



JOHN RAYMOND

WHEN A TEAM IS NOT A TEAM

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



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EPISODE 25



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[Start of Transcription]

MURRAY: My guest today is John Raymond, principal and head of coaching at the Institute of Executive Coaching and Leadership in Sydney.

John, welcome.

JOHN: Thanks for having me.

MURRAY: Really excited to have you today, John. The theme today is coaching, specifically team coaching.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Now John, you've coached thousands of hours in both private and public sectors here in Australia and overseas. You also teach the team coaching program at the IECL. How would you describe team coaching?

JOHN: It's an interesting question. It sounds like I'm going to give a very long winded maybe a vague answer, but look, team coaching is still a very emergent area of professional practice in the coaching industry, so depending on who you ask, you'll get different definitions or descriptions. I use the David Clutterbuck definition for team coaching and we flex it out a little bit more. The definition that we use, team coaching is about helping teams to improve their performance and the process is by which performance is achieved through reflection and dialogue.

MURRAY: That's good. Now, what does that mean?

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: How does that look like?

JOHN: My very firm belief is that if you are an organizational coach one-on-one, team, group, it doesn't matter. Your job is to have, to nudge the dial on performance.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Performance comes in all shapes and sizes. It's not just creating another widget or hitting a KPI. Resilience helps your performance, your relationships; your network helps your performance. So there are many kind of facets, I think, when



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we say that you've got to understand that we're probably using it as broadly as we possibly can and it's got to have an impact on performance and the same for team performance. So when you're thinking as a team coach, to me our primary job is to help them improve their performance, in some shape or form.

The next piece of the definition... So to help improve performance and the process is by which performance is achieved to me is where the gut of team coaching actually happens. There are many processes in play that will impact a team's ability to perform. Some of those are internal to the team and some of those are external to the team. So if you think external to the team, for example, the strategy of the organization, the resourcing that's given to the team, the economic environment, technology, all of those things, which are kind of out of the team's influence, I guess, or control.

MURRAY: Or control.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah. But there are a lot of things that are within the team's control that they can focus on and so processes they're both structural and social. Structural ones, you know, having clear job descriptions and understanding the structure of the team and who's who and how we work together, you know, having clear goals. I think one of the things that disengages managers more than anything else is role confusion and changing priorities. I think the other thing is lack of resources, which kind of annoys everyone really. So you've got the structural components, but you've also got the social component, the team dynamic. How we're working together. What's the level of effectiveness of our communication? What's the level of trust? For those that know Patrick Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team, you'll see those sorts of things play out. I guess in terms of coaching in organizations and again it doesn't matter whether one-on-one or team, I think all coaches need to take a systems view. So we might be working with an individual, who is sitting across from me, but there's a whole world of influence that sits outside that person, some we're aware of some we're not, and so as an effective coach we need to find ways to consider that.

A team is exactly the same, so when we're coaching a team there's a lot of stuff that's happening within the team and that's kind of easier to see because they're sitting in front of us, but there's a lot of stuff that sits external to the team that is absolutely



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playing a role in how the team is functioning. So for me a team, you've got to go quite broadly in order to nudge the performance star.

MURRAY: Yeah. I love the way you define performance there. It's not just about the numbers. There are so many other elements about it, how people are managing themselves so they can actually perform and support others.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: In this environment then, coaching a team, we talk about... We often get called in. So the leader says, "Come on. We've got a problem. I want my team to get on better with one another." I've always got this real question now is, are they actually a team or not and what is it we're wanting to do? Isn't the leader asking us to fix them because they're not right or do we really want them to work as a team? Because I think there's a subtle difference, isn't there?

JOHN: I think there's a not so subtle difference here to be honest. [laughter]

MURRAY: [laughter] Yeah.

JOHN: I think there's a lot of literature around the difference between a working group and a team and the way that they function, what their output is and that pretty much determines how they work together and what they need to do and say with each other and that's often very task based. So you can have a collective of people that for some tasks need to work as a team and for other tasks it's better to work for group. One of the distinguishing factors is, probably the simplest one, is a team is working on a common goal.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So everyone is working on a single common goal that everyone needs to contribute to in order for that to be achieved. You know, you think... We're in the middle of World Cup.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: That's a classic team. The common goal is to win the match and everyone needs to play a role in order to do it. If any one person decides, "Ah, I'm going to just sit out this half," the team would actually fall down and that's an important distinction to make. Now a group is a collective of people working together for individual goals.



