



LEANNE PILKINGTON

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



murraywright.com.au/podcast

EPISODE 11



**LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



[Start of Transcription]

MURRAY: 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.

We're moving away from hotels today and talking with Leanne Pilkington, managing director of the leading New South Wales boutique real estate group Laing+Simmons.

Leanne, welcome.

LEANNE: Hi, Murray. Thanks for having me.

MURRAY: No. Great to have you. And as always we are asking the three Leadership Moments questions as a frame for personal stories and it's really stories of leadership that give us some insights. But before we dive in to those questions, I think Leanne it would be really good if you could tell us a bit about Laing+Simmons and what your role encompasses.

LEANNE: So at Laing+Simmons we're celebrating our 50th birthday this year, so it was established in 1967 and we have 40 franchise offices around Sydney. We've got one in Port Macquarie, but the rest of them are all Sydney Metro. Right, so I'm the managing director. I've been with the group for, would you believe, 22 years starting as a franchise coordinator and working my way up. We were bought in 2012 by a group called Dexar who owned two real estate brands in the ACT.

MURRAY: Fantastic. So 22 years only.

LEANNE: Correct.

MURRAY: Beautiful. And I see that you are the only female managing director in real estate franchising in New South Wales and only one of a handful in the real estate business.

LEANNE: That's right.

MURRAY: As such, you are really focused about empowering women agents to take on leadership positions. That's a real passion of yours.

LEANNE: It is.

MURRAY: Can you tell us a bit what are you doing in that space?



**LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



LEANNE: So I started a networking group called Real Women in Real Estate almost two years ago now and to be honest, I didn't ever really see the point of that. I was never one to go the women's conferences or the women's events and on reflection, I realize that was me trying to fit in rather than me trying to sort of separate myself from all of my colleagues because I worked in male dominated environments almost my entire career. I had a lot of women saying to me that there are not enough leadership role models that are female in the real estate area and I would like to be able to connect with them. So I sent an email out to a dozen women that I knew in Sydney in real estate that had networks. Within two weeks we had 65 women turn up to our first event in Sydney. That made me realize there actually is a need for it, so we now have events all around the country and also Newcastle and some regional events. We've got our first group that has started, would you believe, in Los Angeles.

MURRAY: Wow.

LEANNE: Nearly 800 members and it's all just word of mouth and it's just, it has blown my mind.

MURRAY: That is huge. Absolutely huge.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: I'm really interested. You talked about that you were trying to fit in.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: Now you are no longer trying to fit in.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: What's changed for you?

LEANNE: I'm very comfortable with who I am now and the value that I bring, but that's not been an easy place to get to even as MD. I've had a, you know, reasonable amount of success in my career and industry accolades, award wins and that sort of thing. But I was, not that long ago, asked to become the president of the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales and I took a step back and went, "Why on earth would they want me?" And I thought, "Oh, heavens above, Leanne, after all this time why wouldn't they want you? You have had enormous value." But that was a moment where I just went, you know, "It's time. It's time to actually realize the value that you bring to the industry and the organization."



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: So I'm interest... this is almost I'm the wrong person to be doing this interview because I'm a guy. So I've got a question around, is that because you're a woman or because that's just the way you are? Because there are some men also who struggle to acknowledge the value they bring. So that's a question...

LEANNE: Yeah. I think it's very typical behavior for women.

MURRAY: Yeah.

LEANNE: I really do, but I do acknowledge that some men do suffer from the same thing.

MURRAY: Yeah.

LEANNE: But women typically... if you ask a woman, "Okay, there's a promotion. Are you interested in going for it?" They'll go for it if they 100% know they can do it. Men will look at the job and go, "Ah, I can do a bit of that. Yeah, yeah, I'll go for it." Men typically have more confidence and... I don't like to generalize and I don't like to be in the women's space, if you know what I mean, because I do... men are really good real estate agents. Some of my very best friends are men. I don't want to separate.

MURRAY: No. I'm not trying to judge anything. It's just curiosity, where it lies, you know, and that's an interesting perspective you talk about, the going for jobs and I have to say I've been guilty of that. Yes.

