



017: Choosing heart-centred leadership with Sasil Pir

[00:00:00] **Sasil:** 52% of the Fortune 500 companies have disappeared since the year 2000. So in 20 years time, you know, these very large, long tenured organizations just sort of went off the market. So the question was, what happened to them? Mm-hmm. And then of course we are all curious individuals. So we started asking what happened to the remaining ones and what are they doing differently?

[00:00:24] So this concept of sustainable growth came to mind and we got curious about understanding what may be leading to these organizations longer tenure, if you will.

[00:00:38] **Carolyn:** Our guest today is Cecil Pier. Cecil serves as head of employee experience at Takeda Pharmaceuticals, and she's c e o of Cecil Pier Consulting, a boutique research management consultancy focusing on changing the.

[00:00:54] Status quo at work. She's been an active contributor of Forbes. She's been published in hbr, Harvard Business Review, HR Zone, and the UK's HR magazine. She's also contributed to many management books and is the author of Leadership Awakening the Choice Within, published in 2021. I hope you enjoy your conversation.

[00:01:24] You know when you meet somebody for the first time and you just find this comfort with them as if you've known each other for years, perhaps you might even think you're staring into a mirror. Well, that's how I felt with my first conversation with Cecile. There were so many things that we had in common.

[00:01:48] Our background, our academia focus, writing books. It was a very invigorating conversation and I was really excited to bring her on to the podcast



and share her blend of academia and practical experience being a leader herself. I think that's such an amazing combination when we can blend data with experience.

[00:02:19] I hope you enjoy this conversation that we had together about human-centered leadership.

[00:02:25] **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.

[00:02:50] Because the only way to deliver real results is to understand what it takes. Lead real human beings. This is a new era of leadership.

[00:03:05] **Carolyn:** I'm Carolyn Sora, and this is Evolve a new era of Leadership. Hello everyone. It's Carolyn Sora, host of Evolve, a New Era of Leadership, and today's guest is joining us from the other side of the world, and I'm so excited. Cecile Pier, welcome to Evolve. Thank you

[00:03:28] **Sesil:** for having me, Carolyn. Good to be

[00:03:30] **Carolyn:** here. We met.

[00:03:32] I'll say Vet met, but we met virtually several years ago on LinkedIn and I noticed this amazing woman making comments here and there on my post, and I would go and look at, at your post and your background. I thought, oh my goodness, who's this woman? This amazing woman, making these comments on my post?

[00:03:50] And I just felt really honored because Cecil, you have such an incredible background and I'm just really excited to have you on the show.



[00:03:58] **Sesil:** Thank you. Yeah. I'm uniquely excited to be here. It's one thing to be with people. It's always a bit of fun and you learn from one another. It's another to be with people who have similar spirits.

[00:04:12] Yes, and I catch each other there, Carolyn. So thank you for having me. It's truly an honor and a pleasure. I

[00:04:19] **Carolyn:** appreciate it so much. And I know that we both share the fact that we're authors and you've had an amazing book called Human-Centered Leadership. I'm holding it up for everyone to see, but you can't see it cuz you're all only on voice reading this and going through your work.

[00:04:35] I mean, yeah, we really do share a connection and, and you've had some global experience with your work working in large organizations, and I'm just curious. How this notion of human-centered leadership became such a passion of yours and an area of focus for you.

[00:04:52] **Sesil:** Thank you for asking. And I also wanna say congratulations on your book.

[00:04:56] Thank you. And you know, I just finished it and I love reading it. I learned a a ton and I definitely saw some very good synergies, so. Mm-hmm. I'm hoping that comes out today through the conversation. So, Wonderful question. How did it all start? I think it started with the fact that, one, I have been a practitioner my entire professional life, so it's been a little over 25 years now, and I had my own leadership journey.

[00:05:27] Mm. That's definitely the beginning. But then as an HR practitioner, I've been serving many, many leaders over the years and what I've realized, Caroline, is nobody. Nobody wants to fail in the job. Yeah. You know, everybody is there for a reason. Yeah. And I don't believe in the concept of bad leadership. I don't think anyone comes to work saying, I wanna have a bad day today.

[00:05:53] I agree. Or I wanna be able disservice to my employees. Yep. But you do see people struggle, right? Yeah. You see them struggle, and I think that



awareness made me curious. Around what's happening here. You know, we have these wonderful people in what I think wonderful jobs and they're really trying their best.

[00:06:16] They're giving their whole selves, and yet we are not always getting the outcomes that we wish. Right. And I think that's the curiosity that's sort of pushed me into. You know, making affiliations with some organizations and thinking about research and writing even. So that's how all it started,

[00:06:36] **Carolyn:** I think.

