



022: Traveling at the Speed of Human with Alain Hunkins

[00:00:00] **Alain:** The analogy that I came up with around microaggressions. You know, microaggressions are in some ways like bee stings. I get sung by a bee once every 25 years. It hurts, but frankly, I don't think about it a whole lot. Well, as a white heterosexual man in North America kinda like me and microaggressions, I go outside.

[00:00:15] I don't think about getting stung by a bee ever. Yeah. However, there are people who every single day wake up and go outside and they're potentially either being sung by a bee, threatened, being sung by a bee, having to tell their children, don't go that way, cuz if you go that way, you're gonna get sung by a bee.

[00:00:29] And the fact that I have never had a conversation like that with my kids, if that's not the definition of privilege. I don't know what is

[00:00:37] **Carolyn:** Ale. Huns helps leaders, teams, and companies achieve performance goals easier. Over his 25 year career, he has worked with over 3000 groups of leaders in 27 countries.

[00:00:51] In addition to being an executive coach, leadership and team development facilitator and keynote speaker, Len is the author of the book, cracking the Leadership Code. Three Secrets to Building Strong Leaders. Anne's work has been featured in Chief Executive Fast Company, Inc. Training Magazine, chief Learning Officer and Business Insider.

[00:01:14] He's also a monthly leadership strategy contributor to Forbes Magazine. Atlanta was recently named number 33 on the global powerless of the Top 200 Biggest Voices in Leadership for 2023 by leaders. Hum. In this



conversation today, I'm going to be asking Ella about these elements of the leadership code that we need to crack.

[00:01:42] He calls them the three secrets, and when you hear the words, they might not seem like a big secret, but when we get into the details of how great leaders can embody these elements of the leadership code, That's where we'll unlock the secrets. I hope you enjoy our conversation. Welcome

[00:02:06] **Intro:** 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.

[00:02:30] Because the only way to deliver real results is to understand what it takes to lead real human beings. This is a new era of leadership.

[00:02:45] **Carolyn:** I'm Carolyn Sora, and this is Evolve a new era of Leadership. Hello Evolv listeners. It's Carolyn Sora, your host, and I am really excited to have a guest with us today who is going to share the boatloads of information are not even information, the boatloads of insight that he has around leadership and working with teams.

[00:03:11] So Ellen, welcome to the show.

[00:03:14] **Alain:** Thanks so much Carolyn. I'm super excited to be with you here today.

[00:03:17] **Carolyn:** Yeah. Now you are the author of a book Cracking the Leadership Code and the title of your book, I was quite raptured with what do we need to Crack and what is the code? I mean, there was just four words and it just had me like, you know,

[00:03:34] **Alain:** Had you at cracking leadership?

[00:03:35] It did. Yeah.



[00:03:36] **Carolyn:** So, yeah. What, what? Like what do we need to crack? I'm really curious.

[00:03:41] **Alain:** Well, it's really interesting. It's a great question because I think for so many people, whether you are in a formal leadership role and will define formal leadership role as a position, you have direct reports in an organization of some kind, whether you are in that formal or informal role.

[00:03:59] You know, leadership, everyone knows it's important, but for most people it's really vague. We know it when it's working well and we know it when it's not working well, but giving some more language and some distinctions around it. And so the book wasn't just me sitting down at my desk and saying, what do I think about leadership?

[00:04:18] So, Part of my background is being this facilitator and coach and trainer, and I've worked with organizations for 27 years, probably well over 3000 groups in 27 countries now. And so the book emerged out of watching patterns. Mm. Basically what I kept seeing was that the best leaders. Were doing certain things in common, and the poor leaders were doing certain things in common.

[00:04:44] And so what I started to look for were patterns. Patterns and patterns. And what I finally noticed, what I started doing was blogging back in 2011, I'd come up with an idea based on a story I heard, and that would turn into a blog. And I consistently blogged every week for over four years. Oh, wow. But what I ended up doing is I started reviewing, I mean, now we have 250 or so blog posts and looking for what were the big themes that kept showing up?

[00:05:07] What were the common things? And what I found was I. The three, the subtitle, the book is The Three Secrets to Building Strong Leaders and this is what they are. And I'll tell you what they are and then we'll get into why this gonna sound simple and it's actually harder than ever. So the three secrets, the three themes are first is connection.

[00:05:27] Yeah. Because I don't care what industry you work in. You're in the human being business. Yeah. The fact is everything gets done in and through



people. And then the second thing is around communication. And one of the big challenges or pitfalls to communication is a lot of people think communication is done for its own sake and it's not.

[00:05:44] Mm-hmm. I mean, the point of communication is not communication. The point of communication is to create shared and mutual understanding. Right? And then the third piece is around collaboration. The fact is, as leaders, we create environments or design environments where people either thrive and perform at their best.

[00:06:01] Or a flounder or something in between. And so what great leaders I realize do is they do these connections, communications and collaborations intentionally. And what poor leaders do is they do it accidentally. They don't really know. It's a kind of unconscious, like, I don't know, I. And here's the thing. So what's the code we have to crack?

[00:06:18] So what I found is one of the big red flags of poor leadership is that a lot of leaders are still using a 20th century industrial age playbook for how to lead. And the shorthand for that is, we'll call it the commander in chief, the boss basically. Command in control do this. Why? Because I said so.

[00:06:40] That's why. Yeah. And you know, if you ask people do you do that? They'll probably say, no, I don't do that. But if you watch their behaviors, both subtle and not so subtle, you will see command in control all over the place. Yep. And so I did a lot of research for the book, and what I found was only about 23% of people think their leaders lead well.

