



026: Confronting ambitious conversations as a mindful leader with Sarah Jenner

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Yeah. And so we really focus on gathering their. Solutions that are going to support them and getting that personal accountability for change whilst also instilling in them. I, as a leader, believe in your success and I believe you can do this, and I'm here to support you in order to achieve that.

Carolyn: On my show today, I'll be talking to Sarah Jenner.

Sarah has spent the last 10 years creating leadership development programs that show leaders how to address workplace issues, cultivate team relationships, and improve. Psychological [00:01:00] health and safety. She's worked with hundreds of leaders to support their continued growth, the success of their team, and organizational excellence.

She is a facilitator, a training formulator, and a human-centered leader, and she brings all of these great skills to the role of executive director of Mindful Employer Canada, and also as the principal of Sarah Jenner Consulting.

As a leader, it can feel like a really tricky dance between holding people you work with accountable while also recognizing their humanity. In my conversation with Sarah today, we're gonna talk about this and we're going to hear about the programs at Mindful Employer Canada. That help [00:02:00] leaders gain confidence and skills to show up in a mindful way and to approach these ambitious conversations.



Hope you enjoy it.

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, 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.

Carolyn: I'm Carolyn Suarez, and this is Evolve [00:03:00] a new era of Leadership. Hello, evolve listeners. It's Carolyn Swear here, your host, and I'm really excited for another fabulous episode of Evolve, a New Era of Leadership. Today's guest is Sarah Jenner from Mindful Employer Canada. Sarah, welcome to the

Sarah: show. Oh, thank you so much for having me.

It's an absolute pleasure to be here.

Carolyn: Now, Sarah, I was kind of stalking you on LinkedIn for a while. I didn't know Sarah was behind it, but I was like, who's this mindful employer Canada profile and just like all the great stuff that you were posting and I thought, I need to get in touch with this group.

So when I was. Putting a list of folks together for the podcast. You were on that list because I've seen the great work that you and your organization have been doing. So I'm really happy to have you on the show.

Sarah: Oh, I'm so honored and I'm glad you got to finally kind of pull back the curtain of Mindful Employer [00:04:00] Canada and see, see a little bit more about who's behind it.

Why



Carolyn: don't we just say a little bit more, or give you a chance to say a little bit more. I'll be honest, I was a little surprised to hear it was a nonprofit and sort of the purpose and what you're trying to do. And I know we do certainly have a lot of listeners in Canada. So could you start off by just telling us a little bit about Mindful Employer Canada and how it started?

Sarah: Sure. So as you had shared, we are a national nonprofit in Canada. When we originally opened Mindful Employer Canada, our intention was to support organizations who were adopting the national standard for Canada on psychological health and safety because it was just a lot to deal with for organizations who are trying to update policies and processes in order to support points within that standard.

And so that was our main focus initially. And then we, after two years, evolved into focusing more on leadership development because after speaking with [00:05:00] organizations around psychological health and safety, we really found there was such a gap in leadership development and how are we supporting leaders in order to help them?

Build a workspace environment of psychological health and safety, I think as many of us have experienced, I know I was often promoted because I was really great at a specific task where I was really great at selling things right. And then you get into this position, which is so brand new when you are managing a group of people who all have.

Different values, different perspectives, different ideals, different goals, and that sometimes can create some contrasting ideas and opinions or individuals can find themselves struggling, whether it's with significant life stressors or maybe it's with a mental health diagnosis and. It leads into being a leader and not having the strategies, the framework, or the [00:06:00] experience to sometimes have these, what I like to call ambitious conversations.

Mm. Other individuals may call them uncomfortable or difficult conversations, but I find when we continue to identify a task as uncomfortable or difficult, it kind of forces us to pull away from it a little bit. Yes. Or to avoid it. Whereas with an ambitious conversation, I like to think that it can help us recognize that a task may not be easy, but that it can be very beneficial.



Yeah. So we really try and support leaders to just empower them with what they need in order to have those ambitious conversations while recognizing. It never gets easier. Right. I myself still having these conversations, like I still get the nerves. I still get the butterflies because you know, you never know how they're gonna go, but it's always so important to take that first

Carolyn: step.

I love that you call them ambitious conversations. You're right. Words matter. Right. And it really set us up to see [00:07:00] it in a different light. Now before we go there, cause I definitely wanna go there. Yeah. I'm very curious. About the fact that you're a nonprofit, right? Mm-hmm. Because what you just talked about is, you know, frankly what I built my business around leadership development.

Yeah. And I know there are many wonderful leadership coaches and consultancy firms, big and small who address this. And why is it that mindful employer has chosen to stay a nonprofit and pursue your goals through that business entity?