[00:06:37] Yeah, I had a similar curiosity when I did my own thesis for my masters. I. And it was based around the fact that one-on-one with leaders, I'm gonna come back to the word that you used with us. I saw a very different spirit. It was almost like a different person would show up and then when they were in front of others, I.

[00:06:59] It was like, whoa, where did that person go? I became really curious into specifically authentic leadership theory. That's what my thesis was about, and I know we share this notion of authenticity, sort of, you know, being at the core of how we show up and, and I know that also relates to this idea. We see authenticity related to human-centered leadership.

[00:07:20] Which I know is the topic of your book. So how did you come to write this book about human-centered leadership? What does it mean with, for you, and how does authenticity integrate into that?

[00:07:32] **Sesil:** Hmm. I love the word authenticity. I'm speaking to the choir, so correct me if I'm wrong. I haven't done research on this one, but.

[00:07:41] I really feel like there are a lot of misnomers around the word of authenticity, if you will. Yeah, I agree. I personally have come to the conclusion that authenticity is not a process of discovery. Hmm. It's a process of acceptance for me. Ah,

[00:07:59] **Carolyn:** wow. That's amazing. I love the way you said that it's in,



[00:08:03] **Sesil:** but it makes quite a bit of a difference for me, and I think it also helps.

[00:08:10] Me to define what I mean by human-centered leadership. So step back, I hear a lot of people argue about the fact that our system is not human-centric. Mm-hmm. And I would agree with that. And there's a bit of an argument, if you will. I was at the World Economic Forum this year, for example, and there was a discussion around, you know, should we have human focused economies or should we have.

[00:08:38] Generative life focused economies. I don't see the two being so different.

[00:08:44] **Carolyn:** I, I was gonna say the exact same thing. They kind of are one in the same, aren't they?

[00:08:48] **Sesil:** I think we have the notion in our minds that. The current system is designed for the human, but it really isn't. I think we need to realize the industrials and industrialists and the economist of its time back.

[00:09:05] You know, 200 years ago when we had the first industrial revolution, they designed the system with the P of profit in mind, not the P of people in mind. Yeah. So, I feel like we're not quite honoring the whole of the human, because if we did that, the system would be a lot more generative on its own. Right?

[00:09:28] Yeah. So I don't know if you're familiar with its self-determination theory, but it would say that, All human beings as apri have three core motivations. One is a self-interest, one is our need for connection, and one is our need to have a tie of. Some purpose, something greater mm-hmm. Than ourselves and what we do on a day-to-day basis.

[00:09:54] Yeah. When I look at the current, especially the capitalist system, you know, the economic system that we have, it really centers around the self-interest, but it doesn't honor our need for connection or our need for purpose. Yeah. So, For me, when I say human-centered leadership, I, I'm



thinking of how do we create individuals or state of being that honors the whole of an individual, also the core of an individual which is unique to everyone and, and also serves the reason for our being.

[00:10:28] Yeah, and I think that's probably the difference in my mind from, you know, from how people are thinking about human-centered. Societies or systems or leadership.

[00:10:41] **Carolyn:** Yeah. I know when I was writing my book, I wanted to dig into that notion of humanity a little bit more as well. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And doing my own research again about the where the industrial revolution came from and what our economy was built, that the systems around that.

[00:10:59] I was really struck at how long our focus has been like, I mean, it's been a couple hundred years of our systems focus on profit and I would say productivity came shortly after. Sure. I mean, that was, you know, when, when we started getting into the assembly lines and, you know, the early 19th, uh, century. Or early twenties, and that just sort of took over and it's like we're having a hard time unhooking from that and detaching from that.

[00:11:27] Or balancing, actually balancing is probably a better word with purpose. I, I couldn't

[00:11:31] **Sesil:** agree more. And it explains sort of the disintegration and the fragmentation we see in the workplace. Yeah. I loved. Many things in your book, and one of the things I loved is that you were, you know, talking about the different dimensions of a human being, how we need to activate the hand, the head, the heart, et cetera.

[00:11:50] Yeah. And this is true. We have four primary dimensions. You know, we have a cognitive. Capability. We have an emotive capability, which you can relate to the heart. We have a physical and a spiritual one. Yeah. And we have it when we are a child. We have it as adults. It doesn't go away. And yet when you look at the current workplace or the organizations, we are part of majority.



[00:12:17] Activates our cognitive space, but it doesn't do anything for the five or the physical, or let alone the spiritual. Yeah. And it's not just the workplace, right? So you go to a very busy city, let's say like New York City or Istanbul, where I have lived many years. You know, people won't even look at each other in the eye.

[00:12:38] I know, I know. Um, we don't see each other physically, like we don't recognize each other's physical dimension to begin with. Yeah, and this transpires into the workplace. It's absolutely amplified by digitalization. Now, one of the things that, you know, I make my leaders laugh all the time because I challenge them on, you know, stupid little things on a day to day basis.

