



EPISODE 11: What's a trauma-informed system with Snjezana Pruglinic

[00:00:00] **Snjezana:** I think it's really crucial for the people who have the power to design how things should run throughout the day to be asking themselves these questions, how do I create it first with myself and feel it, and then like, why does it matter for the whole team? Because if the leader doesn't have those breaks in their day, they're not gonna understand why they're important to an employee.

[00:00:22] You trying to put them in your day now becomes a conflict rather than care.

[00:00:31] **Carolyn:** Is a thought leader, speaker and writer on the intersection of wellbeing and social justice. She has a collective and reciprocal approach of care making and has 23 years of experience as a somatic trauma therapist, community builder, and c. Justice worker. This all informs her commitment to elevating capacity of people, processes, and places to tackle economic inequity, injustice, and unwellness.

[00:01:06] When I do my culture and leadership work with clients, there are three distinct types of work that I do. One is at the individual. Level. So that's things like coaching, any sort of one-on-one interaction. Then there is the team level, so that's team dynamics and how we are in relation to each other. And then the third level is at an organizational level, and this is what I refer to as a system.

[00:01:36] Level. So there's systems that we operate within as a team and as an individual. Today's conversation, we are gonna be looking at a system and how we can show up within that system in a way that is trauma informed. I hope you enjoy this conversation. I think it's gonna be.



[00:02:01] **Intro:** Welcome to Evolve a new era of leadership, a podcast for real leaders to join real conversations with business experts, practitioners thought leaders, and change makers who integrate head, heart, and body in all they do, who commit to compassion and curiosity, who commit to radical self-leadership in their quest to understand others better too.

[00:02:26] Because the only way to deliver real results is to understand what it. To lead real human beings. This is a new era of

[00:02:35] leadership.

[00:02:41] **Carolyn:** I'm Carolyn Sora, and this is Evolve a New Era of Leadership. Well, hello, evolve listeners. We have a fantastic guest on deck for you today. I'm so excited to bring her on and she actually was introduced to me through another podcast guest that you all have, I hope listened to, and that is Lisa Burchart.

[00:03:02] So thank you. Shout out to Lisa for this great introduction. So my guest today is Shaza pni, and sh, welcome to the.

[00:03:14] **Snjezana:** Thank you. Such an honor to be here.

[00:03:16] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Well, Lisa introduced me to your work, and there's not necessarily an immediate connection into the work that I do in the corporate sense, but I think there's a really important overlap here today that we're gonna talk about.

[00:03:31] But let's start off, can you just share with the audience a little bit about your work and what it is that you.

[00:03:38] **Snjezana:** Yeah, absolutely. So for the last 23 years I have been working really focusing on trauma through a couple of different approaches. So one is a somatic, which is basically means body-based. So through body-based therapies, body mind approaches.



[00:03:53] And then the other one is through a lot of trainings, and this is where I've done a lot of trainings with employees, employers, community members, people facing different kind of traumatic experiences in their life and really just kinda under. How do we deal with trauma? How do we recognize it? How do we move through it?

[00:04:10] How do we heal through it? What else can we create in its place? So that's in a nutshell, kind of where I've been over the last 23 years.

[00:04:17] **Carolyn:** May I ask, what inspired you to go into that line of work?

[00:04:22] **Snjezana:** What inspired me was my own personal experience of trauma. I came to Canada from former Slavia at beginning of the war, and you know, the war lasted for about 10 years, so it was 10 years of ongoing trauma plus intergenerational trauma that I kind of brought with me and really trying to understand what were all these things that I was feeling, what was all those things that my body was feeling going through and how it was impacting my life, my work, even my work choices and career choices.

[00:04:48] And you know, were kind of influenced by this. Wanting toward move towards how I can support other people came from that same search, or how can we always kind of move toward this and ideally and hopefully create a world where people don't have to keep experiencing these things on the day. Yeah,

[00:05:04] **Carolyn:** yeah.

[00:05:05] How long were you in Yugoslavia with the war going

[00:05:07] **Snjezana:** on? So I was lucky that I came at the very beginning. The war started in 1990 and I came in 1990. Most people may not recognize it starting as 1990 because it wasn't so globally shown at that time. But really where I was, it started in 1990 and we were lucky that we kind of got our papers three months after.

[00:05:27] Wow.



[00:05:28] **Carolyn:** I know that, you know, when we talk about that word trauma, it's not an easy word for many of us. Really absorb. And so the trauma that you were talking about, I just wanna acknowledge that, that that's what we would call a big T trauma. Mm-hmm. Right? Where there's some massive event surrounding it.

[00:05:47] Mm-hmm. And there are other types of trauma that, you know, small T trauma, and that's the subject of other podcasts and the subject of my book. But trauma is something that we all have in our lives. And so obviously your experience, it sounds like, really inspired you to help people work through that emotional wound.

[00:06:08] I like using that description of trauma. It's from Gebo. And so when you got to Canada and was finding a place of, of how you wanted to make your mark in the world, how did Circle Point Wellness come?

[00:06:20] **Snjezana:** A circle point Wellness as a name is pretty new, but the idea of it kind of came from this understanding that we can't heal by ourselves, that we have to heal together, and that if we want to create change, we have to do that work on ourselves.

