

EEP EP169 - Shasta Nelson_ Why...ers Encourage Work Friendships

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SPEAKERS

Maria Ross, Shasta Nelson

Shasta Nelson 00:01

Here is the truth. We are happier when we feel connected when we have friends. What we're doing right now is leading to 60%. Loneliness. So it's not working, just letting people do it organically and just hoping it works isn't working. It's not leading to a connected population. So is what we're going to have to do going to feel awkward to most of us. Yes, because it's going to feel different than what we're currently doing. Is it going to feel some people might use the word forced, I might use the word intentional. Yes, it is. And is it going to make you get a little nervous and make you feel a little awkward? Probably. And is that a bad thing? Nope. Relational social health is on the other side of them relationships, sweat. And so if we keep having leaders and employees, avoid anything that feels awkward or uncomfortable, or outside of their comfort zone, we just stay where we are. And we just stay on that couch is watching TV and we just stay in our little work, cubicles working and being productive, and we just stay lonely.

Maria Ross 01:01

Welcome to the empathy edge podcast, the show that proves why cashflow, 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. welcome my friend, Shasta Nelson to the empathy edge podcast, we finally made this happen. Yay, I'm

Shasta Nelson 01:49

so glad I'm really happy to be here with you.

Maria Ross 01:51

I know. And you and I have known each other for years being authors and speakers, and I have long admired your work on the importance of friendship, which you know, as folks know, just hearing your bio, you started on this journey of more about personal friendship. But in recent years, like me, you found a bunch of data and research about the importance of friendship at work, and how it drives performance and productivity and morale and engagement and all the things. So before we get into all that, can you give us a brief? How did you get to friendship work? What's the story?

Shasta Nelson 02:27

They just know the research around how important relationships are to everything. And so I think Mike, just even way back in the day when it was like it was tied to your success. It was tied to your sense of your health, your sense of belonging, like does he go down the list. And yet, you know, especially when I first started studying this way back in like 2008, with like archaic times, everybody was so obsessed with romantic relationships and parent child relationships. Like those were the only ones people met heard about, like you go into a bookstore, and there were just shelves and shelves, the books on those subjects, and certainly work relationships, but they were also all focused on toxic people back then, or just like how to put up with the annoying co worker, but you didn't really see things on how to just build all the healthy relationships you need in our in your life, and how much more all those other relationships like who you work next to impacts your health more than sometimes who your spouse is, who you work next to impacts you definitely more than who your doctor is. I mean, we are like, our friendships end up having so much more impact in our lives than those 2.5 kids or that one spouse or that one person that you have. And yet we just really I think I just kind of zeroed in on it because I was like, Why is nobody talking about these all these other relationships? And so you can only hear yourself say that so many times Bora Bora, you're like, Okay, I will y'all start talking about

Maria Ross 03:44

start talking. And I know, you know, for you and for many women of our age, it's also a very personal dilemma. Sometimes it is harder to make friends as an adult in general, and even harder for men, I would presume given some of the data that you've shared. Talk to us about the epidemic of loneliness, because even though I've heard about it a lot, I'm more in tune to it. And even our US Attorney General is talking about it as a health issue. Tell us what you found from a very health oriented perspective.

Shasta Nelson 04:15

Yes, I'm one of my favorite subjects, we could do a whole hour on that. And I will just say it does feel harder as an adult sometimes to us. But back to your kind of earlier point. Why it feels harder is actually because of one of the three requirements of relationship but we can dive into all three of them at some point. But one of them is consistency. And consistency is can sometimes feel harder as adults but that's why the workplace friendships become so important because work is to adults like school was to us as children. It is a place of consistency where we are paid to show up next to each other we don't have to invite and plan and schedule and put it on our calendar for three weeks out. And so that is why work is the number one place we make friends as adults is that consistency piece and

