



LIANE MCGRATH
DIRECTOR & FOUNDER, THINKTIME
STOP AND THINK

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



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EPISODE 32



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[Start of Transcription]

LIANE: (00:00) I still see that there's a fundamental challenge in that people when they step into a leadership role are never given any support, so they don't learn the basics on how to delegate, how to coach, how to have challenging conversations and it doesn't matter how sophisticated the organization is there's still those fundamental skills that hold people back whatever level of the organization.

[music]

MURRAY: (00:24) 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 I talk with fellow coach Liane McGrath from ThinkTime. Liane talks about the simple but powerful premise of her business, give yourself time to stop and think. And that's where we get the breakthrough moments. She shares her leadership moments and talks about gender in leadership and some of the unconscious biases we have and how they play out at work. I hope you enjoy.

Liane McGrath, welcome to the Leadership Moments Podcast.

LIANE: (01:06) Thank you, Murray. Very nice to be here.

MURRAY: (01:09) Listen, it's great to have you. We've done quite a bit of work together, various situations. Your business is ThinkTime and there's a really pretty powerful premise under that. Do you want to talk about that, because I know you're pretty passionate about it?

LIANE: (01:25) Yeah. Very simply everyone is always talking about not enough time in the day and what they do each day is they do the doing. They don't stop and think. And so my passion is very much about helping people and enabling them to stop and think and do things differently in order to create more effective and efficient ways for them to function and enjoy life.

MURRAY: (01:48) And what happens? What do you see happening when people do stop and think?

LIANE: (01:52) That's when they get the 'aha' moments and that's what I find really rewarding and that's when I feel like I'm adding value to my clients as an individual, as an organization or as a team.



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MURRAY: (02:05) Brilliant. Now you've had a varied career. I would say largely in the marketing side of things. What drew you to the coaching space?

LIANE: (02:14) From a personal point of view I was always everyone's agony aunt and people used to always come to me. And even in the work space I found that I was the person that I would lend my ear to others and what I was realizing was that I would get really involved and enrolled in their dramas and their issues.

MURRAY: (02:33) Right. That's not always a good thing Liane.

LIANE: (02:36) No. And that's probably more on reflection. I came to coaching after I realized the importance of leadership and I went, "You know what? That's actually where I want to work. I want to step out of marketing and I want to get into leadership." So I was marketing manager for a couple of leading car brands and what happened in that organization is that they had different brands that were looked after by different MDs that were all brought together and each MD was promised the role of CEO and as you can imagine three can't go into one and so two of the MDs were very disappointed. What happened as a result of that is that the staff engagement dropped. People started leaving. The culture got very frayed. So what happened as a result of one MD being appointed as CEO was that the other two felt let down and that started to impact throughout the business. So the different brands were impacted, even the brand that I was working for. We were a tight knit team before but you could see that we were starting to fray around the edges. One or two people started to leave. We got new people on board for the other brands that were coming across and there just wasn't this cohesive team. We weren't aligned at the top and that really was filtering through to creating silos and individual thoughts throughout the organization.

MURRAY: (03:58) Brilliant. Thank you. Let's get to that first question we have. Who would you say has influenced you the most in your career?

LIANE: (04:06) It's a really interesting question Murray and the more that I thought about it really does go back to family. I think I have led a very very privileged life and I have a wonderful family that's been a very strong family unit and on top of that I had very strong women around me from both my grandmothers and my mother, but also from teachers as well. And so the first real stand-out moment for me was a teacher called Mrs. Hoskins when I was in sixth class, so in primary school who told my mother and father that I could be anything that I wanted to be. And we were in a



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small country town and people don't always dream big in small country towns, but it was interesting that it planted a seed with Mum and Dad and they did everything that they could possibly do to give me the opportunity to achieve what I wanted so much so that when I was in high school and the careers advisor asked me what I wanted to be and I said I wanted to be a lawyer. He laughed at me and I went home, told Mum and she went straight down to the school and had a few words with him and said...

MURRAY: (05:10) Had a chat.

LIANE: (05:10) "How dare you shatter her dreams." And, you know, my parents then continued to in hard times in the building industry put me through schooling they really couldn't afford but they did whatever they could to give me that opportunity.

MURRAY: (05:28) So how has that served you, not so much in your career but as a coach, that whole strong family support and understanding that you can do what you want to do?

LIANE: (05:44) I think it's got two ways that it serves me. One, it's about that optimism and that tenacity and that persistence and there's always a different way. So the path that I thought I was going to take in my career I didn't take. I took another path.

MURRAY: (05:59) So you didn't become a lawyer.

LIANE: (06:01) No, but I had the opportunity and my father said, "We will put you through university if that's really what your dream is." And I said, "No, it's not anymore. It's changed."

MURRAY: (06:10) Yeah.