[00:06:34] So that's the the point of the circle point in the center in the middle. But then we also have to connect to others. And that's the circle, the collective, right? So we're interconnected, but in the same way the environments were in impact us and that we impact the environments we're in. So if we're looking at trauma and how are we're moving through it, or preventing further harm or preventing, you know, re-traumatization, we have to look at both.

[00:06:57] My role and the role of the environment or the system that I cannot call these days, and what is that relationship between the two? And that's really the essence of Circle Point Wellness, is examining that relationship between the two one's own journey and inner work, kind of one's external space that it, one is in what it does inside their work or their community, or what are the bigger systems, the global systems, political, economical systems, all those different pieces.



[00:07:23] Right.

[00:07:23] **Carolyn:** So you could be on a lot of different podcasts cuz we're only gonna talk about the workplace today. But as you said, it can apply to a lot of things. So we're gonna take it like into the corporate world, into the workplace, right? So we have a relationship with the system within which we operate.

[00:07:40] Could you just sort of paint that picture for us using workplace terms and, and sort of bring us into the context. I

[00:07:46] **Snjezana:** love root it into the workplace because it's where most of us spend our time. Mm-hmm. And it's where most of us create our identities around, you know, the work that we do. So think about if you're going to work and you need to have a project finished, for example, that project first of all, was never created just by one person.

[00:08:04] It was created through, ideally, you know, different needs assessments, and talking to clients and understanding what the problems. And then you have to look at, well, who are the people that are gonna support and create that project? All the ways from its inception to the final outcomes and evaluation. And that includes all these different people that come into it.

[00:08:23] And in a sense, create a bit of like that wheel, that bicycle wheel that where you have this project is at the center and then everyone else at the spokes, they're making it move to. And they're creating a system, which means they're creating a process that is being embodied, that's coming to life. That's ultimately gonna kind of show is if this project is successful or not, and how the success is defined.

[00:08:46] Is that process a painful one, an easy one? Is it one that There's a lot of conflict within all of those different pieces, I think is when we're looking at the system and then when we're looking at it from that trauma informed approach. How that system is playing out is where we wanna look at.

[00:09:03] **Carolyn:** Okay. Okay.



[00:09:05] So we know the system of our workplace. Mm-hmm. What does it mean then to have a trauma informed? Workplace. Let's start there. We'll start, we'll stay up with the system. What does it mean to have a trauma informed system? Because, I mean, that is new language. I don't even know if employers would even advertise that way.

[00:09:28] Right. Cuz it feels kind of heavy. But in essence though, what does it mean? A trauma informed workplace? Mm-hmm. I

[00:09:33] **Snjezana:** think it's important to kind of step back and look at what does it mean to be trauma informed. Right. Okay. And I think that there's a few key elements to look at. One is that a trauma informed anything approach is usually one that will cultivate the sense of safety for people or so a safety where people can feel in their own definition of safety.

[00:09:53] So not a safety prescribe, but I'm telling you this is what safety

[00:09:56] **Carolyn:** should look like, right? Because we hear that often. This is fine, it's a safe environment. Everybody can speak up and say what they. Yeah,

[00:10:02] **Snjezana:** but if I don't feel like I can speak up without punishment, then is it a safe space? Right? Is it a safe space for me?

[00:10:08] So that's one important thing. The other one is there trust and trustworthiness between the different people who make up the system because people make up the system ultimately. Right? It's not just things written on paper. And then what is that kind of relationship between those people? Is it a hierarchical kind of like, here I'm telling you what's gonna be done and you're gonna just do it, no questions asked.

[00:10:31] Or is it a collaborative method? Is it a reciprocal method? Is it a transactional method? So all of those kind of pieces where we start to see. What, where a trauma informed lens could kind of eventually come in. And then, then the one last piece is, do I walk into this space and feel like I'm just ticking off boxes?



[00:10:49] I don't really have much choice. Or do I walk into this space where, and I'm feeling like, oh, what I say matters. My skills matter. My strengths matter. I'm of value here beyond just my title. Beyond. What's on my resume? Like I bring something. So there's a sense of like, I feel empowered as to how I can engage in here.

[00:11:10] And when people talk about lack of engagement is oftentimes there's a lack of that empowerment to feel valued because nobody's going to engage if they don't feel valued. Right? And if you don't feel valued, you don't feel empowered. You're just kinda like, what? Whatever.

[00:11:24] **Carolyn:** Right. What comes to mind when you were saying that too?

[00:11:27] That piece of empowerment is autonomy, right? We know through the work of other researchers that that notion of autonomy is really important not to go, I can do whatever I want whenever I want, but that I have an element of choice in my day. I love how you clarified that. You know, trust in relationships.

[00:11:43] I always tell people that relationships are the glue that keeps the organization together and trust is really an outcome of what that looks like. And I think this notion of safety, I love the work of Amy Edmondson and you know, I've had another guest on the show who talked specifically about the psych, uh, health and safety standards that we have here in Canada.

[00:12:05] Mm-hmm. And I do think it's time for us to understand that trauma informed. Leadership or being trauma informed as an organization means that we are prioritizing safety and it's not a checklist. Mm-hmm. We are acknowledging that safety has different meanings for all of us, right. In this great brain of ours, and it's out of our control.

