



BONNY RAWSON

WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



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EPISODE 56

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

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BONNY: (00:00) What I expect from leaders that have been in the industry for a while is the willingness to listen to new ideas in a fresh perspective and the value of innovation and thinking outside the box. You know, working in big corporations, you sometimes get stuck in that red tape or the way of thinking. So, having that kind of openness is really motivating to let you speak your voice and voice your opinions and be confident in what you're saying.

[music]

MURRAY: (00:33) Welcome to my podcast. I'm Murray Wright and this is Leadership Moments, real peoples stories about the people and the moments that have shaped their leadership. I hope they give you new insights and some inspiration to be a better leader, make a better world and live a better life.

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(00:54) Today we listen to a different voice and perspective. Bonny Rawson is a young, up and coming leader and she's also an indigenous woman. Bonny shares her indigenous history and explains the challenges of walking between two worlds. She talks about her passion for giving back and gives us insights into the needs and expectations that young people have of their leaders today. I'm sure you'll enjoy.

Bonny Rawson, welcome to Leadership Moments.

BONNY: (01:26) Thanks, Murray.

MURRAY: (01:27) It's great to have you with us. Now you are a product technologist with one of the major food retailers. Can you tell us a bit about what it is you do?

BONNY: (01:40) Yeah. So, a product technologist looks after the quality, safety and legality of our own brand products. So, a lot of my job is working with suppliers and making sure that they're producing products per our standards of quality and responsible sourcing and all that kind of thing and also working internally to help launch new products and I guess just manage all the products that we sell at our stores.

MURRAY: (02:12) Brilliant! Now, you're a young, indigenous woman in the corporate world. What has been your journey to bring you to where you are today?

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

BONNY: (02:21) I guess, I thought...

MURRAY: (02:22) And maybe before that, just give us a background. Where are you from? What's your mob...?

BONNY: (02:28) Yeah. So, I'm a Ballardong Noongar woman. So that means that my family are from... Noongar people are from the South West of WA and Ballardong people are two to three hours just east of Perth in the Wheatbelt region. So that's where my mum's from. I grew up in Perth though, in the Fremantle Cottesloe area and I went to school and I was lucky to go to a really great school and I really enjoyed... I so really enjoyed the sciences and that kind of thing. So, when I finished school I thought that was probably a path I'd like to pursue and I went to an open day at a university in WA, Curtin University, and I saw the food science stall and they were doing all these different flavour tests and I thought it was really interesting, so I thought that I'd give it a go and I really loved the degree. So, I did my three-year food science degree and then a year of Honours. After Honours I found out about a program called Career Trackers, which is an indigenous internship program that helps link indigenous students into the corporate world. So, with them I got an internship at Qantas with Q Catering and then after that I taught at university and then I got offered a job at the distribution centre for the retailer that I work for. So, I worked there for a year and a half and found out about the graduate program and got into the graduate program and that continued on through that journey and progressing my career within the company.

MURRAY: (04:10) Fantastic! Now, I met you through Career Trackers. What difference did Career Trackers make for you?

BONNY: (04:18) I think CareerTrackers... Because they have quite a big support network and you get some really great student advisors. They guide you through going from university to corporate which is such a different world. I think already it's probably different enough just being a student, but then being a young aboriginal student as well there's all those things to navigate. So, they provide that support network, someone to kind of bounce off if you're struggling or not being able to fit in and they link you up with companies that they think are aligned to what you're after. I think that it was really great that I got that internship with Qantas in Q Catering because that really helped kick start my understanding of food in the corporate space and by influencing changed there. And they've been a great support for me still after that. I found out about them in my last year at uni, unfortunately. I wish I found out

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

about them earlier, but I've also continued to be really engaged with the program and participate in networking events and alumni events and the gala leadership phase that they have every year as well.

MURRAY: (05:26) You talked there about the challenges that indigenous students face. What are some of those challenges?

BONNY: (05:33) Well, for me as well doing the internship in Sydney to start off with, it was being away from family and all my support network. So, being a bit isolated in that way. But then also you come into the corporate space and you might often be here and be like the only brown face that you see around here. I guess just a different way of upbringing that can make you feel a bit isolated or alone in the corporate space.

