

In The Trenches_ Conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 1, Jennifer Garvey Berger, Steve Divitkos

S**Steve Divitkos 00:00**

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J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 03:15**

Thanks so much. Thanks for having me.

S**Steve Divitkos 03:18**

Pleasure nenento have you here. Maybe we can start with an easy one. Just walk us through your story, who you are, the major stops that you've enjoyed throughout the course of your career and what you're doing today.

J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 03:33**

Well, that might not be so easy, but let's try. Let's try. Let's try. So I started my career as a teacher, actually, as a literature teacher in the US public schools. And I loved being a teacher, and then began to get into teaching teachers, which sent me scuttling back to my original graduate school, Harvard for for a PhD, and trying to understand how it is grown ups learn. Because this question of, how do kids learn? I knew something about and, but yeah, seemed like there was something mysterious in this grown up thing. And so I got a doctorate in adult development there. And then from there, I spent some time teaching teachers, and then principals, and then ultimately business leaders and researching and writing. And then about 15, maybe 20 years ago, 15. You can see how much we were keeping records about it. At the time, a couple of friends and I set up a company we called cultivating leadership. And we've been kind of growing and leading that company that helps leaders around the world. Get their head around, hearts around, minds around this question of, how do they lead in complexity? So I spend some of my time leading that firm, and I spend some of my time writing and researching, and I spend some of my time with clients, leaders and organizations around the world trying to figure out, how do you deal with the kind of mayhem that is our current context?

S**Steve Divitkos 05:29**

So you have written several books. The one specifically that caught my attention was called, or is called, I should say, Changing On The Job. I think there's two editions of it out before we dive into the meat of our conversation, can you just talk about, like, What compelled you to write that book? Like, why did you think that that was a book that deserved to be written, and what kind of catalyzed its creation?

J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 05:51**

I love that question. Thank you. So I went to Harvard, and I studied with a professor there named Bob Keegan, and what he had to say just rocked my world. He had this course on how adults grow and change over time, and it helped me make sense of my life in a way I had not been able to make sense of my life, and it helped me make sense of my choices and some of the pain I was experiencing, it helped me make better choices. And I thought, this is really important. Like, where is this accessible to people? Where can people go? You know, if I want to share this with my friends, if I want to share this with people around me, my neighbors, this is so important, where could people go and find out about it in a kind of readable way that doesn't involve taking a semester long course and reading a lot of pretty tricky books? And the answer was, you can't do that. If you want to learn about it, you can go to Harvard. I thought, well, that's kind of a crappy answer, to be honest. So I wrote *Changing On The Job* the first time to make it really accessible. And then I got a lot of feedback that, yes, it was more accessible than it had been in the past. Yeah, but it still wasn't genuinely accessible. Thanks for your efforts. And so after working now with hundreds of leaders on this stuff in the book, I thought I could do a better job. And so that's why there's a second edition.

S**Steve Divitkos 07:32**

Yeah, like, one of the things that really resonated with me about the book is there's a million books about how to change a company as a leader, what to do, what not to do, etcetera, from a commercial perspective, but your book was largely about, at least from my perspective, like how to change yourself as a leader at a personal, spiritual, emotional, psychological level. And I went through a lot of those transitions as a leader. I didn't know that I was going through them at the time, but I made the transition from rookie CEO to quasi experienced CEO, and so where I want to begin is just kind of like setting the context a little bit for new leaders. So in this podcast and in blog posts I've written, I regularly say nobody knows what it's like to be an entrepreneur or CEO unless you've been one full stop, and you've written a lot about the psychological and emotional realities of leadership that a lot of listeners probably still can't fully appreciate unless they've sat in the seat themselves. So it's a big question. You could probably talk about this for the next two hours if you wanted to, but in kind of a bite sized format if you can. Can you just share some of these like emotional or psychological realities with us, especially the ones that tend to surprise new leaders once they're actually in the role.

S**Speaker 1 08:45**

Yeah, and we could talk about it for a long time, and it would be fun. The first thing new CEOs say to me is, I can't believe how much less power I have that I thought I would have. So this is the first thing. People have this idea that there's somebody on top of the organization who can make stuff happen, who can, like, snap their fingers and the world changes, and then they get into that position, and they're looking around, they're like, oh my goodness, I am the person in charge, and I can't make those things happen.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 09:24

That's that's very surprising and unsettling for folks, because they find out they have even though it looks like they have a ton of power and they have a ton of accountability, they don't always have, they don't always have the the ability to put their hands on things and make them happen.