[00:12:27] Trauma sits in our body. And so I think it's an important step that we need to be talking about, how fast organizations and leaders will gravitate to it. We'll see. Mm-hmm. But this was our point of connection, right? When we, when we



[00:12:42] **Snjezana:** talk. Yeah, exactly. And I think that piece of, well, why would I wanna even think or use this language if I'm, you know, someone in, in the corporation?

[00:12:50] Why, why does this matter to me? Trauma informed approach is ultimately the question. That. Do your people matter to you, right? Mm-hmm. Do your employees matter to you? Do your clients matter to you? And if the answer is no, then you should kind of maybe check yourself what it is you're actually doing. But if the answer is yes, then you wanna look at the trauma-informed approaches because everyone that's coming into your space, your workspace, your physical space, but also your processes is bringing a whole lot of intersectional things from their life with them, right?

[00:13:22] They're coming with maybe already feeling I'm not safe anywhere in my life. I'm not, I don't have choice anywhere in my life. So I'm also gonna be on the defensive here, you know, just as I'm everywhere else cuz I'm used to being like this. So if you ask, well how can I create a safe space that might be a safe space?

[00:13:39] The only space somebody has, right? Yeah. And you will see that person shine and you will see them open up and you will see them do their work differently and, and I think that ultimately comes to that questions, do you care about your people?

[00:13:50] **Carolyn:** I love the way you put that. I think the other thing that I've learned through the years too is just because I think something is a safe space and I'm open and vulnerable does not automatically mean everybody else feels safe.

[00:14:04] Yeah. And that's really learning to value and honor other people's experiences and identities. That has really opened my eyes a lot over the past few years is, is just because I say.

[00:14:20] **Snjezana:** What does mean? I've done a lot of training with employees where, you know, they kind of ask, oh, I wanna know how I can deal with difficult quote unquote people, right?



[00:14:29] And this idea of like why people are even difficult. But there's so many different things. Why somebody can show up today and quote unquote be difficult, right? And trauma is one of them because, as you said, beginning, there's many small tea traumas that are ongoing and that we are so unaware of, and they're kind of shaping how we interact with the world.

[00:14:47] Shaping all of our relationships, why wouldn't they shape our work relationships where we spend most of our

[00:14:52] **Carolyn:** time? Yeah. You know what comes to mind when you say that to difficult people? It looks like different things. Like what is difficult to you may not be difficult to me. I had an interesting conversation the other day with someone and you know, they termed somebody difficult and my response back, Are they really difficult?

[00:15:12] Like do you think they got up today planning to be difficult or is that your reaction, your perception of them?

[00:15:22] **Snjezana:** And even if they did perhaps get up that day and say, you know what? I'm gonna be difficult today cuz I'm having a bad day. That's probably also coming from somewhere from them. Right. And that's when we do that famous question in trauma.

[00:15:31] It's like, what happened that is having this response for you that they feel they need to protect themselves this way. Right. Yeah.

[00:15:37] **Carolyn:** Yeah, so I wanna be clear too, with all the listeners, as we've been talking about being trauma informed, one thing that we would never endorse or support is being trauma informed does not mean you need to ask about anybody's trauma.

[00:15:53] It is none of our business. Yeah. And being trauma informed simply means what we heard, which is you. Creating this space of safety and allowing trust to build from it. But acknowledging and knowing we all have these emotional wounds. So let's talk about then how can we create habits? What are



things that we can do in our day-to-day job, in our day-to-day work that allow us to create this place of safety, to build this trust, and to really deepen our relat.

[00:16:32] **Snjezana:** I think that's a great question and I, when I answer it by tying it to what you just said also about not asking people about their traumas, and I think this is where a lot of people get stuck about why they don't integrate trauma-informed practices because they're like, well, I'm not a therapist, I don't know a trauma, I don't wanna know about your trauma.

[00:16:46] Right? Yeah. So if we take away even the wording, trauma informed, and we just say, Do you wanna build processes that are care centered for your people? Where people, where people feel like they can be themselves, they can feel safe to be themselves, they can be in that open, reciprocal relationship, they can show up and fail, they can show up and succeed, and all of those things will be seen and valued.

[00:17:07] Right? I think if we look at it that way, then it takes away this pressure, oh my God, it has to be trauma informed. Oh my God. I don't know what traumas they're dealing with. I don't wanna know. I don't know how to approach that, because as you say, that's not our role. Nor should we ever be doing that. Right.

[00:17:23] So, To look at then what can I create? What kind of habits can I create in my corporation, in my company, in my team, that build care, that make people feel like this is a space where I feel cared and I feel that I can, you know, provide that for somebody else. And this comes back to that understanding. What does care mean for different people?

[00:17:45] It's the same like safety, right? Like you can't define what being cared for means for every. So it requires that collaboration, which is trauma informed. So that's like a first habit. And that can be integrated is a habit of collaborative processes, right? Of collaboratively defining what a space can feel like or a team meeting should look like, or even creating a team meeting agenda, you know, collaboratively that is trauma informed practice in practice.



[00:18:14] And that is that creation of a space where I feel cared because, oh, I'm being asked for my opinion, right? What, what we need to talk about at this meeting, you know, or whether. I agree with it or not.

[00:18:26] **Carolyn:** Right? Oh, there's so many things you said there. I wanna, I wanna ask you about, so this notion of care, I'm gonna, I'm gonna start using that with folks to say, you know, trauma might be a, a, a hard word to, but let's use care on the way to get there.