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So you think a lot of executive teams for example are actually not teams. They're more groups because they're all working for their particular part of the business and they come together to share information.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: I think it's an interesting question because to me organizations have this absolute addiction of calling every kind of working group a team and not only that, they need to be a high performing team.

MURRAY: Yes.

JOHN: And it's like calling an apple an orange and we're all pretending that we're not. I think it doesn't actually serve the efficiency and the effectiveness of productivity by kind of mislabeling them or misunderstanding what the label is.

MURRAY: So a team then needs to be brought together for this common goal and we talk about working with them through all the different processes and everything reflecting and learning how they're doing that. What does a group need when they've got the individual goals?

JOHN: Well, I mean the group still needs to meet like they still need to discuss and share information, but they don't necessarily need to kind of work with each other in order to do their job and that's the thing. Again, an executive team which is more of a group... It's very often that there's a position in the executive that's vacant. Now if that was a true team, the team would pretty much stop functioning.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: But because it's a group, "Oh, that's all right. We'll just continue without staff and we'll kind of make do and we'll fill that gap." But yeah, it really doesn't matter if that seat is vacant for a month or two.

MURRAY: Yeah. When we come to working even with a group or a team, what are some of the outcomes you've seen that teams get when they put in the process? Because this is the other element. Often people come in and run a day whereas in fact the coaching process is a bit more sustained. It's over a period of time, maybe six months, a year, whatever. So what are the outcomes when someone embarks on,



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“Yup, we’ll engage team coach or group coach.” “We’re going to do it monthly. We’re going to reflect, etc. and go the whole haul.” What are the differences in the outcomes that you’ve seen?

JOHN: Yeah. Look, many and varied. I mean it really depends on where the team is at and what they’re trying to achieve. A couple of teams, just for example, is a small team in a big organization that they were the diversity and inclusion team. So they had an important agreement, but they were five people. There were 35,000 in the organization.

MURRAY: Right.

JOHN: So it was a challenge and they came to me because they said, “For whatever reason we’re not getting the cut through with our work that we need to.” So okay. So we’ll just kind of have a look at the team and what ended up happening as a result of the coaching, the team restructured, which was team led. So the leader actually kind of took a step back and the other thing that was an output was the way that they were engaging and communicating with their stakeholders. So kind of prior to the work they were very much the consultant. This is what you should do. Diversity is a good thing.

MURRAY: A lot of telling.

JOHN: Yeah. A lot of telling and they realized that because there wasn’t a bottom line figure attached to diversity, most of the people in the business were going, “Well thanks.”

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So anyway, we worked as a team so that the team had a shared mission and I guess a common purpose, but they had a common way of working with their stakeholders and that was co-created by the team and so it was very much part of the team’s DNA always.

MURRAY: Yeah. Yeah. And I think there’s a piece in that about... That each team in its’ own right having its’ own purpose. There’s that organizational purpose, but within that each team has to find its’ own purpose.

JOHN: Yeah. And in fact one of the definitions of as team is that it has a goal that is not the organizational goal.



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MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Because everyone in the organization in one way or another they have to kind of make the organizational...

MURRAY: Yeah. Okay. Good. Let's get to the first leadership moments question. Your career has been very much about leadership development though I see you've also owned and ran cafés.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Who would you say has influenced you the most in your career?

JOHN: Yeah. There's probably... I'll stick to two people and then obviously there are many. Two women, the first one is a coach, Fleur Dwyer. She was my coach for about a year and then probably another year after that. But her role modeling like, you know, I still remember some of those coaching moments and we're probably looking at 10 to 15 years ago. So in terms of influencing, I think it's always good, a good test of how much they influenced you like how long it's been since you've... kind of saying that you feel very much... It's still very much kind of a part of you. So I do think of the way Fleur coached me and that certainly influences not only my coaching but certainly my leadership.