Maria Ross 04:57

so or find our husbands

Shasta Nelson 05:00

I think yeah, there you go for you. Yeah. Yeah. And so like, let's just acknowledge that is the case that it's happening, and that the research actually bears out that it's a benefit to the employer and to the employee when it does happen. So it's really important. And so then diving deeper into your second part of kind of your question around the health, like from an obviously a corporation benefits from us being healthy and not calling it as sick and recovering from surgeries faster and having a stronger immune system and having stronger mental health. But obviously, I talked about it from like, we benefit from our physical health, and friendship, and feeling all healthy relationships are probably the number one factor to how long you will live, to the quality of life you will have and to really how strong you are physically, it's worse, like if you feel disconnected on a regular basis, it's worse than smoking 15 cigarettes a day, it's twice as harmful as being obese, it does the equivalent damage on your body as being a lifelong alcoholic, it's worse than not exercising, it's worse than living in pollution. I mean, you just go down the list. And if you feel lonely, it is almost impossible to like, do enough healthy lifestyle habits to make up for the stress that happens to your body to just live with a feeling of not being supported. We are wired to function when we feel supported, we feel more hopeful, we feel more resilient, we feel safer. And so yeah, you can go back to from you know, whether it's evolutionary, or biological or psychological, all the different methods like when it comes down to it, we function happier and healthier when we feel connected. And so whether that's, you know, it just plays out in so many ways in our physical way.

Maria Ross 06:39

Totally. So I love that you made that bridge there. Because we do spend the bulk of our time at work, and whether you know, now we are in a hybrid environment or a virtual environment or you you have been brought back to the office, whatever, whatever that looks like. These are still people that you're consistently interacting with throughout the day. And like you said, oftentimes more than your spouse or your kids. So talk to us about what does friendship at work look like? Because I think that the pushback you sometimes hear is that work is work. And personal is personal. And when you blur those lines, even though the pandemic showed us we can blur those lines, and we'll be okay. That it detracts from the work you need to do or from the performance. So first talk about what does friendship at work look like?

Shasta Nelson 07:31

Yeah, you know, it always cracks me up. Because yeah, when I first started saying that I was going to do a book on workplace friendships. Everybody was like, That's so great. Except and it was like everybody had like this big hesitation or fear, but like, but what about favoritism? Or what if you're the boss, and you have to like discipline to get it was just like, nobody could just be like, Oh, that's great. It was just always like, fear immediately. And like the but what ifs, and we have a lot of issues around it. And it's kind of funny, because I always say, it's funny. None of us, I've never heard anybody send their kid to school and say, Okay, you are there to learn. Don't get distracted with other people with drama with all the relationships, just stay focused, keep your school life separate from your personal life. Like we never expect that blending things together is a problem. And then suddenly, we become adults. And now suddenly, the thing that we're the place where we're supposed to be the most creative, show up and make the biggest contribution in the world, use our strengths collaborate, the place where we actually do all the things better when we're doing it together. Now suddenly, that's the place where

we're, we're like, well, make sure you keep all these straight lines and all these things and you're like, What are you talking about? And then that's why I finally wrote this book, because I was like, the research has been telling us for two decades, at least, I mean, we can go back even further than that. But Gallup has been very clear for 20 years. And they're still coming out and saying this, that if you have a best friend at work, you are seven times more engaged in your job. That engagement means you treat your customers better that engagement means you're more loyal to your company. That engagement means you call in sick less often, it actually means fewer workplace accidents. This means better inventory control. I mean, the list of the things it does for us is so strong, like if you care about retention and losing like less turnover, then the number one thing you should be focusing on building better relationships in your workplace with each other. And so it kind of has driven me crazy as you can probably hear it in my voice. I was like, why are companies not googling friendship speakers? Why are they not looking at Friendship? Why are they not prioritizing this? Like why are they not only not prioritizing it when all the data continues to show like even studies coming out every month, I see a different study now saying, number one issue to workplace satisfaction is who your coworkers are. The number one issue for somebody staying at a company is do they have friends there? I mean, it just comes out repeatedly.

Maria Ross 09:47

Well, they're not only not talking about it, they're discouraging it. I think that's at a bad day. And so that's why I want to get to that question is the when you talk about friendship at work, people have an image in their mind so Tell us what it is and what it isn't?

Shasta Nelson 10:02

Yeah. Good question.