LIANE: (06:11) So take what opportunity faces you but I think the other thing is the flip side of that is that I do come from a very tight family unit and not everyone does. And so I think that I'm also cognizant that I can't put my thoughts and my experiences in the way of the conversation. I really have to step out of me and step into the coachee's situation, show that empathy.

MURRAY: (06:38) Nice. Now you've... In your coaching work you do a lot of work with women in the work place. What sort of stuff comes up? What's going on in that space?

LIANE: (06:52) It's interesting. I've done a lot of work in transitioning women and supporting women in and out of parental leave. It's something that I am also very



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passionate about. But again there is that common thread is that women don't stop and think. They don't stop and think about their career. They all have this belief that, "Oh, I'm just going to set my head down, my bum up and I'm going to do a great job and I'm going to get noticed."

MURRAY: (07:14) Yeah.

LIANE: (07:15) And we all know that doesn't work and then the other piece on that is that women do generally, and I know it's a generalization, but they don't seem to have as much confidence. And I think it's a cultural thing. You know, one of my coachees once said something to me which really resonated. She said, "I can't believe that I went to my sisters' on the weekend and I said to my nephew, you know, 'Wow! That's fantastic. Look what you've just built.'" And I said to my niece, "Wow! Isn't your dress pretty." And she said... All of a sudden I stopped and realized, "Look what we reward our children for. It's completely different." And so, you know, we have gender gap issues and it's, you know, so much a topic of conversation to the point that it gets overplayed and I do think there's gender fatigue out there and everyone's like, "Haven't we fixed that yet?" But we're not going to fix it until we fix it at a cultural level and the only way we can do that is from an individual point of view. So, you know, I think that comes back to my coaching where if I'm talking to men, I really encourage them to look at each individual as an individual not part of gender and challenge their assumptions, their biases, etc. that they have and I think, you know, the same for a female. It's really about encouraging them to do things differently, to stop and think. You know, if it wasn't you and you were in somebody else's shoes, how would they approach this situation. So it's no different to how a coach would approach any situation. I just think it's got more of a focus on how we can support and nurture and create that equality throughout organizations in society.

MURRAY: (08:57) It's a massive topic, isn't it, and we could talk for hours. You've said some pretty powerful stuff and I like the way you framed it. We've all got to stop and think about it in how we approach it and what should be coming out from our deep-set beliefs and thoughts about these things.

LIANE: (09:14) Absolutely. Absolutely.

MURRAY: (09:17) I hope you're enjoying the show. I just wanted to take a moment to remind you that you'll find great leadership questions from our guests at murraywright.com.au/leadership-questions or follow the link in the Show Notes and



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while you're there, why not share your favorite questions.

And now, back to our guest.

So second question, what was your 'aha' moment? The moment that you suddenly understood what leadership was all about?

LIANE: (09:47) Yeah. That one is absolutely that experience in the car industry. Three MDs told that they're going to be CEO and the impact that that had on the organization. And that's when I said, "You know what? I love what I do in marketing and in the car industry. You get to do some pretty cool stuff. However, I didn't feel like I was adding enough value and making enough of a difference." And I went, "Wow! Isn't it wonderful? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to play in that space where you can encourage and support and enable others to be better leaders and create that leadership throughout organizations?"

MURRAY: (10:25) Was there a particular moment? Was it, you know, I imagine this played out over a few months. Did it sort of just happen gradually or was there that bolt of lightning that hit you between the eyes?

LIANE: (10:38) It was a bolt of lightning Murray and it was over a beer in London.
[laughter]

MURRAY: (10:42) Alright.

LIANE: (10:44) I actually left the car industry and orchestrated an exit for myself and I went overseas for three months and I was at a party in London and I was speaking to these guys and I said, "So what do you do?" And they said, "Oh, we do leadership." And I said, "What do you mean?" And they said, "Well, we're an organization that's focused on developing leadership throughout organizations." And I went, "That's it! That's what I want to do." And I came back to Australia and knocked on their door and said, "I want to work with you." And they said, "You want to do it in marketing?" I went, "No!" [laughter] "I want to understand how you do what you do and be part of that." And that's when I started upskilling, re-skilling, doing all of my coaching training and doing a lot of coach facilitation and reading, etc. to understand what this leadership thing was all about.

MURRAY: (11:33) Brilliant! And I think there's a lot of work in that re-training and actually getting, understanding what it is. Because I know myself when I thought I was going to be a coach. I quickly learned I didn't have a clue.



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LIANE: (11:46) And it never stops.

MURRAY: (11:48) Yeah.

LIANE: (11:48) You know, some days I walk away from a coaching engagement and I go, "Wow! You know what? I'm a good coach." And other days I walk away and go, "Oh God! Where's my coaching supervisor? I need to have a chat." [laughter]

MURRAY: (12:00) So how long have you been coaching then?

LIANE: (12:02) I think 2006.

