The Leadership Diet Josie McLean

Josie: delighted to be here. Thank you.

Pod: You have just published a new book called Big little shifts, a guide to complexity, organizational change, and adoptation. And I want to jump into that in a few minutes, cause I know there's loads of really interesting topics for us to delve into and get our minds around.

But before we go into that, I want to jump back to your original career. Am I right in remembering you were the first female finance analyst in the Mitsubishi car company in South Australia.

Josie: Actually Chryslers- by the time Mitsubishi had taken crisis over, I'd moved into the finance industry. So yeah, that's how old

Pod: And I remember you telling me once, you, did you, I think you did all the original coding by hand originally, or was some the strap planning.

Josie: No, it was on cards. we used to you probably not familiar with the word comptomotrist?

Pod: No,

Josie: I'm not. No. So in the old days, I really feel like grandma now, there used to be banks of women.

Actually. They were women in the Comptometer room and they would sit there with adding machines, doing all of the calculations that our computers do now.

Pod: Wow.

Josie: And so we would draw up these huge sheets, 13 column twenty-five column sheets of paper with pencil on them. In case we made an error and they would check.

Or they would actually do the computations. So we, computers were just emerging at that stage. And, I was the only one that had coding experience at all because I was a young whippersnapper from uni.

Pod: And,

Josie: I could code in basic it just enough to do, some arrays and some computing that was actually coded onto cards.

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That they had to run at night because it took the entire capacity of the computer to actually run these spreadsheets effectively.

Pod: How far we've come in a relatively short time when you think of competing speed and everything else. And I would imagine that early background of you, you had an economics education background as well, that shaped your thinking around systems I'm imagining, but to tell me more.

Josie: Yeah, Crawley economics, does tend to encourage you to think in systems think more broadly than just small parts. Although macroeconomics in its traditional form, doesn't actually extend the system out into our physical resources or the natural world. It stops at the limit of the social world. and there are macroeconomic series now, like modern monetary theory and the doughnut economics that actually extend our economic thinking out.

into the planetary resources that we have as well, but certainly then that didn't happen. But, it did facilitate a way of understanding that this is connected to that. And if this goes up, that might go down

Pod: because it sounds is the fundamental way leaders often have to make decisions is understanding the interconnectivity between different relationships.

Josie: No, I think that's right. And, when times are really stressed, it's really natural for us to, really reduce. We get like tunnel vision and we tend to reduce the field of vision, I think, and we lose sight of some of that interconnectedness in our stress. And so to hold that, interconnect that broad vision open is a really great tray for, Why is leaders to possess?

I think

Pod: right now we are probably emits maybe the most complex time of certainly of our lives, but certainly from a leadership perspective. And I thought it might be useful just to really a common understanding, what is complexity? what is whole ism and reductionism, the butterfly effect.

Some of these terms are often thrown around that some of us may or may not even know. So maybe let's just start there and then we can jump into the whole notion of how you apply it. So complexity holism reductionism share with us your wisdom, Josie.

Josie: What is it? Okay. How many days do you have? so complexity is shorthand for complex adaptive systems, and these are actually computer models designed to understand the behavior of living systems.

So they're connected, but they're not the same. So we often use complexity and living systems as interchangeable terms. Holism is connected to, living systems and complexity. By virtue of the fact that if we want to understand a living system, we have to develop the capacity, the capability to actually see the whole, the relationships between all the parts.

What were we just talking about? If this goes up that goes down, this influences that influences that, but when it becomes really complex, like in our Metro systems and even in our social systems and coronavirus is just an ideal example of this. The uncertainty is so high in these systems because of the interdependence between a large number of variables that we can't predict what's going to happen.

And, planning fall short. As a way of understanding how to make progress in the world. So planning is actually, and strategic planning like I used to be involved in is really, it comes from an understanding of the world where the world is a lot more certain and it's predictable. And this is often referred to as Newtonian paradigm champion developed by sir Isaac Newton in all of his brilliance.

and I'm certainly not saying that it's wrong. What I am saying is that I think it's been incorrectly applied to different types of systems. So there are actually different types of systems. There's not just one system. Okay. And then you Tony and paradigm, which has at its heart and understanding. That the universe is actually a clock.

that was a phrase that sir Isaac Newton used. And if we could just understand all of the nature of all of the paths we could understand the whole. So another way of saying that is that the hole was no more than the sum of the parts and we can break the whole down to parts to understand it, and we can break it down to parts, to resolve problems.

With the whole machine as well. And we see this approaches deeply inculcated into our society and into the way we run our organizations. The idea that, there's an equal and opposite force and that's one of Newton's first laws, wasn't it? that idea applies in our organizations. We think if we push hard, we'll get a big impact, but it's not necessarily the case.