MURRAY: What is it about what she did that has this influence on you?

JOHN: I think... I would say that what she did and the way she did it. So she would ask some incredible questions and then she would just sit there and allow me to squirm until I answered it. But as much as there was tension and challenge in the coaching and I certainly felt that, there was never a time that I felt unsupported or I felt that she wasn't, you know, kind of rooting for me from the side.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So that incredibly deep support, but that ability to stretch and challenge and then to ask me some questions that I so didn't see coming. I still remember one. So she... we used to coach on the find and... Anyway I was going on... I know I should be talking about this, but I don't really want to talk about it so I can probably just dance around it. At about five minutes in, Fleur said, "So John, what aren't you talking about today?" I go, "Oh my God! That's exactly what I didn't want you to ask me." So she was



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very intuitive, just a wonderful human being with real strength and skill and character and authenticity.

MURRAY: I think a piece in that where you've highlighted there that is really important because sometimes as leaders we coach and support people but we are almost doing it from this point of maybe being their friends as opposed to what you're describing there really whilst creating safe, encouraging supportive relationship but really putting tension in to the challenge and that's where the growth actually happens. So I think for anyone listening, yes, look after the people, but make sure there is some healthy tension there to allow the growth.

JOHN: Absolutely and you need to have the support and trust and rapport there to be able to do the tension, but in the absence of the tension it is like you're just a couple of mates kind of like catching up.

MURRAY: That's right and you're doing no one any favors.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Yeah. Great. And you talked about someone else.

JOHN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The other person is Ann Whyte. Many people will know Ann Whyte although she died last year maybe the year before. So she was a mentor of mine and I met Ann when she was the chair of the standards working group for the coaching organization standard and to see her in action as a leader to hold a fairly large working group together with different opinions and to kind of hold the space to bring people together to write the document that we did. The output was fantastic. To say her leadership was fantastic, but experiencing being part of the impact of her leadership. It's one of those rare opportunities that where this group of people had an incredibly unique and powerful experience together. Everyone that you would speak to that was on the standard will say it was magical. It was all... We kind of talk about it with this cult like fervor because it was so special and Ann played a huge role in that. We used to catch up maybe two or three times a year sometimes for drinks sometimes for lunch and I loved her. She was someone who was generous of spirit. We would share information even though we were competitive and she was always stretching me to kind of, "What's next?" "Where to from here?" And it's not about... She wasn't kind of saying, "Leave us here," but she's going, "What's your next step? You've



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got a lot of potential and particularly in your leadership.” I remember the last lunch we had, you know, and with... along those lines and that was only about six months before she died.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So she is very much kind of present with me.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: And so again her influence was certainly back then, but it’s certainly current now.

MURRAY: And again that tension.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: The challenge.

JOHN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MURRAY: So you’re very much a leader now in the coaching profession industry.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: And you talked about the Standards Committee. You’re very involved in the International Coaching Federation from an Australian point of view and representing overseas. What is it that brought you to coaching? What was the journey? How did you get there from running cafés?

JOHN: It’s kind of funny because it was very much by accident. [laughter] I kind of don’t feel at all responsible for the fact of me becoming a coach. The short story is I sold my last café in the beginning of ’96 and I came back to Sydney and decided that I would set up a small business consultancy. So I found a couple of small businesses. I got a marketing degree and I thought I’d mix that together to help small business owners work smart rather than work hard.



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MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Anyway, so I started setting that up and it was a kind of a whole of business gig and a friend of mine said, “Look if you’re doing this, you should do this course,” which was William Glasser’s Choice Theory. That’s not a coaching program, but it had some good leadership management things. So it was good. Anyway embedded in there was this framework that again wasn’t called coaching, but it absolutely kind of follows a coaching framework. So I took that out and I started working with my clients and I started doing this and I started thinking, “You know, I really enjoy the people side of things. That’s the piece that I want to focus on.” And I was using this with my clients and getting good results and then quite by accident I guy called Robert Gerrish, he was one of the first coaches I met. Anyway, he’s a solo flyer. So we were both working in the small business field and so he said, “Now look here, do you want to catch up for a chat? We seem to be in the same business.” “Fine. That would be great.” Did that. What do you do? This is what I do. He said, “Now that sounds like coaching.” I go, “What’s that?”

