it then created these big bold steps for themselves, right and started creating the level of execution that we involve people throughout the organization that had never been involved in any kind of execution strategy. Like yeah, it's like, it's, you know, oftentimes people don't have the patience to do development, but I really believe in development through the work. Yeah. And so then we were putting people super passionate about certain segments in charge of it until must be the captains of the chips. And then they're able to organize to actually start delivering. And as a result, the organization was able to start growing and scaling and their profitability dramatically increase as a result of those steps that they've made.

Maria Ross 25:17

There's, there's this idea of trying to put together a strategy before you actually have a vision. And if you don't have a vision of where you're going, where the ultimate destination is, you can't figure out how will we get there, which is the strategy.

Esther Weinberg 25:33

Well, I think that it's a couple of things. One is that I've seen this a lot, especially in organizations that have merged organizations. I can't tell you how many words in show I'm working with that either have reorganized the companies reorganize the teams, and there and there are people inside the organization waiting, literally waiting for a vision to emerge. And so, a lot of work that we're doing is just small pockets, like this division, create your own this division, create your own division, create your own. Now, it's not an ideal situation. But here's the thing, also, that when you're creating transformation inside of organizations, sometimes it's very difficult to actually create a picture of a future that you don't yet know what it fully looks like. But what I find that, especially during times of change, people want to have road under their feet. So, what I tell people is, you know, what we talk often about is what can you control, and then what you can you create based around that. So, give you an example, like there's a division a CFO, a corporate social responsibility, division one, and one of the organizations we're working with, and their company just merge. And the leader was saying, I can't I if I see people all around me that are waiting for the organization to say, or to bring in like a McKinsey or an Accenture to start doing the work that tell us where we're going and where we're headed. So that we know how to organize our strategy. She's like, I can't wait, we have business to run, we have things to do. And so, she's like, you know, so we're talking about, okay, create your own right now for whatever you know. So, this way, at least, that you can set strategy based on a context that you've created the context. And then you see within the organization about getting buy in for it. Now I know it's not ideal. But when you're running a business moment to moment, you need a agile way to do this, in order for you to feel like you can rally yourself behind something, and then you can rally your people around it. So for example, this executive that I'm talking about, now, her team has a purpose now, do they not get a little wobbly at certain times, because they say, Well, wait a second, here's what we're doing feeding into the hole. But if they waited, they would, there'll be nothing. And most, most likely, what would happen is the business would look at them and say, you know what, I don't even know what these people are doing, we should let them go, which is not now as a result of the fact that they've self-generated. Now they're becoming a model for other divisions inside of the organization of how to be more nimble.

Maria Ross 28:16

I love that so much. I mean, that's why I talk about that a lot in terms of, you know, from the aspect of empathy, you know, people just sort of giving up going, you know, well, our culture will never be empathetic, our CEO will never, you know, mandate and measure empathy. But you can create micro cultures, within your team within your department, within your part of the organization to do exactly what you just said, which is become a model, because as they succeed, doing what they're doing, people will start to take notice, and they're gonna go, I want to do that for myself. And then all of a sudden, you start getting people on board with understanding the value of a vision linked to strategy. So, I love that example. I want to get back to the original question that we kind of talked about, which is how we create organizational cultures where trust, respect and safety are valued. And you talked about a really important piece of that, which is helping people understand where they're going and sticking to

your word, as a weight of building trust. But what I guess my question is, what with your clients? How do you help them measure trust, respect and safety, psychological safety?

Esther Weinberg 29:26

Well, what we do is, first of all, for the ready, so we have an assessment that we do give people so this way they can see because the zones are made up of the environments, because you have to remember, trust, respect and psychological safety are a they're a, what would I say? They're a fabric of many, many things. Yeah, right. So, so there, its interpersonal relationships, constructive and respectful debate and dialogue. I mean, that's very small, right? Minute examples.

Maria Ross 29:59

Feeling like you can contribute an idea feeling like you can take a risk. Like your what you're saying is there's a lot of threads nodded into those concepts.

