

AT THE EDGE PODCAST



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SHARON WINGRON – Dialogue Is the Key to a Happy Hybrid Workplace Interviewed by Michael Lee

Sharon Wingron is the founder, President, and Chief People Development Partner of DevelopPEOPLE, helping organizations to improve their effectiveness and enhance their leadership excellence to achieve organizational performance. She has thirty years of staff, line, and consulting experience, and her client list ranges from Fortune 100 companies to small businesses across twenty-two countries and five continents including Egypt, Europe, India, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia. The companies she has worked with include Anheuser-Busch, Inc., The Boeing Companies, Sanofi-Aventis, Keller Labs, Microsoft, and Wells Fargo. She was chosen to deliver programs in because of her cross-cultural understanding and her ability to build rapport and communicate effectively with people from around the world. Sharon was one of the first people worldwide, and the first member of the ATD International Board of Directors, to achieve her CPLP, now CPTD. She is St. Louis' first Certified DiSC Trainer and is a Diamond-level Authorized Partner - in the top 1% of the worldwide partner network - for Everything DiSC, the Five Behaviors, and PXT Select assessments by Wiley. Sharon holds an MBA from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She is an adjunct professor at Washington University in St. Louis, a book reviewer for Berrett-Koehler Publishers, and a contributing author to several books including *Rising to the Top: A Guide for Success*.

In this episode, Sharon discusses:

- The increased need for people development due to hybrid work and how to best achieve it
- How people today are struggling with trust in the workplace and what to do about it
- How Patrick Lencioni's model for team behaviors can help build trust and collaboration
- The importance of bringing humanity to the workplace
- The need to keep having one-on-one conversations and private space
- An ideal virtual hybrid workplace platform (elements)
- How technology can make the employee experience great
- The importance of ongoing learning
- The importance of learning and humility
- And more!

Michael Lee

So Sharon, welcome to At the Edge. And thank you very much for being here.

Sharon Wingron

Thank you. I appreciate you inviting me and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Michael Lee

You've got a really long history in people development. How has the methodology or the need for developing people changed because of remote work, hybrid work, and the pandemic?

Sharon Wingron

It's actually accelerated the need. Intensified the need. I've said for years, people will always need us. They need us as far as helping people grow, helping people learn to communicate more effectively, helping leaders lead more effectively. Our world in the last two years has gotten so much more complex, so much more stressful, that the need for developing people has really intensified.

Remote work puts a whole new layer of complexity and often confusion to our communications, to our how we approach leadership, how we manage others, how we team together. So we are needed more than ever. And now with the most recent layer of the Great Resignation, there's also that aspect of helping companies figure out how do they create the teams and the positions that they need to not only survive, but to thrive. Especially when there's fewer people in the workplace, fewer staff opportunities or people to hire into the positions.

Specifically, trust needs to be built. People are struggling with trust in the workplace. And communications are always a challenge. So how do we help people, for example, know that remote workers are doing what they say they're doing? How do we figure out how to move from a model of "I need to see you and talk to you in person every day to make sure that you're doing the work that I think you should be doing?" versus a model of, "We trust you, we hold you accountable for results, we don't care how many hours per se or what hours you're working, but how do we get you the resources you need so that you can do your job and do it well?"

So that's part of it. How do we build those interpersonal relationships, based on trust, not misinterpreting what someone says in a text or an email, when we don't have the nuances of face-to-face communication?

Michael Lee

You're asking a lot of questions. How do we build that trust? How do we get people to communicate better? What are some of the answers to these questions?

Sharon Wingron

Two of the frameworks that I use for building trust - one is based off of the work of Patrick Lencioni and his Five Dysfunctions of a Team. And we use an assessment tool created by Wiley in partnership with Patrick Lencioni's team from Table Group. Our tool is called The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team. It really looks at building trust at the base level first. We work on building vulnerability-based trust, getting people to be human with each other, to be authentic, to quit posturing, and to reveal more about themselves. So bringing humanity back to the workplace, that's part of building trust.