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: And I had absolutely no idea. So it was Robert who introduced me to the ICF. We went to the first ICF meeting here in Sydney and from then kind of moved into coaching, obviously did some formal coach specific training and stayed with the ICF from there, but I kind of feel like it was more serendipitous. There was something else going on.

MURRAY: Something... yeah.

JOHN: God knows I didn’t know what I was doing. [laughter]

MURRAY: Just a reminder. Send me your leadership moments and we’ll share the learning and insights in future episodes. All are welcome, the serious, the amusing, the weird and wonderful. Whatever you’ve got, share it with us. Simply follow the link to Your Leadership Moments in the Show Notes or find it on the podcast page at murraywright.com.au. Now back to our guest.

Let’s get to the second question and maybe you’ve answered it already I don’t know, but what was your ‘aha’ moment? The moment when you understood what leadership was all about.

JOHN: Yeah. Look, I remember I used to work for a company called Yellow Edge,



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which is a Canberra based leadership development HR consultancy. I used to head up their coaching practice. You know, a reasonable sized business and I always remember Andy Gregory. He was the CEO and there was a year that we had where it was a tough year. There were business challenges. There were people challenges. There was... They bought a new office and it was moving into that and it wasn't quite finished but the lease was up, you know. It was just a difficult year on a number of levels. I look back at that year and remember how Andy led through that. My take out was... I guess this is that kind of 'aha' moment. Actually good leadership in good times is kind of easy.

MURRAY: It is. Yes.

JOHN: But good leadership in bad times is where you actually get tested.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: And so I just thought, "That was a really good lesson." Because we came out of that... He led the people. He led the business. He led the clients and he was able to navigate through that really challenging time in an incredibly positive way even though there was a lot of stuff that would have been going on kind of behind the scenes.

MURRAY: So there was the positivity about it. Anything else that struck out, stood out for you? You're saying, you know, that's what leadership is.

JOHN: Look. I think the honesty was probably the thing that... Andy was just up front and he would say, "This is going on and you know what, I haven't worked out what to do about it," or "I don't know what the next step is." So he was... I guess he was confident enough to sit in this space and allow something to emerge which is kind of how we need to as an adaptive leader I guess and communicate that with people. I mean he was always very positive. He was a bit of a Pollyanna in terms of kind of the optimism scale which was good. The other thing, I mean he communicated to everyone. I was one of the more senior people in the organization, but there were a number of administrators who were fresh out of uni and, you know, their first job and kind of avant garde, what's... Is this what work life is like?

MURRAY: Yes. Yes.

JOHN: You know, this was the first cycle that they'd seen. To see him work with those people and help them to feel okay about coming to work was a real inspiration.



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MURRAY: And I love that bit about being willing to share that he doesn't know and I think this comes up again and again when you talk to people...

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: About leaders having that... being willing to be vulnerable.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: And say that because half the time we put so much pressure on ourselves trying to find the answers. If we don't know just tell people.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: And they'll follow you.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: "That's fine. I just wanted to know. Now I know where I stand."

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Brilliant.

JOHN: And I think that the... talking about the adaptive leadership and we've got the agile kind of movement sweeping the world at the moment.

MURRAY: Yes.

JOHN: But the whole notion of living in a complex world is that we may not know... We may know the next step, but we're probably going to review that in order to work out the next step. So this kind of big plan is rarer than common, but I think everyone still likes the certainty of having that even though it may not be the reality.

MURRAY: Yeah. Yes. That's interesting. That's another debate.

JOHN: It is.



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MURRAY: So third and final question. In terms of your work and what you've done, what would you say is your biggest failure and how does that inform your leadership today?

JOHN: Yeah. I'm thinking quite memorable. [laughter] as failures go

MURRAY: The best one. The best one, John.