[00:18:38] What about those types of personalities that are like, I don't need care at work, I'm fine. Mm-hmm.

[00:18:45] **Snjezana:** I just come here to do my job.

[00:18:47] **Carolyn:** Yeah. How would they acknowledge. Hmm. Or, or sorry, not how they would acknowledge it. Maybe I didn't ask. Ask that question. What might care look like for them in your experience?

[00:18:57] What kind of words? What kind of things might they say? Show care.

[00:19:02] **Snjezana:** Mm-hmm. I think that, you know, even people who are like, oh, I don't need to be cared for, my order can just come here to do my job. There is still something. Keeps them there. Even if, and I've had this a lot people, so I'm just here for the money, right?

[00:19:17] Even if it is money, the money is, is always connected to something else that's of value to them, right? So it's about finding what is of value to them and that's how people feel cared for. Cuz if you are just doing a job to make money because that money will support your family, then that means that what's really of value to you is your family and how you show up for your family, right?

[00:19:41] So, How can I support that? Right? How can I make your job easier so you can go home and make, take the money that you need to go home and do what really matters to you, which is be, you know, support your family. Right?



[00:19:53] **Carolyn:** Right, right. We don't need to have a list in our desk. I'm standing really old school when I say that on our phone, but you know, as a leader, I don't think it means that we need to have a list that like accounts for all of this, right?

[00:20:08] How can we make this easy for.

[00:20:11] **Snjezana:** I think it's coming back to, as a leader, especially, I think it's coming back to just being with people, right? Being with people and understanding what is of value to them because. They also bring value to you and you know, and understanding how they bring value to the team and to the company.

[00:20:32] That helps people feel valued. When people feel valued, they also feel more engaged and encouraged to wanna also do the things they need to do to fulfill on their own value. Right, right, right. And I think a lot of that trauma-informed work and asks the question, what do we place value on? And so when we look.

[00:20:53] Work distribution. You know, for example, you know, I have a tech deadline and things need to get finished. There's the reality of things need to get finished, right? Like you need to complete something cuz you have shareholders, you have profit responsibilities, you have the quote unquote bottom line you have to do.

[00:21:08] That's part of business. We can't deny that. Right? Yeah. But there is also, how is that process intrinsically valuing the people who are a part of. And how do those people bring value to it? Mm-hmm. Is this going to ultimately define what the quality of your final ROI ends up being? Right. Because of the more you can have people feel valued and the more that they can express what's of value to them.

[00:21:33] The more that that process becomes a safer space, right. Becomes more collaborative. Right. Becomes a space where people feel like they have that empowerment, autonomy, and choice.



[00:21:42] **Carolyn:** Right? Yeah. Yeah. Now I wanna circle back to that word collaboration that you used. You know, for example, setting up an agenda.

[00:21:49] There's been a fair manner of research over the past few years demonstrating that we are over collaborating. Mm-hmm. And I think that word is, Received a pretty bad rap. You know, people kind of roll their eyes like, oh God, here we go again. Have to collabo. When you were sharing that example, the word that came to mind for me was co-create.

[00:22:11] Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's a

[00:22:12] **Snjezana:** great

[00:22:12] **Carolyn:** word. And there's a lot of power in co-creating an agenda at a meeting. You know, we don't need to always. Circulate an agenda to everybody ahead of time. I think those are some sort of old habits. Old habits die hard, and I think, you know, there's a certain structure we could perhaps maintain, but you know, getting into a meeting and co-creating what's most important to people right now.

[00:22:35] That would be an example then, right? That would be a trauma or a care informed approach.

[00:22:40] **Snjezana:** Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, you can circulate ahead of time. Here are the themes that we want to kind of touch on and additional themes we can co-create in the moment, right? And then the details we'll co-create together.

[00:22:53] We'll kind of develop it as we go, and it changes how the meetings are running. It doesn't have to be, here's the agenda, let's keep checking it off, you know, but it's like, let's, let's create it as we go. What's needed? What are the challenges? What are the strengths? But this also require. Leaders to create kind of fluidity and space around things, so mm-hmm.

[00:23:11] You know, if you're like, I have a very tight deadline and I have a meeting that ends right before this meeting, and I have another meeting that



starts thereafter, the last thing on your mind is, oh, let's co-create. Exactly. It's about, let's get the job done and, you know, I want everyone to walk away with their action items and then come back and report kind of thing.

[00:23:27] Yep. So it's also about changing how you're structuring everything in the whole day and creating those breathing spaces where, you know, so just like as we inhale and exhale, there's a little bit of a pause after we inhale in between the inhales and exhales, and there's a little bit of a pause between exhales and inhales.

[00:23:43] It's the same thing in your daily breath of the day-to-day organization. Where can you have those little pause? Yeah, that allow for people to like reconnect to, okay, now we're transitioning into a different space, different way of being because it is using also different parts of the brain. Go into that creative thinking a little bit more like, Hmm, what do I feel I need?

[00:24:03] Invites the body and a little bit more, right? Yeah. A little bit of that emotional brain that it gets invited and the more you can create little space, little buffers. So even if it is like a five minute between at the front and the back end. Right. That people can transition that and that if something isn't finished, it's still okay.