Then we help people learn how to have productive conflict. Once you start to be more vulnerable and authentic with each other, then you're able to hold that space, then you can start to feel more comfortable offering opposing points of view or bringing up concerns, saying, "You know, I don't agree with that decision," or "I have a different approach I'd like to suggest." So we help people learn how to have productive conflict, and that leads to gaining more commitment in the workplace. We define that commitment as a combination of clarity and buy-in.

If you're asking the questions, if you're pushing back, if you're having a productive dialogue, productive conflict, you can get to a better place of clarity around, "Okay, what are the decisions we're making? And am I willing to support those." So that's the clarity and buy-in, which is the commitment. And then that leads to creating and fostering an environment of peer-based accountability, where we're not only celebrating each other, but we're also letting people know, "Hey, I need that from you, you said you were going to get this to me and you dropped the ball." So just holding each other accountable, as a team, not the manager having to hold individuals accountable, but the team holding each other accountable.

And celebrating and recognizing each other. And finally, the top level of that is we're using Patrick Lencioni's model of collective results versus individual results. As the team moves through these stages, they get really clear on how do we focus together on results. So that's one of the models that I use in the approaches we use to build trust in the work.

We use DiSC assessments to help people understand personality styles and to help them better communicate. And then we also use some tools by an Australian company called Integral Leadership. They have a suite of three different Trust Inside Assessments. All of those are diagnostic tools that measure trust in the organization. Then we work with those measurements to help the team work on first building the trust game, identifying what areas are contributing to the lack of trust. And how do we bring them into alignment? How do we work through those - you can't just sprinkle fairy dust and be like poof, trust appears. You really have to work through communication, through conversation, through dialogue.

Michael Lee

A lot of people feel that the situation with remote work and not being together makes all of these things harder. And then some people actually feel like it makes it potentially easier. There are

these limitations that we obviously see. But what are some of the benefits of remote and hybrid work in terms of these aspects of people development and growing trust,

Sharon Wingron

My whole life, I've been a remote worker, since I started my company back in 2002. So I was used to a virtual type of work. And I've had a home office since 2000. So as I built my business through the years, I've always had remote workers. I've always been a virtual team. Even my husband, since he joined the business back in 2010, I jokingly say that we're remote, that I'm on the first floor of our house, and he's in his office in the basement on the other end of the house. So we're remote from each other in that respect.

But what I have observed even more during the pandemic is since the whole world has gone to more of this remote model, one-on-one conversations can be as rich or sometimes even richer virtually than they are in person. I find that a lot of people focus more intently on the other person when we are having this one-on-one conversation over a device, whether it's an easy platform, whether it's Zoom, or whatever else. I know that I personally can just focus more intently.

Oftentimes, as long as the video's on, picking up nuances. Or if the video is not on, you have to listen so much more carefully to what's happening with the tone of voice. And you can hear in the tone of voice if someone is with you or not, what are they struggling with. Emotions transmit through the tone of voice as much as through the face.

When we move to a group or a team, then it gets more challenging. That's when I find the communication does not work as well. It's harder sometimes to ensure that you're catching those nuances of when people want to say something or just the dynamics, the group dynamics in the room. You can't rely just on these video-based meetings, even though they're great. You have to up your game on all of the good meeting management principles we've known for a long time.

So getting clear on an agenda, for example. Doing meeting minutes. One thing that we do within our team as well as with clients is, we are recording meetings so that we can go back and catch things that are missed. I use a tool that not only video records, but also immediately transcribes it. And just by the nature of having to go back and read through that, it helps my assistant to create the minutes. But it also helps us because the transcription isn't great. We have to think a little bit more and listen more carefully to what is being said.

When we're using technology to reinforce our human interactions, that's helping the group to be more effective in the long run. And to ensure that there isn't miscommunication, make sure you're actually visually and verbally checking in with each person, asking people by name: "What are your thoughts on this?"

We've always had the challenge in the workplace that when we're in person, extroverts take over, and introverts are left struggling behind. So we need to give people time to process, time

to think about what is the discussion that we're having, what are the decisions we're making, what are the questions that need to be raised?

Michael Lee

What about the use of technology itself, both synchronous and asynchronous?

Sharon Wingron

The more we can use real world data to see what's happening, that's going to help us. I also think that with any technology, we always need the human check, meaning, I can see the data that's being gathered, but ultimately, unless I actually talk with my team members or talk with the people and ask them, "Is this accurate for you? Is this a good representation of you? What are your preferences?"