Another example of the Newtonian paradigm at work in our organizations is the very way we structured them in hierarchies. And then we take a plan and we cascade down through the organization and we give little bits to different people. And we assume that if we can hold them accountable for their bid and everyone does all of their bits, then suddenly the whole plan will have been delivered.

Pod: Which sounds perfect in this strategic planning session, when you put your lovely PowerPoint together, I go, here's our plan for next three years or where we go?

Josie: I can tell you the basic problem with that because I learned it when I was 25, a long time ago. You can write beautiful plans. That never get implemented

Pod: exactly.

As well as many of us have found that to the detriment.

Josie: So I wrote lots of them.

Pod: so I think what you're saying here is that the original notion from Isaac Newton, which was based on a mechanistic notion that everything is connected. And once you understand the connections, you can then manage the whole that affected what he was saying.

And what you're telling us is that was far that might've been fine in a new era. Gone by, but it's really not fine today. And starting was never true. Anyway,

Josie: it is certainly true that way of operating holds it works for things like bikes and buildings and bridges. As long as you don't have people nature

Pod: involved in isolation,

Josie: but people are actually living systems and we operate differently.

We operate by fundamentally different rules, if you like. and I think we've incorrectly. We certainly didn't intentionally. We just assume that all of these systems were the same and that the same rules would apply. But it turns out that nature is telling us something different now. And, so the world has always been interconnected.

It's always been interdependent. It's just that now the pace of change is so much greater than the number of people on this world are so many more. It's just in my lifetime. For example, the population on earth has doubled more than doubled. so humans are now living in a global niche where we used to live in small geographic niches before, and we're learning how to live in this much larger niche.

Now.

Pod: I read about, and it's often used in explanation around complexity and it is called the butterfly effect and the idea, meaning that a butterfly flaps their wings and somewhere, and then causes something dramatically different elsewhere. Can you tell us, what does it mean if a leadership perspective,

Josie: first of all, it was developed by scientists to try and explain the interdependence in weather patterns.

And, the basic butterfly effect was exactly, as you'd mentioned, that you can have a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the world, and it produces a hurricane or a tornado on the other side of the world. Or not because it is inherently uncertain. And so it might produce. A hurricane, but it may not either.

It may just be the flapping of wins. It's actually about the interdependence between all of those weather patterns. It might include the temperature of the oceans. It might include the strengths of the winds. It might include another tornado appearing somewhere else. It is inherently uncertain and unpredictable.

And we can't control. And so socially that shows up in phenomenons, such as Greta Thornburg, for example, as a school girl of 16, deciding she's not going to go to school on

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Fridays. And she's going to sit outside the parliament. Then some days she gets a little bit of attention and she's a assertive young woman and she speaks her mind. Now we've got students all over the world captured by her words that is inherently uncertain and unpredictable. You couldn't predict it. Similarly. the Arab spring was triggered by, one Twitter, one tweet that laid dormant for about three months before it came to surface again and went viral.

And there's that word went viral. That from nature viruses are the epitome of interdependence and, just taking off exponentially and illustrating to us that a very small change somewhere can produce a change. Much greater advocation. And that's really what the butterfly effect is trying to tell us about.

And we're living through it right now,

Pod: as you're talking, I'm thinking about, I'm province, of course, AOA and interdependent reaction happened that could have happened at any time in the past, but happened. Spontaneously we imagine, but then that causes extraordinary impact all over the world and not, no one could have predicted that to the degree that had happened.

We obviously have had predictions that it can happen. And we also know bill Gates has predicted that in his Ted talks, but how, and when no one would know that.

Josie: No, that's right. And certainly, those that study pandemics had wanted to just September last year, I believe that another pandemic was probably imminent, but they didn't know where or when, but we should get really for, so it's the uncertainty that's.

The real issue here.

Pod: And that brings me to this topic emergence because obviously what we're talking about leadership year, and as you quite rightly said, there's a certain amount that leaders can plan for. And a certain amount of planning is redundant because no matter how much plans you do, it's not going to happen.

And then as the whole thing that just comes out of the blue, it emerges from nowhere. What Josie and you experience, what do leaders need to be mindful of are tending towards to observe the emergence tubs thereof was coming out of left field or unexpected, and then how to attend to that from a leadership point?

Josie: that's a really big question, I think. so first of all, I think I'd say that emergence is actually happening all the time and we're largely unaware of it. And I think within our organizations, I've become more and more aware of the structures within our organizations that are mechanistic in their origins that actually dampen.

The possibility of emergence within organizations. So it's not that the Mo the emergence doesn't happen. and there are various things that emerge from living systems and

adaptation and change is one of them. so it's not that's not happening. It's just that it gets dampened by the structures that exist.