Sarah: Okay, sure. So I think being a nonprofit, we had just always focused, I mean, our main focus before we started Mind Home BLA Canada was supporting employees who had a mental health diagnosis and.

To be honest, I wasn't the one who founded Mindful Employer. I stepped in as ed Oh, okay. Five years ago. So I don't really know necessarily [00:08:00] why the nonprofit was chosen over a for-profit. What I do know is that because we're a nonprofit, it's given us so much opportunity to work with. Other nonprofits to support them.

So from 2015 to 2017, we were able to work with the Ontario government and we were able to provide 25 nonprofits across Canada with free access to our in-house program so that they would have these resources at no cost. Because as a nonprofit, we know that budgets can be tight sometimes, and that. Often when we have to cut budgets, it comes from learning and development.



Yep. And so for us, has given us so many opportunities to work and collaborate with other organizations. And those nonprofits actually helped us to develop two new sessions through the in-house program, one around. Supporting volunteers. So that's something that we actually offer for free on our website for an in-house program.

And another one was [00:09:00] around how do we build resilience in teams? And so being a nonprofit, we knew that working with them, especially around resilience, I mean, nonprofits have to be incredibly resilient entities, right, in order to keep going. And so it's just given us. So many opportunities. And I would say it also holds us accountable for the revenue that we make.

So with nonprofits, there are certain regulations around like, we can't be making so much revenue and not putting it back into the business. Yeah. In some way. And so it also holds us accountable to make sure that we are continually evolving and improving as a business. And that there's not just one individual within the business who's, you know, going home making.

More than six figures, and that that money isn't then being brought back into the business in order to continue to support other individuals. Yeah.

Carolyn: I really admire the purpose and the structure that you're bringing this work into the world with.

Sarah: Thank you. Well, I think for me it [00:10:00] really is a passion project.

Like I, like so many others have had family members who have dealt with mental health issues, and so watching them deal with that struggle personally, uh, but also watching them not being able to show up to their workplace as their. Authentic self, being able to feel safe taking their mask off because the workplace that they were in, it was very, I don't know necessarily the exact words to put it, but it was a very masculine, hands-on working with tools and so they just didn't feel comfortable walking in and, and asking for support when they needed it.



And so they found other coping mechanisms to help themselves, which really. Ended up being more detrimental than helpful. And so for me it's just knowing that I am hopefully able to make an impact through this organization so that other individuals can go to work, can feel safe, having these vulnerable [00:11:00] conversations with their leaders and knowing that their leaders have the strategies, have the tools in order to.

Engaged in that conversation with them. I know myself, I can think of as a teen working full-time before I left for school and I was going through a really hard time struggling and I brought it up to an individual who worked in human resources and the response was, well, here's a car to our e a p, and then there was no further conversation.

And for me that moment, Made me think, okay, this is how I never wanna handle this kind of conversation, because I just kind of felt immediately like a wall was up. We're not discussing this any further. And it kind of brought on a sense, like a flare up of like shame or guilt. And then it was never discussed again.

Carolyn: Well, because you don't feel seen or heard, right? Yes. From a relational level and having been trained and been on the other side of that situation, and that's kind of how we're trained, right? It's not our business [00:12:00] to know and how do we help people navigate through this sort of ambiguous zone? I wanna care for you as a human being.

And I also recognize there are rules where I am not permitted to ask you questions, nor should I know some details. Like how do we navigate through that sort of boundary of this working relationship? And so I'm guessing that's where that notion of ambitious conversations came into play. And so tell us a little bit about the program and how you get it out into the different organizations that you serve.

Sarah: Yeah, so Ambitious Conversations is really a focus of our Psychologically Safe Leader Method program. So it's a completely on demand, self-guided program. We have added structure. It was a few years of trying to figure out like, what is the sweet spot? What do people really want? We attempted doing, All live in class, and I think especially after the pandemic,



people really have enjoyed [00:13:00] being able to complete these kinds of programs from home.

And so we thought, well, let's offer it so that they can do it from anywhere while still adding structures. So, All of the seven courses are available on demand, and they all focus on different areas of workplace mental health. So we focus on what are the communication strategies you need to have ambitious conversations.

We focus on frameworks like the conversation framework where you can use that to help manage an employee's performance, to help support an employee who you've just noticed changed behaviors at work to help build an accommodation plan if you need to, to resolve conflict. So we try and make. Everything we teach, very practical, very applicable, very malleable.

