



PIA LEE

SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



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EPISODE 19



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MURRAY: Before we start, a question. How many leadership moments will you have today? In today's conversation Pia Lee talks about leadership moments, the fundamental leadership question and shares the 3Cs that create the conditions for success. Enjoy.

Welcome to my podcast. I'm Murray Wright and this is Leadership Moments, real people stories about the people and the moments that have influenced and shaped their leadership.

Today we're talking with Pia Lee. Pia is CEO of LIW, a global leadership consultancy based in Sydney. She leads LIW to expand its global reach through a pioneering range of leadership consulting, leadership development and coaching services. She's an advocate for creating measureable and sustainable business impact for a broad range of global clients in both the private and public sectors.

Pia, welcome and great to have you with us.

PIA: Thank you.

MURRAY: So Pia, before we get into the questions it would be really good if you could talk a bit more about LIW and what you're actually doing and what LIW does.

PIA: Thanks, Murray. Well, it's a very good time to be asking that question. So LIW is 22 years old. We deliver leadership solutions around the world to 26 companies, to multinationals and large nationals and we've been delivering that in a more traditional professional services model. We're in an exciting time now where we're really envisioning the future, the future needs of our clients and really transforming ourselves. So we set ourselves a challenge around our purpose and our vision and our purpose is to democratize leadership. What we mean by that is putting leadership into the hands of many more people for good. Traditionally leadership development has been seen to be for a smaller number of leaders, quite often senior people inside organizations. We're looking to substantially change the perception around that. So we set ourselves a vision and that vision is to positively impact one million people by 2020. So we've reached a quarter of a million after 22 years and now, as the maps would say, we've got three times that amount to do in a much shorter time. So really we're looking to embrace technology and the direction that LIW is going to be heading is to become a leadership technology company which has a range of services from high touch face-to-face leadership consulting and development through to mass scale digital services and everything that sits in between and we're very excited about the potential that that can bring to raise the understanding and the value and the



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



application to many many more people on this planet.

MURRAY: That sounds exciting. So in effect, you're disrupting yourself before you're disrupted by someone else.

PIA: We certainly are. I mean there are many causes of disruption, but we believe that as a leadership consultancy we need to drink our own champagne and actually disrupt ourselves, to lead ourselves, to ensure that we are totally relevant and sustainable as a company.

MURRAY: Yeah. I want to go back to this democratization of leadership. That's very hard to say, to be practiced. For me, when I hear that... and I just want to confirm... it's about working with leaders so that they have an impact and create leadership at random [?]. Is that what you're saying?

PIA: Similar. These two terms, leaders and leadership, are used, but a greater... We tend to be drawn more towards leaders and we see that leadership is the domain and the skillset of leaders. We actually would turn that on its' head and say that everybody has an opportunity to practice leadership. They are skills and practices and an individual in any organization or in fact, a mum, dad working in a role... lifesaving community group. These are available. These skills are available to anyone to practice and really it's the language around leadership that actually should be made available and understood and therefore on a mindset around it. Something that's interesting to consider is there's no currency of leadership. You can't weigh it. You can't measure it. So it's subjective. What happens if we saw those as leadership moments and from the moment that you wake up to when you go to sleep at night you've got opportunities to be able to interact with individuals. If you gave that notion 40... you know, from when you wake up, interactions you can have at home, public transport, getting your coffee, work and then the reverse coming home. Let's say there are 40 of those. Let's say that from when you go to school at 12 years of age, high school, you start learning to really proactively, consciously practice these. That's 40 a day, 365 days a year from the age of 12 to the average age of death. I'm told it's 82 or we could try and live to a hundred, but let's call it 82. That's 70 years. That is over a million leadership moments per person. That is your available opportunity that is there. You're never going to get a million leadership roles. It's never going to happen, but the opportunity to practice it with a whole range of people is there and that's shifting the mindset towards that.

MURRAY: You've got something really important there. First of all, thank you because that's the name of the podcast, Leadership Moments...

PIA: Very well



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: So I'm glad...

PIA: Perfect.

