

Authentic Leadership: From Theory to Practice Part 2

A conversation with Dr. Robbyn Wacker and Dr. Katrina Rodriguez
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00:01 All right. Well, hi Katrina. It's good to see you again. Great to see you too, Robbyn. Good morning. Good morning. Thank you for the conversation last time, diving into authentic leadership. I don't know about you, but I kept thinking about it, you know, after we had this conversation because there's so much to unpack. Absolutely. Right. My mind just kept sort of replaying scenarios and thinking about what leadership is in complex organizations and, you know, people, of course, is that's who we're serving and we're also wanting them to do their best work. And so as leaders, how do we do that? And how do we also work with the leadership in our areas who are leading others, right? So there's sort of this, I didn't mean to go down like that, you know, as we go out, like the eccentric circles of leaders and their people that we're working with and coaching. Yeah, I think what all of this literature and before we started recording, we were talking about the concept of mattering, you know, and how people matter. But I think what I really is both wonderful, but then challenging is that I know both you and I really think about, okay, so the concepts of authentic leadership was about self-knowledge, right? And being self-aware and trying to be better, right? Each day and feedback from others and that sort of thing. And then kind of what are your ethical standards around being a leader? What does that mean?

01:28 And then kind of balancing, right? Your idea is supposed to come and, you know, be able to assess and balance and make decisions relative to, you know, a balanced perspective on things and then certainly relational transparency. All that is that. I don't know. It feels to me like it's a very empowering way as a leader to be authentic. Those four things. Like this is how this can work. And I love that. And then you walk out of your office, right? And you're working with colleagues, right? Your peers or you have a team of people. And so what I think is so interesting about a lot of the leadership literature is that there's really great stuff. There's great theories. There's really research that confirms that the tenets that we're talking about have positive outcomes. But I think one of the things we're committed to as we have these conversations is the acknowledgement, well, it's more complicated. And I know we say that, right? But it is. It's more complicated. So I thought maybe today we would follow up part one and talk about, all right, so I'm over here and I'm going to be working on my authentic leadership and my self-development and that sort of thing. But now I've got to

operationalize this. And so take me back to times where, because I've known in your life, the times where you were newly appointed, the IPP, you're coming into these roles. What is that like in terms of trying to live into your authentic leadership? But what do you do about a team that you walk, you know, sitting around the table looking at you like, okay, you're the leader now, right?

03:12 It's oh, I love the question. Yeah. So, you know, I think what I have learned along the way is about, you know, really helping, let's say my leadership team in this case, right, who are then working with their leadership teams as we go out in the organization. So I put together various kind of presentation or PowerPoint with, you know, some of my the ways in which I work, my expectations about how we work together and in that notion of how do we support each other? What are the relationships like? How do we build trust, especially when I've come into organizations where trust was really low and, you know, for whatever good variety of reasons, it was folks were not connected to each other. And so trying to really establish some kind of a baseline and a place from which to have conversation, right? So if I talked about, you know, for me, vulnerability is strength, like, you know, Brené Brown's work, I think I shared this last time. And so that's not about oversharing. It's not about, you know, telling everybody all of my business all the time, but it's about being vulnerable enough to say, wow, I'm not, well, this is a tough one. I'm not sure what to do or, you know, hey, you're looking kind of tired. Yeah, I kind of didn't sleep last night. I don't need to go into it. But to give the person a sense of this is about me, not about you, you know what I mean? Like, if I'm, or if I'm feeling kind of grumpy, like, I just want to let me know I'm feeling grumpy today. Like, but anyway, I go on a tangent here. But I think it's about, for me, that relational transparency that I want folks to know kind of where I stand and that I'm okay standing in my space and I'm okay about, you know, mistakes are going to happen from all of us. And all we need to do is, you know, own the mistake. Let's try and get it out. Let's take care of it as soon as possible.

05:05 Like don't keep that to yourself for two weeks. And we could have maybe been managing it. And that the most important thing is we work together to figure out a solve. There's a way to solve, resolve, whatever it is, everything. It's messy sometimes. And sometimes it'll come out the way we want it to. But how do we help people be in a space of like a growth mindset versus fear? Like if I share this now, I'm going to really, you know, negative consequences to that. Right. Right. Right. And so how do you balance it? It seems like kind of what you're talking about the undercurrent there is trust. Right. It's sort of when you have, you're talking about relational transparency and sharing with folks and that sort of thing in this vulnerability place where you're going, yeah, I just, I'm having a bad day or yeah, I just need to kind of like check out for a minute or whatever, whatever it is. Right. That takes a bit of courage because you have to trust that you're not going to use that information somehow in a negative way or stereotype me that, oh, well, you know, you just can't handle the stress or so I could see that that, you know, in terms of the operationalization of having your team understand what authentic leadership is, that seems like it's like the first thing you have to figure out. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, I guess similarly to you, you know, we all, well, maybe in general, we all want to know what's expected of us. What is our boss, our leader

want from us and what, where was the line?