Esther Weinberg 30:08

That's right, because it can feel it can seem very amorphous. That's why originally, when we created these zones, I'll give you an example in a second. But when we created these zones, it was for people to contextualize the elements through which create that. So for example, if I'm working, if I have, if I'm being measured against certain aspects of how I morph and change and anticipate change, that creates, that creates psychological safety for the people that that I work with, or that report to me, if I actually am emotionally resilient. So, it's not, you know, the the boss that walks in the office, small example, how I am emotionally one day, and then I'm radically different another that also creates a sense of balance and stability. For me, when we're going through all these erratic changes, if I'm able to build if how i index, you know, influence is the leadership currency, if I'm able to influence by actually stepping out and being visible, and being able to find my own voice and to speak up and to articulate things that are really important. And to build relationships based on giving rather than taking, that also creates a sense of stability and trust, if I'm able to communicate, have difficult conversations, not avoid them, not sidestep them, not kind of have a tough conversation, but really do how I'm actually able to be my word, how I'm building, how I have a way to actually measure how I'm building effective, impactful teams and taking care of my people, and how I'm baking into the fabric of what I'm doing coaching and mentoring. So we're always taking care of each other, then that is the that's the that's foundation. So let me give you a few examples.

Maria Ross 31:57

For you do before you do I want to I want to pick that apart a little bit more. Because again, how do you measure those things? You can't just ask a leader? Do you adapt well to change? Yes or no? Like? So how do you measure that for people? How do you measure those aspects that you just talked about? Is it a before and after? And is the after, after leadership development in areas where they need improvement?

Esther Weinberg 32:22

I would say that it's several things. So, development can always be a part of it. Meaning that well, when when I hear that you say development, I'm not necessarily talking about an external force, or you need HR to come in and do a series of trainings. One of the one of the things you can measure as an example, is typically we talk about leadership, we talk about actions and results, right? That's what you and I are talking about, right? You take actions that lead to certain results. We don't like the results, we change the actions. But what we never deal with not never, but when we we sidestep dealing with it as the observer, the observer looks out into the world, I look out in the world, and I take actions that lead to certain results. But we don't take and it's like the definition of insanity is if we're just dealing with the actions or results, we don't deal with the person. So that is one signpost so let me give you an example within that. So, we teach people to create resiliency by what I call pivot moments. What I mean by that, as you know, specialisms COVID, we can't control change, but we can control is our intentions and our actions, you know, think about it. Anyone can change for like a moment. And you can actually measure that incrementally. Are you seeing something differently in this moment or not? Are you taking different action steps or not? Right? You can do that for 30 seconds a minute. If I asked you for a long time you tell me I've lost my mind. But what but pivot moments that we call is it builds up resilience and gives you evidence or proof that I can, you can we all can actually change and have the strength to continue. So, pivot moments are made up of looking at what your current reality is, that comes about how you feel about the change or your emotions, how you experience it, or the actions or inactions you're taking, which could support the changes or not. And if you are honest with yourself, you could see if your output is a match to your intention. So, for example, I had a client named Aisha who is only gotten increasingly frustrated with her boss Jamila, who's the president of content at one of the companies in California, and she's really frustrated that Junella cannot make decisions, she vacillates or she'll make a decision and go back on it and she can't handle conflict. Now Aisha is seen as the number two executive in the department on the team. So, what is I should do is any type a person would do she steps in starts with making decisions where she shouldn't be, or she looks to push more strategic decisions out of just sheer frustration. And she's the situations really escalated. But her intention is she said to me, look, I want to be able to measure my level of how effective I am with my boss, I want to be able to manage up with greater ease. I want to be a collaborator, I want to step away when I'm frustrated, instead of leaning and solve everything. So, when we start to work through this formula for current reality, and we talked about motions, this would resonate with you quite a bit. She's like, look, I'm angry, I'm frustrated, I'm disappointed. But she really was was heartbroken, which I'll get to in a second in her about her bosses, she doesn't know how to manage your lead, her lack of decision making is going to get her into trouble. She isn't strategic, she leads with her ego. But when we talked about the actions, actual proof actions she's taking to support her intention to managing up with greater ease. And being a collaborator. She's like, look, she started laughing. Like, look, I'm stepping into make decisions where it's not appropriate, when it was time to do a reorganization plan with her peer who also can make decisions if you stepped in to settle the strategy. So, she wasn't sharing with her boss, her frustration, and what they can do together to change things. And she was thinking about leaving, which would have been a massive, massive financial hit to the organization. So, when she looked at this live, she paused to get real with herself to see what's feasible. That's what I call possibility, she could see something for what it is not what she preferred. So, what she got clear is then she could put herself in the driver's seat of choice or what I call opportunity to see practically and pragmatically what she needs to stop and start doing to create a new outcome. So as a result of that, then she was able to have a conversation with her boss set strategy differently, and then emerge more critically, as a leader

of the division and then longer term, actually, her colleague welled up getting let go, because he couldn't make decisions.