LEANNE: Yes.

MURRAY: And I've suffered for it later.

LEANNE: Yes. It's a bloke thing.

MURRAY: Yes. Okay great. Thank you.

And so what's the feedback because that's so huge. Eight hundred members and you've got the thing in Los Angeles. What's the impact you hope to have on women and what's the feedback you're getting so far in terms again... it's around real estate industry?



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



LEANNE: It is around real estate or people connected to the real estate industry. For me, I want women to have the confidence to take the next step in their career whatever that might be. Ultimately, I would love to see more women business owners, but I would also love to see the receptionist who really wants to give sales a go to have the confidence to step outside of her comfort zone. I would love to see more women be confident enough to stand up and tell their story on a stage whether it's at one of our events in front of, you know, 50 or 100 women or on a bigger stage. I just want people to have more confidence in the value that they're bringing to a conversation or an organization.

MURRAY: It's interesting and you said when you acknowledged that you didn't have to fit in your confidence grew. So it's like your nose saying you want to give that... spread that word to everyone.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: That's beautiful.

LEANNE: It's really... it's been great and it's interesting that the women that come to these events... because obviously there are some very competitive, aggressive people within the real estate industry, both genders, but the people that come to these events are... they come to give back and they come to be involved in a conversation and to share stories and it's just... they are such fun events that it blows my mind every time. It constantly surprises me.

MURRAY: And I love you say they're sharing stories because this is what this podcast is about actually.

LEANNE: Yeah, right.

MURRAY: Sharing stories and what you can learn from them. So great... and it's the most powerful medium.

So I gave you some time to consider this, Leanne . I'm not sure how much prep you've done but anyway, who would you say has influenced you the most?

LEANNE: Yeah. Probably my dad.

MURRAY: Yeah.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



LEANNE: And actually my mum as well, if I think about it. My parents were both real estate agents. I started answering the phone in Dad's office on a Sunday as a 12-year-old. So I never had a sick day. I worked seven days a week for most of my career and I just... you model what you see and Dad started the business within four months or something. He got very sick. My mother had been a secretary until she gave birth to me. So she'd been out of the workforce for, you know, over a decade and she just jumped in. And she had to run the business for Dad while he was sick. And it's just that kind of... just get on with it, just get the job done, work hard. That's the way I've always been and the rest... my brother and sister are exactly the same.

MURRAY: The same. Fantastic.

Now you do a bit of work as well. I'm talking of influence and giving people confidence. You do a lot of work, I see, for Life Changing Experiences Foundation. Can you explain a bit about that on how you became involved?

LEANNE: Sure. That's a mentoring program for underprivileged and disadvantaged teenage girls. So it's about providing one-on-one mentors for them for a period of 12 months and it's a program that we go and do activities with them. Some of them are fun like going to Lynden Park or climbing the Harbour Bridge. But they always have a workshop component that might focus on cyber safety or it might focus on body image or whatever is appropriate. And I've been involved with them since 2009 and I got involved because I felt like I had an upbringing where I was always... I always believed that if I worked hard, I could really make something of myself. I had strong role models in my family, particularly my father and a lot of these girls come from broken homes. They don't have those role models. Some of them don't even have anybody who gets out of bed to go to work every day. And so I felt that that was a way that I could personally give back. Not just writing a check, but physically spending my time. And so I did. I was a big sister for a couple of years in a row and I loved it and then I became a team leader. So I've been involved to varying degrees ever since.

MURRAY: I've been involved in a similar type program and I think the beauty of it is that you give, but it actually...

LEANNE: You get so much out of it.

MURRAY: So much more back than you give.

LEANNE: True.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: What's been the highlight for you... of your work in that space?

LEANNE: Lots... and some really random ones, which will make you laugh. I have never been one to stand up in front of a crowd and make a fool of myself. I'm okay to stand up and speak, but I am very practiced and very researched. I'm not one to get... to stand up spontaneously and of course in these you had to get dressed up and do songs, sing and, you know, all of this sort of stuff and I hated it. I hated it so much that I cannot even begin... I dropped out of the program for a year because I did not want to do that.