06:43 Right. And so, and where do I fit into that? And so for me, I think putting it out there first and then leaving, putting it out there first so folks can get a sense of who I am, especially being brand new, right? Like they don't know who I am. All they saw was some interviews and am I like that really, or am I going to switch once I have the job now? And so I think to help put that out on the table just gives us a place to start to talk about the nitty gritty. Okay. Well, I hear you say that it's okay to come to you if we've, if there's a problem or something that's made a huge mistake, but what's really going to happen when we're behind closed doors and you're not in front of the team, you know, and so then being able to demonstrate that maybe I say something in that general meeting where we're talking about this, but then individually it's like, okay, let's talk through this. Like let's figure this out first. Now, of course, there has to be accountability at times. Right. So I'm not saying everybody gets a pass like, but to me coming to the table and say, I've made this, I mean, I've done this with you, Robbyn, like, okay, I made this big mistake. Can we talk about it? Because I need to, I need to help. I can't, I wouldn't have made the mistake if I thought I was doing it the right way. Right. Right. So I think it's kind of that. Well, you know, I think I appreciate something too back at early, sort of the premise of when you started coming in and sharing with your team.

08:07 Here's me. Here's who I am. Here's who I aspire to be as a leader. Because I have rarely, I don't think I've ever worked for someone that was that transparent because what it ended up doing is then you try to have to guess how much information do you want? What is it? You kind of back to your point and as leaders, we can eliminate a lot of stress. If we just say, look here, the tenets of how I lead now, I'm not going to be perfect. Right. It's not like, but, but it's sort of like, okay, then there's probably somebody probably has done research on this. Then there's probably a phase of, well, let's see how this really plays out. Right. And say, well, is this really true? So when I do, so when I'm watching, right, and I'm taking it all in in terms of how you engage with people and how our one-on-ones go and that sort of thing. But I think what you've said, I don't, I don't want to lose that valuable insight that you have to share what it is that you're aspiring to be as a leader because then there's, you're, you're having some agency around shaping what that is and what you want them to, to know about you as a leader. I think that's super, I think very important. Very important. Can you think of like for yourself as you come into a setting, your new or new position, like what's your approach? Like how do you go about that? Yeah. I mean, I think we're very, very similar. I mean, you know, coming in as a, as a new president and having a team of VPs around the table, you know, I'm cognizant of the fact that they've had, they've worked for people before me. Yes. They had different styles, right?

09:44 Different. And maybe some of them, like I'm their third president or what it happens to be, you know? So, so I think that I have found that it's necessary to do that disclosure. You know, because you're right. They don't, they don't know you. I mean, the way we do interviews with, you know, zoom day and you're going through, you know, meeting a hundred people and, you know, in an eight hour period, it's easy for people to kind of go, well, is this really the real deal? Back to your, back to your point. So I think, I think that I love that. And I guess what I've thought about over the years is it's necessary, but not sufficient. Yeah. Because you sort of,

you sort of lay the, you know, lay the groundwork and say, this is who I am and who I aspire to be. But I've also realized there's a lot of people that want to have nothing to do with that. They're not interested in being vulnerable or relational transparency. It's too risky, right? And there's too much at stake, right? For that. So I think what I've learned is that it's, it's much like planting a seed and then figuring out how we have to water that constantly, whether it's micro, um, uh, interactions with the team or whether you're, you're on, as a president, you're on a stage where you're, where you're demonstrating, you know, the tenets of authentic leadership, because you, you, you build that and build that over time. And I think by and large, I would say, there's only been at just a rare incident where somebody was just totally like not buying it, not doing it. You could be as authentic as you want, but that is not my game.

11:21 And that was really tough because this person was truly an outlier in the piece and then ultimately ended up like not being comfortable in it and left, which is, which is great, right? Because you sort of want to be transparent around that. But I, I'm struck. I was struck by the fact that it's like, well, what do you mean? Not everybody wants to do this. How could that even be possible? Like, wait a minute. But that's the reality. And who knows what transpires? I mean, we know that people have worked for folks that aren't really the best at leadership. And maybe they tried to be, you know, forward or be forthright or whatever it is, and it didn't work out well. So I think to kind of to your, your question to me, recently, I've been thinking a lot about how working whether, no, you and I have higher education, no matter what the organization is, it's about emotion. It's about relationships. And particularly in higher education, we'll talk a lot about that. We just are very, these very smart people working in higher ed, and we should just know how to just do these things and get on with it. Right? Right. But it's not how it works. So yeah, I do think this introduction is a necessary step to try to sort of, and then it just takes time, I think, to demonstrate and build the trust. Absolutely. You know, there's in student affairs, we it's like a big long string of letters, but it's do what you say you'll do.