MURRAY: (12:05) 2006.

LIANE: (12:06) Yeah, 12 years.

MURRAY: (12:07) Okay. Yeah. And are you seeing anything change in the workplace in terms of challenges and problems that people are encountering?

LIANE: (12:17) I think it depends on the organization and the sophistication of their learning and development. So I still see that there's a fundamental challenge in that people when they step into a leadership role are never given any support. So they don't learn the basics on how to delegate, how to coach, how to have challenging conversations. And it doesn't matter how sophisticated the organization is. There are still those fundamental skills that hold people back whatever level of the organization. Because we see some very senior leaders who still can't delegate very well.

MURRAY: (12:52) Yeah. Yeah, and I think we do work on that, giving feedback and difficult conversations, and I often find it's the guy who is at the top who are the worst at it. They're terrible.

LIANE: (13:03) Absolutely, because... And again this is how our culture has been. People get rewarded for fantastic performance on what they've done on the outcome but not necessarily how and that's where we need to continue to focus on, how people do things because that's the bit that creates the culture.

MURRAY: (13:22) Yes. Now, third and final question, this is the one about failure.



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LIANE: (13:28) Yes.

MURRAY: (13:28) So what was your biggest failure and never mind the failure but the important part is how does that inform your leadership today?

LIANE: (13:36) Yeah. Absolutely. When I was reflecting on this, I think there are two and they all lead into the same thing.

So I had a direct report who had come across to work with me from our ad agency and he was my credit manager and he said to me, "There's an opportunity for me to apply for a marketing manager in another brand. I think I'm going to put my hand up. And I went, "Oh, you know, you've only been here 12, 14 months and you've still got things to learn and don't know if it's the right time." Thankfully he didn't listen to me. [laughter] He stuck his hand up, got the marketing gig and that's when I went, "Oh, you know what? That was so wrong of me to have that conversation. I should have supported him in his endeavors and looked at the bigger picture." If I looked at the bigger picture, he had the skills. He had the knowledge. He had the experience, wanted to get into the car industry and did that through this role. But he absolutely deserved the role that he got and he's gone on to bigger and better things. And as a leader, I need to think for the organization not just for my team and that individual. So that was, you know, the first one.

The second one was when my CFO, who was a pretty big influence on me, turned around and he said, "You know when you walk in every morning, Liane, it wouldn't hurt you to say hello to the people in the accounts department." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You walk in with a scowl on your face. You go up to your desk and you do your work." I said, "Oh, but I'm really busy. I'm really busy." And he said, "It doesn't matter." And I took that away and thought, "Okay. I think I'm a great communicator and that's what my business, you know, that's what I'm all about. Let's see what happens." So I started to say hello to the accounts department and stop and have a chat and funnily enough it made everything dealing with them much easier. So for me it is those two things that really got me to turn around and that's that stop and think piece. Stop. Take time. Engage with people. Understand them. Think about what you're doing. It's not just about you. There's a bigger context. Think about it from the organizational perspective. Think about it from the team perspective. Think about it from the individual's perspective. And I think that's what I try bringing into everything that I do as a coach.



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MURRAY: (15:55) Yeah. I love that bit that's talking... To talk to people and again it's so typical. People just get so busy.

LIANE: (16:01) And I do that when I got to my floor but it was, you know, "Oh no. I'm just walking through here."

MURRAY: (16:06) Yeah.

LIANE: (16:06) "And I'm sure they're all very busy, so they wouldn't want to talk to me either." And you just put your head down and march through.

MURRAY: (16:14) Lovely. Lovely. So I've got this thing going at the moment. I'm collecting questions and we put the questions up on the website. We've got a page on the website, Leadership Questions. What's one or two of your favorite questions you use with people that you find creates that thought - reflection?

LIANE: (16:37) So if I think about my favorite questions again it's probably more from the context piece. Why is this important and who is it important to?

MURRAY: (16:45) Yup.

LIANE: (16:46) Because we get so insular and we only think about it from our perspective.

MURRAY: (16:50) Yeah. Yeah. Nice. Nice. So really getting other... Sitting in the other chair in a sense.

LIANE: (16:57) Absolutely. Absolutely.

MURRAY: (16:59) Lovely. Lovely. Liane, thank you. A great little chat this morning. If people want to reach out and connect with you, what's the best way for them to do that?

LIANE: (17:09) They can contact me through LinkedIn or they can send me an email, liane@thinktime.com.au.

MURRAY: (17:15) Liane McGrath, thank you very much for sharing your leadership moments. Have a great day.



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LIANE: (17:20) Thanks Murray. You too.

MURRAY: (17:22) What a great discussion. I really like Liane's suggestion to stop and think about our beliefs and our assumptions and to reflect on how we can become the change we want to see. At the end of the day that's what leadership is all about. Thank you for listening. Until the next time.

[music]

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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