Sometimes people may be forced into using certain tools, if a company decides, Hey, we're going to use this platform, well, then a person's forced to use that platform if they work there. That doesn't mean they necessarily like that platform. That doesn't mean necessarily that's their preferred method of communication.

I've often said we need to make sure we're driving technology, technology's not driving us. We need to think about, are we choosing the right technology and applying it in such a way that really serves our workforce, as opposed to getting our workforce to serve the technology?

Michael Lee

What kinds of technologies or approaches would you recommend are workable versus not so workable?

Sharon Wingron

Any of them can be workable. It's a matter of what's right for your work, what's right for your company, for your team, for your purposes?

Email is never going to go away, but it's not the most effective by any means. For a lot of the work we do, chats can be a great quick response thing, it can be helpful. And sometimes it can be distracting.

We're always going to need some version of face-to-face, whether it's in person or whether it's virtual, because we need that human connection. We need that way of connecting with each other. There's a ton of different tools, like project management tools come to mind, for example, or even the different productivity tools that are out there. They serve from a standpoint of trying to help people get their work done, being clear on what are the projects we're working on, what are our priorities, are we aligned on where we should be spending our resources and working

on? Or do we have the right people to do the job? Do we have the right capacity? All the tools are going to help with all of that.

But ultimately, we still need leadership and communication to make those things happen. People won't get all the direction they need and the clarification they need just from a written document, because they need to talk to bring up the questions.

Artificial intelligence is sweeping us now. There's so much being done with artificial intelligence. I am sure it is capable of much more than I even realized yet. Just like anything, there's always going to be pros and cons. And if we think anything is going to solve all the problems for us, that should immediately raise a red flag,

Michael Lee

if you had to create a remote hybrid workspace that is virtual, that would contain everything you think that a team should have, what are some of the functions that virtual office should contain to make the most effective teams and most effective collaborations?

Sharon Wingron

I would want it to mimic the best of a real in-person work environment. So I would need to have some group space, a quote-unquote conference room. I would want some private space. One of the things that got workplaces in trouble was when we started going to the whole open office environment where there were no closed doors, there were no private spaces. That actually caused productivity to go down, not increase. So we would need some private spaces where we can have those one-on-one conversations, or where we can have that private time. People need quiet time where they can just focus and sit and work on their work without distractions. So there would have to be some tools in there to say, Nope, I'm not available right now for chat or for a meeting or whatever. So there'd be calendar management, there'd be project management, task management. All built in.

There would be pieces built in for celebration, for rewards and recognition. Recognition is what takes starting teams and moderate teams and moves them to high-performing teams. We use the Tuchman model: Form – Storm – Norm - Perform. The only way you ever get past Storm to Norm and Perform is when the team recognizes and celebrates each other.

It goes back to what I was saying with peer-based accountability with Lencioni's model. You're in this perfect hybrid virtual world, you would need built-in ways to acknowledge each other, to celebrate each other, reward each other.

You need things like strategy, alignment, purpose, vision, values. How do we keep that present? How do we help people remember? In workplaces, we often joke that just because it's a poster on the wall doesn't mean that's the only way to communicate about mission, vision, and values.

Or just because it's there doesn't mean you're really focused on it. But at the same time, having it on the wall does keep it visible when people are walking by it.

So how do we create some of that in our virtual workspace? Getting people really focused on the philosophical focus of the company, on who their clients are, what the strategy is, all of those kinds of things. We don't always think about all the little aspects in our physical work environment that we're using to subtly reinforce our bigger messages of the company.

So we need to find ways to build that into our virtual environment and in our collaboration tools. I think of things like my Post-It Notes. I was talking about my whiteboard. That's so important when we're using the virtual workspace is how do we have those virtual collaboration tools to work together?

Right now, there are so many different applications out there. We're trying to do all this. But to get it all into one space, that would be a pretty amazing platform, if we could figure out how to bring all those together to really simulate an in-person workplace.

Michael Lee

What have you found are the special challenges facing teamwork in the companies you're working with since the pandemic started?