MURRAY: It goes well. I think there's another piece in this. I think society today and people... they almost demand, they almost expect to be given that opportunity to experience and take those leadership moments. So as in the past it, was very much well you'll do as you're told and now I think there's so much to get out of really giving them that opportunity because they want it and they expect it.

PIA: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MURRAY: Yeah. No it's great.

You started as a teacher back in the UK. I'd be really interested to know what moved you from working with children, teaching children to working in leadership and leadership is not so much by teaching but really facilitating and opening that mind. What was the journey for you?

PIA: So I think I went into teaching because at the time I was quite good at sports and I decided to become the PE teacher and that seemed to me... Okay that seems like quite a logical progression. The moment I went to college I realized everyone else was an awful lot better at sports so there were much greater experts at the subject matter. But what I really started to enjoy was the whole element of learning. What could switch minds on and what could keep people engaged? And really when I look at the whole of my career, that hasn't changed. How do you create a light of potential of what an individual can see in themselves through a way of... and how do you generate that? And so I taught in a whole variety of schools to really test out that thinking. I didn't consciously know it then, but now looking back I can actually see that that was in my thinking. And then I got to a certain point to think, "Well what do they do when they grow up?" You know, what do these, you know, these girls and boys... teach them from 12 to 18... what do they do when they leave school and how do they behave then? Does it all change and do they stop being quite difficult at times?

MURRAY: Yes.

PIA: And do they become, you know, really lovely citizens and change? And so I happened to be moving to Australia. I made a deal with myself. I would not teach when I got to Australia and that I would take this out into the business world of which



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



I knew absolutely nothing. I didn't know what people did when they didn't have a bell to tell them to move on to the next class. So I got involved both with some local work to really try and understand that and mixing with companies to really try and get an understanding of that and I got involved with LIW. And when I listened to what LIW, what their purpose was – building a legacy of leadership at the time and the work they were doing, it just completely integrated with what I was looking for. So this whole sort of psychology of the human being and the whole of potential leadership seemed to be... this was a way of embodying it. And it was also quite an emerging topic at this time. So leadership was quite misunderstood and to some degree not particularly valued. But that actually excited me because I really wanted to push along the understanding as well.

MURRAY: When you were saying... I get this picture of you taking this concept of cradle to the grave to a whole new element in terms of where you turn up in it. So I say good timing to ask that first question, our Leadership Moments question. Who has influenced you the most in your career, your development?

PIA: I would actually say it's prior to my career and I would say a huge influence would be my parents and I think the reason for that was I was an incredibly eccentric child and I, now having children of my own, I think I have come to realize how incredibly patient they were. I had a very active imagination for wanting to experiment being somebody else. So sometimes, you know, that would be a... I would actually run a hotel inside our house. Sometimes I would be a waitress. My parents really liked that. Other times I would decide to be a host, you know, and I would sort of, you know, go through the whole process. And it was very immersive for me and my parents never once tried to dissuade me. They had an incredibly tolerant attitude to it because they could see that that was me practicing with an imagination of the power of potential. And now as we are on, to some degree, uncharted territory with LIW, that ability to be in that space to play, to really engage in that creativity to really immerse yourself in what it would like to become. For instance, a leadership technology company which is not... doesn't actually exist in a whole extent. That ability to not have the boys going, "You're stupid doing that" or "That's ridiculous. It will never work," but actually feeling an energy from it and knowing that that energy is actually going to be much more engaging for everybody else around it, is really really powerful. So I thank them that they didn't pigeon hole this slightly crazy kid and actually they let her play.

MURRAY: That's really beautiful actually because I think we always read about how kids and infants have got this creativity, this joy within them, this curiosity that culturally gets drummed out of them and it... to our detriment later in life often. So it's



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



fantastic to hear that you were allowed to flourish.

PIA: I just hope... I'm trying to do the same with my own kids.

MURRAY: Yes. Just wait until they get to teenagers, Pia.

So you've got more than 15 years experience of coaching, consulting to CEO's and executives in a variety of industries. What challenges do you see organizations and leaders facing today and how has that changed from when you started?