12:55 And so the premise of that, of course, is, you know, walk the walk, talk the talk, you know, we that we have to, I guess it's walk the walk, like, are you with, it's what you're saying, what you're also doing. And again, it's not about perfection. It's not about, I mean, the mistake that the mistakes, I don't even know if I want to call missteps, right? Sometimes like you're intending this, but oh, the way I came about that went into a really went into a rut that I didn't even anticipate. Right. And so then, okay, let's back up. How do we, how do we repair that or get clarification, right on what happened. And so I think, you know, there's a piece of this that as we're putting ourselves out there and figuring out what that vulnerability looks like and where we, and there are times when we, when we don't feel like we can be that way. Right. So it is that fine balance, I think. Yeah. Well, we talked last time about discernment, right? You know, because you also have to sort of assess the situation and discern where, what the team readiness is and what the steps are back to your point. I mean, one of the other things that I think really key is that first assessing where your team is at and each member and in your one-on-ones to kind of get a sense of, you know, are they, are they open to this concept? How do they feel about it? Where are they at relative to that?

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Because everybody's going to be different in terms of their readiness to be able to embrace this, this kind of leadership style. And, uh, cause it can't be one size fits all for sure. Correct. And just assessing where each team member is at so that we can then align kind of how we move the team forward based on where people are at collectively and individually. Sure. No, I think that makes sense. You know, also occurs to me, given our background in higher ed, we were both professors. So clearly we have a love of teaching, a love of mentoring and coaching, right? We both, you know, worked with doctoral students on their dissertations and helping, you know, uh, guiding them through the research. So we, we clearly have that, um, interest together, right? It's a deep seated feeling of that. So I think about, you know, my experience with you and this notion of the mentoring, the coaching, you know, which we need to talk a little bit about last time. So perhaps also, you know, our being relational, um, vulnerability, teaching is vulnerable, right? Even if you're not vulnerable subjects, but you're up there, you're, you know, talking with your students, you're working through things, right? Giving some tough feedback sometimes. And so feedback that's hard to hear for the students. So, so I guess sometimes I wonder in your perspective, like as you think about your leadership and there are those people who don't, like, I don't want anything to do with this. Or like you're saying you're assessing the team, like where are they? Who's comfortable? Who's confidence or comfortability with putting themselves out there a little? Sometimes we've got professionals who haven't they're newer in the field or maybe haven't done this kind of work. So I know those are a lot of factors there. Sorry. I guess my thought to you is where do you think like this place of mentoring and coaching comes in with what you're trying to do with leadership and moving the organization forward? Well, yeah, yeah, that is, that's a really great question.

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Because I think in these, in these one on one moments with your team, at least for me, it's a safe space to kind of unpack kind of what's happening, how they're, you know, how they're feeling. How did the meeting go? How are things, you know, how are things going, you know, relative to that or, you know, the other key to all, I think, to being authentic is the observation that we take as leaders that we're observing and we're watching the team's interactions and we're watching somebody shuts down. We're watching when somebody gets animated and paying attention to that. And so, you know, that, that sort of individualized approach to how do I bring, you know, one, one, one VP along because they are, they are really uncomfortable with, with having sort of any kind of vulnerability or, you know, kind of the tenets of relational transparency and that sort of thing. So, so I've always found that the coaching happens in those very safe spaces where you can, where you can do that. And hopefully back to your point, you've over, and this doesn't happen. I mean, this takes at least six months to get people to trust you at least and maybe for others longer. But if you can build that and you are, you reflect empathy around that was, I saw you were kind of, that was kind of a tough meeting, wasn't it? Let's talk a little bit about that. You know, what do you think? And you're, you're engaging them in a way that you're showing to them that they matter, you know, as a, as a team member, but that you can be authentic in those spaces. Now, what I would say is that, and I'm still thinking about this, but there, there are some, there are some folks that I think you can bring them along a little bit, you know, that they're, they're being self-aware and they're trying. And, and I think that's okay.

18:23 I mean, I think that it's a journey for everybody. And then others are like, Oh my gosh, I'm all in. Help me. This is really great. Help me do this. And how can I get my team engaged and that sort of thing. But just like in a class, you've got people at different levels and they're, they're at different, they're at different places in their development around a certain construct. And I think, I think it, it just, it, I don't know why we don't think about this. And well, wow, I didn't think about this earlier in my career is it is an individualized approach and how we work and coach with folks, which then should roll up to team dynamics being much improved, which I, which I do think I've seen happen, which, which is really gratifying to be able to see that. Absolutely. No, I completely agree with you. I think it is a, it is a process and it does take time and some people trust easy, as you said, and some people may not trust ever or, or feel like, well, I, you know, and that's, you know, about whatever their life experience has been and how they come to their, or the type of work that they do that kind of, you know, and of course, we all have life that's going on outside of the organization. And so those are complex kinds of things I have to share with you. I don't know if I've ever told you this before.