Sharon Wingron

Well, some of what we talked about earlier. Communication and trust. Really, those are always the problem. What's different now is we're layering in social needs, we're laying in people struggling individually with isolation with depression. It's a different type of work-life balance. In some ways, remote work improves work-life balance, you know, our ability to integrate. I can go throw a load of laundry, and then sit down for my meeting a minute later, whereas before, I couldn't do that. But on the other hand, now, I've got to manage the distractions of the kid knocking on the door, or somebody being sick. So there's all these different dynamics.

I'm not a big fan of saying A versus B. I believe our life is a continuous spectrum with a heck of a lot of gray in there. There's always going to be pros and cons to everything. The world we are in right now is changing at such a rapid pace, and there are so many stressors and pressures being placed on it as our world evolves.

My husband and I have been binge watching the Morning Show over the last week. It's a storyline about a morning TV news show. And as it's playing out, it's playing out with the timeline of the last couple years. So they've been addressing the MeToo movement, they've been addressing the dynamics of diversity in the workplace, they've been addressing the dynamics of COVID. And some of them were talking about promoting virtual work, all of these real hard human discussions, to have them happening. When we've all been forced to go remote virtual, it makes those conversations even harder.

So how do we keep fostering that communication, fostering that ability for people to grapple through all of this together? When again, we're not just sitting in the same room having a cup of coffee able to talk about it?

Michael Lee

Traditionally, people development has been a top down situation. Leadership decides how to develop people or what needs there are. Someone like yourself might come in and help the leadership understand that with the situation we're in now, which some have called the Great Resignation, some have called the Age of the Employee, how can the employee take more responsibility and productivity for their own development?

Sharon Wingron

There's such a plethora now of self-paced learning, of learning on the go, microlearning. Things like podcasts, what you're offering. The more that employees can think about, have curiosity and think about what do I want to learn? And then what resources are internal in my company that I can tap into to learn and grow? And what resources are out there in the rest of the world? And I can tap in there and learn and grow.

What we know is that high performers in the workplace have always been people that take on their own development. The company may provide opportunities. But the highest performers, the highest producers, the best employees, so to speak, have always been the ones that don't wait for the company, but they really get clear for themselves, not just about work, but, What do I want my life to be? What is the contribution I want to make in the workplace? How do I need to learn and grow to get there? So that hasn't changed.

Now, there's better opportunity for people to do that than ever. So it really is about owning your own development, owning your own career path, being clear about where you want to go. And then looking at the resources, have the dialogue with your company about what's available, how can you support me, the manager to be a mentor or coach. Some companies do great with that. Others don't.

Even before lockdowns, with talent development, professional training development, we've known and said for a long time that we need to be business partners, that we need to be able to do needs assessments, to be able to better drill down and figure out what the development needs of the employee base is, what the needs are in the company to match and support business strategy and business operations. There are some companies that do great with that, and there are some that don't.

Resources are a challenge. With the changing workplace we're in right now, resources are going to be even more of a challenge. How do you do an effective needs analysis when you're just trying

to keep your clients served because your staffing is so low now? And so that's where I think again, we need to move away from this top-down mindset.

The entire time I've been in this profession, which is about twenty-five years now, and even before that, I worked as an industrial engineer, and that was the age of Total Quality Management, we were saying, we have to empower people. That hasn't gone away. And we still haven't nailed it.

What does it mean to empower people? It means talk to your people. Listen, even more importantly. Listen to your people. Find out what their needs are. Find out what barriers are getting in the way. Figure out what resources to provide to them to help them serve the clients and do the work, whether they're in a client-facing role or not.

From a development standpoint, you've got to own your own development. But at the same time, don't be afraid to ask. If you're a manager, or on the leadership team, ask your employees. And then you've got to figure out, how do you enable them to grow on the job? For example, how do you give them resources? Don't think that it always has to be some big coordinated effort that you're in charge of. Give your people resources to get the learning they need. People know what they need. It's often they get frustrated, because they can't get to it.

Michael Lee

I understand what you're saying about how people can empower themselves or how employees can empower themselves. But how can employees impact the organization overall, in terms of development? How can they get the leadership to do what they want, rather than having to be something that they do on the side, or on their own time?