[00:07:00] Wow. Now, when I've shared that statistic with teams and organizations that people say, how can that be? How can that be? I mean, don't those leaders realize it? Don't people tell them, and I stop and ask them. I say, If you had a lousy leader, would you tell them? Cuz in most hierarchical organizations, doing so is a serious career limiting move.

[00:07:20] So yeah. So they are blind to their own blindness, which is a wonderful thing I got from Daniel Kahneman, right? Blind to our own blindness. We don't even realize. We don't know what we don't know. And so



we really have to switch and shift our perception of leadership and really move into what I call the facilitative mindset.

[00:07:37] Today's leader can't be a commander-in-chief, actually needs to be a facilitator in chief.

[00:07:42] **Carolyn:** Well now up until this point, Ellen, there was a lot of C alliteration going on. Yes. And now you brought in like an F word, so I'm a little disappointed and I'm just kidding. Um, I do think it's interesting though.

[00:07:56] There were so many Cs in there and like command and control and moving to connection, collaboration, and, and communication. One of the things I'm really appreciating in what you said is you observed. Yeah. And I think when I think of my own development, My intention was different than my impact, and I think that observing ourselves or observing others is a real gateway into deeper self-awareness.

[00:08:24] **Alain:** Absolutely, and I would say observing others, I would say of the two is probably easier. Yes. The real challenge for so many of us is do we observe ourselves. It's interesting. I was just today while we're recording this, I was sitting with a client, an executive coaching client who just went through a leadership 360 degree assessment.

[00:08:45] Just for those that may not be familiar with 360. I can't assume everyone knows what that is. Is that basically got, uh, behavioral feedback from their peers, from their direct reports as well as their boss. So it's like ideas and themselves. So it's 360 degree snapshot. And what was very clear, there were some pretty big gaps between, you talked about it before, right?

[00:09:02] The intention? Yeah. They meant well. And the impact they had, and they were really stuck that, particularly their boss, you know, really saw some things where on a scale of one to 10, they were rating themselves a nine and their boss was rating them a three. Mm. It's like, whoa, that is a pretty big gap. So what do you, so we started exploring how.



[00:09:22] What you might not be aware of might be really important to someone else, right? In an example, I said, do you follow through on all of your commitments? You know, that's a key piece of leadership credibility. And they said, well, I think I do. And I, so I dug a little deeper and I said, well, let me ask you this.

[00:09:39] Do you write all the commitments down that you have once you make them? No, I don't. I said, so how do you know if things are falling through the cracks? Because I know that for myself, if I don't write stuff down, it is gone within 15 minutes. So it's just that question of, cuz one of the key pieces of credibility is, do you do what you say you're gonna do?

[00:09:58] Yeah. You know? So anyway, so the real challenge here is, are you willing to look in the mirror? And it takes courage because let's face it, you've gotta look back and go. It's not perfect. And not freak out about the fact that, Ugh, it's not perfect. I, yeah. It's like, no, you gotta go. Here's data. Okay, now what can I do?

[00:10:17] How can I get better? And look, I have to work on this too. It's not like I'm perfect. That's the work. The work is the willingness to be humble enough to go. Okay. Yeah. So what am I gonna learn today? Yeah. What am I gonna learn today?

[00:10:30] **Carolyn:** Now, you said the order connection, communication, collaboration was that I'm looking at, it's not alphabetical.

[00:10:38] It's not. So there's a reason behind that. So can you share with us why that is? Connection, love, love this question. Yeah. I'm gonna guess connection. That's an obvious one for me. Yeah. But let's hear all three.

[00:10:48] **Alain:** Yeah, so connection is the foundation. Cuz like, like I said, you're in the human being business and without connection you don't get to a place of real trust, you know?

[00:10:57] Right. Uh, you just don't get there. You don't build a relationship without connection. And it's interesting, you know, all the research would say,



you know, the number one thing that makes people engaged and productive at work, Is do they feel valued and cared for by their immediate supervisor? Now, if that is not a soft and fuzzy sounding thing, and yet all the research would lead to why, that's the number one thing is that I feel cared for.

[00:11:21] So that falls under the bucket of connection. So this is why we have to start with connection because we can learn all these other skills, but without connection. People are gonna sniff us out as disingenuous and fake. And we all know what that's like. When you know someone goes off to a workshop and comes back and they start practicing, they repeat everything back like a parrot.

[00:11:38] Like, oh, you must have taken an active listening class, did you? Yeah. That's all you're doing right now. It's like, I understand what you're saying. I under, yeah, like so, so connections first and then. So beyond that then it's around communication. Um, and then the reason that's so important is, you know, I touched on this before, is that, you know, the goal of communication is shared understanding.

[00:11:55] And the reason that shared understanding is so important is because if you think about it, understanding if it's good, it's solid, clear, if it's poor, it's missed or misunderstanding, that becomes the platform on which we're gonna take. All future decisions. Mm. And you know, so if it's a solid foundation built on shared understanding, we're gonna make some really good decisions, which will net out in some good results.

[00:12:20] However, if we have a really wobbly and tippy or broken platform, or we're not sure, and as an example, how many of us have ever. Walked out of a meeting where we didn't get shared, confirmed understanding. And you have the little hallway meeting after the meeting because wait, what? What? What do we say we're doing?

[00:12:37] What did they think? Janet? What are we doing? How? Right? And then what? And then we have 10 meetings. Think about how we're not aligned and think about the kind of decisions and the rework and not to mention the disengagement, the draining of energy, the morale that goes down for them. So as leaders, we need to be vigilant about making sure.