[00:13:03] One of the things I say, you know, we have these. Back to back online meetings now. And you know, depending on the agenda, people come in and out the room when someone comes in. We don't take 10 seconds to say, hi, Caroline, come in. Welcome. Yep. And you know, it's like someone walking into your living room and you not noticing them or when they exit or you know, when someone finishes something to say Thank you.

[00:13:30] They're so little, but they're so core and fundamental to our being, our desire to be seen, our desire to be heard, our desire to be cared for and rewarded. Those things don't go away. Yeah. As we become adults, we just kind of don't pay attention to them because. You know, there isn't an economic value to it in Right,

[00:13:51] **Carolyn:** right.

[00:13:52] And you know, again, the system that's been in place for so long. By the way, have you read any of Katrina Marcel's work? The Mother of Invention? No, but I have to make a note now. Yes. She is written two books. She's a feminist economist from. Sweden, I think it is. Mm-hmm. And, uh, yeah, she wrote two books Who made Adam Smith's dinner?

[00:14:14] Adam Smith being the Father of Economic Theory that we all live under. And the second one, mother of Invention. Okay. I made, yeah.



[00:14:22] **Sesil:** Great books. So I'll look those up.

[00:14:24] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Thank you. One thing that I learned, oh, I learned a lot writing my book, but I, I'll say one of the most profound things that I learned was the fact that our.

[00:14:37] Nervous systems. Hmm. We'll talk to each other or communicate with each other at all times. Your nervous system is either gonna say, oh, this person feels safe. They just welcome me into the room. Come on in. Or a nervous system is gonna say, Hmm. Be cautious. Mm-hmm. And we kind of will step back. And so those little things that you're talking about, I believe when we recognize that we are made up of not just our head and our heart, but also our body and our nervous system as part of that functioning body, it allows us to see leadership in such a broader way and in such a fuller way as well.

[00:15:16] **Sesil:** Yeah, I completely agree. My mind is going in multiple directions, but this concept of social contagion, yes. I dunno if you come across that. Yeah. So in our research too, we find a set of employees, for example, going into the workplace. If you take their blood pressure early in the morning when they come, it's one thing.

[00:15:37] And then when the leader arrives, Especially if the leader is coming from, let's say, a difficult evening, right? Like they didn't have their children sleeping or they had a family argument, even if they're completely professional and they don't necessarily transpire their experience onto others, if you measure their blood pressure just several hours.

[00:16:00] Later it's different. Yeah. We do pick up on each other's energies. Our nervous system is very, very powerful and I think, you know, the power of your work really comes in here because what we know is the impact of trauma is exactly that. It's. Starts with separation from self, then separation from others, you know, isolation or loss of trust.

[00:16:25] And then you may have an altered worldview thinking, you know, maybe world is not a safe place and maybe there's pain all the time. Yeah. And then you slowly start detaching from what's scoring important to you. And that



creates an obvious gap for how you build relationships and how you build bondage with others.

[00:16:46] Yeah, for sure. For sure. What you say makes complete sense to me. Yeah. And I

[00:16:51] **Carolyn:** know in your work, Cecile, you talk about in your book eight core attributes for leaders. Can we talk a bit a little bit about those? And I read them all. I was like, oh, yep, yep. Check, check, check, check. Totally agree. How did you come up with those eight?

[00:17:05] First of all,

[00:17:07] **Sesil:** very interesting path, and we had sort of three stages to the research, if you will. So the one thing that. We were discussing as a group with my team was the statistics that 52% of the Fortune 500 companies have disappeared since the year 2000. Yeah. So in 20 years time, you know, these very large, long tenured organizations just sort of went off the market.

[00:17:34] So the question was what happened to them? Mm-hmm. And then of course, You know, we are all curious individuals. So we started asking, well, what happened to the remaining ones and what are they doing differently? So this concept of sustainable growth came to mind. Mm-hmm. And we got curious about understanding what may be leading to these organizations longer tenure, if you will.

[00:17:58] So we reached out to those 48%, and some of them agreed for us to interview them. Long story short, what we found leads to. What we refer to as a sustainable growth is sort of two-legged. One is adaptability. Mm-hmm. Which refers to an organization's capability to renew itself. It may be it's processes, it's products, portfolio, even people to some degree.

[00:18:25] Mm-hmm. And the second one is resilience, which refers to. The collective, but the individuals inside that collective individual's ability to bounce back from adversity, to deal with change, and to learn and grow within



themselves. So those two came into play. And then of course we didn't stop there. We were like, well, if that's the case, what's leading to that?

[00:18:51] Mm-hmm. You know, are there some common behaviors, and I'd love to talk about this too, but we came up with five behaviors. Five leadership behaviors we felt like was, there was a pattern across multiple organizations, and those five behaviors for me are sort of, Challenging the current understanding of leadership in a little bit too.