19:40 I recall early on when I think you were the provost and I was an assistant vice president and when we first started working together, you said to me, I really see my role as someone to assist in removing barriers. Like what barriers are you coming across? What kinds of things are, as you're, you know, moving forward with vision and the organization, what are the things that are getting in your way that maybe together we can figure out, you know, what that is and why that's happening. And, you know, do we need to take another route or do we need to sort of dissolve whatever that barrier is because it doesn't suit the organization as a whole. So it's something I've always taken into my leaderships and that's been, that was like 2011, so a long time ago. But, you know, and I think about then how, you know, I don't know if you were, well, I think that's just who you are. That's, I've heard you say that to many people over the years, but where do you think that fits in or does it connect to authentic leadership in your mind? Yeah, I guess that's a really great question because as the, you know, literature defines it, you know, I'm not sure because it is very, it is very internal looking, right? Self-awareness and how am I being today and that sort of thing. I guess maybe it might link to kind of the values part of the tenets of authentic leadership because you have to, over time, hone what it is you value. And for me, it's bringing the best out of people, right? That's a value that is, I think, a moral perspective, a value that I take. So it seems to flow then from that into kind of what, and thank you for sharing that, but kind of the notion of how do I help you be better? You know, how can I assist you in getting, you know, to do the things you'd like to get done and accomplish and that sort of thing.

21:51 And so I think it, I think that's why it's so fun to unpack this because if you just look at the definition, oh, it's internalized moral perspective, well, okay, what does that mean exactly? Right. And it means for me, that's part of, I think it's not, and one of the criticisms, you know, of authentic leadership is it's all too self-focused. It's all really about you. And I kind of reject that because it doesn't have to be, yeah, I have to be self-aware that people are saying, you know, that the meetings are terrible. We're not getting, I need to be self-aware, you know, how I can be better and what my strengths are and what my, you know, what I need to work

on, that sort of thing. But I really think it, those tenants, you are outward focused and you are paying attention to your team and where they're at so that you can do the things you were just talking about, building trust. And hopefully that interaction was also, you know, you obviously felt gratitude. You still remember that and that sort of thing. But I think too that that's also building trust. It's like, okay, you're invested in me. Right. Which means, yeah, you can trust me. I'm going to endeavor to support you as best I can. Right. And I think sets an open door. Like I can come in and say, oh, I think I made a big error.

23:12 I tried this and this is what happened because what you said to me was, you know, let's figure out what the barriers are, what's going on. So then it's like, okay, if she wants to help me like get over whatever hurdles, then I can come in and say, I'm stuck. And it's hard to feel stuck. And as a leader that somehow we should know how to fix it. Right. When in reality, all the external factors and, you know, whatever's happening with the organization or the productivity that's required or you name it, right. The, you know, we want it to go in that forward motion, but we don't always know how. And that's okay to say, I don't, I don't know, you know, I don't know. I was probably brought up in this sense of, you know, you can't say, I don't know. I mean, that's maybe not everybody, but yeah. What do you think that really was about? What do you think about it versus, well, I don't know. I don't know that somehow it's like, no, well, you think something. Maybe the question was, what do you think about it? What are you feeling about it versus what do you know? Right. But in leadership, we can't know everything. And depending on where we are in our own development and our own lived experiences, we know more sometimes as we go along. And then sometimes we realize how much we don't know. Right. But it's, it's stair stepping somehow, or we're figuring it out at different levels. Does that resonate?

24:37 Yeah, absolutely. And I think the other thing that what you just said too, that pops out is that it's so interesting because sometimes we conceptualize our work as it's our, you know, we're solely responsible. Yes. Or whatever it is. So the pressure of you feeling like I got to fix this, or this is my, you know, how am I going to do because I have to fix it because that's sort of our model. I mean, we all grew up at the leader just takes care of stuff, magically does. But, but the, the fact that we can help our team understand that, you know, part of trusting is that we're there for them. Yes. And that they keep, it's not about there's, there's no way they can figure out these things on their own. They're going to need help resources time. Well, I mean, whatever it is, right, that someone on the team or their supervisor is going to have to provide. Yeah. So it, it feels, it feels like those, those kinds of micro conversations and demonstration that I'm all in, you know, how can we do this together reinforces the fact that you're not alone in this work. Right. Yeah, absolutely. I was thinking about something you just said as well. Like the notion of authentic leadership is only about the internal. And I think, you know, what I think about some of the other models that I've looked at that are out there in the literature, you know, I mean, I don't know, I suppose not everybody's like this, but the notion of why are you leading in some way to serve the organization, serve the people in the organization. And from our perspectives, the coaching, mentoring, you know, individualized approach also, you know, those are our values in action. Right. So I think about, again, here's who I say I am. Here's what I'm trying to also put into action so that what

I'm saying is what you're seeing, right? That it's congruent most of the time. Now, you know, we're going to have that human moment of, I said, I wouldn't make this decision or without your input. And then I made it because it needed to be fast. And I was busy and like, oops, I, you know, let me come back to that. And maybe it's too late on this one, but for sure, the next time, you know, so because that's going to happen. So how do you then own it and not let that be a pattern in the future?