[00:12:55] We create clarity because without clarity, there is no comfort and without comfort, people can't settle in and focus on the next action. They are still partially their mind. Their energy is still focused in the past, kind of doubting questioning. Is this right? Are we on the right page? And we all have done this.

[00:13:13] I mean, for example, just think of a time where you weren't sure about something and just, let's say you had to write an email and just. How much more time it took. And you had like, can you read this through? Yeah. I'm not sure. I'm, I don't know. I don't know. So that all falls under the umbrella of communication.

[00:13:29] And then this third piece is, turns out that there are certain environments where people will perform at their best in certain environments where people perform at less than their best. Hmm. So what are we doing to help people perform at their best? It turns out I found that in the research there's like four key elements that we need to create an environment for people to perform at their best.

[00:13:48] The first is that they have to feel safe. Yep. Okay. And safety can be physical safety, it can be emotional safety, it can be psychological safety, and that obviously now you're seeing, wait a minute, that sounds like connection. These start to overlap, so you can see they're not discreet separate from each other.

[00:14:03] So it's that sense of safety because that lets people settle in and focused. That's the first piece. The second one has to do with energy. There's certain things that we do that are gonna create environments where people are more energized to bring more. I'll give you a quick example of that. How many of us.

[00:14:19] Have been in a meeting, it could be in person or remote, and the meeting kept going and going and going, and we're hitting two hours and we haven't taken a break. And at this point you're out of your mind thinking either I have to go to the bathroom or I can't focus, or I'm hangry, or just recognizing that biologically people can't go more than 80 or so minutes at a time.



[00:14:39] So if you're leading a meeting and you know it's gonna be that long, why aren't you scheduling breaks? I mean, the other classic example of this, and this happens in so many organizations, how many of us are default settings for our meeting times our 60 minutes? Because that's what outlook or calendar, whatever it is.

[00:14:54] Yep. So the nine o'clock meeting ends at 10. The 10 o'clock meeting ends at 11. And guess what? That works on paper. It doesn't work for humans. No. Right. So how are you gonna shift your mental, let alone stretch or go to the bathroom or whatever that is. Yeah. So we have to realize we have to build in for humans.

[00:15:10] So anyway, I kind of got on a rant here. Yeah. So that's safety and energy. The third piece around collaboration is the sense of ownership. So again, no one likes a micromanager. So what are things that you're doing so that people have autonomy and ownership over their work? So it's giving them some clear direction about what the end goal is, but giving them a lot of latitude and freedom about how to go about doing that because then they get to bring their own innovation, creativity, and energy to that.

[00:15:37] And then the fourth and final piece around what can create a more collaborative environment has to do with purpose. The fact is when people feel as though what they're doing really matters. They're gonna be more committed to it. And the thing is, as leaders, we have to remember that we need to remind people of this purpose, not just once or twice, but on a regular basis.

[00:16:00] The analogy I like to use around it is you can't get away on your wedding day saying to your partner, well, I said I love you at the altar. Nothing's changed. Right? So, yeah, no, we have to say these things again and again. Cause we all need reminders of the why. Right? The big picture as to. Why we're doing makes a difference and how that's important.

[00:16:19] And there's a lot of different ways that you can bring this element of purpose into things. So again, just to recap that, safety, energy, ownership, and purpose, those are all things that leaders have paint pallets to use an analogy. And every day and every workday is, is a ca blank canvas. And how are you



painting on that canvas with creating safety and energy and ownership and purpose?

[00:16:39] And that to me is some of the creativity and the fun in leadership is realizing, what am I doing so that people go, wow.

[00:16:46] **Carolyn:** And I'm gonna come back to a word you said at the very beginning too, which is intentionality. Yeah. I'm gonna focus in right now on that collaboration piece. Like how are you creating the environment of safety and how are you making sure that you are aware of your own energy levels as well?

[00:17:04] I know your work is grounded in so much research and not just stuff you're making up. Yeah. Um, so, you know, we won't. Yeah. Name all those authors, but you know, I'm hearing Tony Schwartz in there. Amy Edmondson. Yeah. You know Simon Sinek, all that kind of stuff. Yeah. How have you found in the past? I'm gonna come maybe in the past three to four years, since we have had 2020, I don't even say just Covid, cuz that year just was full of so much turmoil.

[00:17:30] Yes. Um, how has safety and energy shown up in your work? Differently than what it was pre 2020.

[00:17:42] **Alain:** Sure, sure. Happy to answer that one. So interestingly enough, so end of March, I was living in Europe at the time when that all started, and what was interesting, if you remember, is that everything that was sort of spreading Europe was about a week ahead of North America.

[00:17:55] Yeah. Right. And I was still working in North America remotely with people butting about was going on. I was like, oh, okay. Okay. And it was very clear, very early on as this kind of the world began to kind of both shut down and everyone lost their collective minds a little bit like what's going on? Is I the, it's very interesting.

[00:18:12] One of the first things I did was I went to the dictionary and I looked up the definition of trauma. And the definition of trauma is in the dictionary is a



deeply distressing or disturbing experience. I'm went, all right, this now qualifies for everybody. Right? And so what I intuitively and again, just intuitively when I was like, People are gonna be feeling isolated and lonely and scared.

[00:18:35] And what they need is they need a safe place to come and just be with wherever they are and for someone else to meet them where they are. Yep. And so what I started doing for clients, for colleagues, for friends, I started holding an open Zoom hour. Every single day, seven days a week. And I did that for a month and we started cutting it back over time, but just giving people a place to be.