PIA: I think we are in an incredibly exciting if volatile time. The whole notion of VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous – is playing out and has probably accelerated with a digital tsunami looming which everybody can see but everyone is also trying to grasp what it means for them, their organization, for the clients and the customers that they serve. I think then what this is doing particularly more acutely now than 15 years ago is that the old rulebooks may not necessarily apply and even all the expertise that we've garnered during our careers. We may be really having quite a vulnerable moment thinking, "Well how does that help me to make the right decisions?" Because we're not necessarily working anymore in a linear type of fashion where we're actually building slowly layer upon layer but instead actually more of a sort of a distributed and connected way of thinking. So really trying to think how different trends connect and actually how we actually connect people in a different way. So what that is leaving is... to some degree almost like an inertia for some leaders where they're not seeing the road back clearly articulated. So they don't quite know what to do and to some degree there's a stepping off that's required of actually... into that conscious incompetence and actually helping that to grow these other capabilities to see these trends and patterns and then being able to be able to make the decisions. And to do that... that's a really strong leadership element. You're testing your own powers of courage, but also your ability to connect with other people because they may have those knobs, those pearls of wisdom sitting in their experience, but they may not know it just yet. So it's quite a different way of operating whereas 15 years ago we were still going, "Well if I did x, y and z and it got me to be successful, I can probably repeat the process."

MURRAY: Yeah. There's this piece we... well we had that sort of control. We set our plan and what we were going to do and we never change and that would be fine. But you're describing... I heard it recently called the emerging future and we don't know what it is. And you talk about stepping off into that unknown and I think that you're right about the courage because the leader steps off into the unknown. He might not be part of that future.



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



PIA: Absolutely.

MURRAY: And other elements might not be part of it so it takes that great courage to truly transform and explore all the dangers and the opportunity of that new future that's coming.

PIA: And it takes quite a lot of courage to be able to say to yourself, "You know, I don't know. I don't know exactly what I'm meant to do. But I do know that I've got a great team around me and we'll figure it out."

MURRAY: Yeah.

PIA: Now that's a different way of operating and when you're under enormous pressure from external factors, external clients, board pressures, shareholder pressures, that puts leaders under an immense amount of pressure. But it's not a weakness. It's an incredible strength and seeing it pivot in that way is actually very powerful.

MURRAY: So that... I'm hearing vulnerability there when you tell, "I don't know." It is and as you say, it's often seen in this negative light. Is there anything you do with leaders that you work with and how do you help them get comfortable with that and own it and see it as... I don't know if it's necessarily let them see it as a strength, but see it as a safe place to go and a place that will actually engage the people around them?

PIA: I think that leaders, the default when you feel a sense of emotion that may be that uncertainty, maybe that fear. Your default could be to make the corporate armor even thicker than it already is in order to defend yourself and in actual fact... You know, I will also be saying to clients, "Let's try and take off this corporate armor." Because the power of connecting as humans and actually tapping into a different part of the brain is where the answers will lie. So the ability to really be able to get that level of thinking not to defend, but to explore is immensely powerful. Connection enables creativity, enables trust, enables you to take those courageous decisions. Relying on people to have exactly the right... and demanding exactly the right answer in order to defend our own decisions won't work.

MURRAY: Yeah. How beautiful. And again it comes back to this allowing yourself to be human whereas too often we're suppressing. Yeah. It's great.



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



That brings us to the second question. For yourself, what was your 'aha' moment? The moment when you suddenly understood what this whole gig of leadership was about.