Maria Ross 10:04

So what it

Shasta Nelson 10:05

is I teach friendship on a spectrum for lack of a better word. So at the bottom of that spectrum should be like people we are friendly with. So there's a difference between people we're friendly with and people we develop a friendship with. And maybe on the opposite side of the spectrum are the people who we feel like we are the closest to them. They're our best friends, they know everything about us, we process live with them, we do live with them, we see ourselves being in touch with them forever kind of thing. And so we've got this spectrum. And I say, at a workplace, everybody should at least be in the bottom of the spectrum should be we are friendly with each other, you can rely on each other, we are kind with each other, we are respectful to each other. That's minimum. And then as you move up that spectrum, a workplace friendship should be about halfway up that spectrum. And you know, a good strong team should be halfway up, which means we can rely on each other, we trust each other. We have psychological safety, we feel like we can brainstorm and we're not going to be ridiculed or ostracized, we feel like we can say, I don't know how to do that, will you help me we can admit, like, I've got too much going on right here and like, not sure the best way forward, let's collaborate on this. It means admitting when you don't know it admit means not just hiring for diversity, but taking the time to like, learn from each other's stories and different backgrounds, and what we can like, what makes us

different, and how we can make that a better team and a better product and a better service. And so yeah, it means we have to have enough safety with each other, to know each other to express with each other, we need to be supported, I need to feel like you have my back. I need to feel like I'm not in battle against you. But we're in battle, that I don't even want the violent terms that we're in this together. We're like, trying to make this service for the world. We're doing this product like we are on the same side. And we need they're

Maria Ross 11:41

on the same team. Yeah. And I think you know, the image people get though, is that it's going to be super emotional, super full of, you know, negative drama, it's going to detract from the work. And that's not what you're saying. You're saying you want to develop these friendships in order to not have that exactly. So some of the reasons that leaders seem to discourage friendships at work is because they have this image of what friendship at work looks like. And it might look like being super emotional, or melodramatic or overly dramatic, or, you know, just letting it all hang out and detracting from actually getting work done. You know, in some cases, gossiping in some cases, you know, screwing around. So what is it? What does it actually look like? And what does it not feel like? Yeah,

Shasta Nelson 12:32

that's a great question. And those are all the fears of it, we all legitimately have. And yet, I always say, it's funny, you can say we don't want friends, you can make sure everyone's up by us you get and that doesn't take those fears away, like we still will have favoritism, we'll still have gossip, we'll still have cliques, we'll still get our feelings hurt. And in fact, we have more of all those things we fear, the less we have friends at work. And so the solution isn't to avoid friendship, the solution is to lean into it and train for and help us know how to do better friendship better, and to develop a stronger relationships with each other, more trust with each other, more of a sense of camaraderie. Because yeah, all these fears those are they they some of it, those are just negative qualities that we have when we feel isolated when we feel alone when we don't feel supported when we feel like nobody knows us when we don't feel like forgotten. What we're describing what we're most afraid of are the things that happen when we're lonely. Like those things get heightened, the lonelier we are. And so really the solution is to start saying, What can we do to bring more joy to this workplace? What can we do to help us feel more supported in this workplace? And will there sometimes be conflict? Absolutely. There's conflict, our marriages, and we don't not get married, there's conflict and friendships outside of work. And we don't say, well, we just should never be friends, because we might disappoint each other. We say yes, those are risks of when people interact and be in relationship. But rather than avoiding it, let's prepare for it. Let's train ourselves for it. Let's practice what we can do in those moments, and the workplace will be stronger for having us practice those hard conversations. Sometimes, it will definitely be stronger for us supporting each other and cheering for each other and celebrating each other. And so everything we want more of in our workplaces is the result of healthy relationships, not of alienation, isolation and loneliness. I love this

Maria Ross 14:17

because the best jobs I've ever had is where I've made good friends that have lasted beyond the job. And we were the most productive teams. We actually had fun at work, not that the work was always fun. But we had fun at work being together. And so this is why with the new book that I'm working on

joy, as part of the culture is a pillar of having being a healthy empathetic leader. So tell us so let's say leaders listening to this, yes, we're having some negativity. People don't trust themselves. I do want to encourage friendships at work. What are some ways they can do that without just hey, go make friends.