[00:18:59] Yep. And so that ties in in terms of, I think continuing from there, uh, I think what we have seen, because what that did is that really put this seismic shift crack in our collective psyche where a lot of people who might have been, we'll just call it a good metaphor, kind of the hamster wheel of productivity.

[00:19:18] Now, just go to work, get up, do your thing, you know, lather, rinse, repeat, have your weekend, go back and do this. Suddenly, People were face-to-face with literally life and death. And so they were revisiting like, wait, why? Why am I doing this? What's really important? And then suddenly, when they couldn't do a whole bunch of things that they used to do, they had to stop and go, all right, so now that I'm doing this, hey, you know what?

[00:19:41] For some people it was, oh my gosh. I didn't even know that my family was so awesome. I really like being around them. Yeah. Now for some other people it was, oh my gosh, I can't stand my family. Yeah. I don't know what I'm gonna do. Right. So I'm not saying there's one size fits all that people started questioning the status quo.

[00:19:57] Right. And then I think what I see is this has happened since before 2020. When the mainstream part of the bell curve, again, there's, there's extremes. There always have been extremes, but I'll say the mainstream part of the bell curve was when someone said, how are you? I'm fine. How are you? Yep. Whereas now it was like, Hey, how are you doing, Carolyn?



[00:20:17] How are you really doing? Yeah. Because people, people want to know, and that has carried on. The wake of that is continued, and so I think. As we think about how have I changed and how has the work changed, I think there's much more of an openness and an appetite for people to recognize, you know, we, we talked about, you know, bringing your whole self to work for a long time and authenticity for a long time.

[00:20:42] Yep. But it's become much more part of the mainstream conversation. Just as, for example, when I started in this work 20, 25 years ago, Emotional intelligence it had been heard of, but it was very much on the fringes. Whereas now it is so solid. I mean, there's all sorts of emotional intelligence assessments and it's a main, it's been adopted and so this whole sense of empathy at work and con like it's, we're moving in this direction now where I.

[00:21:07] What's happening is people are really looking to be able to be more human. Yeah. I would call it, I say more human at work. They wanna be able to be more human. And of course, one of the things with the remote work piece and how some people are, you know, the whole question of are you going back to the office and not going back to the office, is that some people are not willing for them the autonomy of working remotely.

[00:21:32] As a game changer. And now when you've got companies who are willing to hire anyone from anywhere, well then suddenly the playing field has completely changed in terms of where, so where are employees being poached from? So this whole war for talent has gotten. Darn. Interesting. Yeah, it

[00:21:50] **Carolyn:** really has. Well, and remind me, when did you publish your book?

[00:21:54] What year?

[00:21:54] **Alain:** Yeah. Well, the book came out March the 24th. 2020. So I was right in the middle. It was like that same week. Right. Middle of it.

[00:22:01] **Carolyn:** Yeah. I think what really strikes me, so allure of your title, cracking the Leadership Code, and I, I didn't remember the year it was



published. To me, it had just so much symbolism to it because to crack the leadership code is also to crack open ourselves.

[00:22:17] I think that that's the way I took it. Yeah. Is that there's a code inside of us. Yeah. As individuals and I. For me, safety and energy are two pieces that I think we can create a lot more space to talk about. Absolutely. And I was really drawn to that and I like how you've included them in into collaboration because I.

[00:22:40] You know, one of my biggest learnings around safety was how I made a very, very pompous assumption that if I felt safe, other people must feel safe as well. Yeah. Because I'm a good person and why would anybody else not feel that? And so my eyes have certainly opened up to how my bias and how wrong of an assumption that is.

[00:23:04] With your work, Ella, that you do with your clients, how do you talk about safety and what they can do as leaders to create. Environments that aren't gonna guarantee safety, but at least acknowledge that safety is going to look different for different people.

[00:23:22] **Alain:** Ah, great. You have such good questions, Carolyn.

[00:23:23] This is great. So I think ultimately safety is a concept. We have to put it into practice. So what are the, the, the tactical, tangible things that we can do? So there's a couple things. Uh, one has to do. And these are not in any particular order, by the way, of prior They're, these are both really important.

[00:23:40] And again, I wanna credit Amy Edmondson, the Godmother of psychological safety. This work comes from her thinking as well. One is to make sure that people's voice is in the room, right? So we talk about inclusion and exclusion is what are you doing to make sure that people are heard? So for example, if you have a team of eight people and you have a team meeting, Do you have all eight people in discussion or do you have just a few dominate and some people never talk and do you even notice it and you know, so you have to bring in the quiet ones.



[00:24:10] Mm. There's a lot of creative ways to do that, right? So whether that means, maybe it means you need to give people the question before the meeting, cuz not everyone's gonna be able to think on their feet. That's like if you're a reflective processor, you're gonna want some time to digest before just like, Thinking about, oh, I think this.

[00:24:28] So that's one piece A around that. Also, you know, potentially, and if you have a larger team, maybe you put people into smaller groups and have them give them a voice somewhere and then bring up, okay, so what did your team or your smaller groups say, bring this in. And one thing I oftentimes coach leaders, like, let's say you're doing this, many of us are working with teams remotely.

[00:24:47] I will literally, if I'm working with a team of even up to 20, On a Zoom call, I will make a list of names and that after someone speaks, I put a little check mark right? And I can look at the names and go, oh Carolyn, we haven't heard. Well, I'd love to hear what you have to say. Yeah, I'm just making sure you're including, uh, bringing people in cuz everyone wants to be seen.