PIA: I don't think it was a sudden understanding, but it certainly was a dawning of a realization. So I'd gone through school always feeling a little like, "Well I'm just not as... I'm not very clever." And I wasn't particularly clever because it was always based around the subject matter experts. And people became doctors and lawyers and accountants. And they were more revered in my generation. And to some degree I wondered that's why I became a teacher. What was I trying to learn from that experience? When I then went into teaching, many of my colleagues became subject matter experts in teaching. And then I realized that that wasn't what I wanted to do either. So you're on a little bit of a longer journey. For me, it really dawned on me when I discovered my purpose and I think when that... really on a whole personal journey and a series of things happened to me to really go, "What am I'm actually on this earth to do and how am I going to try and live that through the interactions that I have with people professionally and personally and I guess to some degree the legacy that I want to leave behind after I'm gone?" And so the transition for me came not about the things that I was doing in terms of my expertise, but how was I being and what impact was I having on people in that respect? And it wasn't that complicated except that I then realized that my expertise was about enabling people who were very clever and were subject matter experts, to realize that potential to another level. That's where my role became. So it's a bit like a catalyst. Sometimes it's a disruptor. And I'm bringing that level because that raises the tide higher than actually adding a single element of subject matter expertise. And that to me was like... that's the exponential impact of leadership. But I had to demonstrate it through my career. And that hadn't actually really been invented back in the '70s, '80s and '90s. It's something that has emerged and something probably with a bit of wisdom and maturity I've got more comfortable in having within myself.

MURRAY: So as you came to this realization and connection with your purpose, what changed for you? What difference did that make?

PIA: The simple change for me was, it wasn't about a job. It wasn't around a career. It was actually about a much bigger element about where could I add value in everything that I did? And then the roles that I might take become a vehicle to achieve that. So my purpose really simply is around making a difference, but it was how you were able to practically demonstrate that and if you are ever in a situation in a role or actually executing something where you weren't making a difference, the choice became really really clear. And then it was about what were you trying to make a



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



difference for? And then I find those... I went from teaching initially in classrooms to kids to then being able to go out and facilitate in worldwide destinations with a whole range of people from different industries. So that then, that really opened up through that purpose. But now, that purpose for me is executing about how do we take what we are, what would we have been developing and thinking around leadership? How do we take that to a much bigger audience, to people who have never thought that they had a chance to understand, practice or be interested in the whole notion of leadership.

MURRAY: That concept of purpose, where do you see the clarity or lack of it playing out in organizations and the leaders within?

PIA: So the purpose I guess... You know, I jokingly say to some of my clients, you know, can you imagine the scenario where you're visiting your own gravestone and, you know, you dedicated a life's work and so the word manager is placed on your tombstone.

MURRAY: Yes.

PIA: How good...

MURRAY: How does that feel?

PIA: How does it feel?

MURRAY: Covey's begin with the end in mind

PIA: Well, we're not jumping out of our skin at that one. And so that is around a little bit of a stark realization that there is more to this than the level that you're seeking. So I think really asking, you know, "Why am I here," and "What am I trying to achieve," is a fundamentally important question. But it's very thought provoking and it might take some time to be able to answer that. And that may be a whole... through life's rich tapestry... the whole journey that you're going on, so it may not be apparent. But asking it, is the fundamental leadership question. And then the enacting of it is life's journey.

MURRAY: Yes.

PIA: That's when the fun kicks in.



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 19
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: Lovely way to put it and I think as you say, the important thing is to ask the question. And I love what... We'll do a workshop with the clients and we need to work out a purpose today. We'll start, but we might not crack it today.

PIA: Exactly. Exactly.

MURRAY: It'll take time.

PIA: But you'll know it. You'll feel it and you'll know it when you're getting close to it.

MURRAY: Yeah. There's a sort of resonance internally. Isn't there? It just feels good.

So talking of purpose and having that impact... We had Rob, Rob Metcalfe who you would have... when you joined LIW, he would have been the man with that legacy of leadership.

PIA: Rob was my boss.

MURRAY: Yes.

PIA: So Rob was my boss. Rob was the very first person from LIW that I spoke to and the very first thing that he asked me about was not about my expertise. He asked me about my values and about how they played out in my life and how important they were. And I was so struck by the question and by the man asking it that I thought I really want to join this, really want to join this business. And then Rob and I also orchestrated the transition when he was CEO to me becoming CEO and how could we create the world's best, a really good world's best standard of that transition and I'm really proud of what we've done. And then even better that Rob still works for us.

MURRAY: Still associated. Yeah. That's great.

PIA: So that, you know, it's a fantastic story.