[00:24:21] Oh,

[00:24:21] **Carolyn:** so many things were going through my head. I remember those days of back to back, to back to back, you know, race in between meetings. I say remember the days I'm trying to get better at not scheduling my days and allow a minimum of 30 minutes, which usually means 15 minutes. Um, but quite often we just try and overrun the biology.

[00:24:39] It's okay. I can do back to back. I can do back to back. Do you have any sort of little, uh, tips, uh, or suggestions on how we can allow ourselves to take those breaths or allow that space in our day?

[00:24:52] **Snjezana:** You know, I think, like you just said, for yourself, how you create your schedule is important, right? I always like to.



[00:24:59] Look at my schedule the night before. Mm-hmm. And then see where can I block off literally in my calendar where nobody else can go in and book it right for that time. That is really great and there's a lot of great practices that you can do. You know, move, breathe, take, go for a walk, different things, but.

[00:25:17] The challenge becomes when the system you're part of the environment you're part of doesn't support it, right? Mm-hmm. So you can keep doing it, but it just feels like you're running in circles trying to do all the self-care, but then you're being kind of, in a sense, yelled at. Yeah, bombarded. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:25:34] Bombarded for everything needs to be done. So I think. It's really crucial for the people who have the power to design how things should run throughout the day to be asking themselves these questions, how do I create it first with myself and feel it, and then like, why does it matter for the whole team?

[00:25:51] Right? Yeah. Because if the manager doesn't have the leader, senior manager doesn't have, the leader doesn't have those breaks in their. They're not gonna understand why they're important to an employee. Right. Yeah. Or why you trying to put them in your day. Now it becomes a conflict rather than, you know, a care

[00:26:08] **Carolyn:** practice.

[00:26:08] Yeah. You know, something that, uh, I did the other day as we were starting into a, a two hour workshop. It was in the middle of the day. It was like closer to the end. It was two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and I just paused and welcomed everybody and I had a little music playing in the back. And then I just said, okay, let's just take a minute and bring ourself here right now.

[00:26:29] I know you've all had a busy day, and I just invited people to take two deep breaths. That was it. Some people did, some people didn't. And that's another thing that I've learned too, is being trauma informed isn't telling people what to do. Like, okay, everybody, you're gonna take two breaths right now. It



was, I'm gonna invite you to do this and to help, you know, just bring you into the moment.

[00:26:51] And I find through the years as I've been integrating that word in inviting, in invitation in, people are a little bit more open to it cuz you're giving them a choice.

[00:27:01] **Snjezana:** Mm-hmm. No, absolutely. To invite is a trauma informed practice in itself. That wording to invite is, yeah. But to also make it invite in a sense.

[00:27:11] So I met a leader once who, you know, the team meetings were online, as so many still are. And what she did was she set up. The meeting would run from, you know, one to two in people's calendars, but the actual meeting would run from 1 0 5 to 1 55, and then she goes five minutes at the front, and those five minutes at the end were voluntary for people to come in.

[00:27:33] And then the first five minutes was a meditation that somebody would lead. So you don't have to be meditated. You can just be like, Hey, let's take a few deep breaths, like you said. Yeah. The last five minutes would also be some kind of activity that somebody would lead, maybe again, just breathing or shaking your body, but they were voluntary, so if I didn't feel it that day, I didn't have to stay.

[00:27:51] That meant I had the extra buffer now as well if I needed it. If I felt that I could wanted to, I came in and I really liked that approach because you know, she had. The reality of not being able to create extra buffers outside of the one o'clock and two o'clock, right? So she couldn't give you those five minutes before and after.

[00:28:10] So instead, she shortened her meeting by that those 10 minutes and made the buffer internally

[00:28:15] **Carolyn:** available. And I think that's the reality for most people. So that means that we need to make sure we're carving out if we've got an hour agenda, we really only have 50 minutes. Hmm. And now we're into meeting



management, which I know impacts workload management and this whole idea of being real and having realistic expectations about what we're actually gonna do in our meetings or what we can actually achieve when it comes to

[00:28:44] **Snjezana:** work.

[00:28:44] I think anybody who's ever facilitated a workshop knows that if you have a two hour workshop, you're not running your content for two hours. Yeah, right. You should always plan your content for way less time. Right? Yeah. And I think that we forget that when we are doing meetings or work plans or things, you know, deadlines that.

[00:29:05] Always plan for less of the time than you think it should take, because that creates also space for that creativity creates space for that co-creation collaboration, which might actually get everything done faster than you even expected and needed to. So now all of a sudden, everyone has extra time to work on something else or to do whatever else they need to do.

[00:29:24] Right,

[00:29:25] **Carolyn:** right. So we've talked about meetings and I mean, they're. Doing, just some of those things that we've talked about would bring a lot of care into the system. Let's talk about another, unfortunately, common practice in organizations, the good old performance management system. Mm-hmm. Yeah. What are your thoughts on that system?

[00:29:57] Let's just start with that. What are your thoughts on, on performance management within organizations?

[00:30:03] **Snjezana:** Yeah. I would love to see it called something else to begin with. Yeah. But I think that. It's very much flawed. I think the initial place where it came from might have had good intentions and with overtime in practice, it has become flawed to a point where I think it's very much a space of punishment and transactionality and not anything that in any way empowers anyone.



[00:30:28] The person doing it, the person receiving it. It's just like, oh, I have to do this from both sides. Oh, I have to do this for my employee. Oh, I have to do this with my supervisor. Yeah, it's just a dreadful thing. So I think that it has its purpose, right? You wanna see where people are learning, where people are struggling, where people are succeeding, right?