Shasta Nelson 14:58

Which isn't an all bad plan even Now, one of the really interesting things when I was doing the research for my book was how many of us want friends? And then I would ask the follow up question of, Do you feel like your supervisor wants you to have friends? Do you feel like your organization wants you to have friends and those numbers dropped in half, you know, so most of us are walking around wanting friends at work. And yet, when we're by the proverbial water cooler, whatever form that takes in our hybrid workplace right now, if our supervisor walks that do we feel like we need to stop talking, so we don't look like we're not being productive, right. And so it's a leaders job to say I believe the research, I believe that when we have friends at work, we all are happier, and it benefits all of us. And so it is our job to like, say, it's an important part of this, we want to do we want you to I want you to bond, I want you to like each other. I want you to feel supported here. I want you to have a friend here. Absolutely. And so thinking that modeling it talking about your own friendships, talking, making sure everybody on your team in department knows what are the things your company does that can help be a resource for friendship, what are the ERG groups? What are the events going on? What are the different resources available, and being able to provide opportunities for do your employees know when and where it's appropriate for them to connect? You know, I think about going to Trader Joe's and I walk in, and I love that while they're stalking and stalking and kind of doing that they're talking about their weekend. But the second I walk up to the produce section, they immediately stop and say, Is there anything you're looking for? And I go, No, I'm good. And they're like, Okay, and then they go back to talking about their weekend. And they clearly have a culture. That's not that they can't talk about their personal lives. Are there some things they shouldn't be out there talking about on the floor around customers? Absolutely. But they can be connecting and I actually walk in I go I love Trader Joe's they all like, like, they look like good friends. They look like they liked each other. I like shopping there because I believe they have friends with you know, they beat you the everybody feels it? Do your employees know where it's appropriate for them to be talking? Did their only a break room? Or are they allowed to do it in front of customers? I mean, do they know when do they get to eat lunches at the same time? Or have you split them all up? Where they never even have time together? You know? And so thinking through those kinds of things, do you are you offering ways in meetings for them to hear about what is going on in each other's lives, whether it's a quick round table of everybody getting to kind of talk about something they did this weekend or breaking them into twos, even that just takes three minutes, like just turn it like I'm gonna put you in a breakout room with one other person. And I want you to share one thing that you're proud of from the last week, you know, or one thing that once one thing bringing you inspiration these days, you know anything? I've got, like a whole list of sharing questions, but are you providing those moments? And are you and making sure that there's no question? If I were to come in and ask people on your team? Does your boss want you to have friends? They'd be like, yes. That would be the litmus test of yeah, they should absolutely at minimum, know that you value that.

Maria Ross 17:47

So how do leaders who who do create strong relationships with their teams, they do become friends, so to speak with their teams? How have you found that they walk the line of being friends being trusted by

their employees, trusting their employees, maybe even getting to know them on a personal level, maybe even doing things outside of work with them? And the needs of the business? When times get tough? Or there's a challenge or they have to have a difficult conversation? What are some practices or methods you found that successful leaders do to balance both of those? Yep.

Shasta Nelson 18:25

And you don't work capable of this. We do this all the time. We know that when we're married, and we have kids, we're gonna wear two different hats as romantic lovers and as parents, right. And we know that there's going to be a chance of blurry lines in conflict. But we know that we can have more than one relationship one role with somebody. And so we absolutely know that as we build our friendship with the people, the higher that trust, and the higher that support goes, also goes higher responsibility for being able to practice vulnerable conversations, which includes hard conversations sometimes. So I always say it's not about building a friendship and you're at risk of letting your friends off the hook. It's actually that if I have a friendship with you, we actually have a higher responsibility to, quote, be on the hook with each other, we have a higher responsibility. Like, that's the deepening of our relationship is to be able to have those questions and say, to me, we'll say even proactively, if possible, you know, we have I love that we can talk about all this stuff and be friends. If when I have to, like say something hard to you, what's the best way for me to do that with you? Like what would be important to you, if I had to discipline you, if I had to, like, you know, be have these conversations, it's bonding. If you never have to actually do the discipline, you'd still deepen the friendship by talking about it and showing that you care, that you have empathy for what they would most want, how they how you would want them to do it on when you get promoted. I mean, I have a whole bunch of questions in my book of like, if you get promoted and now you're going to start overseeing a friend, have all these conversations with each other, you know, and like have like get to know each other. What do I most need from you now? How might it look different? What are you most afraid of? Now that you're gonna be my boss? What are you most afraid of? Now that I'm you're reporting to me What can I do to alleviate that fear? What do we need to do to increase our trust in each other, what's appropriate and talk about the relationship, the closer you are in friendship, the more you should be able to have these conversations. And yeah, it's so important that you open up more conversation and communication around the different roles you share with each other.