[00:19:13] Maybe I give one example. So one of the behaviors is leaders sit in many chairs. So inside these organizations who you know, have been in the market for many, many years and continue to be, despite the bigger changes that are happening around them, they don't treat leadership the way we know it. Mm-hmm.

[00:19:34] You know, in a traditional sense, when. We say a leader, people will visualize a hierarchy. Yeah. And a metrics. Or a metrics, right? So traditional hierarchical structure where there's top leadership, then there is management, middle management, and then there is employees and the information flows. You know, one way?

[00:19:56] Yep. In these organizations, they were literally looking at everyone as a leader. So you could be coming out of university fresh, but you would still have a job scope that has a beginning and an end. So you have end-to-end responsibility for something within your scope. You had full rights for decision making and if a senior.

[00:20:18] When I say senior, I mean someone with multiple years as an individual contributor or a manager comes in, you're in an equal playground, right? They can challenge you, but you can challenge them back. You ask each other questions. So they were almost deferring to the organization as more of a dynamic living organism, which I think is very suited.

[00:20:42] But those kind of behaviors really challenge the way a lot of the. Think about leadership today. So anyway, we started with the sustainable growth came to behaviors, and then we looked for, okay, within the individuals,



are there some common attributes that are helping leaders behave the way they do? Mm, to create these safe spaces, to create these equal playgrounds, if you will, to build trust, et cetera.

[00:21:10] And that's how the eight attributes came about and the eight attributes are very interesting to me. We have this language of like hard skills and soft skills in the workplace, and I don't necessarily like that. Yeah, me too. We call them core, right? Because Mm. The AIDS pair, you know, purpose Is there as an example.

[00:21:32] Courage is there? Yeah. Wonder is their compassion Is there? These are attributes that we are all born with. Yeah. It doesn't matter the geography, it doesn't matter what kind of a family we are born into or what sort of, you know, credible education we have had, but we are not always taught how to work with these attributes and that makes a difference.

[00:21:54] Yeah. Cause when you play with purpose, if you are able to actually activate and live your purpose, Then you contribute to formation of a certain climate versus not. Or if you can be courageous, again, you attribute yourself to contribution of a certain climate or not. So they almost sit on a spectrum where you can lean in or lean out, and depending on where you play, it creates a certain environment for other people.

[00:22:24] **Carolyn:** That's what I was really struck by. I'm just gonna read off the eight. Sure. And so our listeners can know, I thought to myself like, If I was coming into an organization and I saw these eight core attributes. Mm-hmm. And that helped me develop as a person, a human. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. How that would just really bring out the strengths within, right.

[00:22:47] And serve the whole, like everybody, not just the organization. So the eight core attributes, purpose, courage, foresight. Emotional intelligence, wonder, wisdom, compassion, and mastery. Perfect. Wonder and wisdom. I was really taken by those. Can you help us understand, you had mentioned leadership behaviors mm-hmm.



[00:23:14] Or competencies and, and you started to talk a little bit about how leadership has changed a little bit. How are the core attributes connected to. Those leadership behaviors.

[00:23:28] **Sesil:** Yeah, very, very good question. So let's take a couple of examples. I think it's probably best. Go a little bit deeper so that the audience can also relate and understand better.

[00:23:40] So let's take purpose as an example and then we can take another one. So what do we mean by purpose? Purpose, generally speaking, it's a core belief or an aspiration someone has as to what they do or why they exist in the first place. So in an individual or organizational context, you can think of it as.

[00:24:03] The why. You know, understanding the why, right? Of a behavior situation or a specific mission. There's a scientific definition we have in the book, we'll put that aside. But in the art of leading purpose is key because when we know our purpose, we are able to align all of our. Being and doing accordingly, so we understand what's our life's mission.

[00:24:32] We understand what are our values, and only with that, our nervous system actually gets elevated and we are able to intake information better. Hmm. So when someone comes and says something like, we are going to have a new product in our portfolio, not only we are able to listen better, but we are looking for ways of connection and assigning our purpose, our reason for being to what we can do with this new product that's coming in, and how we can position it for the benefit of others.

[00:25:10] So it really embodies a core effort, almost like an intrinsic motivation that helps us not only overcome our own inertia, so we can do the right thing, but it helps us also. Explain things better and help others make better sense of what's happening in the environment. It's really critical because what we find in our research, the leaders who are able to live their purpose and come to work with that.

[00:25:40] For example, if someone knows, you know, I live to be in service to others, or I live to provide better healthcare, To the world and the environment.



Mm-hmm. And every time they come to work, they're looking for a piece of information and nuance. Something that they can take and work with, and then help inspire others right Through their stories, through a shared story.