S

Steve Divitkos 09:45

So like full accountability, but not full control necessarily.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 09:48

That's exactly right, or not anything like as much control as they thought they would have. And sometimes it feels like less control than they had when they were de. Delivering work of some kind. Yeah, because they at least they could deliver their own work. But the things that a CEO is held accountable for, profit, you know, product launch, creation and launches, you know, all, all these kinds of things. They aren't doing that stuff, other people are doing that stuff, and they're creating the conditions for other people to do that stuff. It's not the same. The next most common thing, people tell me is, and sometimes people come to this really fast, and sometimes people come to it slowly, but pretty much everybody I've ever worked with comes to wait. This is lonely. Before there were others like me. I could talk to a peer, and I could complain or or celebrate or whatever it was, and then we would just be kind of two peers. But now there's nobody like me. And if I talk to a CEO in another organization, maybe that's a competitor, even you know, or maybe a potential client, or in some way, somebody I need to relate to carefully, and all this careful relating is kind of lonely. And then I guess the third most common thing, and I see you nodding your head, and I'm wondering whether these were your experiences as well.

S

Steve Divitkos 11:37

Very much. So especially that second one.

S

Speaker 1 11:39

Yeah. This, this third one is like, like, how do I know who to trust? Everybody now wants something from me. I am a symbol. I don't feel so much like a person anymore. I feel like a symbol, and people I'm like a screen, and people project their stuff about leadership onto me, and I can't really trust that they're looking at me or in touch with me, and I can't trust that I can do anything about the screen I'm being. And that means I can't just say what I want, when I want, like I'm constantly also being a symbol.

S

Steve Divitkos 12:27

You feel like you're always on, so to speak.

S

Speaker 1 12:29

And you kind of can't trust people to let you be you in the same way. You're always a role.

S

Steve Divitkos 12:42

So a lot of what you just mentioned strikes me as timeless, insofar as I bet you, 100 years ago, leaders felt lonely. I bet you, they felt as if they always had to be on. They always had to be performing, for lack of a better way to put it, in some way you talk about in your book, like the realities of leadership in today's anxious world. I think that's the phrase you use, something to that effect. But I'm curious to hear from you, in light of what you just said, is being a leader today different than it was, say, 50 years ago, maybe even 100 years ago. Like, in a way, obviously, the external environment has changed a ton, but a lot of stuff that you just said just strikes me as timeless and fundamentally human. So in that way, maybe elite being a leader hasn't changed at all. I just love to hear you talk about that.

S

Speaker 1 13:36

I think the heat's up, right? So it might be the same kinds of ingredients in the pan, but the heat's high right now. This is why I talk about an anxious world, right? The world itself is faster, more demanding, more people coming at you from more directions, like I imagine a leader even 50 years ago was much more buffered from that, you would have people couldn't get to you. They couldn't talk about you.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 14:16

You were maybe even more of a figurehead, like, maybe more of a role, less of a person, but at least you could believe that people weren't going to dig things up about you, or make a fake naked video of you, or, like, whatever it is, like, all the the weird stuff leaders have to deal with now is, well, it's very new. I think a lot of it is very new. And the fact that kind of anybody can get to at any time, that it's really hard to turn off, and particularly if you're in a kind of VC funded world, the the pressures in that world of scale growth. How fast are you moving? How many hours a day are you working? But maybe that was true of somebody who was like the CEO of an accountancy 100 years ago, but this degree, I just don't think that humans have seen anything in this degree before.

S**Steve Divitkos 15:34**

So, you know, I mentioned that one of the things that I liked about the book, and just like the way that you think in general, is you spend a lot of time thinking about the process of maturing and changing as a leader, not necessarily all the changes that one would make from a commercial perspective to the business. So I'd love to talk about the stages of maturity and development as a leader. I think in one of your books, you described like four predictable stages that leaders go through in their maturation. Can you just walk us through briefly what those stages are and like, what fundamentally changes from one step to the next one?

S**Speaker 1 16:15**

Yeah, sure. And these are kind of human changes. So you you might not enter leadership before you've made it through a couple of these anyway, because the first kind of adult way of making sense of the world is a kind of an it's all about me, way of making sense of the world, right where, in fact, taking somebody else's perspective, if they disagree with you, or if they have a different view, is pretty impossible.