Maria Ross 20:18

I love this, because I don't know if I ever shared this story with you. But after I met my husband, and we were engaged, I got promoted at work. And he was still more junior than me. i He didn't report to me. But there was a global project I was working on. And so someone on my project team was required to get information and get content from him. And I was pushing this person to deliver what they needed to deliver to me. And I remember one Saturday, I was like, let's go, whatever it is, like, I can't because so and so said, I had to get this stuff to her because you needed it Monday. And I remember it was like, oh, sorry. But it was like we understood what was happening there. And that was like a separate thing. And I love your advice about having the proactive conversation and the empathetic conversation of, you know, I love this relationship that we have, I love that we can trust each other. But if there comes a time where we're having some conflict or some challenges, what are some ways we can communicate with each other while still preserving our friendship? If that's important to us? Absolutely. And I just think that

sometimes that is a fear based, I'm not going to be able to balance it. So I'm not going to pursue it at all.

Shasta Nelson 21:34

Yeah, well, to be honest, to be honest, Maria, we live in a culture where we quite frankly, suck at having vulnerable, authentic conversations with conflict. I mean, this is something I'm talking about all the time, and just friendship outside of work, we would rather go see each other than say what's happening, we would rather just walk away or just talk about that person with other people than to go talk to them about it. I mean, we would call them toxic without ever than I mean, I hear from people all the time, who don't even know why the friendship broke off. They don't even have these conversations. Whereas like, we just don't do it well, in general. And so I think it's what's one of the fears of the workplace is Yeah, but just because we're not doing it? Well, the answer isn't, let's just keep not doing it well, and keep being more and more isolated, we have 60% of us are lonely in the workplace, the research is coming out again. And again, that is a big number. That would be the equivalent as if we had 60% of our kids going to school on empty stomachs. We know they can't learn when they're hungry. And we have programs in place as much as we possibly can to try to help make sure that fundamental need is being met. Right now we have 60% of our adult workforce going to work hungry for connection and relationships. And if we don't help provide that they are not working in the way we want them to work. So we are not getting there best. And in fact, we're getting there worse. We have good research that shows when they're lonely, they're less empathetic, do we want a less empathetic workforce? No, when they're lonely, they treat customers worse. They take things more personally, they're more judgmental, they see fear and problems, or they they don't see solutions. And so I mean, we it's to our benefit to start saying the answer isn't to be afraid of the fears. The answer is to start building connection and sort of training us to know how to handle tough things with each other, we can do this.

Maria Ross 23:24

So it probably drives you crazy when there's leaders that say, We're not here to make friends. Yes.

Shasta Nelson 23:29

I'm like, well, then you're not here to be productive. You're not here to change the world. You're not here to do all that. Brainstorming things. You're not here to have a really loyal, engaged workforce, like good luck with that. Yeah. And I

Maria Ross 23:40

think too, you know, I think also what you are teaching and what you're leading about, can get met with the fact that you don't have to make your best friends at work. That's not what we're saying. It's not an all or, and it's just you can become friends and be friendly with the people you work with. And it actually benefits the organization. Nobody's saying you have to invite all those people to your wedding. Exactly.