Maria Ross 37:08

Right. And what I love about what you're saying, is the reason why we have to bring emotions into our work, we have to stop this idea of being emotionless as leaders and emotionless at work because we are human beings. And it impacts the way we observe things, it impacts the actions we take, as leaders. And so I love that part of your work is helping your clients understand and recognize the emotions they are feeling as part of the process where you might have a leader going, it doesn't matter how I feel this is what's actually happening. But we don't function that way. As human beings, we bring our emotions to our work if the pandemic has taught us anything, if, you know, social unrest has taught us anything is we cannot park our humanity at the office door. And then just be automatons as we lead or as we work. And so helping people understand the practical reason why you have to have emotional intelligence as a leader, because it helps you make better decisions. It helps you understand your actions and helps you understand cause and effect. So I'm just loving this example that you're giving because a different coach, or you know, possibly might say, well, it's all about just the inputs and outputs of the structure of the organization and how decisions are made. And the answer is that your boss needs to be fired because they can't make decisions. Well, it's very cold. It's very just like that's not how we interact as humans.

Esther Weinberg 38:44

Well, I'd say a couple of things that one is you have to remember that emotions are signposts about what's important to

Maria Ross 38:50

Yes.

Esther Weinberg 38:51

Second thing is that I find, for example, there was a program that we were leading inside of a company, and we had 22 people on and they were saying retired people of our people in this company complaining, which was funny, because one could say that they were complaining, but they were saying we're tired.

Maria Ross 39:10

We're planning we're complaining about other people complaining.

Esther Weinberg 39:13

What if you saw a complaint is not a complaint, but what someone is really committed to. If you heard it as a commitment, then how would it shift your actions of what you're willing, of how you're willing to see the situation and the assumptions that you're making? That really may not be valid anymore? So, I think that you know, it's an interesting thing, because there's so much body of work now what you're talking about regarding emotions, but it's really a it's, they're not soft skills anymore.

Maria Ross 39:51

I wish that that phrase would just be burned in effigy, but hundred percent with you.

Esther Weinberg 39:56

You're actually you know, you know, this organ if you really boil look down organizations invest, if you really boil it down the the money to train and develop people, it all comes down to the soft, these inherent soft skills that people are talking about that are very, very concrete. And so, people be fired over some of the things that you and I are talking about, if not done right anymore these days. So, it's it's critically, it's critically important. But I think it's important for people to know that your emotions are signposts, but they're not actually your emotions don't, it's not that they are true or not. You have to actually ground them in to see whether or not your emotions are telling you the truth, or they're leading you in a direction of something that's important to you. So, it's important that you're able to develop the facility to be able to step back to be able to do that, because then you can leave much more impactful.

Maria Ross 41:01

Amen. I mean, that's really where it comes down to. And, you know, you really answered my question I was going to ask you, which is how our emotions, our body and our language impact our performance in a real and substantive way. Because they are signposts, they are, you know, when you when you're emotionally intelligent enough and emotionally capable enough to look, you know, and I work on this every day. I'm not saying this is like a guru on high that has mastered this in my life. But someone I'm always struck something I'm always striving to do is to is to look at my emotions and say, well, what is that telling me about the situation? You know, you brought up the issue before about frustrated, it's not just about frustration, it's about someone feeling heartbroken, or, or someone feeling like trust has been broken. And I'm dealing with a situation with an organization that I'm involved with, where that's exactly why I'm having those emotions of resentment and anger and frustration, it's because I feel like they let me down. And I am heartbroken at my my trust and stability in them being broken.

Esther Weinberg 42:05

That's it's a, what you're talking about is so powerful. Because when you can distinguish as an example of the executive that I mentioned before, we she was showing up and and really battling, how, how does she navigate a situation that's untenable with a strategy that's in the wrong direction, where there is where there's a lack of cohesiveness, there's a lack of messaging, there's, there's a lack of alignment, I can go on and on and on. But what we really got to do is that she took this job, because of who this person was to her, because she thought she would be a mentor, that she'd be a teacher that she'd be a guide. So she was heartbroken.

Maria Ross 42:54

Yeah, it feels she feels let down.