[00:25:04] And like you said, it, just because you feel safe doesn't mean that everyone else is feeling safe. So that's one piece. The other thing that is really important, Is for people to feel safe. It's incredibly helpful if the leader will model vulnerability. Mm-hmm. I like to say that the team will only go as deep as leader is willing to model.

[00:25:23] Yep. And so again, we're not asking you and people hear that. Vulnerability. Ooh. Like, we're not asking you to share your deepest, darkest, Pandora's box of a secret. Yes. We're not asking you or cry. We don't need to do any of those things. We don't need to do all that. Right? Yeah. So it's just about what would feel like a bit of a risk for you to show your humanity.

[00:25:43] What's something that you're going through that people can relate to? So this was a lesson that I had to learn along in my journey, which is, frankly, people don't want you to be perfect. Yep. People can't connect to perfection. In fact, what they end up doing is they get resentful of it. And I tried for a lot and am I speaking, I could be perfect.



[00:26:01] And I realized, wow, people are not connecting with me because I'm not showing them. You know, again, no one wants to hear the, and I did this and I was awesome at this and I was great at this and I got this award and that award and like, and then I won the Nobel Prize. Yeah. And like all they go is like, I ca that's not me.

[00:26:15] As opposed to, people love when I tell the stories of where I screw up and I've, you know, I'm happy to share many of those. That's where the learnings are and that's where the humanity is. So leaders need to be vulnerable around that. And then the other thing is recognizing that if you give a space for other people to be vulnerable when they are, for you to acknowledge them.

[00:26:35] Yes. And that can be as simple as, Hey Carolyn, thank you for sharing that. I can imagine that took some courage. I just wanna, I just wanna acknowledge you for that. Thank you. And just to notice that, because sometimes people will share something and if you go on, you're not acknowledging it. Makes them go, wait a minute, wait, uh uh, where am I?

[00:26:53] What's going? So yeah, just being really aware. And so it's interesting cuz as we're thinking about this idea of vulnerability and acknowledging things, the words that come to mind to me are slow down. Yes. Right. Because the fact is, and I'm sure you get into this in some of your work too, is that, you know, in our digital age, so much of work knowledge work travels at the speed of light, right?

[00:27:14] You're getting 300 emails in your inbox every day. Yes. Or even more, whatever it is, and you're on, IM, and you know, whatever your platform and technology of choices, it moves the speed of light. But humans and human psychology and human brains have not changed a whole lot in the last 10,000 years. And all of this emotional work that we're talking about travels at the speed of humans, not at the speed of light.

[00:27:35] And so we need to slow down. And of course, challenge, I mean, we all hear that right now. You listen to a podcast, you're going, oh, I get it. But do you get it when you're in the midst of the pressure filled? I have to get from rushing from meeting to meeting. Deadline to deadline. You know, in our fast



paced world, especially in our corporate worlds, where many of us, our corporate values include something like Bias for Action or Drive for Results.

[00:27:59] Yes. Now I have no problem with driving for results. I'm not suggesting that we all open not for profits, and we're all okay with that. However, It's about knowing there's a time and a place to go fast and a time and a place to go slow and sometimes when with humans, we have to go slow in order to go fast.

[00:28:16] Yeah. Another way I like to say that is we oftentimes confuse efficiency with effectiveness. I'll just give you an example of that is you might think, Hey, we're gonna do this new initiative. You're like, okay, I've got a team of eight. I'm just gonna email everybody. This is what we're doing. Right? That's at scale.

[00:28:30] That's easier. However, are those eight people if you need their commitment and buy-in, Wouldn't it make more sense for you to actually spend some one-on-one time maybe picking up the phone and spending 10 minutes saying, Hey, we're looking at doing this. I wanted to share this with you, because they're gonna be so much more engaged with this than just in insert name here, scale outwards.

[00:28:51] And so yeah, we have the tools to scale Steph, but unless we make, going back to connection, unless we go back to that personal one-on-one. You see me? I see you. No. We're gonna get stuck.

[00:29:03] **Carolyn:** You can't scale connection. No. And and I love what you said there, traveling at the speed of human, as you were talking about vulnerability there and how much we appreciate it when it's modeled.

[00:29:15] Yeah. One thing that I've learned through the years doing this work is that as leaders, it's in our best interest to respect when other people are not willing to be vulnerable and. To even consider when that happens, what we might be unintentionally doing to. Create a space that might not be as safe as they think.



[00:29:41] And this is something coming from a, an identity of a white straight woman mm-hmm. That I've certainly become much more aware of. And not to get frustrated with it and to just accept that that's the other person's experience. Yeah. And to not give up and write it off and, you know, turn it into a performance issue as well.

[00:29:59] And I think, you know, the last C that I would add, not that you're asking me to add a c. And I think it's implicitly included in everything you're talking about is compassion. Yeah. And when we can bring compassion to how we work with each other, it takes it outta that performative sort of mindset that you were just alluding to there.

[00:30:18] That is so hard to let go of

[00:30:20] **Alain:** so hard. Yeah. Yeah, I totally agree. You know, that sense of compassion, and I can imagine that some of you listening might be hearing all this and going, wait, I just don't have time for everything you're saying. Mm. I just wanna let you know that as you practice these skills, and I'll just give a quick, simple, practical tool that you can use.

[00:30:37] I use it a lot. I call it the check in. It's, I'm sure maybe you use something similar, Carolyn, but basically here's three questions, right? The first question that you ask, either individually, one-on-one, or with your team, How are you feeling today? And the invitation is to go beyond level one of I'm fine.