So you can use it in a variety of different situations. So we have the seven courses, and then each month with each course that opens, we have an ax ask the expert session as well. So, We bring in, uh, a speaker [00:14:00] who I guess is just an expert in that course's topic. So some of our speakers have been Maryam Batton, who's a workplace relations specialist.

They've included Dave Lather, who's a vice president of TELUS International. He came in and talked about how do you support resilient teams because he has a background of working in. Many different countries. Mm. And so we thought what an incredible speaker to bring in who has had to move to different teams, who have different values, different social expectations, I guess.

Yep. And how do you kind of mold yourself to be able to create these healthy, thriving teams? We've had Lauren Bernardi from Bernardi HR Law, who came in and talked about accommodation and return to work. So, We like to add in those live aspects well so that the learners can come in and share any questions or any challenges they might be experiencing in those areas.

And then myself and the guest speaker can kind of walk them through, okay, this is how we might approach this, right? Or [00:15:00] this is what you can do in order to. Support yourself and support the employees. So we have the



courses, we have asked the expert. We have community. So within the learning platforms themselves, every lesson has a discussion question that every learner can come in and answer.

By sharing experiences or ideas or thoughts or opinions. And then the learners can see every individual's answer. So they continue to learn from themselves, with themselves, I guess, or with one another and connect. And then after the program, if an individual has become certified in the psychologically safe leader method.

They get to join our online forum, which we call the Inner Circle, and it's hosted by myself and Maryanne Bayton. And it's essentially just a place where you can go and again, share challenges you're experiencing. And Maryanne and I, uh, once a quarter can hop in and we host live events where we can bring in, again, other experts to talk about what are things happening right now, like what's.

The temperature in [00:16:00] workplaces and what are some things that are maybe coming up that we need to support individuals to address or to handle in some

Carolyn: way. And so with those seven courses on demand, what came up for me was, Ooh, that would be a cool onboarding tool. Are people using it in that

Sarah: way? We do have one client who's actually been putting all of their employees through this.

So this program was really created for leaders or potential leaders, and they've decided to put all of their employees through it. Yeah, because there's just so many. Communication strategies that even if you are just having a conversation with a coworker, that can be very beneficial to prevent, I guess, contrasting ideas or behaviors from exacerbating into like conflict or incivility.

Mm-hmm. And so, yes, I would say that. We're going on to their third cohort now. So as new employees come in, they are introducing them to the course and they're able to sign up and join in as well. [00:17:00] So yeah, I would say it's



really beneficial for anyone. I have an individual who is actually attempting to take on a leadership role.

And it's been so helpful for her because she said, now when I go into these interviews for leadership positions, I'm talking about what I'm learning. I'm talking about the skills that I already have, and it's just given her such confidence in pursuing those roles. So, I guess ideally when we're also working with students who haven't entered the job force yet, it's like we're able to set these individuals up for success before they even take on that role.

So it's like immediately they're ready, they're prepared. We're not throwing them in the deep end of the pool hoping that they can swim right, and they're feeling very confident and able to start building those relationships with their direct reports that are. Built on a foundation of trust. Yeah. And honesty and compassion, which I mean just makes all of [00:18:00] these ambitious conversations that much easier to have.

Carolyn: What really resonates for me with what you're saying there is when we can give people the confidence to know, There are boundaries here that yes, we have to follow. And there's a lot of space in that boundary to be human with each other and to also respect the guidelines and policies that we have in organizations.

And that can be tough. When I was growing up, cause I'm a little bit older, it was very clear you left your work life at home and you walked through the doors and who, where Caroline started. That was sort of the mentality that. We thought was the best thing to do then, and we know now that that's not the case, especially after, you know, that big year of 2020.

And so, you know, giving people the confidence to know, hey, no algorithm here. No straight path, but here's the standard. Which by the way, little shared out for Canada. It's an amazing standard. That is used [00:19:00] worldwide. I understand. Yes. As well. Uh, to really say there are 13 factors that help you determine the psychological safety of your organization.



And so all of your work in your Ambitious Conversations program is built around all that. So evidence-based. Mm-hmm. And we can equip these leaders and young leaders, it sounds like, in this case, to. Have the confidence to know, hey, this conversation might not feel overly comfortable. And yes, it's ambitious and yes, I can do it.

I can come out on the

Sarah: other side of it. I was just gonna say, cuz it makes me think of your book, it also allows opportunity for self-reflection to know I. When am I getting in my own way or when am I getting in my employee's way? So, wow. We wanted to encompass a lot of emotional intelligence in the program as well, to not just improve communication, but to all also help each individual be able to pause and look [00:20:00] inward to see, okay, so what are my emotional triggers?