J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 16:52**

And it's not impossible because you're a jerk. It's impossible because you have not yet developed the capacity to do that. And if you can't take somebody else's perspective when they disagree with you, there are all kinds of things you can't do, right? You can't solve for a collective, for example, because that involves taking many people's perspective. You can't. You can't subordinate your own needs or desires to the good of a collective because, again, that's a perspective taking move you need to believe in something bigger than you. And early in this place, I call it the self sovereign place, because, like, I'm the king and I'm the king of me, so I am looking to out for my own interests. The world is relatively black and white. You have kind of this sense that you're either with me or against me. The world is made of friends and foes. There aren't a lot of grays. And then, over time, this pretty simple way of seeing the world for most adults, wears off pretty early. Like, for most of us, it wears out before we even make it to adulthood, right? Like, this is a teenage kind of a thing, but you see it. Research says you see it. You can see it well into people's lives. You can see it in their 40s and 50s, but it's not that common, and the the thing you do to grow out of that is you start to take other people's perspectives, you start to invest yourself in something larger than you, and then ultimately, to take that cue for how you're doing and who you are and who you should be. And many theorists call that the socialized mind, because we get fully immersed in a kind of a society. Now that society could be an organization, it could be a church, it could be a religious institution, it could be a particular part of society, a profession, right? It could be learning how to be the best lawyer in the world. And I get all my cues from the older law partners around me, and they tell me whether I'm doing a good job, bad job, successful, unsuccessful. And I just like take that because I'm breathing that in, and it becomes the the judge of how I'm doing, and that's a pretty tough leadership stage. Actually, there are a lot of leaders in this place, so the first one's less likely it happens, but it's less likely. This one is much more common in leadership ranks, and it's tricky because you're mostly guided by something outside you, and so you're having to respond and react to the world all the time. And if you don't like what the world gives you, you just have to keep reacting. I was talking to a leader the other day who

mostly sees the world through this space, and he is. Like, I'm just exhausted because I can't prepare for everything everyone wants me to be. I don't know how to be everything everyone wants me to be. And somebody's going to come out, even if I were to do it and I were to nail it, and I could be everything everyone wants me to be, somebody would want me to be different tomorrow. And like I am anxious all the time that suddenly people are going to notice I can barely keep up with what they want. And basically the only solution to that is either get a really small set of people who you are trying to be, what they want you to be, or to figure out who you want you to be, to pick up the pen and write these things yourself. You talk about that as the self authored mind, because now you decide, you decide, and then people can you know, you still have to listen to people, you still have to take their perspectives. You still need to adjust, of course. But the thing that's guiding you as a kind of inner system, instead of a reactive trying to make sense of the outer system you are. You are guided by the thing that's inside you that you can test and grow with others. And that's also a pretty common leadership space. And then the fourth one that I'll talk about pretty briefly, because it's much less common. We talk about is the self transforming mind. So how is it that you can actually take the world as it shows up for you and use it to grow yourself into the next version of you? How is it that everything becomes, you know, we talk about kind of continuous improvement, or a learning organization, or something like that. How is it that actually you become a learning organization? You yourself are taking your setbacks and metabolizing them into your own growth. It's a place where complexity is relatively straightforward. It's the natural playground, and it is quite a step change as a leader, and it's pretty rare.

S Steve Divitkos 22:15

So why is it important that a leader knows in real time which of the four stages they're currently operating in? Because certainly, like, with the benefit of hindsight, I can see a situation where a leader says, Okay, in this year, I was in stage one. In that year I was in stage two, etcetera. Because hindsight tends to provide us with clarity that real time doesn't. But in real time, like for CEO listening to this, why is it important that she knows right now I'm in stage two. Right now I'm in stage three. Like, does it impact her behavior or her decision making in any way?

S Speaker 1 22:47

Yeah. I mean, as you start to ask yourself these questions, am I really just doing what other people expect? Because I don't know. I don't have the inner vision to guide me here. I don't know where I'm going without the guidance of these other people, that's a really important thing to know about yourself, because it can be incredibly frustrating and it can be incredibly painful.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 23:16

One of the things my research has taught me is that the bigger your leadership role, the more painful it is if you don't have the capacity to meet it in that moment. And another reason I wrote *Changing on the Job* is to give people handholds to be able to grow into the capacity they need to kind of meet their world in a way that's less painful.