Esther Weinberg 42:54

Yes, but at the end of the day, it's interesting, because she learned a lot, not the way that she thought. And so and so it's a lot different to say you're frustrated than say you're heartbroken, which is, I think the essence of what you're talking about. And that leads to like what Dr. Susan David talks about emotional granularity, which is if we can get people to really talk about it, then we can really address the real issues. And we can move people faster through performance that way.

Maria Ross 43:27

So, I this is a question I wasn't expecting to ask you. But given this juicy conversation, how do we how do we help leaders talk through emotion in a more constructive way, especially those leaders that shy away from talking about emotion in the context of creating strategies in the context of doing what needs to be done? Do you have any sort of gems of advice around how you get more comfortable as a leaderz, managing and dealing with emotions, both your own and potentially the emotions of the people on your team?

Esther Weinberg 44:06

Well, I would say that it's it's, it's not as you're a sum game. So, there's not like a pill for the ill. But I would say that is a few things. One is that for executives that are very driven by return on investment, if they are able to get to the bottom line to the to the cause and not the effect, then they're actually able to get to performance a lot faster. So, if you're able to get really smart about the questions you ask, then you're actually able to get to the performance and the output a lot faster. So, there's a gentleman named Coolio Alala, who talks a lot about the fact that it's about the question, it's not about the answer. And so, one is to is to have leaders orient themselves around their level of curiosity and questioning. As a method to get your performance to get to the level of performance that they truly want. The second thing is to also understand part of it too, like I've had people say to me during the pandemic, I'm not a therapist, you're asking me to be a therapist, I got no want to come in and hear people's emotions. And, you know, I always say to them, Take five minutes, and just do it. Because at the end of the day, that's what's going to engage people, not anything else. So, it's also helping leaders measure the ROI. If they're actually putting in, let's say, touch points of the beginning of their meetings, what's something we want to celebrate, getting people to talk about how they're feeling as a result of certain changes, and then absolutely, taking a look at their performance visa vie the quarter before where they didn't do any of it. That's a way to also have proof in it. But it's, it's really, I would say, you have to connect it with your value system. I've had leaders were talking about emotions. And so, off the table, I can't even tell you. But when you connect it, for example, like someone who's I said to an executive, once I said you have interest in people and she started laughing, she's like, that's not true. And I said, it is true. We did some assessments. And I'm like, you're all about ROI. I said, so if you're all about ROI, then your conversations all a better return on investment, you invest 10 minutes in talking to this person about what their experience is how they were thinking about this project, about the about this issue, how they were setting strategy, what they felt about it in the meantime, and how they oriented themselves to it, I guarantee you that that will give you a greater output. And she did, but she you had to tie it in for her around the fact that she's all about return on investment, not giving for the sake of giving. I know sounds horrible. But

Maria Ross 46:55

No, I just I love the way you've articulated this, because this is exactly what I struggled with. articulating that it it is it is your job. As a leader, your job as a leader is not to do the same things that you did as a worker, you are now leading people, there's a there's a different skill set involved. And yes, it involves being interested in your people. So, you can empower them, and engage them and help them do their best work. That is your job as a leader. It's not, you know, whatever the function is that you're leading. And so, it's it's I often joke about like, it's why you're getting paid more. That's why you have a title now that's, that's bigger, it's because it is expected of you. So, I love the way that you articulated that. And

again, helping people deal with that emotion by tying it back to performance by tying it back to that is your ultimate goal is to help your team perform. And if that is your ultimate goal and your value, then we are going to have to deal with with the messiness of humanity. Esther, this has been such a great conversation, I want to talk to you longer, but I know I have to let you go. So just quickly for folks on the go, we're gonna have all your links in the show notes, and especially the link to your book, better leaders, better people better results, six eye opening strategies to thrive through change you didn't ask for which is a fabulous subtitle. We're gonna have a link to that as well for folks. But for folks on the go, where's the best place that they can find out more about you and your work?

Esther Weinberg 48:30

It's really super simple. Just go to our website, the ready R E A D Y zone Z O N E.com.

Maria Ross 48:39

Wonderful and it's a great it's a great website, great resources there. Thank you again for your time, Esther and for for helping helping us figure out how to be leaders that can adapt to any change it like we talked about and the best of times and the worst of times.

Esther Weinberg 48:55

Thank you so much, Marie, I really appreciate you.

Maria Ross 48:57

And thank you for listening to another great episode of the empathy edge dear listener. If you like what you heard, of course, as always, please share it with a colleague or a friend. Don't forget to rate and review on the podcast player of your choice. And until next time, always remember that cash flow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care and be kind.