

EEP Ep 165 - Teri Schmidt_ Emp...am Building for Lasting Impact

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SPEAKERS

Maria Ross, Teri Schmidt

Teri Schmidt 00:01

So when you are engaged in community service, when you are doing something good for others, there's actually a reward center in your brain that activates. And it turns out that that reward center and the neurotransmitters that are released are the same ones that engage your brain in learning and retaining information. So it just happens to be that, you know, beyond all the benefits that you just mentioned, you know, you're learning, you're doing something fun, you're doing something that makes you feel good, because it's good for the community. It actually has some brain science behind it, and that you are then more able to retain that information and those skills that you just learned.

Maria Ross 00:49

Welcome to the empathy edge podcast the show that proves why cash flow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. I'm your host, Maria Ross. I'm a speaker, author, mom, facilitator and empathy advocate. And here you'll meet trailblazing leaders and executives, authors and experts who embrace empathy to achieve radical success. We discuss all facets of empathy from trends and research to the future of work to how to heal societal divisions and collaborate more effectively. Our goal is to redefine success and prove that empathy isn't just good for society, it's great for business. Okay, when I say team building or corporate training, do you say maybe you imagine sitting in a windowless conference room, or enduring an interminable video call that takes you away from the pile of work you need to get done without offering anything of lasting value? There is a better way. And yes, it involves empathy as the key ingredient for turning a team building event from a one off transactional experience into a transformative one. Today, my guest Terry Schmitt shares how intentional team building sessions can help you bond as a team, develop valuable leadership and communication skills, apply those skills immediately to seal in training, and give back to your community all at the same time. Terry is director of stronger to serve coaching and team building and uses her 20 plus years of experience in coaching, leadership and performance improvement, to seamlessly integrate team building leadership, development and community service for workshops and coaching cultivate empowered individuals, and cohesive teams and impactful contributions to society. Terry hosts the

strong leaders serve podcast, and is an Ironman triathlete, so she knows about performance. Today, Terry and I discuss where most well intentioned team building goes wrong, how serving others Prime's your brain to learn new skills, how you can intentionally combine connection, professional development and meaning to get more ROI for your team building efforts. As well as engage and retain Gen Z talent. We have a great discussion on how to build trust and connection in a remote or hybrid workplace, including how she blew my mind with her observation of how we have always interacted with screens in the past. And why our struggle to connect over screens now just requires some upskilling and relearning. This was such a great conversation. Take a listen. Hello, Terry Schmidt Welcome to the empathy edge podcast to talk about empathy and fused team building. I'm very excited to talk to you today.

Teri Schmidt 03:41

Well, thank you for having me, Maria, I'm really looking forward to the conversation as well.

Maria Ross 03:45

So your work is so interesting. Tell us a little bit about your story and how you got into this work. And what what makes you so passionate about it? Yeah,

Teri Schmidt 03:53

definitely, you know, I can trace the start of what I'm doing right now, way back. But I won't, won't go too long. But I want to say, you know, I trace it to two factors. So really early in my life, I developed a deep curiosity, and actually became pretty adept at figuring out why people acted in the way that they acted. There are some reasons for that in my upbringing that we can go into if you want, but for now, I'll just say that, so I became really good at it. In other words, empathy became my superpower. i Yeah, exactly. It's definitely served me well. And it's why I'm so passionate about it. And the other thing that really shaped my career choices, and who I am as a person, both based on my faith, and really watching my mom as an elementary school teacher, I began to see how different people were really good at doing different things, and sometimes without even knowing it. And I became so intrigued and inspired by that. And so those two pieces really led me into the world of human development. And you know, my career has taken kind of a winding path. But whether it was when I was living in a homeless shelter as a volunteer coordinator, or when I was in the corporate world, or what I'm doing what I'm doing today, as a leadership coach and team building facilitator, the focus is always on using my talents to help make a way for other people to courageously use theirs.