Shasta Nelson 24:04

And it goes back to this spectrum of friendship. It's not all or nothing. It's not friends, or enemies or friends or nothing. It's a spectrum of friendship at the bottom of it, we treat everybody kindly, friendly with respect. And that should be taught in all of our workplaces. That is just minimum treatment. And yes, with our people that we're working with closely, that we're seeing regularly that we're interacting

that we're on teams with, we should be moving up to being good friends, we should be trusting each other, we should say I assume that person wants the best for me. I want the best for them. I want us to both succeed. And yes, absolutely. Some of us might find a best friend at work. Some of us might not know that they're our best friend too. After we leave, there might be something that builds up over years. But yeah, absolutely not. All of us need to be best friends with everybody and some of us will find a best friend at work. But the goal is to create healthy friendships with as many people as you can. And we know like when I do surveying and research on a team, we can directly see the correlation that if you have one friend on your team, your job satisfaction goes up more obviously, than if it's zero people. But if you have two friends on your team and goes up another five points, and then if you have three friends on your team, it goes up. And so we can see double digit increase for how you enjoy your job based on how many friends you have, we can see how likely you are to stay at that job based on how many friends you have, you know, and so it's it does matter, it benefits you in a big way as the boss and also as the worker. Right?

Maria Ross 25:27

So I'm going to ask you this one, which is a little bit personal, because my husband hates us when his workplaces, and it's this idea of forced fun.

Shasta Nelson 25:37

I knew you were gonna say that. Yeah,

Maria Ross 25:38

it's this idea of like, we're gonna have happy hour every Friday, and everyone's sort of expected to attend. And, you know, they're, you're not necessarily friends, you're can be friendly, but you're not necessarily friends with all those people. And you don't want to do the bowling night. You don't want to do that. So what do you say to a leader or even just a worker that's on the receiving end of that, like, where is it appropriate to have events? Or have opportunities to come together and get to know each other personally? And when is it overkill?

Shasta Nelson 26:13

Yeah, so obviously, we all have different personalities, obviously, we all show up. And, you know, it's so funny. I mean, even in my family dynamic, I can feel this happen, you know, it's like one person like, Oh, here's just with her sharing questions again, you know, and like, I know, my husband's like that with board games, uses to play board games. I'm like a deep dive. But here is the truth. We are happier when we feel connected when we have friends. What we're doing right now is leading to 60% Loneliness. So it's not working, just letting people do it organically. And just hoping it works isn't working. It's not leading to a connected population. So is what we're going to have to do going to feel awkward to most of us. Yes, because it's going to feel different than what we're currently doing. Is it going to feel some people might use the word forced, I might use the word intentional? Yes, it is. And is it going to make you get a little nervous and make you feel a little awkward? Probably? And is that a bad thing? No, I talk all the time about physical health, you go to the gym. And when you start to sweat or breathe a little faster, your heart rate goes up, do you stop and say, Oh, my goodness, this must not be good. My heart rates going up like I need to stop this. No, we understand that physical health is on the other side of sweat, we actually go knowing we're going to sweat, we actually lift muscle like lift

weights, knowing it tears our muscles a little bit like that's the crazy thing we actually go knowing we're hurting ourselves. Because we know I use hurting myself in quotes, we we know that on the other side, when that muscle heals, it's stronger. But yet when it comes to our social health, as soon as people like your husband and people, my family go, Well, this is a little awkward, and they start emotionally sweating a little bit in they go the same fine. The goal isn't to pull back and only stay comfortable. The goal is to say social health is on the other side of a little bit of relational sweat. Social Health is on the other side of doing like lifting the weight a little heavier than you're used to lifting walking a little further than you're used to walking, stretching a little bit further than you're used to stretching.

Maria Ross 28:06

Sorry, I love that say that, again.

Shasta Nelson 28:09

Relational social health is on the other side of them relationships, sweat. And so if we keep having leaders and employees avoid anything that feels awkward or uncomfortable, or outside of their comfort zone, we just stay where we are. And we just stay on their couches watching TV and we just stay in our little work cubicles working and being productive and we just stay lonely. So it's not working. And so yes, it's going to feel forced and I'm okay with that. I'm okay saying as long as I'm paying you to be in this space, I It's okay. If I'm paying you it's one thing to ask you to come spend weekends and evenings with people you don't want to be spending time with but if it's during work hours, and I'm like, You know what, just I pay you if we're all going to lunch, I asked you to come to a meeting, why not force you to come to a lunch with people. I mean, it's okay, that's what we're here to do. So I'm okay with it.