And essentially these are structures of control of different types, processes, and systems that are trying to. Control to create the conditions for certain predetermined outcomes to occur. And when we dampen the conditions for emergence, we might be able to control sufficiently to obtain those predetermined outcomes, but we do so at the expense of the abundance of possibilities that exist.

If we removed the controls. So most people within organizations I believe are unaware of how wasteful. Our current structures are in some of my work. For example, I've seen organizations doing twice as much work with the same number of people when we've finished doing our work within the organization.

So that suggests. Almost a hundred percent increase in productivity, which is almost unheard of isn't it. Like I wouldn't go out advertising that because I can't say what we did actually, cause that was a whole organization with a focus on something at a pure point in time. and I don't know how long it's been sustained for either.

But there is an enormous cost to control, which is at the heart of the Newtonian paradigm. And it's at the heart of most of our management and leadership teachings within MBAs. it's all about managing scheduling, controlling, structuring, getting people to do is meant to do. and it's only more recently that we've started introducing notions of, working to people's strengths, which are a natural.

Force within the complexity of people, I think, engaging with their passions, which are another natural force. And then there's research to suggest that when people do that, they are a lot more creative. They have a lot more persistence to continue with a problem and their creativity. this is actually the source of innovation.

I believe it's not in processes and systems. We put in place it's in the way we create an environment for people to work and to experience their work

Pod: point there, the notion of releasing control to cliche, being here to unleash the power of the creativity of the person or the organization, and then that releases innovation, et cetera.

What's the tension between looking for creative outputs through innovation relative to chaos.

Josie: That's a great question. and chaos doesn't insure ensued.

Pod: And that

Josie: that's the amazing thing, because you can take away those structural controls, but there are still forces of cohesion that are working within a living system.

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So the example I often use is that an Oak tree doesn't spontaneously turn into a dark. It has the DNL and it's going to remain an Oak tree. So within an organization, we can think of the lived. organizational values, vision and purpose as the organization's DNA. And we can generate cohesion within the organization by connecting each employee to that DNA.

So can they bring what they care about? They've got their own complexity and their own values and their own picture of what's. Can we bring that into the service of the organization by actively connecting them to the vision? And I don't know about you, but when I work in organizations that I ask people, what the organization will vision is, they go.

Oh, it's over there somewhere, it's on the walls. It needs to be a lot more active than that. and we, we work in the space of engaging people to actually co-create the vision and the purpose. And that's not scary either because these visions are remarkably consistent around the purpose of the organization.

And I think that's because people know the environment that brings out the best in them. And.

Pod: I've just finished, a series of interviews. I think it's about 25 for leadership team. So stakeholders of the leadership team internally and externally, and this is a very successful allegation on many levels. However, they are now moving to a different phase of their gestation and what's become really clear is that the mission, the long-term mission, the long-term reason for being in the organization for the organization is clear because they have a history, but the vision of where they're going to now on the current journey is very unclear.

And the impact of that throughout the organization is, and this talks to your point, is a lot of wasted effort on people doing different things, because they are unclear and therefore they're doing their very best of course, as best as they know how. And so the big call out from these 25 interviews, I've just concluded.

Get clear. As a group on the vision for the next five to 10 years, get clear, therefore on the boundaries that we are operating within. So therefore then we can become as innovative as we can, as opposed to dispersing your energy everywhere, which is causing a huge amount of extra work.

Josie: Yeah, I'd agree with that.

I think getting really clear on the purpose and when I use the word vision on using it slightly differently than many people would be imagining. I think because the talk of vision we help organizations create around their purpose is how do we want. How do we want to experience this organization and how do we want others to experience it in the future?

So the difference is, if I can use, an example, a metaphor, perhaps if we were trying to plan a house together, for example, and then we have an argument over how many bedrooms it's

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got to have and what the shape of the Bush might be and what color the tiles would be, or the iron cladding or whatever it is.

That's a very physical. Vision, it's almost a big goal. That's the type of vision we are used to setting, but in a world where we can't predetermine the outcome, that type of goal doesn't serve us very well. And it's really just one possibility in a really abundant future possibilities. There are all sorts of things that could emerge in five or 10 years.

So if we develop a vision of the house, we want to live in that set the level of cool we'd like it to be safe and secure. We'd like it to be hospitable. We'd like it to be airy and open to the environment. We'd like it to house a certain number of people. That's much easier to agree on and it leaves the flexibility of the tangible outcome to emerge into the future.