MURRAY: Wow.

LEANNE: And so now, I don't even know if you know this story, but I... in our annual awards two years ago, I was carried in, in the arms of a Brazilian samba dancer in feathers and all of this sort of stuff. This year I stood up and sang Goldfinger to celebrate our 50th anniversary. So it's given me the confidence to stand up and do things knowing that people appreciate you having a go. I don't have to be the best. I don't have to be... it doesn't have to be worthy of X Factor. No, I just... people respect you if you have a go and you put yourself out there.

MURRAY: Beautiful.

LEANNE: So that was a really bizarre thing to get out of it, but outside of that I've met the most incredible people and I've had a really positive impact on dozens and dozens of teenage girls.

MURRAY: Fantastic. So if people wanted to look it up, is there a website?

LEANNE: Yeah, lifechangingexperiences.org.

MURRAY: Okay, and we'll put that up on the links resources in the notes of the podcast.

LEANNE: That would be great.

MURRAY: That's great.

So this brings us to our second question. What was your aha moment? What was the moment when you suddenly understood what this leadership thing was all about?



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



LEANNE: I had to think really hard about this one and the answer actually surprised me. So it was when I'd had a team member working for me for about five years and when I think back about when I employed her, the HR manager said to me... I had two candidates I was tossing up and she said, "Okay, talk me through." I said, "Okay. Candidate one has got the skills, but I don't really want to sit down and have a coffee with her. Candidate two hasn't really got the skills, but I really like her and I would really... I'd be happy to sit down and, you know, have a chat with her over a coffee." Now the advice was, "Go with the skills." And for five years, you know, she was part of this business and we never really got on. I really struggled with it. When she left it wasn't pretty and that was when I sat back and I thought, "You know what, what do I want in my business? What do I want to be around every day?" And what I realized is that I want to be around people that share my values and my optimism and my enthusiasm and passion for the work that I do and I've actively looked for that now and I've got a very senior team of people around me who are part of Laing+Simmons because they actually want to work for me, because they respect all of those things... my energy and my passion and my values and they share them. It's been quite phenomenal to look at the difference in the people around me and therefore the difference in the service delivery that I can provide to our franchisees and how happy I am at work.

MURRAY: Yeah. I think for me, a couple things that come out of that. One is, yeah, picking people with the right, I don't know, attitude, mindset... because we can get hung up on skills and whilst it is important... but if they don't have the right attitude to approach it, it can destroy so much.

LEANNE: Absolutely.

MURRAY: And I think the other part of this is really acknowledging as a leader that you are responsible for creating the conditions for your team to succeed in. I think leaders... we can get caught up in this. "Well I've got to do this, I've got to do that, I've got to do that," but actually the biggest thing you do is create the right environment for people to succeed in and if we do that, the rest takes care of itself.

LEANNE: That has been abundantly clear in the last couple of years. So I'm so grateful I've got the most amazing group of people around me now, so...

MURRAY: That's brilliant. Thank you.

Now, I just wanted to touch... you talked about Dexar Group buying Laing+Simmons. You know, I knew you at the time and I could see that that was a really big change for you. But also I think it brought great opportunities for you in terms of rebranding.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



I'd be interested to hear about that and particularly because the real estate market would have been in a bit of turmoil at that time. There was a lot of competition in the franchise space. You had the public listing of McGrath Real Estate and everyone was sort of saying, "Well look what they're doing and what are we doing right," sort of thing so that you've got this really what we call the VUCA, volatile uncertain complex and ambiguous world going on around you and you've got these franchisees and you've talked about them earlier, but you've got the franchisees. How did you manage that, those relationships and take them through what ended up being a rebranding and a big change in the way things were done?