JOHN: It wasn't a kind of a huge failure, but I remember I was working at Yellow Edge and there was in the coaching practice there was myself and there were five other full-time staff and we had all the contract coaches. Anyway we had an offsite with just the five full-time, me and the five full-time and I can't remember how it came about... Then I got some feedback and the feedback was, "John, you're always so positive." And I go, "I know. That's kind of by design. That's how I want to be," when I thought of it. The feedback that I got was, "Yeah, but it can't always be good. It can't always be positive and if you're always positive then we don't know whether you're a volcano about to erupt or whether you're being authentic or what do you do when you're upset or angry because you never show that to us." The take away for this is that it was having a negative impact on the trust in the relationship because, "Can I trust you to show up what's really going on," and the authenticity. That just stunned like I was going, "Oh my God, this is how I want to be. I want to be high trust, authentic, positive." But the positive was working against that and I guess when I looked into emotional intelligence, one of the things that breeds authenticity is demonstrating a range of emotions. That's one of the things. But I always... It just struck me as completely unintentional, but the impact that it was having was so not what I wanted to do.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So not what I wanted to do and so I really... It may not be a kind of failure in kind of disaster crisis, but it was failure in terms of me consciously doing something with having the opposite effect.

MURRAY: Yeah. What did you learn from it?

JOHN: What I've learned is... I still, you know, I would still see me as a generally very positive and optimistic person, but I guess what I've done is... There are times where I'm far more comfortable to kind of say how I'm feeling and it's interesting because I know that sometimes there is fallout from that. So the authenticity doesn't mean that it's plain sailing. It actually means that the conversations that you have kind of vary



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accordingly. So a classic one is... I remember coming into work and just saying, "Ah, God I'm just exhausted," which I probably wouldn't have said, "It was a busy week and great to have a..." So I wouldn't have not said it, but I would have said it in probably a more positive way.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: So then there was whole bit of concern about my well-being and what was going on and do I need some time off and is everything okay. I go, "No. No. I'm fine. I'm just tired." But for me I think it's better to have that range of who you are and share that with others. I think that it's not sharing everything with everybody.

MURRAY: No. It's again different situations, different people.

JOHN: Correct.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah. But it is that kind of... It's emotional and social intelligence. Knowing what you're feeling. How do I communicate what I'm feeling? What's the impact of that on others?

MURRAY: Yes. And more and more this comes out. It's impact, impact, impact.

JOHN: Exactly.

MURRAY: How conscious am I of the impact I'm having on others?

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: That was exactly the question when you said we could leave you with a question. You can never know the impact you're having on another person fully unless you have a conversation about it and that requires your having trust there in order to have the conversation, but to regularly check in and, you know, how is the other person? How is my leadership style impacting you? What else could I be doing differently? So it's really understanding that even with the best intention the impact can be quite the opposite. You only know that because they tell you. So a kind of



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reflective question for leaders is how often do you check in with everyone that are kind of key to your success in terms of how the way that you're working is landing on them.

MURRAY: That's great advice. It's a great suggestion as well because you're right. We often get so busy doing and we forget to just be and check in with people around us.

JOHN: Yeah. That's the thing in teaching, coaching to leaders is, it's not rocket science, but the amount of time that leaders spend asking questions, especially personal questions, is next to zero.

MURRAY: Next to zero.

JOHN: Yeah.

MURRAY: Thank you. Before we do finish off, when people want to reach out and contact you, John, how can they get hold of you?

JOHN: Look, through IECL is probably the easiest way. So our website is iecl.com or LinkedIn. So...

MURRAY: John Raymond on LinkedIn.

JOHN: John Raymond IECL and you'll find my smiling mug there.

MURRAY: Beautiful. We'll put all those things and also your reference Clutterbuck, Lencioni; we'll put those in the Show Resources so people can check that out as well for themselves.

JOHN: The only other resource that I'd put in for the team coaching is Peter Hawkins.

MURRAY: Yeah.

JOHN: Because he's certainly the thought leader that needs to be recognized.

MURRAY: Definitely. Definitely.

JOHN: Great.

MURRAY: Thank you for sharing your leadership moments.



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JOHN: Absolute pleasure.

MURRAY: Thanks John.

JOHN: Thanks for having me. It's been great.

MURRAY: Pleasure. Thank you.

[End of Transcription]



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