Does that make sense? So I'm using vision in a slightly different way. And I think when we use a vision like that, it can be a cohesive force. For people that enables experimentation to see what helps. And I think that is very necessary. we don't, we can't predict what's going to happen, so we have to work it out on the run.

and it still gives us. A guiding light though. And the guiding light may shift around a little bit, but it is possible to run an organization like that. And, for a period of time, the organization that I did, my PhD research in actually had such a vision. It was on one page, it had half a dozen vision values around it, and they used to put their initiatives inside the circle.

With those values on the outside and an understanding of the story that went with those values and how they related to the vision. And they would say which initiative actually serves all of these values at the same time and the are ones that got funded.

Pod: why that would align everybody to the purpose, to the long-term vision, to the immediate action, to the decisions on funding, our resourcing, or allocations or priorities, et cetera. And, it's initiatives are ticking a lot of the boxes, not all the boxes and kitty that they become. Part of Asians very quickly.

Josie: So in the Newtonian world though, our strategic plan. So usually four strategic pillars, and then we put projects underneath each pillar, but they're actually not interrelated. They're not working together in a, like an ecosystem of projects connected by anything, but this way, all of these initiatives that are actually connected by the vision.

And, there are a lot more powerful because of them.

Pod: I love that. I love that. We hope you're enjoying this episode of the leadership diet. Feel free to hit the subscribe button on whatever podcast player you are listening to this on. We've used an iTunes and smarter. I greatly appreciate it. So when the big chefs cook was coming, I was thinking, Oh, this is something worth delving into.

I'm sure there's going to be great nuggets. And sure enough, there's a huge nugget, which is the metaphor of leader as gardener. I'd love you just to walk us through some of the

thinking around that and how you've put some, it's not just a one-line metaphor, there's actually a whole lot of stuff that sits within the metaphor as to why you use that.

Josie: it goes back to understanding the way living systems actually work. And for so long, we've understood, our leaders as people who have to be strong and decisive and out front and with all of the answers. But if we understand the world as a living system, then it is, it becomes clear really quickly that knowing answers is just not possible.

And certainly one person knowing them is even more impossible. so there's a lot of learning to be done, learning how to. Interact with different parts of the systems so that we can influence the outcomes that we're seeking. And we may not get what we're seeking because the rest of the world's all trying to influence outcomes too.

So that's another area of emergence where an outcome emerges. But if we understand that the world operates differently than we thought it did in that linear, predictable, consistent, certain manner. If we say no social systems and living systems don't operate that way, they actually operate differently.

Then it makes sense that if we want to influence those systems, we would think differently about the qualities. Of the people who are trying to influence them. And it's actually delving into the understanding of how living systems operate that give us some of the ideas around what are the qualities that we might seek to nurture within ourselves as people who might be wanting to influence that system.

One of the very first things we observed when we start thinking down this track is that we are all a part of the system. None of us inherently more important than anyone else. So we all have an opportunity to influence and there's this line that's become very popular. through Ron Heifetz's work that leadership can come from anywhere.

And that's the first thing. Any one of us can be a leader, but it's not a position of authority. It's actually a choice to make a difference. And so that's the first thing. Then we start thinking about, if we can't actually predict the outcomes, then it takes a great deal of humility to actually work within these systems.

You have to be humble enough to say we don't know. we can't predict, no is actually an interesting word. Isn't it? If you speak to someone like Tyson, younger Porter, who's just written the sand or I was talking to him about, living systems, complex systems as well. And I said, we don't know.

And he said, don't be stupid. Of course we do. We can't predict what the outcome will be. Knowing is a different matter. There are different ways of knowing there's more than just thinking to know something. So sometimes we do know, but there's a different way of knowing

Pod: and our heritage might give us different insights and ways of knowing to that than that.

Right?

Josie: Yeah. I think of systemic practice, the art of actually influencing a living system. If you like, as a very embodied practice, we feel things where our whole body's gathering data about the info about the system. At any one point in time. So there's humility as a quality there's trust, but you've actually got to trust the system to be able to work it out.

if we, if, as the person in authority, we can't know the answers in the way that we produce traditionally want to predetermined outcomes. Then we have to trust that the people in the system that we're going to and saying. How will we deal with this? We have to trust that they are going to be able to do it.

Not only trust our own resources, but trust everyone, else's resources, their intuition, their willingness, their contributions to trying to work this through.

Pod: which of course is the antithesis to control. if I'm looking to control and even if it's overt, couldn't, as I say, as in subtle control, I may not be overt about my intentions that does diminish trust.

and of course, as you and I both know, and everyone who's listened to this one, now it's easy to feel, not trusted by your leader. straight away when your leader doesn't trust you through their actions and through their behavior.

Josie: Yeah. Trusting is so important. Isn't it?

Pod: Absolutely.

Josie: And we know from the research into organizations that the public has lost its trust in so many institutions over recent years.