LEANNE: Yeah. So let me just go back a little bit. When I... in the year 2000 I was promoted from my marketing manager, whatever my title was I can't even remember, to general manager in 2000 and I didn't see myself in that role at that time. But the owner of the business said to me, "You know what, you are much better at this stuff than I am. I'm going to go back to selling real estate. I want you to be the general manager." So I actually rang all of my franchisees at the time and said, "Okay this is what's happened. I just wanted to share with you." And they were all really excited, which puzzled me because I just didn't see myself as a leader. And I asked them, "Why are you excited about this?" And they said, "Because we know how much you care about us, how much you care about our businesses and how much you care about the brand and we know that you always make decisions with everybody's best interest at heart." And I got that type of response consistently. And that really meant a lot to me because I had worked very hard at those relationships. And so when Dexar bought the business, it came completely out of the blue for the franchisees. They didn't know it was happening. I again rang them all and told them what was going on and why and they often... most of them asked me the same question, "How do you feel about it, Leanne?" And I said to them, "I'm actually very excited. I think it's an incredible opportunity for the brand and for you as a business owner." And overwhelmingly they said, "If you're excited, then I'm excited. I trust your judgment." And that's the biggest thing that you can have people know that I do things for the right reasons, for the strength of the brand, for the strength of them and their business and they trust me. So those relationships... I could not have managed this change if I didn't have those strong relationships.

MURRAY: So there's something about the intent, being clear of the intent and also I suppose a proven track record of actually caring.

LEANNE: Sure. Yeah, I've been around for a long time, so they don't... you know, they know me well.

MURRAY: So through that process, is there anything you learned about yourself?



**LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



Because you had a whole set of... whilst it was exciting, there was a whole set of new bosses and different demands and, you know, they were going to come in and show Sydney how it's done, etc. So how did you manage yourself through that? What did you learn about yourself?

LEANNE: I learned that I am very good at relationships. I'm good at navigating difficult conversations in a positive way. I learned that I'm very resilient and I learned that I am very determined and I can read the play really well. So if I'm going down a track that I know is not going to serve me, I can kind of change direction and go back to it and get... I get what I need eventually and if any of my directors are listening to this they're going to laugh because I get what I need eventually, but I sometimes have to kind of circle back. Does that make sense?

MURRAY: Yeah. Yeah. You find a way.

LEANNE: Yeah. I find a way through it.

MURRAY: You find the resources and the way to do it.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: If your first approach doesn't work...

LEANNE: Yeah. I manage to convince them.

MURRAY: Try, try, try again.

LEANNE: That's right.

MURRAY: Brilliant.

Now this is the third and final question and this is always the one that is interesting. What was your biggest failure and how does that inform your leadership today?

LEANNE: Yeah. So before Laing+Simmons, so a very long time ago, I was a shopping centre manager and I was the manager on site, but I had a boss who was based in the city. I was out in the suburbs and we just couldn't get on. We couldn't, for a number of reasons that I won't go into, he... there were lots of issues in that relationship and ultimately I left the business and I left in a way that I wasn't really proud of. I didn't really like what had gone on and I felt like I'd failed because I couldn't get him on site. I couldn't develop the relationship the way it needed to be. His expectations of me



**LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



were not realistic and I couldn't make him see that that was unreasonable and I felt like I failed and I was really upset. I was really really upset for a very long time and took a much more junior job to get out of there.

MURRAY: Right. So it really shook your confidence a bit.

LEANNE: It shook my confidence. I really wondered, you know, maybe the success I'd had in my previous roles was maybe a bit of a fluke.

MURRAY: Right.

LEANNE: So yeah. The whole... and I was just angry at myself for not being able to deal with the situation in a more effective way. Looking back on that, I've now... I guess now I know that his expectations were absolutely unreasonable and illegal and all kinds of things and I now... if I don't value somebody, I don't take their opinions on board. I don't let that eat me up because I'm realistic about what is right, what's fair, what's reasonable. I'm pragmatic. I think I can deal with a situation as being realistic and I know when to take on board feedback and when to let it go. Does that make sense?

MURRAY: Yes. Yeah, yeah. I think it's... yeah, I get a couple of things. I think also part of this is learning not to beat yourself up too much about things because you can only control what you can control.

LEANNE: Yeah and you can only control your reaction to something rather than the actual feedback.