MURRAY: (06:01) Right. Yeah. Because you're a young indigenous woman in the corporate world, are there many... This sounds a bit of a naïve question, are there many indigenous people around you in the business itself? Or are you one of the few?

BONNY: (06:18) I feel like I'm one of the few in the area that I'm in. The company is doing a lot with the indigenous strategy and have employed a whole range of indigenous people but it's in different areas of the business. So, in my immediate area that I work with day-to-day I think I'm one of the few that's here. So, it's still kind of something being alone and the only indigenous person is something that I've adjusted to over the few years that I've been working.

MURRAY: (06:49) Right. What is that being alone? And we talked about once before. You talked about being isolated. What is that experience? I think it would be good to understand that a bit more.

BONNY: (07:05) Yeah. I guess it's just... You know, having someone that understands you and where you're coming from and maybe how your experiences might differ to other people's. I think, obviously aboriginal people are all about community and family and that kind of thing, so you've always grown up with a whole raft of people surrounding you and now you're working with people that have had this very different life experiences to yourself. So, that's probably one of the ways that I think I feel a bit alone in the workplace.

MURRAY: (07:40) Yeah. And how do you manage that? How do you work to overcome it?

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

BONNY: (07:46) I think from my experience being an aboriginal woman, you just end up being able to navigate like walking between two worlds and you find that common ground with your co-workers and colleagues and then just kind of... I guess being able to operate in a different mindset in the corporate space.

MURRAY: (08:10) Does that put stress or challenge on you? So, you walk with a different mindset in the world at work. What about when you're back in the other world, your indigenous world? Does that then create challenges there?

BONNY: (08:26) Well, I feel like I always have that kind of identity conflict about not being able to fully identify with either, the corporate space or the western kind of norm and then also being able to be kind of black enough so then 100% with your indigenous side. So, sometimes you can experience a bit of a backlash with detachment from both sides. But I think it's always something that I've had to do as well. So, I think you end up getting used to it or like navigating it so that you can work it out internally with yourself, you know?

MURRAY: (09:13) Yeah.

BONNY: (09:15) Because I grew up in a predominantly affluent white area and then coming home to a mixed indigenous family because my mum's indigenous and my dad's not...

MURRAY: (09:24) Yeah.

BONNY: (09:25) ... that wasn't so affluent. So, I always had kind of two ways that I...I had two sides of operating kind of.

MURRAY: (09:32) I just want to take a moment to let you know about my new website at www.murraywright.com.au. It has a whole load of resources including all the Leadership Moments Podcasts, the Leadership Questions, blogs and free tools that you can download. There's also a great download, "Leadership, it's all in your mind," a three-part series giving you more understanding of how the mind and body works to help improve focus, make more conscious decisions and change habits. Use the link in the Show Notes or go to www.murraywright.com.au/mind. That's www.murraywright.com.au/mind.

And now, back to our guest.

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

Let's go into that first Leadership Moments question. Who has influenced you the most?

BONNY: (10:21) I think my mum and my family. I'm the oldest of my siblings and I think my mum always pushed me to make sure that I made the most of every opportunity that I had and making the most of... Yeah, because she never had that opportunity given to her. So she just wanted to make sure that we were doing the best that we could. Then the struggles that my family had to face and overcome. So that's really inspired me to keep pushing myself and it's driven me to... I want to inspire the younger generations of my family who are coming through so that they know that they can be whatever they want to be and there's a whole world out there with so many different options for them. So, I think, yeah, just my mum pushing us, and my family's struggles have made me the way that I am

MURRAY: (11:16) When you talk about your family's struggles, are you happy to share what they were?

BONNY: (11:24) Yeah. I won't get into it too much but, you know, in the family we've got a history of mental illness and I think something that's common in the indigenous community is intergenerational trauma where you have the deep seated issues which are passed onto the children and the fact that the trauma just kind of continues on. So just probably overcoming those things or seeing how that can affect community has made me want to make the most of everything.

MURRAY: (11:57) Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. And that inherited trauma... I think it's often underestimated and it's very serious. It does pass through.

BONNY: (12:08) Yeah. I agree. I think people underestimate the effects the it can have. Like how widespread those issues can be and also, I think it's good to be a self-reflective person and see how that can influence as well.