And how do we re rebuild that again? How do we earn people's trust back once it's lost. And then there's qualities like patients that are so important, in most organizations, if you put your feet up and you rest your head back in your arms and you have a little think about things for a while, people walking past your desk are likely to think you're slacking off.

In action.

Pod: In one of your writings, you tell a lovely story. Alan Malala, from who, when he was the CEO of Ford at the time, I think he might have been new to his role at the time, but it really epitomizes the notion of being patient and allowing the, the change to occur to tell us that story, because that really piss him off is what you're talking about here with

Josie: patients.

I don't know Alan personally, but I heard him speak at a conference and he was relating, his first few months on the job as the new CEO of Ford. And he'd come from Boeing, a very

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successful company and Ford was losing a lot of money at the time. And, so there were clearly problems, right? It was learning, losing millions a day.

And, he set up this agreement with his executive team to have a traffic light report when they got together and even getting the executive team together at the same meeting at the same time was a novel idea apparently from around the world, because of all of the different time zones. They agreed that they would all come with their traffic light reports and they would have a look at each other's reports.

And if there were any yellow or red issues, they would work on them together. So the first team meeting came along and everyone turned up with all green traffic lights. this is interesting. So who I did for the second week, they're still all green and he's still losing money, hand over

board. What are you doing? I'm waiting. I'm waiting for my executive team to actually admit that there's a problem. eventually one of the executives turned up with a red light on his traffic light report and he assumed. That by doing. So he was about to be exited and, ushered out of the meeting and out of the organization because that's the way things had been dealt with in the past.

And Alan made sure that, he, that didn't actually happen, that he drew that person closer to him physically and emotionally, I assume. And, he ensured that the team all rallied round. And they offered him support and ideas, and they made sure that he had the people resources to actually resolve the issue.

And within a few weeks, the issue had been resolved. But what struck me most about this story was not only his nerve to actually wait that out and not rush to action. But he waited with good purpose. Like he knew why he was waiting. He was waiting for his executive team to do their own internal work around, coming to terms with a new way of working and also taking responsibility for what was really going on.

and he waited and they must have been wondering what he was going to do. but he just waited. He had the patients and when the moment came, it was like one of those moments of truths that we used to read about in, was it Northwest airlines? I think, it was a moment of truth for him and he acted and he made sure that person.

Was, supported in order to do the work that they needed to do. So it transformed not only that person's approach to work, but the entire executive team. And then you could imagine how that would have rippled through the company as well.

Pod: No. What I love about that story that illustrates, patients, as you quite rightly said, and also the distress courage on behalf of Alan as CEO to stand.

By his own principles, but on behalf of that executive who on the third week showed up and, historically speaking would have been fired or punished or whatever, but had the courage to

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do it. But the other part about Israel that I really love is Alan didn't necessarily put that executive on a pedestal for, behaving like.

the good executive, you've got everyone else to come around and help them. So he introduced teamwork straightaway as the new way of working together. And I think that learning would have been, the secondary, but brace subtle and interconnected learning for that leadership team that they were forced into it.

And did it really well for a number of years afterwards.

Josie: Yeah. Yeah. And there's this, lovely term, from. The Dow is from the Chinese culture. Actually, Wu Wei is called. It's doing without doing. and I just laughed that this idea of you can do something. I actually know rushing to action. I not pushing it forward by not being forceful.

Actually, those things can actually be. Counterproductive to what we're trying to achieve.

Pod: That's right. It's so starting as a parent, it's been, one of my learnings is to, over the years of the, how not intervene in between the, the gripes between the five children and they eventually work it out themselves and go right there you go doing that.

Doing.

Josie: So much self-awareness doesn't it to actually hold yourself back.

Pod: Absolutely. Absolutely. so you talk about humidity, trust patients. You also talk about vision and awareness as system, and then there's the six one that you talk about, which I really love that the deafness of touch and it goes to, I suspect the. That the masterful way of leading and, the subtle ways. And there's a lovely story telling your book, I think is based in Adelaide, there's a building project and it really illustrates how someone's difference of touch through a lovely question or posing of questions transforms the whole way of that particular group and how they led together.

Josie: Yeah. So I've been working with this group for awhile. So we had been practicing the art of listening for the assumptions underneath compensation. And, we'd been trying it out on each other for a year or so and developing the capacity around this. And we had also been developing an awareness. it was actually an organization that was trying to deliver more sustainable outcomes for its community.

So it was a local council. And, so we'd been practicing, listening and practicing, interacting with each other and practicing that, being that interacts with each other in a way that opens up possibilities rather than closes them down. And I think importantly, this small group had actually developed good relationships with each other within the small group where we'd been practicing that too.