[00:30:47] And ultimately, like how you can support their growth, right? So I think that it comes back down to that value piece, and I think looking at it from this hour that we're gonna spend together, what value is it gonna bring to you? To me, to our team, to our projects, to what we already have established as values.

[00:31:06] Right. What's important to you? I think. Performance management isn't something that should be done once a year, you know? Or isn't something that should be done after a probationary period. I think it should be done on a more regular basis with a different name. Yeah. But it's more, more of like a value check-in.

[00:31:21] Like, are we still aligning? What are the challenges that we're having? What are the things that are working really well? And I think one way to look at it is, is it problems focused or is it strength focused, right? Mm-hmm. And I think a lot of performance management is problem focused. You know, here are the problems, how we can improve them.

[00:31:39] But rather than, here are the strengths, here's what's working really well, here's how value is being created, how can we improve that even more? Because when you look at it, something from a strength-based perspective, you will bump into what the problems are by asking how can we improve what's already working?

[00:31:56] Right, right. Because there is something that's stopping it from working better, right? Yeah, yeah. But that won't be the primary focus. It won't be like, why isn't this working? Or how can you know? So it's more about what is the strength that is already present and how do we make that even more present?



[00:32:13] **Carolyn:** We're totally on the same page. You know, performance management discussions. They absolutely serve a purpose. And the purpose is like, are we on track to deliver to our expectations, to our goals? And so we're not suggesting that that goal change. Mm-hmm. But I'm with you. If we could just take those two words out in combination, it would just create more safety and.

[00:32:39] I love what you're saying too around like how can we look at them from like a care or value perspective? Also weave it into like performance, like almost like what went really well over the last, you know, month or two weeks or to me, I don't even think we should be talk, like, call them even performance management discussions.

[00:32:58] They should just be ongoing conversations. Sure. The problem is many leaders and managers well-intentioned, Don't have space in their calendar or haven't made space in their calendar to have those conversations. So I think that's sort of. Those words continue. I, I believe my, my opinion, and I

[00:33:20] **Snjezana:** think that's where examining things as different types, it doesn't have to always be between the employee and the direct supervisor, manager, leader.

[00:33:28] Can there some of them be more peer centered? Can some, I love it. Some. Self-reflective as well. What are different ways that it can be done throughout the year? Right? Yeah. I think to ask that question is really

[00:33:40] **Carolyn:** important. And if you're doing that in your team meetings, in in the agenda that, you know, we've co-created and really developing this cadence of looking at what went well, looking at what we learned or where we could be even better, or something that, We didn't expect what happened and did happen.

[00:33:58] That really starts creating a different feel, a different level of trust on how we're getting the work.



[00:34:06] **Snjezana:** One thing I would suggest for every leader to understand is how actions and emotions are connected. I think, you know, some, a little basic neuroscience training would be a, a great thing for every leader.

[00:34:16] Just to understand how our emotions influence our actions. And everything we do and don't do is so heavily influenced by our emotions. And what is value is a sense of emotion. It's a sense of emotional connection to something, right? So if you are not feeling valued or you don't feel like there's any value in it for you, You're gonna have a very different type of emotional reaction relationship to it, which is gonna result in different behaviors, which are gonna be the ones that are not driving the results that you want to see, right?

[00:34:44] So if we are even in the team meeting saying what is working? What is bringing value? That is tapping into that emotional brain from a place of what's possible and how can I make it even better, right? Rather. You know what's not working. Oh, then you kind of get blocked and you don't know what to do. It's no different.

[00:35:03] If I ask you, you know, if you're trying to quit smoking and ask you why are you still smoking? And you're like, I don't know. Yeah. And then your brain gets blocked and you start to feel guilt and shame. And nothing can change in the shame. Nothing can transform in the shame. Right. But if I ask you what has worked so far, you know, in your journey to quit smoking, all of a sudden your brain starts sinking in places of possibility, right?

[00:35:24] In place of possibilities where we have. Opportunity to become engaged right. As employees and really kind of quote unquote, do our best work

[00:35:34] **Carolyn:** and be in connection with each other. Yeah. And light those parts up. Yeah. It just goes to show you how much this concept of emotional literacy, it's a really important life skill, let alone leadership skill.

[00:35:46] Yeah. I know for me, as somebody who is always, I've known I'm emotional, but could I label emotions and tell you what I'm feeling? No. I just knew there was something. Like rumbling around within me. So yeah, that's certainly an aspect that I work on in some of my programs with folks is just to



help just a little bit, just to know that we do have emotions and having no emotion.

[00:36:08] There's still an emotion. If we think we're having no emotion, there's still an emotion in there. We can't pick and choose what they are necessarily, but we can treat them. You know, Susan David says we can treat them as data points. Yeah, a hundred percent. Yeah. I have a feeling we could talk for like hours upon hours upon hours.

[00:36:26] Is there anything from a systems perspective, I know we've talked about workload management, we talked about performance management, we've talked about meetings. Is there anything else that you think could help our listeners understand more about a care centered system or a trauma informed.

[00:36:46] **Snjezana:** I think asking yourself that question, is the system that's currently in place, does it allow to elevate the people who make up the system, or does it create hindrances in barriers or predetermined definitions of what that elevation should look like?