Sharon Wingron

I'm a big fan of systems thinking. This is where you have to really look at the whole system. So this is going to go back to, who are your employees? Are people taking jobs just because they need to pay the bills? Or are they doing their own work to figure out what are some of my strengths and talents? Where do I feel I can best contribute? And what type of work can I pursue, where I'm going to be able to serve myself and the organization?

So it starts even at that fundamental level. The more you hire the right people to get a good fit. And when I say hire the right people, the company's clear what they need, but the people need to figure out where they want to be. So you want to get that good fit from the beginning, of people that want to be in that job and want to serve. From the company side, helping people get really clear on who are we and what are we about?

Again, it goes back to that mission, vision, values strategy, all those pieces I touched on earlier. Really helping people understand how they fit in. When I started in this business a long time ago, we talked about line of sight to the customer. And that still applies. How do we get people

understanding what their role in the organization is whether they're in a service role, a manufacturing role, education, no matter what role it is? How do we get them understanding how they directly impact the process, or that line of sight to the customers?

It always comes back to dialogue. It comes back to communicating with each other, asking questions and answering questions. And often it comes back to co-creating too. Just because you're in a management role for this company doesn't mean you have all the answers. Oftentimes, your people more on the frontlines have more of the answers.

But it's about courage in the workplace. Not just in the workplace, but in the world. Really, we need more courage, we need more authenticity, we need more people being able to or willing to take risks and say, Hey, I've got a question, I'm confused about this, or I'm interested in this, or Have you considered doing this? The more we have that kind of dialogue and people have the courage to ask, then we can start getting to those solutions together.

Michael Lee

How do we do that? How do we encourage people to have the courage in their role to ask?

Sharon Wingron

Developing humility. Developing trust in the workplace. That leaders appreciate the resources they have. Focusing on people authentically. Just not getting caught up in all the BS of the business world. Not getting so caught up on it's just about delivering money, stakeholders shared value. But the complexity of, How do we deliver value in such a way that takes the human needs into the equation, and where we bring those people into the conversation?

So really just asking questions, and then sitting and listening, dialoguing, again. In each situation, you've got to look at each leadership team or each company and figure out what are the barriers there? And then how do we then help them go about moving past those barriers? There's no placebo. No fairy dust that you can sprinkle and make it all well. Really it's about assessing what's getting in the way for each individual company, then how do we help move them to that place of trust dialogue, communication, alignment, all of those pieces?

Michael Lee

What are the challenges and potential opportunities around teamwork and around developing people for the 21st century, things that are happening now, that are changing the way people are working?

Sharon Wingron

It's kind of a double edged sword, I think. What's new or evolving is, as you said, it's the Age of the Employee. So on the one hand, employees are feeling more empowered, so they are taking

control more and saying, That's it, I'm done, I'm out of here! So that's happening at a greater rate than before. It's forcing the way organizations have to get better at listening to employees, and doing the things we've been talking about. In the meanwhile, there are so many other pressures in the workplace and in a business organizational environment. How do we quickly get people the right tools, the right resources? How do we stay focused on the client when we're dealing with all these different pieces and human needs?

There's fatigue in the workplace, virtual fatigue of Zoom meetings, of online. It goes back to meeting those human needs, social needs. Mental health and physical health are the new challenges. Again, it's not new, but the evolving challenge is just that life continues to be more of a pressure cooker. So how do we keep working together? We have to keep figuring out how to work together to balance all of those needs. And I think that's just going to keep being the pressing thing. Nobody has all the answers. Dialogue will help us get there.

We are at a place, more than ever, where we have to lean into each other, not away from each other. We have to get past our own egos. To quote one of my idols Stephen Covey: Seek to understand the different people, their needs, what their perspectives are, and be able to get more clear on our own so that we can articulate our concerns, our desires, our dreams, and help to work together towards making the workplace a better place and accomplishing our goals.

Remember, Sharon Wingron as someone who asks questions, who has some insights, but really, mainly tries to draw out those insights in others by asking questions and facilitating dialogue.

Michael Lee

Thank you, Sharon. It's been a real delight to hear your thoughts. Thank you for being on the podcast.

Sharon Wingron

Thank you, Michael. I really appreciate you having me.