And there were, several of them at this meeting of senior managers where they were talking about, developing the central business district at the half of this local municipality. One of the team members, one of the group that I've been working, we just sat back and sit down, wonder what would happen if we didn't keep calling it a central business district, what would it be like if we called it a central people district?

And just, just really generally logged it on the table and then stepped away from it and left it alone. Didn't argue. Didn't persuade didn't force. Just left the question there. And it provoked this incredible conversation that spread right throughout the organization, up to the elected members and into their strategic plan from one little question delivered in.

If I don't know, is there any real right way, but it was certainly an effective way. It was, it was not pushing a solution. It was asking the question.

Pod: Which really goes back to your piece on humility is I can't remember who said to me once, but some wise presidents said to me once a great idea should have no owner.

It should just stand on its own. But most of us want to own the great idea. Therefore, that's why we put a forward as our solution. Whereas I think what you suggested here is. This person had great deafness of touch to go. Here's the thought let's just put in the middle and then see what happens from a life living systems, growth perspective, and a sounds like that really took off as a core notion.

Josie: And I think, and there were other people in the room that sort of saw what was going on and understood what was going on. So they were able to back this initial move up as well. And one of the things that's intrigued me is that. the way we mix colors, we can put, blue and yellow together and we get green.

And that's what we're aiming for in these dialogues. I think, and I put yellow on the table, you put green on the table, suddenly we've got blues and that fantastic. We don't have to just stick to the yellow or the green. So it's when it mixes together that we actually get the richness of what's possible.

Pod: Yeah, there's a leader I used to work with, who I always watched and told this person is extraordinary masterful at shaping conversations and shaping outcomes without the group realizing that the group usually ended up in a place where the leader had thought they might, I suggest, but it wasn't pushy by his behalf.

And one day I just stopped and said, what are you actually doing in the room? And what he would do is like this example that you suggested. He would put in some ideas or some thoughts are more often not a profound question. And then when the group went to a breakout, FIPSE charting type exercise, he would always go to the group that wasn't working on, the thoughts that he had put into the room, because his view was they need to shape it.

Then it's theirs. Whereas if I'm in that group, I'm going to shape it the way I said it originally. And invariably, the group ended up assuming that the profound question or idea, it was a

good one. They ended up shaping it almost to where this person thought I would get to, but it was theirs came from them at that point.

So he had very definitely put into the group, walked away. So the group could then shape it. I throw humility in a lack of attachment to it. And assuming that it was a good version of what they wanted, the group then owned it and shaped it in a way they went. Whereas I think most of this person's peers wanted to be in the conversation so they could get stuck into an attached to it and then, and effectively control it.

So it was a real, a lack of control, a real trust that the group will shape it properly. And they'll end up where it'll end up.

Josie: And I think we can achieve a lot with a deft touch, doing much less than we imagined we have to when you're trying to control people. And

Pod: the mere fact that you believe you can is it is stressful in its own, right?

That's a war that's taught us in 2020 that there's a free, it's not a free to use which I really love. And that is. Different levels of doing. And I think what we've just talked about leaning into this is sometimes, doing requires a lot of effort, but sometimes doing requires deafness and less, of doing and has a different impact.

Did John tell us more about that?

Josie: perhaps an example is the way we go about trying to influence peoples or even control people's behaviors at work sometimes. we want certain things done. So we use rewards and punishments, carrots, and spit sticks most often. To achieve what we're trying to achieve.

That's a fairly, I'm gonna use the word gross, but I don't mean gross as in sickening. it's a blunt instrument if you like, it does work, but it comes at a cost because you're actually missing people's discretionary effort, the things that they do, because they want to do.

A more subtle form. There might be actually a more subtle approach might be, aligning particular work with the, as we were talking about earlier with the strengths and passions that people have now, that's the more subtle that's the more deft approach to getting outcomes. Does that make sense? The difference.

And then an even more subtle approach might be becoming aware of the assumptions that people hold around. What they're good at, what they're not good at. how we do things around here. What's achievable. What's not, one of the things that I'm always fascinated by is the idea that many people come to work.

And this has been proven in mind. Experiences that many people come to work with a belief that their personal values aren't welcome at work, but they have to take the method. And if

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you can, if you can encourage people to actually bring them with them, then you get a whole richness of the whole person at work, rather than just a part of them.

And that's a deft infant intervention too, but it's not the sort of intervention that we're used to where it's, if you behave like that, we'll punish you. or if you behave like that, we'll reward you with a bonus. that's a lot courses sort of intervention. You can align with what someone wants, or you can have a conversation around them about what they believe that they may not even realize that they believed it.

And you just do this tiny little thing and you get an enormous outcome from it.