MURRAY: (12:23) Yeah.

BONNY: (12:23) Because sometimes people living in the moment might not even realize it.

MURRAY: (12:27) Yeah. I'm thinking for people... If anyone is interested in this I'll put a

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

link to a video that talks about how stress affects the brain and it actually talks a little bit about epigenetics and how stress is passed down through generations and gives an explanation of that. So, it would be interesting for people to watch that.

Now, one of the reasons I wanted you on the show as well is to talk to you. You're a young, upcoming, indigenous leader and whilst sharing your leadership moments, I think it's a great opportunity for more established leaders to hear from a younger voice really about what their experience of leadership is. So, from your side, as you're building your career and working away, what is it you need from your leaders? What do you need from the leadership around you? What are your expectations I suppose?

BONNY: (13:30) Yeah. I think, what I expect from leaders that have been in the industry for a while is a willingness to listen to new ideas in a fresh perspective and the value of innovation and thinking outside the box because I know that working in big corporations, you sometimes get stuck in that red tape or the way of thinking. So, having that kind of openness is really motivating to let you speak your voice and voice your opinion and be confident in what you're saying. Yeah.

MURRAY: (14:08) So, what is it you can... You know, we're not saying you experience this all the time, but what are the things that you experience that maybe frustrate you around this? What are people doing? And a lot of the time people will be doing this, they won't be conscious of it.

BONNY: (14:25) Yeah. I think, maybe taking that second to let people in the meeting room or in the environment have that opportunity to speak up because I think sometimes you can get a bit... Well I know I can get a bit... I find it a bit hard to speak my opinion and speak up for myself and what I believe in. So, maybe just having that few seconds longer to let that person in the room voice their opinion would be good.

MURRAY: (14:55) Yeah. So, what I'm hearing is give people the opportunity and the space to contribute and give their views and opinions.

BONNY: (15:02) Yeah.

MURRAY: (15:03) And actually listen to them, I suppose.

BONNY: (15:04) Yeah.



MURRAY: (15:04) Yeah. That's beautiful.

BONNY: (15:06) Yeah.

MURRAY: (15:07) Because I think it's a good point because often, we're in such a hurry, such a rush. We just want to get stuff done and we miss out on a whole load of good stuff that's there and we just got to stop and give people the opportunity to speak.

BONNY: (15:22) Yeah. Yeah. Young people definitely have a lot of things to contribute and I know some are very outspoken and can definitely do this themselves but then there are some maybe that just need that extra support or help to get them to that comfort level to be able to speak their minds.

MURRAY: (15:42) That extra support to get them to that level, what is that? What does that look like?

BONNY: (15:48) I think I've been lucky that I've had really great managers that have spent time with me to work out what I want to do and I know what I'm doing in my work and how they can help support. And then also like mentors in and outside the company as well, which have always been supportive. So yeah.

MURRAY: (16:08) What I'm hearing, there's a really important part about sitting down with someone and working out what it is they want and how you can help them to get there.

BONNY: (16:17) Yeah.

MURRAY: (16:18) And I hear you also saying you've got mentors within and outside the company and I think that's a really valuable point for people at any stage in their career to get different views and different support to help them on the way.

BONNY: (16:32) Yeah. Definitely. Because I guess it's good to have people in the organization because they can help you navigate the business.

MURRAY: (16:40) Yeah.

BONNY: (16:40) But then it's also good to get someone outside the business because

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they have a fresh set of eyes, a different way of working, they've worked in different industries, so they always have really valuable opinions as well.

MURRAY: (16:53) That's fantastic! What gets you out of bed in the morning? What excites you?

BONNY: (17:02) I think that I just really love my job. I work with a really great team. I'm really motivated because I have a lot of different projects in different types of work going on. It's not like a mundane day-to-day.

MURRAY: (17:16) Yes.

BONNY: (17:17) And I'm just really passionate about, I guess, all the stuff that I've got going on because I really love what I do in working with food and making sure that it's safe to eat and the different challenges that you might get every day that you need to think of a different way of approaching it.