S

Steve Divitkos 23:46

So if a leader listening to this wanted to self diagnose, let's say without formal coaching or assessments or something like that, are there any like telltale signs that suggest which stage they're currently operating in today?

S

Speaker 1 24:02

I mean, you would do this very cautiously and kind of as a party trick, right? Like, just as a way to self coach yourself. But yeah, there are some pretty useful ways to notice. To ask myself, I'm really upset about this. I'm having a situation that I'm really upset about. Why am I upset about that? What is the most upsetting thing? And almost always, our mind goes out. I'm upset because that guy cheated me.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 24:30

I'm upset because that woman said she was going to do something and she didn't do it. I'm upset because the market did this crazy thing. We go out, and that is not the question I'm asking. I am asking, what in me makes me upset about this circumstance? Why did it matter so much to me? And note tracking that is a super interesting thing, because you can't actually change very much out there. You can influence it. But CEOs can't mostly put their hands on things and force them to happen, but they can actually strongly shape how they make sense of things and whether they are getting more competent and capable at the role they're in as their business requires them.

S

Steve Divitkos 25:20

So is leadership maturity largely a function of the passage of time? I mean, I would imagine it's not that simple, but maybe you could just talk about to what extent is leadership maturity a function of time, simply elapsing, or are there like deliberate and specific practices that can accelerate movement through these stages?

S

Speaker 1 25:42

It's interesting. It does time seems to be helpful, but absolutely insufficient. In my own dissertation study talked to 12, people, and the most developmentally sophisticated in that study were the oldest and the second youngest. And so it really isn't. It really isn't just a feature of how much time you've been on the planet. It's a feature of how much reflection, how much have you learned from the time you've been on the planet?

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 26:19

And some people can learn a lot from a little bit of time, and some people don't learn very much from a lot of time. And so yes, these these practices of actually inquiring into my own way of making sense of the world instead of looking out there. A lot of leaders spend a lot of their lives out there, tinkering out there, which we have to do. You have to do that. It makes good sense. But they stop there and they think, ah, you know, I've had leaders say to me, I'd like you to help me with better decision making, because everybody in my life eventually betrays me. Yes, some of that is about who you have around you, and it's a decision making question, but some of that is also about how you make sense of relationships and what betrayal is. How you repair from something like there's a lot more than just help me change my hiring practices, because now four people have betrayed me before. People have betrayed you. There's something in you there. And people don't tend to think, Oh, let me grow this instrument.

S

Steve Divitkos 27:34

So it sounds like certainly time elapsing, as you said, helpful, but not sufficient. But inner work, self reflection seems to be a key input, whether that comes from therapy, journaling, meditation, coaching, whatever the case may be. Are there any specific maybe tools or practices or routines or habits that you found to be particularly helpful or particularly instructive to do that self work and that reflection that seems to pay a lot of dividends.

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Speaker 1 28:11

I wrote a book called Simple Habits For Complex Times. So I love habits, and the habits we talk about in that book are my co author, Keith Johnston, and I talk about taking multiple perspectives. So it turns out that one of the most important things you can do is learn how to take other people's perspectives and not take them to put down your own perspective, but take them to augment your perspective.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 28:41

I was talking to a leader the other day who was frustrated with the way this other person had not listened to her in a meeting. She was representing one part of the company. This other person was representing the other part of the company. And the other woman was like, we don't we basically don't need you. And this woman was frustrated about this, and she said, and even in my frustration, I started to think, Well, what of this other woman with whom I'm really disagreeing, what part of her is right? There are ways she doesn't need to take my perspective. And I just watched her make that kind of ninja move right there of her own thinking to say, I'm really mad at this other person who's like not doing the thing she's supposed to do, and then saying, huh, I wonder what sense she's making of me. I wonder what I'm missing here, if this other smart person is seeing this thing this way, there's probably something here for me that is a very impressive leadership move. And that dance of taking the perspective of somebody who's really annoying you, somebody you think is wrong, is a developmental habit. But the second developmental habit is about watching your questions. So we call it asking different questions. But really, like the the leaders who do this super well are like question thieves. They'll listen for, I bet you do this Steve, right, you listen. You probably listen for questions all the time, and when you hear a good one, I bet you grab it, because the questions we automatically come up with might be great, but they are unlikely to be actually augmenting in a developmental way, right? They're kind of questions that our current development produces, and that keep us in this current level of development. And so what we need is a different set of questions, and you can run into them on the streets, you know, like these questions are possible. So I help the leaders around me become question collectors. Like one question, if you're collecting, is a question like, how could I be wrong about this, which is quite a developmental question, but it's not very pleasant question, the question that arises is, what's wrong with you? The questions that's helpful here is like, how could I expand here? And then the last habit that I think is very developmental is, how do you look at systems, instead of individual cause and effect relationships or individual human relationships? How can you, for example, look at what's going on between you and another person in your organization and wonder how the organizational culture is creating that thing and not the other person. Really easy to say, you know, these two teammates are being competitive because this guy's a jerk. It's really harder to say these two people are being competitive with each other and being jerks to each other, because the way the financial incentives work in our organization pits them against each other. It's a less common thing to notice.