[00:30:50] How are you? Right? Yeah, that's kind of right. So how are you really feeling? And the second question is like, what's distracting you? You know, what's on your mind? What's distracting you? And the third question is, how can I support you? Yeah, right. And so if you think about that, giving people that time and space, I will let you know.

[00:31:05] I've coached leaders and teams with this check-in tool and obviously at the beginning it seems like it takes longer, but I have teams of 10 people who can do a check-in in three minutes. All of them. Yeah. Like they can go pretty quickly. If they have other things, they now, sometimes you can have more time.



[00:31:21] I'm not saying you have to rush through it. But it's, again, it's this sense of if you focus on the people first. Yeah. Because the people will take care of the work. And I think unfortunately in so many corporate settings, we have that backwards. What ends up happening is we kind of focus on the work and the work and the work and that people get short shrift and we don't really spend the time.

[00:31:39] And the thing is, all the research and science is known this for a long time, is that if we put people in the optimal state, emotional state, psychological state, physiological state to perform, They'll perform better. Yes. I mean, it's kinda common sense, right? Just give them that space, give them that spacing time.

[00:31:55] And so it's just the willingness to do that. And so I also appreciate what you said around compassion in that. Yeah. So much of this is, is recognizing some of us talk about the golden rule. You mentioned this before, like, oh, I assume if I'm safe, they must feel safe. And it's not that because they're not you.

[00:32:12] And so it's that platinum rule, treat other people the way they'd like to be treated. And you know, going back to your sense of inclusivity, uh, I had a chance to do some work this past year with a client, a financial services company, doing some work around unconscious bias and microaggressions. And I was actually delighted because I've actually been working to get into doing some DEI work and believe it or not, I don't get asked to do a lot of it.

[00:32:36] Why is that? Because I'm a white man, heterosexual man, so I don't, you know, oftentimes I'm not the person they want to lead these. So, turned out, and I'll just share this cause I think it's, it's indicative for a lot of folks. Um, so I was working as a financial services and organizations, a big bank. And so what we were talking about was microaggressions and a good part of the bank are white.

[00:32:57] Heterosexual men. Now, the rest of the team that I was with, in fact, I may have been the only white heterosexual man on the team, but I was thinking everyone at the bank had to go through, this was a mandatory training.



And if you know, mandatory trainings, you can imagine Yep. People coming in like, uh, like this doesn't apply to me.

[00:33:13] I had to rack my brain because what I was looking for was what's a way in that people could relate to this? And it took me some time. But what I came up to, I said, I think, and I would start the training with this, I would say, You know, this work applies to anyone, no matter your color, your gender, your sexual orientation, anything like, any of those things.

[00:33:32] Because all of us, at some point in your life when you were young, you were a child and you were smaller and less powerful than someone else. And at some point, someone, whether it was intentional or unintentional, someone else got it wrong, exerted their power, and you got hurt. And if you can remember what that hurt feels like, you viscerally know that.

[00:33:54] We're gonna explore that thread. Now, it may have had nothing to do with color, gender, or sexual orientation, but you know that feeling of pain. And the fact is, like I said before, we know that for people to perform at their best, It can't be operating from a place of pain. Yeah. So this work is around, if not for you then for your teammates here at the bank.

[00:34:15] So what can you do to support other people who might be going back to what you said, like going back and maybe experiencing this every day? Yeah. Or some days. Cuz the analogy that I came up with around microaggressions. I know microaggressions are in some ways like bee stings. Like I get sung by a bee once every 25 years.

[00:34:31] It hurts. But frankly I don't think about it a whole lot. Yeah. Well, as a white heterosexual man in North America, it's kinda like me and microaggressions, I go outside. I don't think about getting stung by a bee ever. Yeah. However, there are people, people of color, you know, et cetera. People who every single day wake up and go outside and they're potentially either being sung by a bee threatened, being sung by a bee, having to tell their children, don't go that way, cuz if you go that way, you're gonna get sung by a bee.



[00:34:56] And the fact that I have never had a conversation like that with my kids. Yep. If that's not the definition of privilege. I don't know what is. Yeah. And so recognizing that, so for me it was finding that way into these conversations so that people can relate to it. Yeah. And, and, and feel like they're connected to it as opposed to this is something, a mandated thing that HR is, is making us go through.

[00:35:18] And

[00:35:18] **Carolyn:** I think if we come back to this concept of traveling at the speed of human cracking, the leadership code is really about. Finding a pace that will serve all of us, not just those of us who are trying to drive performance or meet a target or, you know, drive shareholder value, all that kind of stuff.

[00:35:40] It's a good reminder, right? We, it's not about the efficiency.

[00:35:44] **Alain:** No. No, and it's also, I mean, as you say that, the word that comes to mind to me, it's a sustainable pace. Yeah, it's a hu because part of humanity is sustainability and you know, I mean, if you look at, again, going to nature, nature is not in constant growth mode for four seasons and understanding humans are not machines.

[00:36:02] We need renewal. We need. To restore and wellbeing. And so you look at, for example, the rates of mental health issues, both at work, just in society in general, look at wellbeing. You know, we just can't keep our foot down on the gas and push and push and push on all these different multiple levels and think that somehow it's gonna be okay.

[00:36:23] And then the other flip side of that, you know, and I've had the chance and the opportunity to coach lots of people, some of whom are, you know, super high powered executives. You know, I'll put, we're on podcasts, so I'm putting this in air quotes for those who are listening. Success. You know what I'm really saying?