Maria Ross 28:58

I love it. I love it. One also, I think also the other side of this, having spoken to a lot of D IB experts is that as long as you're also offering opportunities for different types of people, right? So are those all accessible? Do introverts want to go out to the Loud Bar every time you guys have happy hour, maybe not. So maybe find some different ways to be creative. And that was actually what's so beautiful about the pandemic is that over zoom companies got really creative, like my husband's team did a whole like terrarium building activity together with someone guiding it, they did a wine tasting they did, you know, a drawing class or something. They did all these different modalities of team building. And we were forced to do it because we couldn't get together in person because the default in person is the happy hour, which again and so people don't drink exactly when people are recovering alcoholics, you don't want to put them in an awkward position either. So it's like shaking up a little and being creative in terms of the things that you do. Knowing that not 100 for Some of the people might participate in everything, but are you giving people an opportunity and also, one company I worked for had, you know, a buddy system, where part of it was you got paired with the buddy, when you joined the organization, and that was very forced, you didn't know that person. But another part of it was you were kind of required to go to lunch with them, like every other month or something like that. And so it created a connection, and maybe the connection went nowhere after you left that job, but at least you got to know that person outside of the context of the work you needed from each other.

Shasta Nelson 30:37

And some about us, you know, honestly, we as much as we don't like the word for so I mean, I'd like I'd probably go back to like, intentional, like having an expectation or some like that. But still all of them have a sense of like, when the company is hood, when you join a company, they have an onboarding process where we want you to have phone calls with these different bike people are we want you to meet these, this group of people. Like those are, quote, forced, I mean, those are planned for you. And are you nervous before talking to the marketing ce la marketing? You know, officer, are you awkward about talking to payroll and getting to know them? Yes. And aren't you glad? I mean, I've talked to people and I'm like, aren't you glad that that was set up for you? And you didn't either have to just never have those relationships or have to go initiate them yourselves. And every single person to a person said, Yes, I was like, it was so much easier that done for me, right? And so there is something that goes, Yeah, are we creating an expectation and setting that path and putting a process in place that some people will be like, Oh, geez, yes. And it's okay. Because at the end of that, we want you to feel like you know, how to call the payroll person and have a little bit of rapport with them, we want you to feel like you know, the people on your team. And if we, it comes down to do you believe the research, the mountains and mountains of research, that we are human beings who are meant to be social and connected, and that it pays off to be that way. And if you do, then you set up your workplace to support that. And it's awkward for some people, if we need to teach new skills, if we need to set new expectations up, we need to cast a bigger vision. That's what we do as leaders, that's our call A, that's our job is to not just keep reverting to like, what is been done and what the norm is, and what's comfortable and what's easy. The call is to say I want to be as effective as possible. I want my people to be as collaborative and supported and appreciated and safe as possible. And so I am going to do what I can do to build those to build those relationships. And so yeah, and I love your point around doing that in diversity. And maybe this is a good place, Maria, for us to talk about what actually is a healthy relationship, because that can set a framework for what activities and what kind of things we want to do as leaders to help create that environment for healthy relationships. Does that sound like?

Maria Ross 32:42

Let's go there? Because I think that that is also you know, again, going back to the question earlier, what does friendship at work look like? It's really what does a healthy relationship at work look like? So talk to us about that as we wrap up.

Shasta Nelson 32:55

Yeah, so the goal isn't just the happy hour, the goal is a happy hour if that the effective as ours go to, like, what is it we're actually trying to create? What are we actually trying to do and I mentioned earlier at the top of the show, that consistency is one of the top three requirements of all healthy relationships. Consistency means we are interacting on a regular basis, we're creating shared memories, it's our time that we're logging. It's the it's the history that we build, it helps at work because we have proximity. We also have a lot more frequency we're seeing each other way more frequently than we probably are college friends or you know, family members. And so yeah, this is like all all consistency. This is one of the things that made friendship feel easy at school when we were kids is the consistency was Pelton, but consistency isn't enough. We all know we've worked with people and that just by itself isn't enough to build a healthy relationship. When we look at all the social science we see three things are in common in every single healthy relationship. The second one is positive emotions. Positivity is we want to make sure that all people both people are walking away from each interaction that time together