What are the things that have happened to me in life that when I. Sees something similar in front of me, activates me, and maybe forces me to react in situations rather than pausing and responding in a psychologically safe way. So how are we helping them understand who they are as a person? Because I found before getting into the workplace mental health sector, There was really no time for that.

Like I had never experienced a moment on the job where a leader said, let's stop and let's think about, you know, what reactions trigger you as an individual, and what did those triggers look like and how could we approach that situation differently? Like that never happened or. You know, what happened to you as a child that maybe is now resonating in different behaviors or responses as an adult, and what can we do to support you with those?

So I just find now that leadership is. Taking on [00:21:00] so much more of a almost mentorship role, which I am really excited about. Yeah. I had a couple incredible leaders who I would say were more mentors than leaders and they have had such a profound in impact on me and this program that we developed, I think about, you know, how would they respond or what might they have done in these situations.



Mm-hmm. And it's really just helped to make these strategies evolve that much more.

Carolyn: Yeah, I mean, the definition of leaders really changed over the years. Again, like it's not somebody who sits upon high and throws out orders, or even frankly has the vision. I mean, I've, I know in some workshops where I've asked that question, I.

There's one in particular, this is a few years ago, and they were adamant that a leader had to be the one with the vision. Mm-hmm. And I don't believe that now. I think the way that our workplaces have evolved physically and emotionally, There's space for everybody at the [00:22:00] table and the best leaders I've worked with, the most mindful ones, which I love that part of your organization's title aren't there to tell or to use their power to put over people.

They're really there to create a space and a safe space. To just allow different things to come in and grow and different ideas, different perspectives, and that that is a very different type of person. It's a different type of leader with a different type of skills. Mm-hmm.

Sarah: It takes so much confidence to be that leader.

I can still remember feeling like I had to have the answer to every question, and I had to be the expert in everything as a leader, because if I wasn't. My fear was people are gonna wonder how did she get this job? How is she in this position? Yeah. If she can't answer this question. And then I had an incredible leader, Miriam Batten, who said to me, I don't need to be the expert in everything.

I surround myself with other experts and we learn and we [00:23:00] grow and we lean on each other together. Yeah. And I just thought how incredible. And like people would come to her with questions. And she would say, you know what? I don't have the answer right now, but let me find out for you and get back to you.

And that to me, at first I was like, and then it created such trust and an opened space for myself and other individuals to come to her. With answers to come to



her with a challenge and say, Hey, this is what I'm struggling with, or This is what's happening right now, but this is how I think we can address it.

And it alleviated so much pressure from her as a leader to have to have the answer to everything. And it also boosted our confidence as employees and gave us such autonomy over our work. Yeah. And it just made it so exciting all the time.

Carolyn: Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. And the other thing, as you were saying that as well is the great leaders that I've worked with don't have all the answers.

And they know it. And they encourage you to [00:24:00] find your own, even when it might be easier for them to tell you. But what they can do really well is they can take all of these different things and ideas. And they can create the vision. Yeah, so it's sort of like being that person that can draw out or articulate out where we're going.

And then also allow the group to. Determine how to get there.

Sarah: Yes. Yeah. And that really allows each member of that group to pull on their strengths. Yes. And to shine in different ways, which is so beautiful. I think when we are able to highlight employees like that and then recognize the value and the strengths that they have, it just really creates this space.

Where employees aren't competing with one another to get ahead. Instead, they're working together and supporting one another, so that as a team, we lift each other up and we reach these goals together rather than [00:25:00] just one person leading the way. Now, can

Carolyn: you tell us a little bit about some of the areas that your Ambitious Conversations program focuses on?

Like what are some of the key topics there?

Sarah: Yeah, so with psychologically say Leader Method, we have the seven courses. So the first course, every individual. Should take that we recommend



they take is foundations for psychologically safe leadership. And this is a course where we focus on those communication strategies that you're gonna see throughout all of the courses because we really just want to embed them so deeply in each course.

So that it just becomes muscle memory for leaders to call on them. We cover that framework. I had talked about conversation, the conversation framework that can be used in so many different situations in order to support an employee. It really forces us as leaders to take off our fixer hat because I find.

In these ambitious conversations, as leaders, when [00:26:00] we see a challenge, we often wanna fix it. We wanna find the solution, but when it comes to another individual who may be struggling, us throwing our solutions at them forces them to comply to what we want, and it doesn't allow. Space for them to commit to positive change moving forward.

Yeah, and so we really focus on gathering their solutions that are going to support them and getting that personal accountability for change whilst also instilling in them. I, as a leader, believe in your success, and I believe you can do this, and I'm here to support you in order to do that, in order to achieve that.