[00:36:38] Success. What we're really saying is they make a lot of money, which is Gen North American definition of success. That's one degree of



success and. Oh my gosh, I've met some really unhappy people. Yeah. You know, billion dollar unhappiness, like wow. So there's all that. So I think a big piece of this, you know, part of cracking your own leadership code is really getting clear on what are your values, what's important to you.

[00:37:05] And run your own race or walk your own race, whatever it is, it's so easy to get stuck in this world today of comparison and think you have to be keeping up with this person and that person and the Joneses and that, and you know, you know. So I think it's just asking some of those questions. And what we're seeing frankly is Gen Z, gen Y, they're asking these questions much earlier on, and they are because of supply and demand of the workforce.

[00:37:32] They're forcing changes in the workplace because of it. Yeah. Which I hardily applaud. Yep.

[00:37:38] **Carolyn:** Yeah, absolutely. Oh, that could be a whole other conversation, Ilan. Oh yeah. This next generation and what they're, what they are teaching us about the grind and about performance and efficiencies and all of that stuff that folks like us were mired in earlier in our careers.

[00:37:56] Exactly. So, Ella, as we wrap up here, what. Advice, could you give leaders listening? Now, where do I start? For people who are like, oh, this isn't working for me. I know it, but I don't know where to

[00:38:12] **Alain:** start. Hmm, great question. I'd say that great place to start, and we touched on this earlier, about just the importance of closing the gap between what you intend and how you're being perceived.

[00:38:22] Great place to start is, and you don't need to do this in a formal way, you can do this in an informal way, is ask for feedback. You know, feedback is such a gift because the fact is when you ask for feedback, You're getting to hear stuff that people were thinking already, right? So why wouldn't you want that?

[00:38:38] And so it could be as simple as, Hey, I'm trying to find ways to become a better leader, or ways I can support you better. What could I be doing differently? What's working well? And what could I be doing differently? Hmm.



From your perspective. And then listen, with the goal of absorbing and capturing that, not getting defensive, and just saying Thank you.

[00:38:59] Thank you for that. Yeah. And what I suggest is, you know, go more than a sample size of one. You know, and I'll just give, you know, again, from my own experience. When I had the eighth person said to me, hello, I'm from New York, and I can talk really fast. You come across hard driving, fast charging, and a bit arrogant.

[00:39:15] When the eighth person said that, and I was like, okay, eight people say this. I don't say it's true. Who's right here? You know? I was like, I had to kind of go, all right, it's eight against one. I think I may have to change my approach. Yeah. And that was one of the things I had learned. So I say the F the big piece of advice would be get feedback, then listen to it, and then work on acting on it.

[00:39:35] **Carolyn:** Right. Right. A good friend of mine doesn't use the word feedback. She calls it perspective taking. Nice. I thought that was really interesting. Cuz you know, sometimes that f word can, it

[00:39:45] **Alain:** has a lot of baggage for a lot of people. It does because they've had bad experiences with it.

[00:39:48] **Carolyn:** Yeah, yeah. Or like, you know, what's your perspective of me?

[00:39:51] How and that sort of thing. Love that. Yeah. I'm with you. Just again, how do, how do we close that gap between intended impact? Yeah. That is a great place to start. I would say, for any other leader or or another place to start is just to pick up a copy of your book as well. Yeah.

[00:40:06] **Alain:** Oh yeah. There's that shameless plug.

[00:40:07] Yes. And dig in, dig



[00:40:08] **Carolyn:** into those three Cs, which also has a, have a few other Cs embedded in there as well. Yeah,

[00:40:14] **Alain:** and the thing about the book, I'll just mention for those that are interested, like I said, it, every chapter ends with a, a checklist of tools. It's super imminently practical. The goal here is to accelerate your learning curve.

[00:40:25] It took me, people say how long take you to write it? In some ways it took me 25 years, so I'm hoping it'll cut some time off of your learning curve by hearing some of these things. That's

[00:40:33] **Carolyn:** great. That's great. And Ella, where can people find you if they wanna reach out, if they wanna buy your

[00:40:38] **Alain:** book? Sure. So probably all things easiest place to go is to my website, which is Ella Huns, a l a i n h u n k i n s.com.

[00:40:48] And since you've listened this far in, you're part of the end of the podcast club, feel free to email me directly, which is ella kins.com if you have questions. Also, I do a lot of posting on LinkedIn. I have a following there, so if you want to connect with me on LinkedIn as well, there's only one and that hunks there as far as I can tell.

[00:41:04] There we go. That

[00:41:05] **Carolyn:** nice French accent too. We've been able to drop into the podcast today. Now all the podcast guests that come on the show, I ask three questions at the end. Are you game to go? There

[00:41:16] **Alain:** I am. Game We

[00:41:18] **Carolyn:** alright? Alright. So the first question is around self-awareness. Mm-hmm. And so would you mind sharing a moment with us that was really uncomfortable, yet full of insight about yourself?



[00:41:32] **Alain:** Sure. Just remembering this brings up a little of that kind of pit in the stomach of, oh, that was tough. So, I would say probably one of my greatest teachers that I've ever had is my son Alexander. Mm. Uh, Alex has just turned 19, uh, this year, but he has always been a champion of giving me feedback and there, I'll, I'll just mention a moment where I shared something with him and he came back and said, dad, you're too loud.

[00:42:02] When you scream, I can't hear a thing you said, cuz I would, you know, I came from a very shouty kind of, I'm a loud person. I'm a big, I'm six foot three. I have a big voice. But it was one of these things, and he must have been six or seven when he said this to me, right? So this is early. It's like, wow, dad, you're too loud.