Maria Ross 05:23

I love that. And I love that you discovered so early that empathy is your superpower. Because I think many of us who learn to embrace that it comes later, we sort of like have to think back at what was the secret sauce of us being able to succeed in that job or connect with that person or, you know, create a relationship with someone that we were told was really, really not you know, you weren't, you were never going to be able to create a relationship with that person. And, you know, it was only through for me, it was self awareness around the StrengthsFinder, doing the Clifton Strengths Finder and realizing that empathy was one of my top five strengths, because I never would have said that. But then when you unravel that, and I think this is true for a lot of people, and a lot more people than think it's true for them, and how they relate. Now, there's

Teri Schmidt 06:07

definitely those of us that we still need to practice and strengthen that empathy muscle. And that's what I love about your work is it enables people to continue to strengthen that empathy muscle as they go along. So I would love to ask why empathy is such a key ingredient for returning a team building event, which is your specialty, from a one off transactional experience, the thing that makes us roll our eyes and go, Oh, my gosh, can we stop doing this now and get back to work? And turns it into an actually a transformative one a transformative experience that we we take with us beyond? Even possibly that job? Yeah, yeah, definitely. Well, you know, when leaders are investing in team building experiences, hopefully they are thinking about, I want to get a return on this investment, right, we're taking people away from the real work, right, and, you know, spending money spending time or two most precious resources. And I think sometimes they just kind of go with, uh, you know, let's hope we get something out of this. Or hopefully, we'll have some fun. I wouldn't say that's the right way to approach it. Because especially in these current economic times, time, and money is everything. And we want to make sure that you are getting return on your investment. So I think it comes down to the fact that without empathy, there is no connection. And without connection, there's no teamwork. Sure, you can have a bunch of individuals working side by side, but they're not really working as a team. And you're not realizing the enhanced product, enhance productivity, enhanced performance that comes when you are truly working as a team. So in our experiences, we infuse empathy in many different ways. Because we want to make sure that that team is actually connecting in a way that it's going to impact their performance when they get back to the job.

Maria Ross 08:02

Okay, so tell us about the mistakes, well intentioned people are making, whether they're HR leaders or employee experience professionals, when they try to do team building exercises, and it turns into a transaction, what are they doing wrong?

Teri Schmidt 08:21

You know, I think it's just really a lack of intention. It's a check in the box, it's we know, we should be taking care of our team, we know we should be giving them some experiences, to have fun to connect, to learn about each other. But if there's not a whole lot of intention behind it, that's not going to happen. Sure, you might have some great conversations, some really friendly banter during the event itself. Maybe you learn a little bit about yourself. But you know, we as humans have a lot going on through our brains. And so unless there is some intention put into, okay, how are we going to design this in a way that they're learning something new that they actually need, in order to function better as a team? And then how are we also going to look at how we're transferring what they've learned into the workplace itself.

Maria Ross 09:15

I love that because I think that is the missing piece of, you know, people trying to, again, with all good intentions, trying to manufacture fun. And they say that, you know, having the happy hour on Friday is the team building exercise, or let's go do a ropes course or, and all of those things can be good, but often they're just sort of the lowest hanging fruit of what people think, okay, as long as we're doing something outside of work or outside of the office or something, quote, unquote, fun, you know,

according to whose opinion by the way I would say it just feels like another forced exercise that people have to go through. And again, some of them might be so preoccupied by work, because they're like, why am I here? Like I already have a good relationship with people or or, I'm already friends with the people I want to be friends with at work. And I don't, you know, so talk to us a little bit about that concept of bringing in skills development into deep building activities, because I don't know that that's often intentionally thought through and how can someone who's in charge of these events, or who's putting together these events, figure out what the most important need is for the team to work on?

Teri Schmidt 10:24

And I'll start with that question. And I'm a big data person. So, you know, I think it just starts with getting that data in some way. So whether that's through observing the team, whether that's talking to the team leader, if you don't happen to be the team leader yourself, whether that is looking at engagement, survey data, or different however, you are getting that feedback for how people feel about their time that they spend at work, you're going to want to try to dig into that and see, okay, what are what, what are we doing well, but also, what are some of those muscles that maybe we need to exercise. So maybe it comes up that, you know, we're not really good at giving each other feedback, or receiving the feedback which connect, you know, via the heart, right? Sometimes, right? Or maybe, you know, we're just not really good at planning effective meetings. And those are two skills that, although they seem simple, are critically important in terms of how the team is going to perform day to day. So that's how you can find out kind of what skills are needed. But then beyond putting that into the team building experience, your itself, you can do it in a multiple different ways. I mean, even on a on a ropes course, maybe you have an opportunity to give and receive feedback. The way that we design it is we actually are team building experiences are called Learn by Doing good. And the good is in parentheses. So you can learn, you know, learn by doing but also learn by doing good. And the reason for that is that we take that skill development, and we combine it with a community service project. So some project that benefits those in need in the community. And while they're doing that community service project, they're actually practicing the skills that we taught them. So that may sound a little bit different. It's quite innovative. And so let me give you an example. So for our courage team building event, we talk a lot about giving and receiving feedback. And we, I will, through interactive activities help people to realize how they feel about giving and receiving feedback, you know, where maybe some of the roadblocks are for them. And then also, we go through a model that makes the feedback really specific, so that it's actionable. Then in the project, we since it's called courage, where you're doing a project for first responders and active duty service members, and it's making paracord lanyards. So that's something that they can use out in the field for multiple different purposes. But a lot of people don't know how to make them. So we partner them up, we let one team member learn the skill from a video how to do it, and they have to teach the other partner and the other partner has to use that model of giving feedback that we just learned minutes ago, and give feedback about how well that person taught them to do that skill.