[00:26:06] And then they don't actually. The complete opposite happens, their nervous system starts to slowly shut down or disconnect from any information, any activity that's happening in the environment. So when an employee comes in and says, why are we investing in this new product? They're not always able to articulate for the better.

[00:26:26] Right? You know, or they give some answers that are pre-prepared and it doesn't necessarily transpire as energy and inspiration. Right? Um, so there's less. Sense making, if you will, in the environment and more lacking.

[00:26:41] **Carolyn:** Yeah,

[00:26:42] **Sesil:** that's the leaning in and out, if you will. Okay. So there's no harm in not knowing or not living your purpose, except that if you can, it helps others better connect to you, better connect to what's happening in the environment.

[00:26:57] And create a shared story,

[00:26:59] **Carolyn:** right? The individuals. So is it almost like these attributes are like the seeds and then the, I love that. Leadership behaviors are like you, water. It's like the water, the sun, it's the, I'm not a gardener, but it's the, it's the things that will make it flourish. Yes,

[00:27:16] **Sesil:** absolutely.

[00:27:17] Absolutely. It's a beautiful symbol. They help you potentially grow the capacity that's in you. Yeah. And through that opening, through that blossom, it gives others to be a part of what's happening, right. It creates an environment where others can come in. We could take another example. I don't know what's interesting to you either.



[00:27:41] Courage or wonder, but

[00:27:43] **Carolyn:** can we go with wonder? I was in awe. Are wonder in awe kind of similar? They

[00:27:48] **Sesil:** they're related. Yes. And in scientific terms they're different. Awe, okay. In scientific definition tends to be bigger than wonder. Okay. They're very closely related.

[00:27:59] **Carolyn:** So let's, let's go with that one. Let's go with wonder.

[00:28:02] Okay.

[00:28:02] **Sesil:** So. When we talk about wonder, we often say it's a sense of curiosity, and I think it is. Yeah. But there is something a little more to wonder. There's a sense of connectedness that comes through this particular attribute. So individuals are really in the moment when they have a sense of wonder in an organizational context.

[00:28:26] It really sort of manifests itself as having a beginner's mind so people can build valuable options and have a better ability to listen to one another. Right. And there are really three facets to wonder. There's. The ability to sort of find and recognize or take pleasure in whatever is existing. So that's kind of being in the moment, but then there's an active engagement and there's responsiveness to what's happening.

[00:28:55] So not only you see something and you go, wow, you actually kind of lean in to learn more and dig a little bit deeper. Mm-hmm. And through that sort of active cognition or emotion, if you will, there's an ongoing engagement and it creates, More synergies, more discussions, more dialogue with people. So in practical terms, it literally feeds into people's creativity, right?

[00:29:22] Yeah. Right. So that's what happens. I mean, a lot of organizations are looking for innovation and they'll turn to technology or they'll turn to. Something that they hope will sort of right their creativity where we have this wonderful attribute that we can work with. And the beautiful thing is when



leaders are wondrous, not only they share this sense of vastness and beauty, if you will, but they also.

[00:29:50] Start sort of looking actively for areas where they can find moral excellence, where they can find ethical practice. So it takes them to a whole different campus, if you will. Mm-hmm. Which I think is wonderful. And again, on the opposite, when. Leaders are not able to work with wonder. A lot of the times what happens is they start slowly again, disconnecting from the moment, disconnecting from the discussion.

[00:30:21] Sometimes they're only playing in their heads, and even if they look like they're listening to someone, they're actually preparing their own answers or justifying their own sense of judgment. Yeah. And so they get into this like I know it all. Attitudes and you don't see a lot of dialogue happening. You don't see a lot of synergies being built.

[00:30:42] You don't see a lot of discovery happening in a mutual setting. I think it's a really powerful tool, if you will wonder. For me, it's one of the key attributes.

[00:30:53] **Carolyn:** Yep. Mm-hmm. It really stood out to me. Would you say that our inability to be present in the moment is the biggest barrier to. Achieving these core attributes?

[00:31:07] **Sesil:** Hmm. Wow. That's a great question. I think that's part of it for sure. I think, you know, going back to the original opening we had in terms of how authenticity is about acceptance, I think you really need to be in the moment to come to agreement with. Whatever you may have, right? Mm-hmm. Or whatever you may be lacking.

[00:31:34] That's the other thing. I don't think there's anything good or bad about what we have. I don't see a judgment, Carolyn, I, this has been. My biggest, I think, epiphany, if you will, in my own leadership journey. I used to be my own judge before anyone else. Yeah. And if I couldn't do something, I continuously beat myself for it without anyone knowing.