So we have a conversation framework. At the end of that course, we focus on building a personal plan for resilience. So thinking about what behaviors do I show when I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed, what does that look like? How could that impact other individuals around me? What are the healthy coping strategies that I use when I'm feeling stressed or [00:27:00] overwhelmed?

And we take them through framework to help them address specific stressors. So to kind of help them feel unstuck. I know that I'm the type of individual where when I'm really overwhelmed and dealing with the challenge, I can start to spiral a little bit. Yeah. And so we try and give them some. Strategies that they can use to become unstuck and find very objective ways to at least take a next step to move forward.

And then we have recognizing and responding to mental health issues. And that course really focuses on what does mental health look like? What are the four



quadrants of mental health and understanding how at any time in life, We can find ourselves in any of those four quadrants. And how do we support employees who are struggling?

How do we recommend resources to them without making them feel sick or weak? Right? And then we have supporting employees at work, and that really focuses on how do we build accommodation plans that aren't focused on. Physical [00:28:00] accommodations, but really think about what are the cognitive and behavioral requirements that we have for employees.

Mm. And how can we support them to meet those instead? Cuz I think any leader who's ever received a doctor's note that says needs less stress has been like, where do I even begin? Right. To support an employee. So that's what we try to accomplish in that program, is showing them. A resource called Supporting Employee Success developed by workplace strategies for mental health.

That really helps them narrow down and have that conversation with the employee of, you know, this is the expectation in the job role. Where are you currently at? And how do we build a bridge and order to help you meet these expectations?

Carolyn: Wow. Yeah, we just have to stop there for a second because I know I had to build out plans for myself with my manager cuz I took a leave a few times and also had to do that with others.

And to your point, like that can be a really, like what is the right thing that I do here? And I don't wanna treat them with sort of, you know, white gloves type thing. What [00:29:00] would you say is sort of a little nugget of insight you could share around that topic in particular from that program?

Sarah: Around supporting employee success

Carolyn: specifically of when an accommodation that might not necessarily be a physical accommodation?



Sarah: Oh, absolutely. So I would say giving the employee voice and choice and also. For many employees who need an accommodation that isn't necessarily physical, they often have never experienced something like this before. And so they may not know all of the different solutions available to them in order to support them.

So I think leveraging a tool like supporting employee success, it includes. So many examples of, for instance, if your job requires you to have a lot of attention to detail, and that employee feels like, I just know that I can't reach that right now. It includes different ideas or [00:30:00] examples of solutions that can help you bridge that gap.

And so I think it also just helps the employee to consider what's available to me. Some individuals go into this conversation and they are feeling ashamed. They're feeling. Guilty that they need accommodations and that their coworkers may criticize them for it. And so I think when we as leaders have these open conversations with our employees consistently to let them know.

Struggle is a normal part of the human experience. We're all going to face it at some point. And I as a leader, am here to support you to be successful at work. And here is the accommodation tool or process that we use at work. And here's examples of how we've accommodated employees in the past and recognizing that as coworkers.

We're all in this together, that one employee may be struggling at one point, so we're accommodating them and each of us as coworkers are maybe taking on a bit more. Yeah. [00:31:00] But then at another point you may need an accommodation, and again, we're all gonna surround you and support you with that accommodation.

So I think that can really help to alleviate that sense of shame or guilt or uncertainty that it, that might stop employees from. Asking for accommodations, and I think for coworkers, that conversation can prevent them from feeling that sense of resentment. Yeah. That sometimes can come up towards their coworkers, which then just creates such animosity within a team that can just lead to so many other issues down the road.



And

Carolyn: hopefully in due time it would be nice if it was tomorrow, but we don't even have to use the word accommodation, right? Yes. Because that implies that there is one proper way of doing it. Mm-hmm. And if you aren't using that way, we'll have to accommodate. So I hope we get there sooner than later because I think back to the beginning of our conversation, words make a big difference,

Sarah: right?

Mm-hmm. Yeah, you're [00:32:00] absolutely right.

Carolyn: Yeah, you were talking about the different elements of the program, but that one really struck me for managers, cuz I've talked to many leaders over the past several months. It's like, oh, what do I do with this accommodation? Mm-hmm. How do I show up in this conversation, this ambitious conversation in a way that ensures accountability and also treats people with the respect and the humanity that, you know, we want them to experience and feel.

Sarah: Yes, and the whole purpose behind these ambitious conversations is that hopefully, like you said down the line, we may be able to eliminate the need for individuals to go off work to need accommodations, because we have that confidence to have these conversations very early on when we start to notice these small changes in employee behavior and we're able to get in there.