feeling more pleasant feelings than unpleasant feelings. And so that means we want them to feel empathy. We want them to feel joy, we want them to feel hopeful. We want them to feel inspired. We want them to feel proud, we want them to feel whimsical. Like you. There's hundreds of fabulous positive emotions, pleasant emotions, and we want them feeling as many of those as possible. The research shows that we want to have five hopefully the quantity five positive emotions, pleasant emotions for every negative one. So there are going to be annoyances, there's going to be stressors, there's gonna be deadlines, there's going to be unmet expectations. But we, as a healthy team, as friends at work want to do our very best to throw gratitude on there and appreciation and anything that leaves each other feeling pleasant feelings. The third requirement is vulnerability. Vulnerability is where we feel like we can be ourselves it means we feel like we can kind of let you know a little bit about who I am what's going on in my life. It also means that we know each other's strengths at work that we know what each person brings to the team. That also means that we feel safe brainstorming and throwing ideas out there. That's vulnerability. It means we know how to apologize and are safe feeling like we can come and admit when we're wrong. That takes some courage. Double vulnerability. We also want vulnerability when it comes to being able to say I don't know or say no when we need to say no or say yes. When we want to say yes. Like, it takes incredible vulnerability to show up and have our opinions heard and our ideas shared, and are who we are brought to the table for good. And so yes, we want that. And so kind of going back to your earlier fear, we're not talking about like, disclosure, we're not initially talking about needing to have like, we're not here at work to process our personal lives. That's a different form of vulnerability. But we absolutely need healthy vulnerability to know who like, what does Maria, who is she? And what makes her tick, and how do I work well with her? And what does she do? How do I celebrate her what feels good to her? What does she need from me? What does it look like, we don't be able to know each other where we feel like we can build that healthy relationship. So I love that consistency, positivity and vulnerability. That was

Maria Ross 35:48

exactly I was hoping you'd recap that for us. I mean, that's like the magic triangle of a healthy relationship. And I always remember that when I think of your work, and I'm so glad you brought that up again. So let me

Shasta Nelson 36:00

let me just say to that, so I mean, that happy hour is one way if we're spending time together, and at that happy hour set up where we can have conversations. So the consistency happens, if it set up where we actually are having meaningful conversation, that's one of the problems about a happy hour is it might not be set up for vulnerability, or it's up to each person. And positive. He's not always there. So there's better events to normally do. But it depends like so what we're leaning for as leaders is what I'm creating an opportunity for people to know each other, to enjoy each other and to feel safe with each other, to spend time with each other. And so when we're trying to create ways for people to do that stuff, it's always going back to does this will this increase their fun factor, their joy factor? Are they feeling accepted? Does this increase their opportunity to know each other? And does this feel like quality time? And so when you name when you can use that those three things as a way to say yes, that's what this off site will do? Yes, that's what this team meeting will do. Yes, this is what we will do on the retreat, then you've got events that are guaranteed, guaranteed when these three things are in place to bond. Well, I think

Maria Ross 36:58

the biggest takeaway from all of this is that it's important to be intentional and make time for this. This is not detracting from the work. This is the work and it's going to enable the work to be better. So I love this so much, Chester, thank you for sharing your insights. today. We will have all your links in the show notes. But where can folks on the go? If they're listening right now while they're working out or hanging out with their friends? Where's the best place for them to find out more info about you?

Shasta Nelson 37:24

Yeah, Shasta nelson.com has all of my books listed. And also, if you bring trainers or speakers or consultants in it's all there for Shasta nelson.com

Maria Ross 37:32

Yes, definitely bring her in friends. Thank you again for spending time with us.

Shasta Nelson 37:37

Know You're so welcome. I'm so grateful that you cover this and yeah, as you know, empathy is such a huge part of those positive emotions and probably one of the most important ones so I love your work.

Maria Ross 37:47

Thank you. And thank you everyone for listening to another episode of the empathy edge podcast. If you liked what you heard you know what to do, please rate and review the podcast on your player of choice. Tell a friend or a colleague. And until next time, please remember that cash flow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care be kind and don't forget to connect with me on Instagram at Red slice Maria. For more on how to achieve radical success through empathy, visit the empathy edge.com. There you can listen to past episodes, access shownotes 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.