[00:32:06] Yeah. You know, I didn't even share that. And that alone disconnects you from the moment. So you miss multiple opportunities of what's happening if you are in the moment. Then hopefully you can start to see what's happening for what's happening without any judgments, and if you can be compassionate with yourself, then hopefully you can start growing some awareness and say, oh, maybe that behavior didn't necessarily land itself the way I meant it to.

[00:32:39] I wonder what happened there and start analyzing a little bit. Yeah. And that creates an opportunity for us to potentially step into correct course, reconnect to our values, right? And even have some dialogue with the people who may be on the receiving end of that behavior and rejuvenate our bondage and our relationship.

[00:33:02] So yeah, it's a wonderful question you ask. It really made me think, but I think you are onto something there. Being in the moment makes a huge difference.

[00:33:11] **Carolyn:** Yeah. And I think for me, Another thing that I've learned, I won't say the one thing, is we can be in the moment with our head. And I think for many years I thought being in the moment meant.

[00:33:23] Cognitively being focused on a topic, sitting in a meeting, and so you're shaking your head, we're on the right. We're on the same page. What I learned is, again, I'll come back to those three centers of intelligence. I think they're easier for people to remember. Is your heart in the moment? Are you allowing yourself to feel in the moment?

[00:33:41] And use that data and that emotion as data instead of, Ooh, pushing it away. Mm-hmm. Are you in the moment with like feeling your feet on the floor or you know, feeling the temperature around you? And I'll be the first to say I've lived probably, you know, most of my life not being in the moment with all three of those centers of intelligence.

[00:34:02] And I think that's where I think there's such a huge opportunity for. Leaders, and again, we both agree on what a leader is. If you step into an organization and you wanna make things better, that makes you a leader, doesn't



matter what your title is. I think that's where there is just so much untapped opportunity is to agree.

[00:34:23] See that integration.

[00:34:25] **Sesil:** I fully agree and I love the probes you have in the book. In fact, I made an order of a couple and one of them was around when his. Fear being present for you. Mm-hmm. I'm not gonna quote it. Exactly. Yeah. And what does it look like? And you know, over my career, over my professional life, there has been many occasions where, you know, leaders didn't necessarily come out the way that they wanted to.

[00:34:49] And then as their HR practitioner, you know, we would have a debrief afterwards. And if I ever stop them to ask, what are you feeling right now? Where is it in the body? Less than 1% can actually articulate it. Yeah. They're so disconnected from what's happening. They can't say, my hands are cold, or I am sweating.

[00:35:11] Yep. Or it's in my guts, or I have a burning sensation in my head. They actually do not know. Yep. Because they're not there. They're physically there or cognitively they're in the conversation, but they're not able to carry that hole. And this is where. The importance of that hole comes in. Exactly, exactly.

[00:35:31] If you don't have the awareness, then how are you gonna create space for any sort of self-regulation?

[00:35:36] **Carolyn:** Yep. Yep. And that's bringing me back to a comment that you shared, or it was a statement that you shared when we've had our first conversation a few weeks ago, and it was about, The importance of holding the space of safety and not trying to solve things.

[00:35:57] Mm-hmm. And that comment of holding space, I think, again, is where we need to go with leadership. How do we hold space? We can't hold space for ourselves or others if we're not present with our head, heart, and body. I



[00:36:15] **Sesil:** absolutely agree, and there is so much around language that plays against us here. I'm really unhappy with the business language.

[00:36:24] Let me just put it out there. There are many things that we say. I think it doesn't serve people well. Management. Or manager as a vocabulary is one of them. Yeah. You're smiling. We're probably on the same page. The way we think of a manager is someone who actually manages things. Manages, yeah. Comment and control and fixing.

[00:36:48] And the truth is you can't really manage people. I mean, I wish you could. Yeah. I know you're a mom. I'm hopefully going to be one in a couple of months. I can't manage my partner. Let's pause. Exactly. I would love, it's really not possible. And that of management versus leadership. I think these are things that really paralyze us because what happens is, You know, somebody who is an excellent individual contributor, perhaps, has perfected the way they do time management, task management.

[00:37:23] They got their operations in control, right? Yeah. Like you give them an assignment, they know how to break it into pieces. They know what to do, they know when to get feedback, and then hopefully they deliver on time with them budget, and then you promote them into a leadership role. And they assign something to someone else, they expect the same formula works for the other person.

[00:37:47] Right? Right. Because that's what they know. You wanna get from A to B, this is what you need to do. I have it. I haven't perfected it. And when the other person starts to go from A to C to come back to be, they jump because. Their sense of control is elevated and what's going on here? This is not how I know how to do things.

[00:38:07] Are we gonna land in the right place? And sure they feel accountable, they feel responsible for the end result, and therefore they start to sort of activate all these. Practices that they know. Anyway, long story short, I know you know where I am going with this. There are circumstances, there are practices, there are mindsets that we have been taught that are really working against us.