Sooner to be able to make those small adjustments faster and get that employee feeling well at [00:33:00] work, get them feeling like they are productive at work, like they are accomplishing things. And rather than, you know, we see those small changes sometimes and we hesitate and we think, well maybe it'll just sort itself out.

Yes. Or maybe they're just going through some like a moment, you know, and then we watch as they kind of. Eventually just continue to escalate to a point where, okay, now it's affecting coworkers, and now that's affecting the relationship the coworkers have with the employee. And the employee is really



struggling, and now we need to have that conversation and maybe they have to go off work, or maybe we have to build that accommodation plan.

And so it's really. I'm hoping going to be that gentle nudge that leaders need in order to have these conversations faster. Yeah. So that we can just eliminate the need for many of those like employee file processes down the

Carolyn: line. Yeah. And you know, as you were saying that, I'm thinking back over my career as a corporate leader and [00:34:00] having an inkling, a suspicion.

And thinking, oh, you know what, I'm probably wrong. I'll just ignore it for now. Yeah. And then a week later, a month later, a year later. And that's not fair to anybody, you know, the other person or myself. And it can just be easier to avoid it. And so what I really appreciate what it sounds like these programs do is it, it helps us get the confidence and the skillset mm-hmm.

To. Get curious about it. Have the conversation so that there can be help to navigate through it in a different way.

Sarah: Yeah, so what we included within the program is a lot of, when we're teaching these conversation frameworks is a lot of role play. So you hear me leading these conversations with other individuals and we don't just show it like, this is the perfect way to do it, where, you know, Everything ends with a ribbon around it.

It's that we also throw in issues that can commonly come up in these conversations where [00:35:00] you're like, okay, now I need to pause and redirect, or Now I need to overcome this kind of wrench that the employee has thrown in there, and how do I do it? So it also really focuses on the what to say, how to say it, when to say it, because I think that especially when there may be a mental health diagnosis involved, We get so caught up in what are the perfect words?

Yes. Because there's this fear of what if we say the wrong thing? Yeah. Or what if we say something that then triggers the individual or we make the situation



even worse. And like you had said before, language is so important. So we try to include as much language in there as possible so that individuals can even write down the words.

I mean, if that gives them the confidence to have that conversation, I am totally on board with sharing the language that we use.

Carolyn: I'm a big believer that when you are having these conversations for the first time, maybe you're a new leader or it's the first time you're having a return to work conversation with an employee that's [00:36:00] coming back, is to take a bit of time before you're in the conversation.

Mm-hmm. To plan out. The key elements that you want to address. How do you open it? How do you close it? And I know when I started doing that, I thought at first I'm like, oh, well good managers don't need to do this. Well, more experienced managers may not, but what I've learned is that it always served me.

It served the other person well because I could be more present. Mm-hmm. And see them and hear them versus worrying about, oh my gosh, what am I gonna say next? I can't forget about that. And that it was okay to take notes. That was the other thing. It took me a while to get over is like, It's okay to write down notes and not be perfectly showing up all the time.

Sarah: So, sorry. And I. Go ahead. I was gonna say, that's also such a great opportunity for a leader to pause and check in with themselves before having that conversation. Because you know, sometimes we come out of meetings where we are feeling activated, we're feeling overwhelmed, we're feeling stressed, and we don't wanna carry that.

[00:37:00] Energy or that body language or that verbal language into that conversation. Yep. And it also grants us the opportunity to think about what's my intention with this conversation? Cause I think sometimes we can walk into a conversation and our intention is to. Find someone out or to be deemed right in the situation.



Whereas with these ambitious conversations, our intention should always be to come from a place of open curiosity and to listen to understand the other individual's perspective. That's gonna get you so much further. You kind of just have to leave your ego at the door. Yeah. And just walk into it like completely open to whatever may come from it or whatever may happen.

Yeah.

Carolyn: How many hours does it take this in this online program to go through the seven modules?

Sarah: I would say each module ranges from six to eight hours, depending on how interactive the individual wants to get, [00:38:00] how often they answer the discussion questions that are on the platform. We also have incorporated into each course applications of knowledge.

So there's two to three items from each course, whether it's a resource we showed you or a framework that if the individual wants to become certified in the Psychologically Safe Leader method, they have to take what they've learned and either use it to support an employee. Or to teach a coworker what that strategy or resource is so that then they can use it to support an employee.

So I would say every course ranges from six to eight hours between the lesson plan and then adding in those applications of knowledge as well.