S**Steve Divitkos 32:09**

Yeah, yeah. So you mentioned that you're a big fan of habits, and that's perfectly true. That's exactly where I want to go next, and particularly habits in the context of complexity. So you know, maybe your answer to this question is going to be the same as the answer that you just gave me. If so, that's perfectly fine, and we can just skip it. But we talked about how, before we hit record, how the fact that most of our audience is comprised of either new CEOs or those hoping to become new CEOs, and as somebody who purchased a business myself from its original founder and suddenly found myself like catapulted or parachuted into a CEO role. You can probably imagine that those first six to 12 months as a new and inexperienced leader were like some of the most complex and ambiguous times in my entire life. No playbook, no instructions, no experience. In one of your books, you outlined a bunch of practical tools for navigating like very uncertain, very complex environments like this one. Can you just share with us one or two tools or habits that might be especially useful for leaders who just don't yet fully understand the system that they're operating in as I didn't understand it all those years ago?

S**Speaker 1 33:20**

See, the first one is to know that you don't understand it. One of the biggest mistakes people make when they're new in leadership roles is just doing stuff because they are, because not doing stuff makes them uncomfortable, and they they see things that are wrong, and so they just start doing things. And so this question of, could you go in and understand, could you listen to why it is this way before you change it?

J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 33:54**

I think that would save people a lot of pain. And I think, when you're in a situation like the one you describe, understanding it's disorienting, and letting yourself be disoriented, disorientation is uncomfortable, but it's an incredibly, incredibly useful learning space, and to track what you're learning, to track how you're learning in, to track who you're talking about, like to have that be kind of like the part of the project of what you're on about. Instead of often, we let kind of our self talk in these cases win and we you we do this unhelpful thing of undermining ourselves, and saying, Oh, we have to rush forward, or we have to solve this, or we can think about it later, actually setting yourself up as a learner from the beginning. It's good for the culture, and it's good for you developmentally. And it's just practical. It's just a smarter way to start to intervene once you understand something, instead of intervening before you understand something. It's just a smarter approach.

S**Steve Divitkos 35:20**

This episode is brought to you by Boulay. Now for those of you who operate within the search fund ecosystem, you probably already know that Boulay is the standard when it comes to quality of earnings, reports, tax and audit services. But for those of you who are newer to the community, consider this. Over the past 20 years, Boulay has worked directly with hundreds of search funds from capital raise to exit, currently assisting over 150 funds in the search phase and another 125 in the operating phase. They work with searchers across the entirety of the ETA journey, from issuing K1s to your investors during the search phase all the way through to helping prepare your books for an exit at the conclusion of the operating phase. They are the industry leader in performing financial due diligence and creating Q of E reports that your investors can rely on. They provide a full suite of tax services, both for your search fund and for the acquired company. They perform the annual audits required by most debt and equity investors, and they also perform outsourced accounting services, acting as a fractional bookkeeper and controller for those companies whose needs might not necessitate full time in house resources. In short, you can safely assume that these guys get it. They've grown up in the search fund ecosystem over the past 20 years, and they have the reputation to prove it. To learn more, go to [Boulay group.com](http://Boulaygroup.com), that's B, O, U, L, A, Y group.com. So if you were coaching a new and inexperienced executive who just, you know, maybe they acquired the business. Maybe they just got promoted into the CEO role. Maybe they just got hired into that role externally. But this person, however they got there, they're basically inheriting they're inheriting people, they're inheriting culture, they're inheriting customers, they're inheriting problems, they're inheriting opportunities. They didn't create any of these things, but now they have ownership over each of them. How might you advise this person, like, what are some things that they should be absolutely sure to do, and maybe even more interesting, some things that they should be absolutely sure not to do.