[00:38:31] Yep. So I wanna en invite our colleagues to give themselves the freedom to not believe. Just because we are taught something a certain way doesn't mean it's gonna work for us. Give yourself the freedom to try something else. Yep. It doesn't work the way that you are taught. Maybe there's another solution that you have not been taught.

[00:38:52] Yeah. Yet,

[00:38:54] **Carolyn:** and this is where we'll come back to those core attributes and how they can serve us to move leadership forward. I'm curious of what other words are not serving us. Can you share a few other ones? I know we definitely agree on management. What other ones come up for you? There are so

[00:39:09] **Sesil:** many. I don't like work-life balance.

[00:39:12] Yeah. I feel like, I mean, you know so much about neurology. We are sort of coding into our heads that work and life are. Separate, separated. Yep. We're not, we have one Life and work is a part of it, hopefully. Yeah. It's a beautiful part of it. It doesn't have to be, but there's so much more integration there and there's something about also stepping in and really fulfilling our space.

[00:39:37] I have nothing against. Economists, but we do disagree a lot. You know, when I at the four or else places, we have very vivid arguments and I love them because I learned so much through them. Mm-hmm. But even recently, this concept of Great Exit, for example. Right. The argument for me is not solid. Why is it a great exit?

[00:40:03] I wrote an

[00:40:03] article

[00:40:04] **Sesil:** saying, is this great exit or great awakening? Because if you're an economist, you are gonna associate everything to, again, revenue and money,



right? Yep. You're gonna say people are living workplaces for pay and additional benefits, where in reality, the research shows us, no, they're not.

[00:40:21] They're looking for better purpose. They're looking for better cultural fit and meaningful connections. So maybe. It's not necessarily an exit. Maybe they're awakening to the fact that there could be a different reality. See how it shifts the conversation in a whole different place? Yep. And then we don't have to be so much on the offense.

[00:40:42] So I always say to my HR colleagues, it's your space. You don't have to take concepts at the heart value. Yeah. If it doesn't feel right to you, doesn't feel right to you. Yeah. You don't have to own it. And in fact, I would want us to challenge one another and, and say, SIS Cecil, you think this, or you write about this.

[00:41:02] Do you really think it is this? And. You gimme an opportunity to go back and forth and let me learn something from you, and maybe together we arrive at a better place, right? I don't like this sort of flavor of the day, concepts and trends, and I know how they generate money. Don't get me wrong. I've been this a long time, but this doesn't serve us.

[00:41:24] That's what I am trying to

[00:41:26] **Carolyn:** say. Yeah, I agree. I agree. Oh, Cecile, we could talk for a long time. I know I have thoroughly enjoyed this conversation. In some ways I'm sad to wrap it up, but we do have three questions. Ands, can we go there to wrap up the conversation? Sure, sure, of course. Yeah. And these three questions, they're based out of my book and the evolved leadership model, which we talked about so many overlaps today with that.

[00:41:53] So the first one has to do with self-awareness, and I'm asking the guests who come on to share a moment of self-awareness that was, you know, kind of striking a moment when there was a lot of discomfort, but it yielded a lot of insight for you. Hmm. Yeah,



[00:42:11] **Sesil:** I love that question. I'll go back to my early days as a leader, Caroline.

[00:42:17] I made many, many mistakes now, so I have so many examples and I hope I have been able to learn through them. But this one, I lost sleep for many, many nights over this one. So what happened was, I was with a company, a large pharmaceutical, and I had a very big team, and we were just introducing open spaces and I don't have a preference for open spaces.

[00:42:44] I'm an introvert and I need a bit of a closeness. Um, but nevertheless, this was our setting. And, uh, there was someone on the team where I really struggled to gain trust with. Mm-hmm. Um, it was a, she, she was also older than me and more experienced than me. And I thought I did everything right and I just could not gain her trust and I couldn't figure out why.

[00:43:09] So, you know, after many, many months, one day I just said, what's wrong? Like, tell me what am I doing wrong? Mm. And by the way, if I can say, If you notice something, don't wait. Yeah. At all. You don't have to wait. I think vulnerability is a sign of courage. I didn't know it then, so I waited, I think too long.

[00:43:32] Yeah. But anyway, she shared with me something she observed because we were in an open space, a conversation I had with another colleague, someone from the team. She didn't have the context, she didn't have the background of what was happening. All she told me was that my response seemed. Forceful, if I can use your model.

[00:43:57] Mm-hmm. Yep. Forceful to her. And there was a very legitimate reason for why, if there was any aggression, there was aggression in the conversation. However, I recognize that day that no matter what, the job comes with a microscope. Yeah. People look at you for better or worse, for role modeling and. It's not just about one-to-one relationships we build, it's about how we show up in the environment right alone or with others.