26:53 Because if you keep saying, I'm going to be about this and these are my values and I'm here to be of assistance and continually learning. And then I don't continue, then I don't live up to that. That's where that inauthenticity shows up, right? Versus the continual. Yes. Which is just straight out the trust, right? Any trust that you've built now goes out the window because it's one of the things I do like about this is what you're talking about. There's consistency. Yes. Right. And how you show up, that doesn't mean perfection. Right. But it means consistency. So the fact that you can come and consistently, you know, show up as, as the person that wants to be relational, that's trying to engage and then just like, look, president walked in, this never happens, right? The president walks into my office and you know, I needed to do this right away. And I'm just telling, you know, I wanted to share that with you because my, my way of being as leadership, you know, I really want to engage folks in this, but I just couldn't this time because of whatever, right? You know, that's huge, as opposed to, you know, just saying, well, I, you know, I just make decisions and never addressing it. Right. I mean, how many times like I remember hearing, you know, and you, two over time stories, well, that decision was made, but I had no idea why. And nobody asked me about it. And so, I mean, I think that I think what I, what I want folks to hear is that consistency does doesn't mean perfection. Correct. It's just, and I think that the research supports the fact that people see that, that it's consistently trying to align. And I love what you said. I wrote values in action, right? Because you say you value this, but your actions didn't align. What's up? Right. Right. And being vulnerable enough to share that and say, here's why this deviated from what I aspire to be and do as a leader.

28:52 That takes a lot of courage, Katrina. Right. It takes a lot of courage to, or vulnerability, maybe. I don't know. Yeah. No, I appreciate that. You know, I guess, I think it's for me, the opposite of not owning it and not putting it on the table for the people that, for whom that affected feels so heavy for me, that it's, I just feel much more, gosh, I don't know what word I would use. It just feels, it just feels like the right thing to do. I was gonna say necessary. It feels like the right thing to do. I can't, I can't not own that. Like it just, I can't, I feel like I can't then look at the person in the face again without having owned that because it feels like I am then not, my values are not in action because, and maybe the bigger piece of that is I want folks to feel like they can be brave enough and courageous enough to do that when they make a mistake because it's going to happen. Right. And so that they, I don't know. And some people may never do that. And, and like you said, that's gotta be okay. For me though, I can't, I just, yeah, boy, you can see I'm getting all tongue tied here. It's just not an option.

30:13 So I appreciate that. That's, you know, you said it was courageous and I, I guess I, it's just, I mean, I guess if you, if you go down the path of aspiring to be an authentic leader and all the, all the sort of tentacles that come out from that, like building trust and making sure people

matter and, and having, you know, empathy, all those things, if you want, you choose to be that kind of leader, it's already a buckle up, right? For, for the knowing that, you know, there's some things that that are, that might sting or that you, you know, you have to have some humility walking in and going, look, this wasn't how I wanted this to be. I mean, I think, I think that that's an important part of this because back to what you said, it's something that you value so much as a leadership, you know, construct or how you want to be that you just live into that. You don't kind of go, oh no, this was too hard. No, no, this was way too hard. I'm sorry. This is too hard. I'm going somewhere else. I'm going to be the authority. I mean, it's just kind of not how it works, right? I'm on vacation now. Right. That's right. I'm on a vacation for an authentic leadership. I'm done with that. Thank you very much. But I don't want to underestimate though, the fact that you, you, you do, it's this journey and a lot of the literature talks about it's not a thing you accomplish and you're done.

31:36 It's just this sort of ongoing commitment to be these things that we aspire to be. So I wonder, so I, I didn't necessarily do this myself, but you know, I, I wonder about, so, so we talked earlier about sharing with your team here are the tenants of my leadership here and you, and you maybe call out, I don't know. I'm kind of on the fence about whether you name it, you know, I want to be an authentic leader or you just talk about the tenants of it. I'm still not sure how I feel about that just yet, particularly early on when you're introducing yourself. And I'll talk about why in just a second. But anyway, the tenant was, you know, you, you, you share that. Here's what I aspire. Here's what I work on as a leader. Here's what I, that sort of thing. At what point do you ask your team members to do this, be on the same journey for themselves, right? Which is, which is kind of, which is sort of interesting. So they can be a consumer of your leadership and try to adjust and figure out how to, how to be, how to work within that leadership, you know, style that you've, you're creating in your context, in your organization. And at what point do you, do you facilitate their development as authentic leaders themselves? Do you go down that path?