S**Speaker 1 37:28**

So I think this idea of making changes fast is almost always problematic under these conditions. It's not 100% of the time problematic, but I would say it's like 98% of the time problematic, and I think I do coach people like this, and I think a listening tour is a really great thing to do. To go out to talk to people, to really understand it, and then I also encourage people to say back what they've understood, and to test and see, did I get that right?

J**Jennifer Garvey Berger 38:06**

So you'd have one on ones with not just your executive committee or whoever your most senior leaders were, but also people over there and people over there, you get, like, sampling of the organization, and then you call those people back in together and say, here's how I'm making sense of all the things you said, and here's what I'm still confused about.

S

Steve Divitkos 38:30

Yeah, I like that second step.

S

Speaker 1 38:32

We rush so fast to, here's what's broken, here's how I'm going to fix it, as opposed to, here's what I've understood and here's what I don't understand. We almost always rush to fix the things we don't understand. And there's almost always a reason that we don't understand for why things are the way they are, how they got there. And until we understand what that reason is, we risk either not fixing the thing at all or making it worse.

S

Steve Divitkos 39:04

Yeah, that resonates a lot with me, because when I started on the advice of some mentors of mine, I did exactly what you were saying. So my first two weeks on the job as a CEO, I did nothing but meet one on one with every single person in the company and ask them basic questions, what's working, what's not working? What should we change? What would be, what would we be crazy to change? Etcetera. I found the experience both incredibly instructive, because somewhere in my life, God knows how many pages of notes was like my to do list that was going to inform how I was going to spend my time over the next six to 12 months as a leader. But I also found it to be incredibly overwhelming for a couple of reasons. Number one, for whatever reason, at least in my experience, when you have conversations like that, the natural inclination of folks is to only talk about what's wrong. So I remember, after I finished these one on one interviews, I kind of like exhaled for the first time in two weeks, and I was like, holy shit. Like, what company did I just buy? Like, this is just broken everything. Bag of problems. Like, is there anything good about this company? So that would be one, and I might like raise that as a flag for leaders, just to say, hey, if that is also happening to you, hey, you're in good company. At least it happened to me. The other one was, the other challenge was like, where do I start? Like, I've got 100 things apparently that I need to fix. Which one do I start with? For better or for worse? I still don't know this is the right solution. I ended up starting with, like, quick wins. So there was a couple things that were just like, I could fix this tomorrow with no time, no energy, no effort, no money. I decided to start there, if for no other reason than to just provide the employees with evidence that, A, I was listening to you and B, like, Hey, I told you I was here to help and change things for the better. Here's some evidence, but I just be curious to get your reactions to my experience, because I imagine that it's pretty common for those in similar circumstances.

S

Speaker 1 41:01

Yeah. It's funny, people often come to their leaders in two ways. They come to kind of praise them and give them a false sense of, you're doing great. Everything's so rosy. Just don't fire me, right? Yeah? Or they come to complain like, Oh, thank goodness there's a grown up in the building. Now, could you fix the 37 things I haven't been able to fix that have been pissing me off. So I think that is a very common experience.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 41:33

And I think it's useful to notice when you're feeling depleted. I think tracking your own reaction and energy, not necessarily to listen to it, but to know that that's happening. Like, wow, I'm really depleted right now. I just talked to four people from operations, and I'm exhausted. That's really interesting. What does it say about the operation system? What am I curious about now? Right? Like, so I think that that's useful to track yourself and your reactivity. And then I think it's really useful to go to everybody and say, Okay, here's what I heard, here's what I here's what I feel like I know how to attack here, following your suggestions, which lined up pretty easily. Here's some quick wins that don't look hard to me. Here's what I'm thinking about doing with those things. And then here's here are ones that look harder to me for a variety of reasons. And here's the help I need to be able to think about addressing some of those things.

S

Steve Divitkos 42:36

Yeah, I love that second step. I didn't do that. That kind of like synthesizing and summarizing what you learned. A, it shows that you were really listening, right? And B, it also introduces, like, a very healthy, I don't know what the word is, like vulnerability or like, humanizing you as a leader, saying, hey, there are some stuff I can fix. At least I think I can fix them, but here's a whole bunch of stuff that I still need help with, and or maybe I just don't understand it. So I love that second step, and unfortunately, it's not one that I did when I was sitting in that seat.