Maria Ross 13:28

Wow. And so. So you're really it kind of goes beyond it's almost a mixture of a of a training session on skills development, and a team building activity. And it benefits the community. So you're actually doing something that matters you're putting out you're putting it into practice, and you're putting it into practice because of that community service aspect. So why is it is that? Like, how did this come about? How just serving prime our brains to learn and retain new skills better than just, you know, sitting in the

session, other than that being, you know, sitting in the session being more boring? How does that actually help us learn and retain the skills

Teri Schmidt 14:11

better? Yeah, it's fascinating. So when you are engaged in community service, when you are doing something good for others, there's actually a reward center in your brain that activates. And it turns out that that reward center and the neurotransmitters that are released are the same ones that engage your brain in learning and retaining information. So it just happens to be that, you know, beyond all the benefits that you just mentioned, and you know, you're learning, you're doing something fun, you're doing something that makes you feel good because it's good for the community. It actually has some brain science behind it and that you are then more able to retain that information in those skills. You just learned?

Maria Ross 15:01

So how do your clients determine what activity to do? Do you encourage them to pick a community service project that aligns with their purpose or their mission? Or how do they even decide? Or is it based on the skill that they want to master,

Teri Schmidt 15:17

it's kind of a mix and match. So we do have nine standard events that we offer. But we allow organizations to customize, and I love what you said, because I definitely recommend that if at all possible, they can align it with the purpose of their organization, because that's just another way to transfer it back into the workplace. So if they're doing something that is aligned with what they're going to be doing every day, that makes it all the more likely that they're, the brain is going to be triggered. Oh, yeah, I remember when we did that. And I know why we did it. Because that's the one thing about, you know, the empathy generation, they need to understand the purpose behind what they're doing. And they need to be able to relate to the person or the animal, we have projects for animals that they're doing it for. And so without that, the empathy isn't generated as much. And those reward centers don't light up as much. Because although empathy comes to us naturally, it only comes to us naturally, for those who are in our in group. So we need to find a way, whether it's through seen person face to face, or just watching a video about the person, which is usually what we do, because while they usually do it virtually, and they have to be able to relate to that person so that empathy can be triggered by them feeling more like that person is someone who matters and someone who they want to help. And it's been part of their in group.

Maria Ross 16:48

I love that. And, you know, can you talk a little bit about how you can do this in a remote environment, because I think that's, you know, as the workplace is changing as we are in this new era of work. The reality whether some leaders want to admit it or not, is that there's a lot of people who are not going back to an office every day. And we realize the opportunity that potential with that, but the argument you often hear for making everybody mandating everyone to go back into the office is, oh, we can't collaborate. If we're remote, we can't form connections. And for those of us that have been working remotely from home for decades, it's kind of a weird thing to hear. But you know, it's fear of the unknown for a lot of these leaders, like I don't know how, unless everybody's under the same roof, and

we do an event and we're all in the same room. How am I going to do team building? How am I going to do skills development, if everyone is still isolated in their own homes, but you have effectively done team building and skill building events? Learn by Doing good with remote teams? So how does that work? How are unable to make that happen? And what can someone listening? Learn from that about how to build more collaboration and camaraderie between their team even in a remote or possibly hybrid environment?

Teri Schmidt 18:08

Yeah, definitely a great question and one that I think is at the top of everyone's mind. And before I jump into the answer, I do want to say I love the blog post that you recently did about that. And I, and the episode that you did a while back about the state of the empathy, you know, report in the workplace.