MURRAY: (17:31) Yeah. And that brings me... I actually meant to ask this question, when it comes to food safety... We're in this fast-moving world, we've got people who are wanting more organic, natural products, less preservatives where people are talking about packaging, etc., what are some of the challenges you are facing in meeting customer expectations but maintaining food safety?

BONNY: (17:57) The challenging part is keeping up with the ever-changing customer needs because they're obviously changing so quickly as well and you need to be able to keep up to... Be relevant but also be offering the best products that you can and meet their needs for organic or no preservatives or whatever. So, all of these things can impact on the food that you're eating, so it's kind of about finding those different ways of... You know, maybe having a natural preservative or something like a different way of doing things that still maintains the food safety. And same with packaging. I guess in the past it's always been used to help preserve shelf life generally, but now looking at a recyclable way of doing that or a way of still delivering a fresh product to a customer and reducing that outer layer of packaging. So, it's just a different way of looking at solving a problem and knowing that you need to do it quickly.

MURRAY: (18:53) Yeah. So, there's a different way and speed that you need to incorporate. Brilliant!

BONNY: (18:57) Yeah.



BONNY RAWSON
WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 56 murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: (18:58) So, second question, what has been one of your 'aha' moments, when you've understood what leadership was all about?

BONNY: (19:10) I guess I had snippets here and there but probably the turning point was like in my role just having to stop a production because obviously that has a big flow-on effect because you aren't able to launch the product in line with the timeline that it was supposed to be in stores and you're stopping a whole factory from operating because it wasn't meeting our expectations. I had to make that tough decision. I guess that helped me realize that I can make those decisions. I know people are going to back me for that if I have a good grounding, reason for why I did it. So, I think that was probably a big change or step, 'aha' moment for leadership.

MURRAY: (20:03) What precisely was the 'aha' moment in that?

BONNY: (20:07) I guess making a tough decision and standing by when you're getting challenged by a few different stakeholders.

MURRAY: (20:14) Yeah.

BONNY: (20:15) And I think that's a big thing because as you move up the corporate ladder you're always going to be faced with making a challenging decision, so sticking to your guns and making the right decision in the moment is I think what makes a strong leader.

MURRAY: (20:32) Absolutely! I'm interested in the anatomy of that decision. How did you come to that? Because that must have been huge for you to make that call. So how did you get to that? In a sense how did you resource yourself to have the strength to get to the decision?

BONNY: (20:52) I guess just looking at how the production was tracking and how the product was turning out both those previous time we'd looked at it and just knowing that it wasn't, it was going to disappoint customer as well. Having that kind of criteria helped me make that decision and backed myself when I was getting challenges from other people in the business.

MURRAY: (21:19) And what sort of thinking supported you? What was the inner dialogue?

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

BONNY: (21:27) I think in our industry it's always like thinking about what the customer wants and needs. So, looking at it and thinking is this really going to put us... Like have a good... Like a brand reputation or look like a good product that we would be proud to have on the shelf. So, I think that's probably the one driving thing at that moment. So just thinking about the expectations of other people helps me make that decision.

MURRAY: (22:03) Brilliant! Now Bonny, you're pretty passionate. You're passionate about food but you're also passionate about giving back which you've touched upon earlier. What ways do you give back?

BONNY: (22:20) With Career Trackers internship program I was the Alumni State Rep for a couple of years, helping to kind of bring people together. I graduated from the program and maintaining those networks and driving the program here in Melbourne. And then now I'm also on the advisory committee for CSIRO, for young indigenous girls that are interested in STEM careers which is something I'm passionate about because I have a STEM career and I'm also indigenous and there's not many of us in this space. So, providing that extra support and that network is something that I'm really keen on.

MURRAY: (23:03) Just when you say STEM career, Bonny, what is STEM?

BONNY: (23:09) Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

MURRAY: (23:11) Yup. Yup.

BONNY: (23:12) The role of the advisory committee is to, I guess, give feedback on what's worthwhile, maybe what's not, what's a better way of doing things, what's the way of engaging and making sure that the culture is maintained as well as showing them the career opportunities. So yeah. So that's what's happening this year.

MURRAY: (23:33) Fantastic! Fantastic! You touched on it again there. So, maintaining culture but building career. Is there anything to add on what we discussed earlier around that?