32:59 Do you let it be what it'll be? I, what do you, what's your thoughts around that? You know, it's such a fascinating question because, you know, you can only, uh, you know, show up in that way. You might have some requests, right? In terms of expectations of how, what's building relationships with others or your team, right? That kind of, um, I guess being visible in that way. So you're right. I think, so, so I'm okay saying I strive to be authentic and I strive in my leadership to be authentic and what that means to me is and kind of listing, you know, my values and how I go about doing that. And some examples of things, you know, well, here's how I would approach if I made a mistake since we were just talking about that. Um, here's where I've maybe thought I did that well and I didn't. And so again, you're right. Like you're just meeting these people and you're sharing some things, but to me that just opens, opens the door for everybody has stuff like that in the, in their, you know, in their closet, in their mind, right? And whether we share or not, we don't always share all those tough things. But so I think I don't ask them to be authentic, but when they then come in on one-on-ones and we're talking about, or even in the group meeting, you know, we'll hear some situations that they're trying to work through. And some of my questions will be, well, so from a relational perspective, how, what do you think is a path that you could take to help resolve that? Or

when you think about, you know, you're, maybe somebody's having an issue with one of their staff and they have to hold them accountable.

34:37 And it's one of those things, if it keeps happening, they're going to really have to consider whether that person, you know, ought to be remaining at the organization. So I think to coach them in a way, so how can you have that mentoring conversation with them and, and put on the table what's going on, especially for those who are, have never had to do it or really struggling to step into that. Because that's so hard. Even if you've done it sadly more times than you want to have, it's still hard. But I think it's trying to develop for them that approach. Now they can take it however they want, but if I'm encouraging them to have some courage around it, you know, how do you validate that person's experience? This is why, this is what they're doing and why. It's like, okay, well, that is, I hear you and I can see where you came to that. How, how can we shift in this direction instead? Sorry, this is super vague, but I guess I'm, I think for me, it comes from modeling that and asking them the questions. And then when they try things out, we talk about it again. Well, how did that go? Well, what, you know, what were the results? Would you do it the same or what would you do differently? And really just trying to, again, it's that to me, the mentoring, the coaching and helping them figure it out. Now, I think to your point, the individualization, some people, you know, our personalities and how we come at things are all different. So they have to put it in ways that make sense for them. It's not my words, because I'll even say like, this is, this is the language I use, but what language works for you? Do you want to practice? Do you want to, I'm the other person and you're going to practice. And they're kind of like, can we do that next time? Okay. Look, I'm not ready. Okay. Right. Well, what I, what I'm, that's what, thank you for sharing that. It's, what are you saying? It really, it really shows up as you mentor because every, every leader, wherever you are in the organization is going to feel stuck at times. You're going to deal with difficult situations. It's about relationships full stop. Right. And so I think that's really great because you're modeling, you know, here's an approach, but then framing it so that it relates, it's relatable to them, you know, and their personality and how they view the world, which, which I think sometimes we don't stop to make that translation. It's like, well, here's my language and then here, and then the person's like, that makes no sense to me. Right.

37:01 But I do. So that's a super important point. I think you make Katrina and how to, I say it again, operationalize this with the team and without sort of saying, well, everyone's going to be an authentic leader. It's the coaching and the mentoring and that sort of thing, because I just know. And I think the research is out there too, that being this type of leader has demonstrated positive outcomes. And as the team starts to see that, that's really great. I think before we got on, I was looking at a study where authentic leadership facilitated more knowledge transmission between the team. Right. Because they're feeling so you're, yeah, right. You're getting more people to share and be engaged and share knowledge and help one another and that sort of thing. It's like, so people aren't, they're not oblivious to that. I mean, they can see that kind of change in the team, particularly if it's been a dysfunctional team. Yes. Prior, right. To the arrival. So people are like, okay, so I want some of this. Yes, exactly. It feels like that's way. Yeah. Sorry, go ahead. No, no, no, I said it feels like there's a, the

indirect sort of impact into it because people are so observant. They are watching.

38:19 Right. They are watching and paying attention for sure. Absolutely. Well, right. Because I think part of that is also, well, what is expected of me, you know, I guess I believe people don't want to walk on eggshells. They don't want to be afraid of moving because or taking a, making a decision because they might, you know, end up in a tough place with their supervisor, right? And so if they feel like they can't be, they can't really be, I don't know, come to the table and their true knowledge and authenticity and experience that, you know, that's how they're going to use what they, who they are and what they know to do their best work. We spend so much time at work, you know, with all these people. Exactly. And I'm sure many industries are the same, but we know when I hired, you know, folks are working way more than an eight hour day and we're working with students and complexities of, you know, what they're going through, but in other organizations as well. And so it just seems like if you feel generally, you know, that your environment is positive and that you've got your expertise is being valued and listened to and taken in as decisions are made as part of the decision making, then it would have to feel better for employees. I know it does for me when I've been in situations where, you know, I feel like, all right, you know, luckily not that often, but a couple of times where I felt like, you know, how the person I was reporting to was showing up and was creating a lot of fear and speaking really poorly of other colleagues of mine. And I, it just was a place I felt like I can't, I can't just watch this happen. And, and the leader wasn't interested in feedback, even though I tried to share some things and it, I just thought, well, this isn't for me. So then being to be at other places where I'm like, okay, it's not perfect. It's complicated. You know, there's some hard stuff to deal with, but I felt generally like I was validated that I could bring my values into my work, that I could build strong relationships. And I have somebody who's back and they have my back in terms of, okay, you know, we're helping each other and that support is really what I need. So yeah, I, I don't know. Do we look at our, through our own lens and say, well, people want this because it's what we want. I don't know if there's, I'm sure lots of theories about that out there.