S

Speaker 1 43:06

It's not at all intuitive. It's not, I don't know anybody who's ever done it who hasn't had somebody suggest it to them. The other thing it does, by the way, is sometimes our biases are so strong that we do hear wrong. And we can hear, we can talk to three people who say the same thing and report a different thing. And so it really is a useful check to see, was I so wedded to my last role or my last organization, or my last way of seeing things that I actually have a screen between me and you.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 43:40

And I can't actually see you, and so when I say back, and this is what I heard you say, you can say some of we said that didn't happen here. That's not a here thing, yeah, because sometimes people come in just with their mind so full of their vast job that they have a hard time orienting to this new job.

S

Steve Divitkos 44:06

Yeah, so at a commercial level, not to put words in your mouth, but what I'm hearing is which makes intuitive sense to me, diagnose before you prescribe. Right? Make sure that you understand what the problems and opportunities truly are before you start making definitive decisions around them. Makes good sense to me. What about at a purely personal level? So during your first, let's say, year as a new leader, what do you wish more new leaders like deliberately spent time doing to learn about themselves, and not just the business, during that period?

S

Speaker 1 44:41

So the first thing I wish is that they would take better care of themselves. You're kind of on this mission. So, you know, people hire me because I write books and do stuff like this. And then one of the first questions I'm going to ask you when you hire me is, are you sleeping? Yeah, seems a little bit basic, but I have actually all of my research suggests you simply cannot perform if you're not taking care of yourself. And you just will break down.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 45:17

You cannot be at your most sophisticated, thoughtful, literally best, unless you are sleeping, moving your body, dealing with your stress, and you have something like an out of work life that's working for you. And people very often put that stuff off. You know, in my second year, I'm going to turn to that. Well, you know what? You're going to have a really crap first year, and then you're going to set some really bad habits and really bad boundaries in place. And then the people around you are going to say, oh, that's what this person expects. And so they're going to set bad habits and bad boundaries in place, and then you'll have a terrible culture and people burn out and be anxious and angry, because that's what happens. Our bodies go anxious or angry when we aren't getting enough sleep and we aren't moving them enough. Yeah, this is not a great leadership stance. So this is the first thing I wish new leaders would do is actually understand I'm overwhelmed, and I think another hour at my computer is going to help me feel less overwhelmed, but probably having a walk with my dog or a nap, is a better approach, and really paying attention to that.

S

Steve Divitkos 46:41

Yep, I know from firsthand experience, not because I did it well, because I did it very poorly, and I paid the price for it. So I often, you know, when I talk to new CEOs, understandably, especially in that first year, because it's so intense, let's say something to the effect of like, well, I can't afford to blanket right? Can't afford to sleep eight hours, or I can't afford to play softball every Tuesday or whatever. And then I point to myself as a case study, and I say, actually, you can't afford not to.

S

Speaker 1 47:11

I think it's so like listening for sentences like that, like an, I can't afford to about time is a it's your anxiety speaking, that's a fear sentence, the leaders I coach, some of whom lead really large organizations, like some of the largest organizations in the world, they have time. Yeah, they have time.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 47:39

And when they went into the job, they didn't have time, and over the course of their own growth and development, they stopped doing the things that don't deliver value, and they realized that things like walking their dog delivers a surprising amount of leadership value. Because they think better, they're nicer to be around their cortisol levels aren't through the roof, like it's better in a job.

S

Steve Divitkos 48:08

That's productive without necessarily feeling explicitly productive.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 48:12

That's exactly right.

S

Steve Divitkos 48:15

Two concluding questions for you, Jennifer, with the time that we have left, I'm curious, at the risk of putting you on the spot, what is your current definition of success, and I'm curious how that definition has either changed or evolved over time.

S

Speaker 1 48:40

I think it would have it would have features, right like multiple features. One of them is, for me, is, am I living a life ever more aligned with my own values? This is one of my core success features right now, because I have found that as a leader now, as a leader, the more I live in line with my values, which I which I'll screw up every single day. But can I see that I'm screwing it up, and can I course correct a little bit every single day.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 49:24

The more I live in line with my values, the more magic happens in the world. Things go together. The resistance of the world begins to reduce, because there's something about living in line with your values that makes more possibilities open.

S

Steve Divitkos 49:46

And what a wonderful question for leaders to ask themselves at a regular cadence, right? I don't know, weekly, quarterly, monthly, annually, whatever the cadence is, what a wonderful question to explicitly ask yourself.