Pod: That's the great thing about valleys is most of us don't fully understand our own values until they're compromised or they're forced to address it. Or someone actually asked a question about it and then it becomes to light.

That's for sure. And as you said,

Josie: like they change yes.

Pod: Yes. Say as a 50 year old man, my valleys today, Different to 20 years ago. I mean my core buddies probably haven't, but what's important to me now is very different to what I was. Josie, I'm interested in, what are you noticing with leaders you're working with in terms of how are they learning?

These principles are how they apply these principles and those that are applying them. What's the impact they're having in their organizations as leaders.

Josie: Do you know the expectations that most leaders have around their own ways of operating and what other people expect of them? Are so strongly Newtonian that is actually really hard to share some of these ideas, but, like there's a great deal of trust that needs to be developed in order to consider the possibilities quite well.

Having said that, The MBA is a starting to teach this sort of thing now. and that makes it easier. the younger generation are certainly a lot more open to it, I think. and it makes sense that if you are in a position of higher authority in an organization, you've got more risk. if these ideas aren't.

Aren't successful for someone that there seems to be more at risk, but one of the gorgeous things about working in living systems is that the same principles. Apply at every level or subsystem within the larger system. So you don't actually have to bet the farm to try these ideas out. So one of the ways that you can start experimenting with them is just to reflect on your own behavior and what works for you and to raise your awareness around that.

Most people tell me that they don't like being controlled by others.

Pod: That's right? Yes. They forgive him due to somebody else. Yeah.

Josie: And that they actually perform better when they're not. So we can start there and work outwards, I think. And then, we can actually just start to experiment with teams that are willing.

so if there is a team leader and a team that is willing to experiment with the way it's working to see if they can work better and produce a better work environment and most are willing, you're not, then you can experiment at that level and you can gradually work it out. The successful people can build some trust in what they already know to be true, actually, but we have been taught to distrust it.

Because of that older paradigm letting and it's, with Corona virus, I think it's really clear that, that older paradigm is disappearing more quickly. even in the mood to work from home. Most leaders and organizations have experienced. I won't use the word strengths and even that's not quite wrong.

They've experienced a more constructed cultural merging because the purpose became really clear. Crystal clear and everyone was acting on it. And from a living systems perspective, I would say that they generated greater cohesion within their organizations because the purpose was really clear for a point in time and everyone was really connected to it.

many organizations have talked about how their cultures have actually been enhanced by, The pandemic and coronavirus and that working from home has taught them that they can trust people to work hours. And in fact, I've had clients, Reflect on the fact that they've had to try and stop their people working such long hours, but they've been working from home and they'd been working perhaps 12 hour days.

And they can tell that from the

Pod: interactions with the

Josie: students and the emails, and they're actually trying to get people to reduce their number of hours rather than do their number. So it's just not true that people won't do the work. If you're not watching them like a fall. so we can observe this.

And I think now is a time when we can really build on some of these ideas of living systems to help prepare organizations, to be more adaptable, continually adapting into the future, being able to adapt to the pandemic once. Great. But we're going to have to go on doing this.

Pod: I love what you said about experimenting.

Cause that's a word I use a lot in all the work I do because I find that the notion of experiment allows us to make mistakes and allows us to learn from it and allows us to try out our hypothesis and to prove it right or wrong or whatever. Whereas if you say change the behaviors as that can be very difficult sometimes.

And so the notion of experimenting. During COVID, but everyone had to, there was no choice and we've learned a phenomenal amount as a result of it. And as you quite rightly said, a lot of it leaders have learned that, either the trust they had built up has been validated or they can trust the people more.

And there were surprise and it's a very welcome surprise. but they were forced experiment. I think what you're telling us now is. COVID forced us to experiment because we had no choice now, how do we take that experimentation muscle that we've been building and then keep applying it over and over again and see what naturally emerges and watch for that.

Josie: Yeah, because one of the qualities of living system is that it naturally adapts when it needs to. That's one of those emergent qualities. if you can organize. An organization, according to the principles of living systems, you're actually building in the capacity to be naturally adaptable when it's necessary, right.

Throughout the organization, they may be adaptive patients that are different in different parts of the organization. And that's an anathema to us when we think of Newton Newtonian paradigm, because the change has to be uniform the same and at the same time, So we're at the organization. But actually that's not the way natural systems work and you can have an adaptation in one place as peculiar.

Because of the circumstances and it makes sense in that particular location and not in another, and, or it might be at a different time because one place is ready at a different time. it, it enhances the adaptability and that this will actually become a strategic imperative that we can develop strategies as we've known them in the past, but it will need to be underpinned by an adaptability.

And I think. Developing that adaptability is becoming a strategic imperative and it fits so well with the work that Henry Mintzberg did back in the 1990s around emergent strategy, because that's what strategy will become as we move forward, it will become a lot more emergent from different parts of the organization.