[00:42:17] You can't do that. I can't hear you. And it was just like, Wow. It was just one of those, and I really shifted after that. I have to give him a ton of credit. You know, I shout out to Alexander Total. Shout out to Alexander. Yeah. Who he's been a great, great teacher and he is taught me lots of other things as well.

[00:42:34] But that's a moment that stands out for me's seared into my psyche for sure. Thank

[00:42:39] **Carolyn:** you. Yeah. So second question. What is a practice or ritual that keeps you in a calm, regulated state or returns you to one?

[00:42:49] **Alain:** I have a few of these, but I will say one of the rituals I think is exercise. What kind of exercise?

[00:42:56] All sorts of different things. I go through cycles of things. Right now I do strength training about five days a week. And, um, There's something to me about picking up heavy weights that just literally grounds me. It's like there's something about that. And I also do some cardiovascular things. Like I was, I just went for a 20 mile bike ride before you when I got on the call today.

[00:43:16] There's something about that that clears my head. I have other mindfulness practices and stuff, but I'd say the one that I'm definitely the most



consistent with is the exercise practice. Hmm, that's right. And there's, you know, there's so many benefits on so many levels. You know, whether it's mental cognition, et cetera.

[00:43:31] There's so much good stuff that comes out of physical exercise, so I can't recommend that strongly enough. You know, we talked earlier about energy. Yeah. And how as a leader you need to model that. And so for me, you know, whether it's with a group and like people say like, how do you keep your energy for four, eight hours doing this?

[00:43:45] It's like, Because I'm, I'm an athlete. I have to be, and I'm an athlete and I, I know that you're gonna be feeding off that energy, so I need to have that kind of energy as well.

[00:43:54] **Carolyn:** Well, and we know that yeah. Physical energy is like the foundation at the other levels

[00:43:58] **Alain:** of, of everything else. Exactly. Alright,

[00:44:01] **Carolyn:** and the final question, what is a song or genre of music that makes you feel connected to others or part of something bigger

[00:44:11] **Alain:** than yourself?

[00:44:12] Oh my goodness. So this is really interesting, a lot of things around this. So I was a violinist as a kid. I played at violin from the time I was five to 18. So classical violin. My father, he's one of five siblings, they were all professional musicians. His dad was a cellist, his mom was a violinist. Uh, they're all professional, very, very successful folks.

[00:44:29] I decided not to go into that, but, uh, music I've always loved. I love Js Bach. I mean, I love, love. So if you know, you know Johan, Sebastian, Bach. And interestingly enough, so my father passed away a couple years ago from kind of, uh, effects of Parkinson's and I was with him the weekend he died. And so in his room there's a little CD player and we were playing the Goldberg Variations, the Bach piano stuff.



[00:44:52] And he was listening to that. And I took that CD after he passed. And I have it in my car and I listen to it and it really just connects me to him. And there's something about Bach that is just. Genius. I don't know if people are familiar, but just the symmetry of that music, the, the mathematics of how things go and when I just kind of can be with that.

[00:45:14] I was gonna say, close my eyes, not when I'm driving, but, uh, other times there's something about being in the midst of that music that just makes me feel connected to anything and everything. And it, it's really amazing. So I'm a big, I'm a big fan. And was

[00:45:29] **Carolyn:** there a specific, I mean, I've heard of Bach, but it, was there a specific symphony or or piece that he did that

[00:45:36] **Alain:** really.

[00:45:37] Well, this stuff, I mean, this is the Goldberg Variations. We could Google it right now, but Glenn Gould has the best one. It's a musical composition for keyboard. Yeah, it's an, it's a set of 30 variations, piano variations. Oh, up. So, and if you hear them, some of them will be familiar, but some of them won't be.

[00:45:51] But they're called the Goldberg Variations and they're three to five minutes. They're short ones. But there's something about just the way they build. I mean, and this was something about, you know, being a classical musician and just understanding how. Music comes together and forms, like for example, if you're familiar with the idea of a fugue.

[00:46:08] Yeah. A fugue has a theme and then there's a repeating theme and it builds, and it's just, it's like building a house. I mean, it's the same kind of architectural structure of like building a house. So anyways, that's the one that I'm, I'm a

[00:46:20] **Carolyn:** big fan of. Well, you know what I love about this question is I haven't received the same answer twice.



[00:46:25] No, I would think. I would think no. Yeah. Which is really cool. So I'm gonna listen to some Bach tonight after we finish off. Great. I am so grateful that our paths crossed and to have you on the show, and I hope that someday we get to meet in person as well. I hope

[00:46:39] **Alain:** so too. This has been absolutely delightful.

[00:46:42] Thank you so much for having me, Kim. Yeah. All

[00:46:43] **Carolyn:** right. Thanks to all the listeners for tuning into another episode of Evolve, and we will see you again next time. I'm sure you noticed in the conversation with Ella. How much reference there was to safety, and I purposely zoned in on that part of our conversation because it is an integral part to being a trauma informed leader in understanding that safety isn't a cognitive proclamation.

[00:47:18] Safety is something that is felt at our nervous system level that operates underneath our cognitive capabilities. And so I really appreciated Alan's work in calling out safety as an integral component of collaboration. If you enjoyed our conversation and would like to explore this notion of trauma-informed leadership further, please go to my website swar.com, and you can order my book *Evolve There*.

[00:47:51] You can also find it on Amazon. Thanks for listening.