S

Speaker 1 49:59

And I think it's really useful to say every day you're gonna fail. And to say, Okay, you're human. This is not a thing to be perfect about, because if you're perfect, you'll never get any farther. Like, oh, I believe, I really believe in telling people in kind and open hearted ways what's going on for me and giving them feedback. Did I do that in every case today? Probably not.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 50:27

You know, I could do better at that. So can we get more like that? That's That's my first question. And then, am I more motivated by love or fear? Is another big success metric for me, because the world there's a lot of pressure, or it might be anger, love or anger, like whatever it is, you're a bugaboo. For me, it's fear. For some people, it's anger. Are you working because you're mad, like, are you working to defeat people? Are you working because you're afraid? You're working to keep the wolves at bay? Or are you expressing love? You're bringing something into being that you think has some chance of leaving the world better than it was before you got there.

S

Steve Divitkos 51:22

Yeah, yeah. I read a book not terribly recently. I think it was called Shine, and it basically said, All decisions stem from either love or fear. It's just that you don't really realize it.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 51:31

That's right. Yeah.

S

Steve Divitkos 51:33

And then the concluding question that I love to ask people, admittedly, it puts them on the spot, but usually we kind of end up somewhere, is what is the most meaningful lesson that you've learned over the past 12 months across any domain of your life, personal, professional, spiritual, family, anything? The most meaningful lesson that comes to mind over the past year?

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 51:58

So great question. You're clearly a question collector. For me, you know, you can imagine, I work on myself a lot, right? One of my values is about growing, and I try to get closer to that. And one of the things I've been trying to grow is, or I guess I've actually, to be fair, I've been trying to shrink my relationship to the self critical inner voice I have, which is, everybody has a self critic. Some of them are more toxic than others, often, at some point they start to get in the way. I was trying to put mine kind of in a corner and get it to stop being so loud. And the most meaningful thing I learned this year was how to befriend that inner voice, and what what it means when the self critic becomes your friend instead of your critic, and what it what it is to have an inner friend instead of an inner critic. And that has been a remarkably beautiful and relieving experience.

S

Steve Divitkos 53:26

How did you go about doing that? Because, as you said, having an inner voice and inner critic is just like fundamentally human. So I suspect a lot of people are nodding their heads right now, and they would love to cultivate, like, a gentler relationship with that inner voice. How did you go about doing that tactically?

S

Speaker 1 53:49

You know, I've been, maybe some of it is just, I've been working on it a long time. And I realized I was at a workshop, you know, as as one goes to? And I realized that I was kind of having a pissing contest with my inner voice, right? Like my inner voice would say something caustic, and I would say, You shut up. And we had like this, like, No, You Shut Up. No, You Shut Up. Kind of relationship. I don't want that relationship with anybody in my life.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 54:23

So, okay, inner voice, what do you care about? What are you scared of? Oh, what's hard for you? Like, could I actually cultivate a friendlier relationship with this thing instead of just wanting it to get the hell away. And it turns out, when you do that, it's a lot nicer inside, not every day, because we fight with our friends too, but it's much nicer. Yeah, I used to say I would never be friends with the voice inside my head.

S

Steve Divitkos 55:00

Yeah, it's a good way to put it.

J

Jennifer Garvey Berger 55:03

But now I'm more and more every day.

S

Steve Divitkos 55:07

Jennifer, what a treat it was to speak with you. We've covered a lot of ground today. Is there anything that we left unsaid? Anything else that you want to leave our audience with? Any questions you'd like to ask, statements you'd like to make, places for them to go, anything of the sort.

J Jennifer Garvey Berger 55:23

I guess the thing I want to say is, I think leadership is super hard. So if you're listening to this podcast and you think, oh, you know, this is a hard thing I'm doing, I'm really screwing it up. I just want to say I think it's hard. And I think it is the thing that will make the difference for us as a species right now. Like I think the stakes are high. Everybody listening who has the idea about how to make a better world and is leading other people into that vision of some better tomorrow for their colleagues, their communities, their customers. I believe that leadership is what's going to get us out of the many, many messes we find ourselves in, and I think it's small acts of leadership all the time. So I just want to say thank you to your listeners and to you for what you do to make this more possible, and to say, Yeah, it's hard. We can join hands together and know that the hard work we're doing is important.

S Steve Divitkos 56:36

What a perfect place to end. Jennifer, thank you for your time.

J Jennifer Garvey Berger 56:39

Thanks so much, Steve.