Maria Ross 18:24

Thanks. I'll put a link to those in the show notes. Yeah. I recently for folks listening, I recently wrote a blog post about the real reason people may not want to come back to the office and how we can address that. So I'll put links to that. Thanks for giving me a shout out there.

Teri Schmidt 18:38

Of course, of course, that was very insightful, in terms of how do you build connection, I was interesting, I was just listening to another podcast that you know, kind of beard, how we do this in a virtual environment. And the gentleman on there was talking about, you know, for so long screens, whenever we are in front of a screen, we expect it to be entertained. And the person leading, you know, was the person doing it, and we were just receiving that we were really passive. Now, if you operate your virtual meetings, or you operate your virtual team building events like that, there's no connection that's going to happen. And he was talking about and I would agree, because this is what we do you introduce those opportunities to connect as early as possible in the event, so that you can kind of say to your brain know that even though you've had decades of the screen being you know, your entertainment and you just passively absorb that we're going to use it in a different way now. So what we will do is we will break people up into breakout rooms. Now the way we structure those depends on you know, what the leader wants and what activity is going on and what we understand about the relationships between different people, but we'll give them an opportunity to do a quick connection exercise that is related to the scale, but still kind of light and fun and, you know, doesn't require everyone to get real deep real fast, right. And we'll do that as early as possible. And we'll do those types of activities and breakouts very frequently throughout the event, so that people are getting to engage in a smaller group and able to not only, you know, gain some understanding about themselves, but also gain familiarity and understanding of how and why other people work the way that they

Maria Ross 20:32

do. I love that observation that you've just shared, because I never thought of it that way. I never thought about the fact that why was why was remote work easier for me when the lockdown happened since I had been doing it for you know, over a decade. And it's because I was used to collaborating with people screen to screen, I was used to collaborating with people I'd never met in person before. And it's such a, it's such an underappreciated skill. And the fact that you called out why is because usually, when we have a relationship with the screen, it's us and the screen. And we're either doing our work by

ourselves with that screen, or the screen, TV, tablet, whatever, is entertaining us and we are passive. Now you could argue like with video games, or whatever, that's a little bit different. But again, we don't associate work screens with that type of entertainment. And so it's sort of this expectation of if I go into the Zoom Room, and it's a class or a course or a team building activity over zoom, I just get to sit here. Yep. And, you know, show me what you got kind of a situation right, exactly. But getting used to this idea that we need to interact through the screen is a learned skill, and one that we don't have. And just that was a brilliant nugget you just shared with us because I never thought of it that way of people. The challenge that people have with remote the challenge that leaders have, with leading remote or leading hybrid is their inability to interact screen to screen. But if we learn that skill, and you know, do it through team building activity, so we're not only building camaraderie, but we're you know, whatever skill, we're also learning whatever professional skill, also learning the skill of how to interact with each other in a work environment through screen, and not being passive and to be part of it and participate.

Teri Schmidt 22:24

Yes, yeah. And I will say no, the other thing that we do are several of our events, they involve some sort of supply. So I talked about the paracord lanyards, we will ship out individual boxes, to the people who are participating. So what that does is that also gives you something tactile to work with that, again, engages you in the experience a little bit more than if you were just sitting back listening to something

Maria Ross 22:52

right. I remember one of the fun exercises my husband's company did during the lockdown was they made succulent planters? Uh huh. So everybody on the team got their own little kit. Uh huh. And I think someone was guiding them. I'm not sure but, but it was creative and fun. And it was had nothing to do with work. But it was all about sort of expressing themselves and getting their creativity out and being able to share the experience of like, oh, let me see what you did, John. And let me see what you did Sarah. And I just thought that was such a neat opportunity for them to do something over zoom. And then we've all heard the stories of people doing things like wine tasting classes, or, you know, baking bread together or something like that. So, but what I love about this is, I feel like that component of that type of remote team building, in their minds, people have isolated to the lockdown. Like, we don't need to do that and everything. And what you're proposing is you still need to work on skills development with your team, you still need to build camaraderie, and teamwork. And you need to you might possibly need to do it in this new environment. So what's a way you can do that? That's not a, you know, not saying the succulent session was a waste of time. But you know, one could say, well, where's the ROI on that? What you're doing is you're bringing in actual practical skills that impact productivity in the workplace, to the same kind of event and making it fun and giving back to the community. It's like, it checks all the boxes, so I just exactly how much yeah, we

Teri Schmidt 24:22

kind of see it as a three for one. It was like what the succulent, you know, yes, that could enhance well being that could enhance relationships. You know, we feel like we are enhancing wellbeing of the team. We're doing skill development that helps them develop skills they can use back in the workplace, and they're doing good for the community. Right, right. And so as

Maria Ross 24:45

we wrap up, I want to ask one last question that I know you and I have talked about in our pre conversations to this call. And that's the component of this that really appeals to younger generations in the workforce. Gen Z, the top talent that you know, to be a sustainable business we need to attract and engage and retain. Why is this type of team building skill building community service, event or experience so tantalizing to younger talent?