BONNY: (23:48) Yeah. You know, you always want that strength of self or that strong self-identity. So, maintaining your cultural heritage and your understanding of that is really empowering while taking that into the workplace knowing who you are and

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

being strong in yourself because that's how you make strong decisions and become a strong leader. Because if you're always kind of self-doubting or have that disconnect then it can be hard. And I think that... You know, obviously, from history and stuff there hasn't been much pride in being aboriginal but now we know all these things about agricultural practices that aboriginal people have had for years or that we were one of the first astronomers in... Yeah, through what we've done in the past. So just kind of having that knowledge and that strength of culture can be really empowering.

MURRAY: (24:43) Last time we talked you mentioned about your... And it was talking about your mum and the challenges faced there and there's some stuff you said which is... It's so recent but it's quite... I think it's good to understand it, some of the challenges that were faced by people like your mum. Do you want to talk a bit about that?

BONNY: (25:08) Yeah. Yeah. Well I mean my mum was ten years old when the government made the decision to acknowledge aboriginal people as citizens of Australia and not just as flora and fauna. So, can you imagine growing up with that and you're not even considered an Australian citizen.

MURRAY: (25:26) Yeah.

BONNY: (25:27) And then like further on from that just probably the different parliaments and stuff that aboriginal people had to overcome and going from maybe limited education to now a lot more opportunities in where you can go and what you can do. So growing up in that kind of timeframe would have been super challenging and such a change as well going from that to where we are now.

MURRAY: (25:59) Now, biggest failure? You know, we talk about failures and they're really the learning opportunities. Is there anything that you've gone through that really informs your leadership today and how you go about things?

BONNY: (26:17) I feel like working in a corporate environment, and a really fast-paced one at that, that you need to learn quickly. So, there's been a few things that I've failed and really, I guess, overcome and made sure not to make the same mistake again. Probably... You know, being like... I feel like it was everyone, but time management and knowing the urgency and how quickly you have to move was probably a big failure earlier on.

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MURRAY: (26:46) Okay. Yeah.

BONNY: (26:46) Now I know about sticking to timelines and working through that. But maybe also some things that I'm still working on would just be, something that I'm still learning and developing is speaking up for myself because I feel like it let me down in the past where maybe I hadn't spoken up for myself and then other people have maybe taken credit for the work or taken that acknowledgement because I haven't been so vocal in what I've been doing. So, I think that's something that I'm a lot better at but still continuing to develop.

MURRAY: (27:19) Still continuing. Brilliant! So, a couple of questions as we start to wind up here, what excites you about the future for yourself in your career?

BONNY: (27:33) I guess just how quickly... So, in food and retail, like how quickly our customer base is changing and like we talked about before, all the changing requirements for natural and organic and no-preservatives and convenience food as well and changing eating habits. So, because customers are changing so quickly with technology and everything as well, just having to adapt to that and move quickly and be there for the customer... Like how we change the way we shop and do things.

MURRAY: (28:07) Yeah. I love it that you get excited about this fast pace because there's a lot of other people who are not excited by it at all, get quite threatened by it and you're just expressing beautifully there that growth mindset and seeing the opportunity. That's wonderful!

BONNY: (28:24) Well for me, yeah. It makes your day more exciting if you've got something challenging to think about and solve really quickly.

MURRAY: (28:29) Yeah. It's fantastic. It's brilliant. Now, another question I've got is... Advice for any young indigenous people seeking to make a career, is there any bits of advice? If they were listening to this, what advice would you give them?

BONNY: (28:46) Okay. I think that we've overcome so much in our history and our families have overcome so much, so it's within us to become the future leaders of Australia and the world and that if you put your mind to it and make the most of every opportunity you have or make those opportunities for yourself, then there's a whole world out there and so many different options that are open to you. Naturally, you guys are going to be the leaders and you have the strength to be able to do that as well.



BONNY RAWSON
WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 56 murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: (29:28) That's beautiful. Thank you. Advice for organizations, managers who are looking to hire and lead young people, and not necessarily indigenous, but young people. I suppose young people first, but then indigenous as well, what advice would you give there?