MURRAY: And he's a delight to work with. So I talked to him in Episode 11 and he listed the three leadership questions. So, you know, W1, What is it you're trying to achieve and why? Where are you at now? And what next? There's another piece of this that LIW really worked which I think people would be really interested to understand and it comes off a lot in the leaders I talked to. They talk about this. Well they've got to create those conditions, the right conditions for success. How does LIW bring that to the work it does?



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



PIA: So again I think simplicity is really key here. So leaders are in the firing line. There's a lot of complexity going on. And so they need something simple to be able to guide them in their leadership actions. So where as the Ws is much more around the mindset, the actions need also to be very focused. And having worked now with these quarter of a million leaders around the world, people can only remember three things. However smart, clever and incredibly intelligent they are, they can only remember three things at any one time. And then giving them the same letter really does help to remember it. So three conditions, three things that leaders need to create as the conditions for themselves and for others and for their team or organization to be successful.

The first one is 'clarity' and we should never underestimate how hard clarity is to develop and also to sustain. So this is clarity of information that you send out, but also understanding. And sometimes we're really poor in the questions that we ask to ascertain understanding. And used, you know, the most used question around the world is, "Do you understand?" And the most common response is, "Of course. Yes." And people smile and look enthusiastic and they have absolutely no clue about what it is that you've said. But they're too scared to ask. So really getting clear about what you're trying to do, why you're trying to do it and how you're going to do it and who's responsible. Those simple elements are fundamental and alignment of strategy and vision and purpose for an organization, a team or an individual.

Second one is 'climate' and this is structures and processes, the hard stuff because sometimes we have unwieldy structures and processes that make it really hard to enact that. But the softer stuff is the cultural element and that's absolutely key. So what type of high performing culture do you have inside your team or your organization to enable you to deliver on the vision of the organization. Do you have really, you know, goals that become untenable because of the culture or the structures and processes that exist inside the organization?

And the final bit is 'competence' and that's two parts: knowledge and skill. So it's a bit more the technical knowledge, the expertise that is required, different elements of those. But the behaviour and attitude is the undoing of many teams and organizations. So what do you want to have in terms of behaviours and attitude and for people that are in your team and how do you nurture and develop that? It's actually much easier to develop technical knowledge than it is behaviour and attitude. So it's better if you get somebody that might be slightly underbaked on the skills side, but is really incredibly willing to develop them. And that impacts. Those behaviours and attitude impacts the climate and impacts the clarity. And being able to segment



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



those 3Cs helps you then to be able to proactively develop those for your team and aligns it when things go thank you or wrong and then prioritize. There may be multiple facets that sit under that, but they're your three main conditions that you're looking at. That then helps to segment and focus a leader's mind. And our clients, you know, who have worked with this for many years will remember and come back. It's quite interesting, when you see somebody that you haven't seen for years and you come back and they're going, "God, never will forget those 3Cs. This is still what I use every day to be able to help me to be able to create the conditions."

MURRAY: And you bring those together nicely with the 3Ws and the OLA.

PIA: Yeah. So OLA is Organizational Leadership Architecture, which is a very long word, but what it means is you are actually building an architecture of leadership for either yourself, for your team or for your organization. And really the first thing we do with any team is to go, "What are you trying to achieve? What does the future state look like in terms of clarity, in terms of climate and the culture and the structures and processes and in terms of the competence?" Because where many organizations come to us is... they're telling us what's going wrong, but they haven't defined what it is that they actually want to be. So let's do that first and then we can then benchmark it with the current situation. Then we can prioritize what we need to work at in terms of the W3, What next?

MURRAY: I think once you've done that it also becomes this wonderful tactical project. Whatever tool for whatever situation.

PIA: You can apply it to meetings. You can apply it to projects. You can apply it to clients, issues that you've got. It has multiple uses because of its... It's rigorous, but it's simple enough to be able to use and our client impact studies have shown that people who have applied this to their own customers have applied this in terms of efficiencies, have applied this in terms of engagement and all the metrics have been incredibly positive.

MURRAY: So the information is on the website, is in the LIW website.

PIA: It is. Yes. Yes.

MURRAY: So click the links in the podcast resources so people can go and have a look at that. I certainly recommend it. It's a great tool.