Carolyn: Oh, and then at the end of it, there is a certification or

Sarah: a certificate. Yes. So if you complete five of the seven courses along with those applications of knowledge, you would become certified in the Psychologically Safe Leader Method, and then you would also get access to that Inner Circle online community I had spoken [00:39:00] about.

Carolyn: Wow. And so can you tell us a little bit like some goals for your organization? Are you aspiring to hit a certain number of employers or employee impact? What, what does the future look like, uh, at Mindful Employer Canada?



Sarah: Yes. So with our first launch of the Psychologically Safe Leader Method, we opened our first cohort in January of this.

Here. It was the most successful launch we've ever had of a program, so we are so thrilled about it to have so many individuals involved. We also went international for the first time, so we have individuals from Europe, from New Zealand, from Southeast Asia joining us as well. So that felt like a very big moment for us.

And then our goal for the fall is to be able to offer this program because our next cohort begins in September of 2023. Our goal is to be able to offer it in both French and English. As a nonprofit, it's been really difficult to find the [00:40:00] budget in order to translate because translation is definitely an investment of sorts, but we've had so many organizations.

Reach out to us and say, we love this program, but we need it in French and English because we have employees across Canada and we require both. Yeah, it's been a miss in so many incredible opportunities. So that is what we're working towards right now, is being able to offer it in both French and English so that we can see this continue to expand, continue to reach so many more leaders and have such a positive impact on employees as well.

So that is our goal that we're striving for right now.

Carolyn: Wow. I wish I could speak French and volunteer some of my screenshots, but my French ended in grade 12. Yeah, same. Yeah. And so Sarah, where can our listeners find out about this program and about Mindful Employer Canada?

Sarah: Yes, so you can go directly to our website, which is www.mindfulemployer.ca.

You can follow us on LinkedIn at Mindful Employer Canada. You [00:41:00] can follow us on Instagram at Mindful Employer Canada. If you are in a space now where you can't necessarily invest in the program, I would definitely check out those social media platforms cuz we are constantly sharing strategies and



how-tos on our social media so that we can still help individuals make those changes.

To become psychologically safe leaders.

Carolyn: Yeah. And we'll make sure that those links are in the show notes as well. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you really wanna get into our conversation today? I feel like there's probably more wonderful wisdom from you in the organization. Any sort of final words?

Sarah: I would just say that if you are a leader who is struggling at this point and feeling like maybe a little lost, like you don't necessarily know which way is up, you're not alone. I, as a leader, even now, even after creating these programs, working in workplace mental health, having so many years around [00:42:00] leadership development and psychological health and safety, I have moments where I am like, how do I even take that next step?

What does that next step look like? And. I would just say you're not alone as a leader, that there is so many of us out there, and I would say do whatever you can to find your community. I was able to join an incredible mastermind of other leaders who helped me just feel seen and help me to feel heard and supported me, you know, to take those next steps.

So if you can't take the program, Look for other opportunities to be able to meet with other leaders because I guarantee you what you're going through right now, other leaders have been through, and they'll be able to support you and to help you at least just to let you know that you're not alone in the struggle.

Carolyn: Wow. Yeah. So well said Sarah. So well said. Now before we close off, I end every podcast mm-hmm. With three questions of an evolved leader. So are you ready to go into those two questions? [00:43:00] I'm, I'm ready for it, yes. All right. So the first question is all about self-awareness, which, you know, we touched on obviously with the work that your programs do, but could you share with us a time that might have felt really uncomfortable, but was full of a tremendous amount of insight for you about yourself?



Sarah: So I would say it takes me back that moment to, I think something that really instilled in me the leader that I wanted to become. So in my first career right out of university, I had a leader who would try to motivate us through. Public shame, humiliation that when they would provide feedback, it was always done in a group setting where our coworkers were there.

Sometimes customers were there as well. Our district manager was there, and for me, I think that really. Helped me. At first, I felt [00:44:00] such anger and frustration with that leader. And then a couple years down the road, I really started to recognize that that leader themselves, that's how they were motivated by their leaders, that they were brought into a room of their peers and they were shamed and they were humiliated.

And I think that it really just opened my eyes to how. Important it is to model the behaviors that you want to see in your direct reports, that you have to walk the talk as a leader. So that situation was very uncomfortable for me, but it also brought me to this point of recognizing that. Sometimes our behaviors don't necessarily reflect who we are as an individual.

They reflect what we've been taught or the environment that we are leading in. And so to have grace for other individuals and to, instead of making assumptions about them or their intentions to wonder, Hmm, I wonder what led them to this, or I wonder [00:45:00] what's going on for them right now. And yeah, I think that was.

One of the most uncomfortable things I've had to deal with in a, in a workplace setting for sure. Wow, wow.