40:54 Well, yeah, but I guess I'd go back to this point about folks that maybe are skeptical about authentic leadership and those of us that really appreciate some of the tenants of it. I think, I think at the end of the day, what grounds me in this and why I'm so keen on understanding it better, not only my own leadership, but as we help others, is that I go back to the research. I can have my opinion about, and I think y'all need to do it because, you know, it's really great for me. So it's great for you. That's over a beer, right? But, but really what grounds me in all this is that, is that there's research that shows that employees want to work in this kind of environment that's created by somebody that's aspiring to be an authentic leader. So it doesn't feel like necessarily, I mean, it gives me, you know, the backing in the background that say, okay, well, it isn't just an in of one and you have to like it because I like it. There really is some empirical evidence that backs it up about what, about what people want. So I think to, yeah, I mean, you always have to check yourself. It's like, well, it's good for me, it's good for you. But, but, but I would say like you, working with colleagues that, that aspire to this kind of leadership, it has been incredibly rewarding. And certainly as a president coming in and building a cabinet and a team that aspires to be that is unlike anything I've ever experienced

in my, you know, professional life, because there was never effort to figure out how to build that among the team.

42:40 And so the team was really more about independent actors that always trying to, and this is not, you know, it's, this is normal. People are trying to figure out how their unit or their area can benefit the most. And they interpreted their job as going in there and getting the resources that your team wants you to get. And, and so you, there was never any conversation around team building and how you, how you manage these, these contradictions of working together, but what is your unit need? And it's a whole nother conversation we can have. But it, but it feels, and I, it's not just about feeling, but the work is also much improved. We have better outcome. We have better conversations, which means solutions that we get to are thought through, right? That are much more, much more deep dive and figuring out and that sort of thing. So I have one more question for you before we, before we have to have to wrap up. And so, you know, this is kind of a soft skill, right? Everything we're talking about is sort of soft skill stuff. Yep. And being connected with that kind of thing. I'm wondering if you can reflect on, on how, as a, as a woman and a woman of color, you're coming into these spaces and you're pulling, you know, you're talking about who you are as a leader. Do you have to manage or navigate the perception that you're just too soft and you can't make, because you care about the, you know, people's feelings and you, you know, which is, isn't that antithetical to what we think leaders should be, you know, paying attention to? It's the outcomes. It's the output.

44:17 It's the get this done. We've got to get this. So, so have you ever felt like you've had to navigate that or is it, has it been just something that you've just been able to, not, not necessarily have to pay attention to and manage. And it just has been, I want to say easy, but it's just something that you've done. Yeah. You know, I think it's probably come in stages and maybe with particular individuals. So I'd say earlier in my career, you know, I probably had more I do this anyway, but I probably scan the room, if you will, sort of in quotes, like wherever I was kind of scanning, like, is this safe? Are the people safe in the sense of, am I going to, how are they, how are they perceiving me? Right? Do they think I have what it takes to be an effective leader? Right. So I think, you know, I would probably in my own confidence in my own, I don't know, trying to figure out who I am, right, at the same time. So there are probably times when I felt more vulnerable in that area. And then if there were individuals who, oh, I don't know, maybe a little more blatant in their, I don't know, their negative views, you know, whether that's in a sort of sexist or racist, those are strong language, I realize, but discriminatory kind of ways. And there's certainly been a few in my career that I felt showed up that way to me, right, or the things that they said to me and sort of in a demeaning way. So those were hard and trying to figure out who am I, how do I feel about myself? And because they're saying this, how is it impacting me? And so I think as time went on, you know, it used to impact me quite heavily, and I would get really stuck and then try to find my way out of my own mind, I suppose. But you know, as time went on, I think I became, I don't know if it was confidence in myself, or really being able to maybe push aside some people that I felt that they were coming, I would hear comments and things, you know, where I would try to really pivot to, okay, what, what can I do? What

matters? And sort of, now, does it ever go away just because I'm pushing them to the side? It's still there, but I worked maybe, I could, I have approached people to say, when you said this, this is how I felt, you know, can we talk about maybe I'm incorrect in what I heard, and we're how I assumed it. So I try to have those conversations first, to try to understand maybe once some of the hurt subsides a little. Now, the hard part is if you're, if you're being supervised by somebody, the leader is like that. You know, like I said, there was, you know, there've been a time at least once, maybe twice where I've, I've left, I've made a choice to leave, because that was just not, I couldn't feel good about being there. And luckily, you know, I had the privilege to, to relocate, right? That was an option for me. I know not everybody, you know, has that kind of option. But so yes, I have. And, you know, I suppose it's, it's just trying to work through it because I can, I can never change who I am.