[00:37:07] You know, in which ways it can go rather than does it create possibilities that haven't yet been. Right, so it's existing a little bit of in the unknown. If you can answer everything about your system and you're like, I have this structure, it's like this, like this is like this. Then you're not really existing in that space of unknown, a little bit of that space of what is possible and a trauma inform approach exists in a little bit of what is possible, what is unknown, right?

[00:37:36] So, I think that is like a good marker to kind of look at yourself as you're examining like your org chart, your, you know, roles and responsibilities, job descriptions as you put an amount for hiring people, workplace distribution, you know, work task distribution. Is there spaces for where that unknown can kind of present itself?

[00:37:56] And if there is, that means that there is space for possibility to have a bit more of a care centered, more trauma informed. If there isn't, it just means somebody's calling all the shots. And that's not trauma informed.



[00:38:09] **Carolyn:** Wow. Is there space for the unknown? But we don't like the unknown. Nobody

[00:38:15] **Snjezana:** likes the unknown.

[00:38:16] I

[00:38:16] **Carolyn:** know. And we don't. Rewarded or in the past we haven't been rewarded for being okay with the unknown. Yeah, right. So there's some real big changes here that we're asking people to step into.

[00:38:31] **Snjezana:** We are in a sense, they feel like they're new changes, but we actually know how to be India unknown. Anyone who's ever started a business, a company is all about existing in the unknown, right?

[00:38:41] Yeah. You don't know if that's gonna succeed or fail. We already have these abilities in us. We just forget. Because we get really focused on, I need to make sure that it turns out okay. Right. It needs to turn out. Okay. So we get really focused on trying to control it all. And that in itself is a bit of a trauma response because one thing that trauma does for us is take away our sense of control.

[00:39:03] Right. So a trauma-informed approach is learning how to be okay with not always having that control. Right? Right. And how you kinda navigate through that.

[00:39:13] **Carolyn:** So not everybody's going to feel safe going out and doing their own business, so they're gonna, they're gonna wanna stay into a larger system. Mm-hmm.

[00:39:20] But what I'm hearing you say is just making sure we have space for the unknown in how we do our work together, and that that's okay. It's okay to have a little bit of space for the unknown.

[00:39:30] **Snjezana:** Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Yeah. Woo. That's



[00:39:33] **Carolyn:** a big one. That's a hard one for people.

[00:39:35] **Snjezana:** That invites everyone into this space, right?

[00:39:37] Yeah.

[00:39:39] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Yeah. Wow, I'm writing that one

[00:39:43] **Snjezana:** down. And I just wanna say like, I think a lot of this can feel very like abstract and overwhelming. And so what is, what do I actually do? Right? And to me, the best piece of advice that I you would ever give to myself or anyone else in anything, whether it's work or personal, is pick one small thing at the tiniest, smallest thing you can pick and keep repeating that over and over again until you feel comfortable.

[00:40:07] I pick the one small thing that will create a little bit of discomfort for you. A little bit of discomfort, not so little that you're like, whatever, I'm okay, but not so much that you don't wanna do it. But maybe it is just a little bit of discomfort of like taking away those five minutes in a meeting.

[00:40:22] Like I'm a little uncomfortable with this cuz I worry if we're gonna get everything done, but I'm not so uncomfortable. I'm not taking 20 minutes. I'm not, yeah. You know, we're not co-creating the agenda just yet. Like, that's too uncomfortable for me. Yeah. Starting something small and repeat that. Repeat that.

[00:40:36] Repeat that. Until a discomfort eases. Yeah. Right. Because now you're created a new habit as a system. You create a new habit for everybody. Cuz if it's uncomfortable for you, it's probably uncomfortable for others too.

[00:40:47] **Carolyn:** Right, right. And then soon enough it becomes, like you said, comfortable where people know that we're gonna have a five minute breather.

[00:40:55] Yeah. Hopefully that doesn't turn into, I'm gonna show up at. One 15 because I know that Carolyn doesn't start the meeting until 1 0 5, but I think



that's where, leave a little space for the unknown. Yeah. And let other people's responses happen. You're not responsible for them all.

[00:41:11] **Snjezana:** Yeah. And we're learning together, and I think we forget that sometimes in workspace is that we're all trying to figure all this out together.

[00:41:17] Nobody actually knows. Yeah. And we're all trying to figure it out together.

[00:41:21] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Woo. This time just flew by. I'm not gonna be surprised if we have you back to have more conversation. Really, really helpful insights. Thank you so much. Where can our listeners find you or get in touch with you? They

[00:41:35] **Snjezana:** can find me on my website, circlepointwellness.com.

[00:41:40] There there's a link to our LinkedIn page or my personal LinkedIn page, just my name. Those are probably the best places. Yeah.

[00:41:48] **Carolyn:** All right, and we'll make sure that we have those in the show notes as well. Now you know that I was asked three questions to end off my podcast. Are you all set for those three?

[00:41:59] I am set. All right. And these three questions are all based around my Evolv leadership model, which is of course about being trauma informed. So the first question, no surprise, is about self-awareness. So is there a moment or you know, a short little anecdote that you could share with the listeners about a time where you had a real light bulb moment where the insight and something about yourself really, really.

[00:42:26] Heightened your own self-awareness?