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



So this brings us to the third and final question. What was your biggest failure and how did that inform your leadership today?

PIA: This might be an odd one, but I would go back in time. We had to enter to the high school to get preschooling something called an 11-plus and the 11-plus was an exam that you sat in your geographic area.

MURRAY: So this is back in the UK?

PIA: Back in the UK.

MURRAY: England. Yeah.

PIA: Yes. Sorry. There are lots and lots in Australia for me, but then there's probably an equivalent. But the lesson of it is interesting for me. So I sat this exam not knowing what it was, why it was important or any rationale. My parents decided not to bother me with that information. So I had no idea what I was doing. So clarity was very low. I didn't realize that actually it was competitive and the number of us that were working towards it... and there was a goal that there was a free tuition. But no one told me that and no one gave me any development in terms of my competence. So not being the brightest, the sharpest tool in the pack, you know, I failed. So I remember my parents coming back and saying, "You didn't get this."

MURRAY: Wow.

PIA: And that was a real kick in the gut because I didn't realize until far too late what the impact was. To me that was a clarity lesson and I learned to really be able to look ahead to go, "Why am I doing this? What is the impact of it?" And I think I felt disappointed in myself, but to some degree disappointed I wasn't set up for success. So I had a chance to do the 12-plus the following year, to get the books out, do the cramming, understand what it was and be better prepared for it. And I got it, which was an interesting lesson in life for me is... how do we set up the people that are in our teams, in our organization...

MURRAY: The 3Cs.

PIA: Because it really wasn't about my capability. It was actually about being set up for success.



PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: There's also a piece in there about... yeah, also not making a judgment about people's capability. It's actually people can do anything as long as you help them and support them and set up the right conditions.

PIA: Yeah.

MURRAY: Yeah.

PIA: And not having... I could have made a decision at that point that my capability was limited and I could have...

MURRAY: Stopped there.

PIA: Stopped.

MURRAY: Yeah.

PIA: And it was a bit like, "Actually I think there has to be something more than this and what is it that I need to do?"

MURRAY: Yeah. A great story. Thank you. So just moving to wind this up now, the one leadership practice that you have seen that can transform people's lives. Is there anything you can think of that you would share with people?

PIA: When I came to Australia, I really got involved in LIW. I went and re-educated myself at Sydney Uni and did a masters of organizational coaching and fantastic information there and was a huge enhancement to my education. One of the lectures said very simply, "The quality of your questions creates the quality of outcomes." And that was such a simple concept for me. So quite often we feel we have to tell people the answers. The question, what are you actually trying to achieve and why, I think is the most powerful leadership practice because you're putting the answer back into the person that you are talking to and you're getting them to have to think and search for the answer, which may be the best leadership practice that they have had for a long time. Telling them things is the short cut, but asking a good quality question like that is probably much more empowering and much more useful to them in the longer run.

MURRAY: And I think for you as a leader because they're going to come back better equipped and grow much faster.



**PIA LEE -
SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 19**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



PIA: Absolutely.

MURRAY: Thank you, Pia. Thank you for a great talk and great insight.

PIA: Oh thank you Murray.

MURRAY: People, if they want to reach out to you, contact you, how would they do that?

PIA: I'm very happy for you to contact me by my email, pia.lee@liw3.com.

MURRAY: Okay. We'll put that up in the resources. Thank you again.

PIA: Thank you so much. I really enjoyed talking to you.

MURRAY: Thanks.

A big thanks to Pia for sharing and challenging our thinking about leadership in today's world and how great are the 3Cs, clarity, climate and competence... all about creating the conditions for success and as Pia reminds us, it seems simple to you but it's not necessarily easy. Good luck with it.

That's it for this episode. Thanks for listening. Head to murraywright.com for the transcripts, key learnings and resources from today's and past episodes. Once you're there why not subscribe to the Leadership Moments podcast. That way you never have to miss one. Until the next time.

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An obligation free 30 minute chat to help you focus on what you want to achieve and why it is important.

Either call +61 407 262 475 or via the [website](#).
Look forward to hearing from you.