47:39 People are going to perceive whatever. And am I too soft? Sorry, that was the question you were getting to. It's taken me a while to get there. I think that's also, I had this colleague, her name was Renee Welch. She was the director of a career readiness center on one of my, the campuses I was on. And she talked about how soft skills were really these skills, right? To be effective in our work, where we're working with people, that those are the skills that matter in order to have effectiveness with what you're trying to do in an organization, right? So I think that has always helped me to think about, I don't know, to sit in my own space and think, I just know the results I have seen from the ways in which I value and work with my team and with people. And because those have by and large been, the outcomes have been what I hoped they would be. The anomalies over here, I've just tried to let them be. And I guess I've had to make choices about my own life when those haven't been congruent. So it's a super long answer to your question, but I think that's how I've navigated it. Well, it has to be super long because again, what's so great about this conversation, and the one we had before, is that, yeah, it's tried to say it's complicated, but it is.

49:03 And that's the kind of stuff I hope people appreciate in this conversation. We're really trying to unpack what it means to be in a space and be in an organization where you're trying to sort of demonstrate the effectiveness of authentic leadership and it just isn't valued. Or you're not in a space where the people that we report to hold those same values. They treat people, the trust, the transparency. Somebody say the other day, I just never knew how this person was going to show up. One day they're like this, the next day it's like this, yet can I trust? I can't trust somebody like that. So it just creates such unhealthy noise in the organization. But the question is, well, what do you do about that? And that's why I was curious about that and how you manage it. I think it's an interesting question because the higher we move up into the organization, the more you're subject to a broader audience, interpretation of leadership and your leadership style and that sort of thing. And so it's an interesting thing, I think, and I need to check the literature on this. What's the current stereotype about effective leadership?

50:23 Have we moved the dial at all? With Brené Brown's work and other people that have been talking about the definition of leadership shifting, that it's not the I'm behind the desk, I know everything, and my job is to come in and make decisions, and your job is to implement those. So I'd be interested in knowing how that definition has shifted over time. And if this

means that we're thinking more that leadership is in fact a mix of, yeah, you have to get stuff done. But yet you can treat people with respect and value and it's very relational and the melding of that. Because I think it'd be interesting to see that if there's a study out there that looks at male leaders who embody authentic leadership, if that's valued highly because it's a disconnect with what we are stereotypes about men and male leaders, but women who are authentic leaders, it's just sort of like, well, of course, no, that's how you that women are more prone to be that way. So I'm fascinated about because we have to whatever our identities are, we're navigating that as well.

51:39 Right? So we talk about walking in and helping your team and say, how do we how do we do this? Well, they're seeing, you know, they're they're seeing you as who you are and how you present, and then you've got to work with that. So it's, you know, I don't know that I have a definitive answer either about what to do about that. But I know that it's something that that I think leaders still struggle with is what's the what sort of everybody's working operational definition of leader. And who that who that is, and how they present. So maybe for another conversation. Yeah, right. There's just so much to unpack with all of these pieces. And it, you know, we're getting giving a cross section in a conversation. But when you think about the longevity of, you know, our leadership roles and all the various things we've experienced, and yeah, I guess I lost my train of thought here. But you know, it is it is again, just that it's the longevity, the complexity of it, as we try to think about what have we done and what, you know, and what would we do today? Is it different than what we would have done? You know, and I don't know, and how do you have, you know, I think about your question in the sense that I also know how I need to show up because I work constantly about knowing myself and uncovering things that assumptions I've held or, you know, as I hear feedback like, Oh, okay, I either heard that before and now I've missed it again, or okay, that's a new perception. Maybe I need to think about, but all that builds to I just am who I am. And am I in the right am I in congruence with the organization I'm working with or the leaders? And if there's not congruency, then I know for me that that's I have to make a change. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And luckily, I've had to do that so few times for that reason. So I suppose I've also been fortunate or I've been maybe zeroed in on the types of places that I want to be. So that it can grow because that matters when I'm interviewing. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. That's exactly right. Well, we'll talk more about this. I'm sure. Yes, for sure. There's a lot. There's a lot to do thinking around this and reflection. So thanks for the conversation. Thank you, Robbyn. Appreciate it.

54:13 Right. Let's learn. We'll keep having more conversations. So absolutely. Enjoy the rest of your day. Thanks you as well. Happy weekend. Okay.