[00:44:30] And trust can be built or taken away from that too. And that was such an eye opener for me. I think it was one of those things along with others



later in life, I. When I decided I have to be who I am at home, at work elsewhere, it's who I am. Right? I'm not gonna leave pieces of me. That was one of those things, because you can't earn trust by gossiping to someone about someone else.

[00:45:01] Like one behavior we always see in the workplace. I trust you. So I'm gonna tell you this. Yes. Yeah. And the other person is thinking, well, are you doing this in the back of

[00:45:12] **Carolyn:** me too? You know? Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So are you saying like, you, you wish you hadn't been forceful? Or you wish you were more forceful and maybe forceful people don't have the context with it necessarily, but obviously yeah.

[00:45:27] **Sesil:** What I think what I learned is if I'm going to give someone feedback, it has to be one-to-one. Gotcha. Or if, or if it's in a group setting, everybody needs. To be brought in on the context, but they can understand what's happening. Yeah. Yeah. Um, otherwise there's gap. And they fulfill the gap with Yes. Their own experiences, their own beliefs and assumptions, so, got it.

[00:45:48] That was the biggest learning. Yeah. Mm-hmm. And that trust isn't necessarily built only one to one.

[00:45:56] **Carolyn:** Yes. Yep. Yeah. Oh, that was a profound example, Cecil. All right. Second question. Hmm. What is a practice or ritual that keeps you or returns you to a regulated state in your nervous system? Hmm.

[00:46:15] **Sesil:** Um, it's a beautiful question.

[00:46:17] Also, I love. Taking walks as a way of meditation. Yep. I am not someone who can sit in silence for meditation. I have a praying practice, so I do that every morning. Kind of like a meditation. Yep. I have a mat that my grandmother hands off for me many, many years. Oh, beautiful. I just sit on that and. You know, show a sign of gratitude for things that I have.



[00:46:47] That's, that's my prayer. Yeah. But what helps me the most is if I'm out in the nature and walking, and I really try to do that almost every day currently for 40 minutes to an hour. Sometimes I have podcasts in my ears. Most of the time there's nothing. It's just violent. Yeah.

[00:47:06] **Carolyn:** Just to connect with nature.

[00:47:08] **Sesil:** Yeah, that really grounds me. I feel like that's my soil and I kind of wash all the energies the way it's come back. That's beautiful.

[00:47:18] **Carolyn:** Yeah. And last but not least, the final question has to do with. Connection and something bigger than ourselves. And so this one is about music. Cause I find that music is just a way to connect, it's a language in its own right, but what is a song or genre of music that makes you feel connected to something bigger than yourself?

[00:47:40] **Sesil:** Hmm. I love music. I love dancing too. I don't do it as much as I used to and I regret that. I love disco music, like sixties, seventies. Yeah. And I tell you why. I think there's something about the sort of the flow in the music that's makes me feel free so I can just let go and surrender. Surrender to the moment.

[00:48:07] I think that's what makes it. Worthwhile for me, and I'm such a silly character, just to get giddy with people. Yeah. Makes me laugh and smile. It just elevates my state. I feel joyful and I feel really happy. So yeah, I'd say that probably. And we do it with my husband too. Sorry, I just cut you off. Like in the morning, you know when the radio is on, usually it's the vintage tunes that are playing and.

[00:48:35] You know, we kind of go woo woo. Yeah,

[00:48:40] **Carolyn:** I know. Thank you so much for, uh, coming on. This has been an amazing conversation and I wish you all the best in your next chapter that is about to come into your world. And thank you so much for joining us today.



[00:48:55] **Sesil:** Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure. You're right.

[00:48:58] We could go on for another hour, but I loved every minute of it, so thank you.

[00:49:05] **Carolyn:** One of the statements that Cecil shared in our conversation today. Is still resonating strongly with me. She said authenticity is a process of acceptance, and I've never heard it stated like that, but when I think about all of her work in human-centered leadership and my work in trauma informed leadership, it really does come down to that.

[00:49:32] How willing are we as leaders? How willing are we to find what our true, authentic. Being is who are we really? And I know that might sound deep, but I honestly don't see a way out of our workplaces and the frustration and the chaos and the pain that people are feeling until we as leaders, and in particular leaders who have the power at the top of the hierarchy, are really willing to look inward and.

[00:50:11] Is a word that's used and thrown around a lot, and yet true authenticity is really hard to find and sometimes you think you might have found it and there's a few other layers to go. I hope you enjoyed this conversation with Cecil if you are interested in any of her work. We have left her contact information in our show notes.

[00:50:34] And if you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review and share and subscribe. It really helps. You can find me@carolynsora.com and my new book, evolve Path Trauma Informed Leadership Can Be Found on Amazon. Thanks again for joining us. We'll see you again soon.