BONNY: (29:51) So I guess for young people... Probably being open, making sure that there's a culture within the organization that is open to change and can move with change because young people I think have really a different way of thinking and seeing the world around them, so having that culture that has that opportunity to grow and develop and then letting younger people have their voice in the workplace so they have that opportunity to lead and have those opportunities that sometimes people don't let young people have because they think they're inexperienced or don't know what they're talking about.

MURRAY: (30:37) Yeah.

BONNY: (30:38) Just give them a chance.

MURRAY: (30:39) Yeah. So, it's really about giving people a chance. Yeah. And for managing, leading young indigenous people?

BONNY: (30:51) I think being aware of the history and where indigenous people might be coming from. Obviously, everyone has their own story and their own way of growing up and everyone is so diverse, so having a bit of that cultural knowledge is certainly helpful. And then, maybe having an engaging workspace where you've got the opportunity to talk and have that personal interaction and make it more engaging by... Maybe if they want to, linking indigenous people with other indigenous people and having dining sessions at lunch or whatever, just making it a more inclusive workspace.

MURRAY: (31:31) Wonderful!

BONNY: (31:32) And then empowering them to be able to make the decisions and lead on their own as well.

MURRAY: (31:38) Yeah. Yeah.

BONNY: (31:39) Yeah.

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcast

MURRAY: (31:39) That's wonderful. Thank you. I curate questions. Have you got a favourite question you use for yourself or with people around you to change way of thinking or get deeper insight?

BONNY: (31:57) Because I'm more scientifically minded. I just ask them what led them to that way thinking and push it back and challenge, "Have you thought about it this way?" Or "Why is it that you think that?" "What facts have given you the information to have that thought process?"

MURRAY: (32:18) Yeah. So, it's really the 'why' and getting into the facts, understanding the facts.

BONNY: (32:23) Mmm hmm.

MURRAY: (32:24) Fantastic! Fantastic! Bonny, if someone wanted to reach out and connect with you, what would be the best way for them to find you?

BONNY: (32:34) LinkedIn would be probably the best. Yeah.

MURRAY: (32:38) Bonny Rawson on LinkedIn?

BONNY: (32:40) Yeah. Yeah. I think I'm one of the only one there, so...

MURRAY: (32:43) The only one there.

BONNY: (32:43)

MURRAY: (32:47) And you were talking earlier about the history of indigenous agriculture, etc., and I think the book you would probably read is... Was it "Dark Emu"?

BONNY: (33:03) Yeah. So, I just started reading it because I only heard about it recently. So, I'm half-way through. But I just found it really interesting about, you know, understanding the agricultural techniques that aboriginal people used to use and that they're way more complex than maybe just the hunter gatherer lifestyle which is probably more widely taught and I think it was something that I found really empowering to know that because I actually never knew either until I started reading this book.

MURRAY: (33:36) It's an interesting read. So "Dark Emu" and we'll put a link to that on the Show Notes as well.

**BONNY RAWSON****WALKING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS**PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 56** murraywright.com.au/podcastMurray Wright
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Bonny Rawson, thank you so much for your time and insights as a young leader but also a young indigenous leader. Thank you.

BONNY: (33:55) Thank you very much.

MURRAY: (33:56) Thanks again to Bonny for sharing her leadership moments. I hope that discussion has given you new insights, not only to the indigenous world, but also how as a leader you can engage and motivate younger team members by letting them have their voice and giving them a go. There's something to learn from Bonny's enthusiasm about the opportunities presented by rapid change as well as her passion for encouraging others to make the most of the opportunities presented to them. Two questions for you: if you have indigenous team members how well do you understand their background? For your younger team members, have you had a talk with them about what it is they want to do and how you can support them? That's it. Thanks again for listening. Until the next time.

[music]

That's it for this episode. Thanks for listening. Head to the podcast page at www.murraywright.com.au for the transcript, key learnings and resources from this episode. You'll find the Leadership Questions from all my guests under the Resources tab and while you're there, why not subscribe to the Leadership Moments and that way, you'll never have to miss one. Until the next time.

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PLANNING A CHANGE?

In the middle of, or planning change for yourself or team and want to get it right? Talk with Murray to discuss options on building clarity, setting expectations and creating the culture that will engage people and bring success.

Either call +61 407 262 475 or via the website.
Look forward to hearing from you.