MURRAY: Absolutely. So it's your reaction and this is a real big thing about when we're working with people and leadership.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: You know, you've got a situation. How you choose to react is your choice.

LEANNE: Yes.

MURRAY: You can help it. So you have a choice in that.

LEANNE: Yeah.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: What choice are you making? What's the intent of that? But once that's done, you can't choose the other person's reaction.

LEANNE: No. Exactly right. Exactly.

MURRAY: That's up to them. And there's a place... well yes, you can try and try again, but there's a point where you have to say, "Well..."

LEANNE: Give it up.

MURRAY: "That's it. That's, you know, enough. I've don't my bit."

LEANNE: And I don't give up easily.

MURRAY: No. I get that sense.

LEANNE: Yeah. That really... I was determined that I was going to be able to make it work.

MURRAY: So how... if you're having a situation like that now, how have you used that experience to inform you today? What's the change?

LEANNE: Well, I never really... I didn't realize that I do, but I very clearly... do you think I'm very realistic? And if there's an issue that I'm... that somebody sort of poses to me, I'm realistic enough to go, "Actually, you know what, that's a fair point."

MURRAY: Yeah.

LEANNE: But if I don't value you as a person, I don't value your opinion and I don't take your feedback on board. I just let it go.

MURRAY: Yeah. We talked a bit about this earlier. I've still got a piece about...

LEANNE: Go on.

MURRAY: So even though you don't value the person, they might have some... they might be making a point somewhere. They might have something of value within it.

LEANNE: Yeah, which is okay. I think I'm able to pull that bit out without taking aboard the rest of the stuff.



**LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.**
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: And I would imagine dealing with a variety of franchises. That must be quite a useful thing to be able to do.

LEANNE: It is and I also... one of the franchisees actually called me Pollyanna once, which made me laugh because I always see the best in people.

MURRAY: Right.

LEANNE: And I always will go into relationships believing the best and thinking the best. But I will change my mind if the evidence is there not to support that. But usually, nice people want to do the right thing. The problem is that we don't always see the right thing as being the same thing. Right?

MURRAY: Absolutely, yeah.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: We all see the same thing. We just see it differently.

LEANNE: Differently, yeah. And I think I'm good at seeing things from other people's perspective.

MURRAY: Brilliant. I've got another question, a final one which... this is without notification.

LEANNE: Oh, thanks a lot.

MURRAY: No problem. So women in leadership is your passion.

LEANNE: Yup.

MURRAY: So if you were to look at yourself as a young, we'll say 24-year-old.

LEANNE: Yup.

MURRAY: Yeah?

LEANNE: Sure, just a couple of years ago, yup.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: Yup, a couple of years ago, building your career and you saw that person who really wants to contribute and become a leader. What would the one piece of advice you would give them be?

LEANNE: Goes like, "You're so much more capable than you ever realized."

MURRAY: Beautiful. That's good advice for a lot of people.

LEANNE: I think it is too. Yeah, I think it is too.

MURRAY: So Leanne, thank you for that. That was great. Thank you for sharing your leadership moments. If someone wants to contact you, and obviously you know, you might get a few queries about the Sydney real estate market.

LEANNE: Sure.

MURRAY: And what's the best deal, but more around the leadership and things you've been saying today.

LEANNE: Of course.

MURRAY: If someone wanted to connect with you, how would be the best way for them to do that?

LEANNE: My email address is leanne@lsre.com.au, but I'm also on LinkedIn.

MURRAY: LinkedIn so far.

LEANNE: Yeah.

MURRAY: Beautiful. Leanne, thank you.

LEANNE: Absolute pleasure. Thank you.



LEANNE PILKINGTON -
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP - BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF.
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT **EPISODE 11**
murraywright.com.au/podcast



MURRAY: Thanks to Leanne. A lot to reflect on. I love the reminder about being true to yourself and the importance of the leader creating the right environment for the team to succeed.

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.

[End of Transcription]



CONTACT MURRAY FOR A **FREE CLARITY SESSION**

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.