Carolyn: Uh, second question is around any practices or strategies that you use to bring yourself to a place of calm to, if possible, self-regulate? Yeah,

Sarah: so there's a couple strategies that I use. The ones that I find most effective are.

Practicing gratitude each day. So I have the five minute journal app and every morning I get up and I complete that. Yeah. And I find it just kind of sets me off



in such a positive mindset for the day. And then I am also someone who struggles with, I would say, functioning anxiety. But when I am stressed, when I'm overwhelmed, I can really start to.

Lead with negative what ifs. So if there's a situation, I [00:46:00] think about all the negative outcomes that could come from it, rather than like, what if it turns out like this? Like really positive. And so I also focus on, I call it upleveling. My what ifs. So I'm trying to retrain my brain a little bit. Yeah.

Instead of immediately going to the negative. An example I have is I've been really thinking about going back to school and my first thought was like, well, what if you don't get in? Or what if you get in and it's too much and then you have to leave? Or what if you get in and you hate the program and now you've lost all this money?

And instead it's like, well, what if you get in and you love it? What if you get in and it leads you to this next incredible season in life and you're able to. Support other individuals in a different way. And so just trying to switch that. What if more

Carolyn: positive? I love how you haven't stopped yourself from like doing one behavior and just balanced it off with something to just bring that balance back.

Sarah: Yes, cuz it's such a natural response to me to lead to what ifs. That if I tried to completely cut it off, [00:47:00] I would just find myself back there once again. Like, it might work for a couple days, but then I'd eventually find myself back in the negative. Yeah.

Carolyn: Oh, that's, that's, that's good. Now the last question is about a song or a genre of music that makes you feel connected to something bigger than yourself.

Mm-hmm. This whole notion that we are all really connected.

Sarah: Yeah, so I would say right now I had shared with you, there's an artist that I just stumbled upon. His name's Noah Kahan n Oa, H N K A H A N, and



he's like an indie singer. I think he's from Vermont, and his music is just so. Raw and real. Mm-hmm. It feels like a mini therapy session sometimes just listening to it.

And so he just talks about like childhood and the struggles of, you know, being an adult and then reflecting back on how you were parented. And he has [00:48:00] this one line in one of his songs, I think it's called Growing Sideways. And the line is something along the lines of like, I'm still angry at my parents for what their parents did to them.

Oh. And I just thought what insight and grace to start to reflect on, I think it pauses us to stop and think about we only know what we know, and oftentimes we're doing the best we can with what we know. Yeah. And to not harbor that anger that really doesn't hurt anyone but ourselves.

Carolyn: You know, I asked this question to all the guests and I've never had the same answer, and what it's done is it's just opened up.

The opportunity to hear more and more artistry around this notion of connection. Thank you for sharing that. I'm definitely

Sarah: gonna Oh, thank you for asking. I'm so excited.

Carolyn: Yeah. Yeah. So Sarah, I'm glad that I met you through the LinkedIn universe. You know, LinkedIn isn't [00:49:00] always about those annoying.

Messages that drop into your inbox for people you don't know or trying to sell you something, which I know they're just trying to do their job, but hey, it can get really annoying. But no, I am so glad that you answered my LinkedIn request to connect. And yeah, thank you so much for coming on the show and really wishing you and mindful employer Canada just all the best with what you're trying to do and, and bring into the organizations that you serve.

Sarah: Oh, thank you. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so glad you reached out on LinkedIn. It's been such a positive experience getting to hear more about you and getting to read Evolve. That was such an incredible book,



and I'm so happy to be able to support you in the podcast. And thank you for giving me a platform to share more about Mindful Employer Kim than what we do.

Carolyn: Yeah, everyone out there listening, please go check out mindful employer.ca. And as I said, we'll have that in the show notes. And until our next episode, [00:50:00] enjoy your week. Oh, Sarah, I think she just summed things up beautifully at the end of our conversation with that reminder that you are not alone Where.

Whenever you are leading, wherever you are working, I know you're doing the best that you can, and some days that might not feel like it's enough, but please remember, as Sarah said, you aren't alone and there are communities, there are offerings that can help you navigate through all of the challenging experiences.

That are out there right now. I hope you've learned about some resources today with our guest, Sarah, for Mindful Employer Canada. And thank you once again for tuning into this podcast. I really appreciate your support. And don't forget, if you would like to know [00:51:00] more about the work that I do, please reach out to me@carolynswear.com and my book is available across many platforms.

Forms where you can purchase books. It's called Evolve the Path to Trauma-Informed Leadership. Thanks for listening.