And then it can be institutionalized when it's ready.

Pod: Josie. I need to bring this to an end are coming to an end. I've got two questions that I ask everybody in all of my interviews. And I love to pause and to you. One has got nothing to do with our interview. And one has the first one is what's your favorite band or to our song?

Josie: Oh, wow. I think it probably, this is embarrassing probably takes me back.

Probably takes me back to John. Lennon's imagine. I was a real Beatles fan when I was a kid. I can remember crying the day that they broke up, but I just love the sentiment behind John Lennon's imagine there's no. No borders, no differences between us. it's such a, utopian song, but it's great to imagine that this really

Pod: appeals.

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None of them embarrassed by that song was the first one I ever learned on the piano. So there you go. You brought back memories for myself. And then last question, Josie, given everything we've talked about, given everything that you now know, what would you be telling the 35 old version of yourself today?

Josie: I think it would be, there's no real rules. I used to think there were rules about how I should be and they are there's cultural ones, but no one cares if I break them. And so I would be telling the 35 year old me, just to have a goal and to forget about all of my self doubt and.

All of my beliefs about what I can do and what I can't do, because the more I do, the more I find out that he can do it. And so I don't mean that there's no legal laws. What I mean is that there are no rules about what you can do or can't do in terms of your own capacity and your own potential. And. And I've nowhere reached my own potential and I don't believe any of us ever do, but just to go on having a triad it and keep experimenting and trying things out.

But the world has not stopped spinning when I got it wrong.

Pod: That's a lovely sentiment turned. I suspect many of us wish we had taught ourselves that a long time earlier than we actually did. Josie. Thank you so much for all that you've done and all that. You, all your research and all your contributions and thank you for making time for us today.

Really enjoyed hearing all of your insights. It's

Josie: a real delight to talk with you. Thank you.

Pod: I hope you enjoy that conversation with Josie McClain. She certainly brings a whole wealth of knowledge to every conversation around complexity and particularly in relationship to leadership. Before I move into that. I've had a lot of people contact me over the last few weeks and how much they're enjoying the end of episode seven, such as this.

So thank you for all of those contacts and reach outs and feedback. Glad you're finding that. Helpful me. When I think about George's conversation, a few things jump out at me as being really worthwhile to spend some time thinking about our noting about. The whole idea of living systems. There's a huge body of knowledge around that.

And I certainly found for myself, I went back into some old readings on leaving systems and I find this a really useful reminder. So for anyone who is either new to living systems as a whole philosophy of knowledge, Or who hasn't read about it recently, this might prompt you to do a revisit and look at some of the principles of living systems, such as adaptability, such as patients, such as humility, et cetera, and see how that might impact your thinking of leadership during times of complexity.

The metaphor of leader as gardener raised some lovely traits that are not new in any way in terms of leadership, but are very useful than how Josie gathered them around the metaphor

of a gardener. And as does strike me that humility is one of the most underestimated and probably one of the most strategic.

Quantities of effective leadership during times of complexity, not because humility of itself or in itself, but because humility does allow or enable us as human beings and as the leader to be more open-minded to ask questions such as, how could I be wrong in this situation? Or what am I not noticing in this situation?

Or who can I ask? Questions or advice from in this situation and, keeps the open-mindedness on a high alert as well as staying to the edges of the conversations and looking for alternative opinions that might be useful. So the question for all of us always is, how can I be more humble or direct questions such as, how could I be wrong here?

Or who else can I ask information from? Might be useful questions to increase our levels of humility.

Josie: Okay.

Pod: The other metaphor of a deft touch. I really like that idea because it talks about mastery. It talks about effortless as opposed to effort team, and she outlined three areas. Where leaders can increase the sense of deafness of touch. One is looking at the strengths of your team and how do you allocate work or ideals of, strategy towards folks.

Who've got different strengths in different areas too, is how do you help? Aluminate the assumptions that your team are carrying with you and with them into different conversations. And lastly, how do you use powerful questions as a way to force bigger conversations? In a way that's different to you just giving your opinion.

So there just three ideas that Josie brought that I think are worth while playing with. Lastly, for me, the biggest thing that came out of this is this notion of experimentation as a muscle. I love the idea that COVID has enabled almost all of us in all of our lives to experiment in ways we haven't done before.

And adaptability is a trait of living systems. I, when we're forced to, we can adapt very quickly. So how do organizations keep creating environments that encourage adaptability and encourage experimentation and encourage innovation? And not just have to resort to pandemics or external market changes or competitive her emergence as a reason to experiment with, to actually make this a lifelong and a work long process.

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Josie: you.

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