[00:42:29] **Snjezana:** Yeah, this is a great question and I've had, I think many, but one I can think of most recently that was kind of very much in my face is the transition of when I got divorced. And do I, I say that when I reflect in this



question, I realize most of these moments were in moments of transitions and some transitions are smaller than.

[00:42:47] Yeah, but the transition of divorce was huge because a lot of my identity had to shift around it. Right? So that's where a lot of this, even trauma-informed work, it kind of clicked in and it was like, okay, here's, are you gonna walk the talk? Right? Yeah. How are you? Are you gonna leave room for that discomfort and unknown?

[00:43:07] And how are you gonna be okay with not being okay?

[00:43:10] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Wow. Yeah. I'm with you. I think the hardest lessons we learn are in those moments where it's not perfect, where we've quote unquote done something wrong, and it's not about doing it wrong. It's just didn't go the way we thought it would. Mm-hmm.

[00:43:25] **Snjezana:** Yeah.

[00:43:25] Yeah, yeah. And that, that part of like, I did something wrong. That's a human natural reaction, and I think it's important to not shame ourselves first, thinking that,

[00:43:34] **Carolyn:** right. Yeah. Yeah. Second, This has to do with self-regulation and bringing ourself back in our bodies back into a state of calm. So is there a practice or ritual that you use to bring you back into a calm state?

[00:43:51] **Snjezana:** For me, I've been meditating since I am been 16 years old. I'm 43 now. Wow. And that, so for me, that space of just breath and focus, even if I can't breathe or I can't meditate, just kind of mindful focus on something. So whether that's like taking a moment to look at the plants on my desk, like really look at it or.

[00:44:10] You know, to me that's what meditation is, is that real mindful presence and focus. So that's the process that will bring me back. If I'm in a, in this stressful situation where I can go off and meditate, that's kind of what I will



do. And, but I do meditate regularly as a way and try and. Prevent how I respond into some of these situations.

[00:44:28] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Just bring you into the present moment. Yeah. I recently learned that method of just like looking and focusing in on something. I'm seeing a somatic, experiencing an SE practitioner. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And the power of it, again, so simple. You can do it in a meeting, you can do it anywhere. No one needs to know and it.

[00:44:47] You know, sometimes I think we can have these big grand images of what meditation is and think, oh my gosh, I don't have time for that, but

[00:44:55] **Snjezana:** mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly.

[00:44:56] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Yeah. Alright. Last but not least, um, what is a song or a genre of music that makes you feel connected to some in bigger than yourself?

[00:45:08] **Snjezana:** So this is hard for me because I love all kind of music and all genres.

[00:45:12] So I had a hard time with this one and there were two, and I couldn't figure out which one, but I settled on one that I don't know if a lot of people who are not Spanish speakers might not know it, but it's a group from South America, I believe, actually from Puerto Rico. Um, I can't remember right now.

[00:45:26] They're called . Um, and they have a song called Latino America. And the reason why I love this song is mostly for its lyrics of how it kind of paints a picture. A unified reciprocal relationship between people, ancestry, land, and you know that together we're stronger and that together we really need each other, all of it.

[00:45:48] We need our histories, we need our lessons, we need our medicines, we need the land. We need each other's wisdom and love, and that's the only way we can kind of move forward. And that none of that is for sale. Oh,



[00:46:00] **Carolyn:** beautiful. I'm gonna have to look that up. What was the name of the group?

[00:46:06] **Snjezana:** like street and like number 13.

[00:46:09] Okay.

[00:46:10] **Carolyn:** Wow. Thank you. Thank you. I just love asking those three questions. I've never had duplication with all the guests, so it just goes to show you, you know, how we're all so different and yet all the same in that those three things really, uh, self-awareness, self-regulation, and co-regulation really, really are just part of our human experience.

[00:46:31] **Snjezana:** Yeah, no, I, I love the question.

[00:46:34] **Carolyn:** Well, thank you. I can't thank you enough for coming on and bringing this system approach to talking about trauma informed leadership. Really, really appreciate it. Yeah,

[00:46:43] **Snjezana:** no, thank you again. It was such an honor and to be in to, to chat with you and thank you to Lisa for the connection and yeah, yeah, really

[00:46:50] **Carolyn:** grateful.

[00:46:50] Awesome. Well, thanks, uh, to everybody who tuned in for this episode. Uh, please let us know what you think. You can share something on social media and we'd love to. What your responses are to our show today. There were so many, so many golden insights in this conversation with sza. One that I'm really sitting with is this notion of being care centered.

[00:47:19] And I know for me, I used. To think that being care focused or care centered was really reserved for the sectors of healthcare or education or social justice. But what I'm taking from this conversation is being care centered means being committed to each other. And if we are going to say that people are our biggest assets in our organizations, Show how we care by these day-to-day

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actions and we can help our nervous systems feel that care, and that's ultimately what is gonna unlock performance.

[00:48:06] I hope that you gained some useful insight from this conversation and Asana said, just try out one small thing. You don't need to change everything but. Just that five minutes at the beginning of a meeting, maybe it's at the end. Whatever it is that you choose to do, I'm cheering you on. If you'd like to get in touch, you can reach me@carolynsora.com.

[00:48:34] And don't forget, I've got a new book coming out called Evolve the Path to Trauma Informed Leadership, and you can find out where to purchase that in the show notes. Take care.