Teri Schmidt 25:18

Yeah, it's really for two factors. So two factors that the younger generations consider when they are selecting a job or deciding if they want to stay with that particular employer have to do around professional and career development. So one reports from McKinsey said that 87%, consider professional development as important or very important to their choice of employment. So that's 87% of people who are looking at that. So if you're showing them that you are invested in giving them skills that they can use to progress in their career with you, or with another organization, that's going to be very attractive. And the second one, I think, there's been so much said, and there's been research to back it up about how socially conscious the younger generations are. And, you know, I heard from a Deloitte Report to that 1/3 will actually reject an employer based on personal ethics and beliefs so that if they don't feel that their employer is concerned about the causes that they are concerned about, well, I shouldn't even say their employer, if they don't feel their potential employer is concerned about it, flat out rejection, you know, it's not necessarily about the money. It's more about that purpose, and that professional career development.

Maria Ross 26:41

I love that because again, you look at these types of events and experiences, whether people do them with you, or they start being more intentional about how they're doing and for their own organization, you're able to accomplish a lot by combining these experiences into one experience without feeling like you're trying to cram everything in, right, it all is interrelated. And add on top of that, the fact like you mentioned earlier, when it's done in this type of an environment, when it's done in this type of format, people will actually retain the skills that they're learning and talk about wasted ROI. When you spend all this money sending people to fancy trainings or workshops, and they're sitting in a room for five hours. And you know, they're away from their job, and then you fly them back home. And then how much of that have they actually retained? And how much of that have they actually learned to use in practice?

Teri Schmidt 27:34

Exactly, we do one more thing to support that as well, we will offer resources or beyond the event. So whether that is strategies that you may want to incorporate in your weekly team meeting that relate to what was done in the event, whether that is leadership coaching for those, you know, organizations that do the team building with us, we do offer discount of leadership coaching so we can continue to work on, you know, what happened in the event? What was some of the progress that was made? And what is some progress that still needs to be made? And how can we support you and helping to make that happen?

Maria Ross 28:08

I love it. I love it. Thank you so much, Terry, for coming on today to talk about empathy infused team building to create lasting impact. And I am going to have in the show notes the link. But we've got a little

gift for listeners, you have a free guide 10 activities to connect in 10 minutes, and it can be found at strongertogether.com/forward-slash-empathy-edge again, we're going to put that link in the show notes for people and they'll also be able to link to more information about your Learn by Doing good experiences, and hopefully spark some ideas for them. So for folks on the go, though, that are not in the access the show notes right now, where's one of the best places they can connect with you and learn more about your work?

Teri Schmidt 28:50

Yeah, the best place is to find me on LinkedIn. So I'm under Terry te ri Schmitt, and I think it has an M in the middle. But if you search Terry Schmitt, and stronger to serve, you'll find me and I know you'll have it in the show notes as well. And I do want to give a little secret hint, there is a discount for our team building events in that activity guide that you were just mentioning that free gift. So love it. Make sure you get your hands on that and exactly it does support you and your teams. Yep, become

Maria Ross 29:20

strongertogether.com/forward-slash-empathy-edge. Terry, thank you so much for your time and your efforts to help build teams build skills, but also benefit the community.

Teri Schmidt 29:32

Well, thank you for having me on Maria. This was great. And thank

Maria Ross 29:35

you everyone for listening to another great episode of the empathy edge podcast. If you liked what you heard you know what to do, please rate and review and share it with a colleague or a friend. And until next time, remember that cash flow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care and be kind. For more on how to achieve radical success through empathy, visit the end At the edge.com there you can listen to past episodes, access, show notes and free resources. Book me for a Keynote or workshop and sign up for our email list to get new episodes, insights, news and events. Please follow me on Instagram at Red slice Maria. Never forget, empathy is your superpower. Use it to make your work and the world a better place.