

EP 91 - Nancy Murphy: Effective Leadership Strategies in Implementing Organizational Change

Mitch Simon: Welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere where CEOs, leaders, and experts at building teams,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: companies,

Mitch Simon: organizations,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: and amazing cultures share how to lead from anywhere in the world. I'm your co-host on the East Coast, Ginny Bianco-Mathis.

Mitch Simon: And I'm your co-host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon. And we invite you to join us Team Anywhere.

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere. I'm your co-host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon. And on the East Coast, our amazing co-host, Dr. Virginia Bianco-Mathis. So, Ginny why don't you introduce our amazing guest today?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes Mitch. Today we have Nancy Murphy. She's the Founder and President of CSR Communications and Creator of Intrapreneurs Influence Lab. Her passion is teaching leaders how to make organizational change stick. Nancy's work in philanthropy, strategy and change has been international and she has worked for organizations such as Steve and Jean Cases' Family Foundation, The Corporation for National and Community Service, APCO Worldwide, UPS, Johnson Controls, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and a long list that follows.

She holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from University of Minnesota's Humphrey School and a Master's in Health Communication from Boston University.

Welcome Nancy. Nancy, please tell us, a question we've been asking many folks. Over the last two years, what have you learned, both professionally and personally?

Nancy Murphy: I've learned so much really, I guess, as awful as the last two years have been in many ways. I would say they've been a gift to me in terms of the lessons. So, I guess I'll share three with our listeners today.

The first one is know what's important to you. Because when you do, no matter what's going on in the world, you don't wait around for someone else to make that happen. You make it happen. So, for example, physical fitness, healthy lifestyle and my workout group which was also my social group have been an important part of my life for decades. And I remember the day that the gym announced it was closing.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yep.

Nancy Murphy: That night I reached out to three friends and said, you know what? Let's meet at the school playground tomorrow. I'll make up a workout. The three of us met. The next day, there were two more people. Then there was a core group of fewer than 10 because we knew that was the limit, right?

And we continued to work out outside. And then we actually got our gym to start offering classes outside on the rooftop of the parking garage behind the building.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Alright.

Nancy Murphy: You know, it was like I wasn't going to wait around for somebody else to figure that out or to give up on something that was a core part of who I am and that keeps me sane. Especially in the midst of a pandemic. And that kept my social life intact as well. So, that was really important. Know what's important to you, right? And then make it happen.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That's good. Yes.

Nancy Murphy: The second thing is— and this really applies to my business, which is stay in close touch with the people you serve, so that you know what their needs are and how they're changing. And you can stay relevant. Even if you can't offer exactly what you have been offering in the way you were offering it, right? You stay relevant so that when things start to shift, you might be able to offer something. So, in that instance I created a process I used for

myself. I started sharing it with a few friends who are also entrepreneurs. And that led to our strategy, Quickstart 321 Toolkit, which you know, again, gave me a reason to start having conversations with people. And I shared all the tools that I was using to keep in close touch with clients and folks in my network. And that turned out to be a really powerful tool for others to stay relevant, no matter what was happening in the world.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes.

Nancy Murphy: And then the third thing is, you know, given those examples I just shared, I learned that I'm more adaptable than I thought I was, right? I think—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: WE all can say that. Yes.

Nancy Murphy: Yeah.

So, I now am trying to remember that as I'm encountering roadblocks or things, like how can I be that flowing river, that water that encounters a rock and just sort of moves around it very easily and simply. It doesn't make a big deal about it. And so, sort of finding the workarounds. And, you know, not assuming that just because you've never done something before means you can't do it now. And those things that right before March 2020 were seemingly impossible, but two weeks or two months later, were suddenly utterly possible trying to keep that in mind too.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Oh, those are excellent. And one could say that you also don't sit around. You just make it happen.

Nancy Murphy: Yeah. Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And all three of your examples definitely says a lot about that. So, let's move to the concept of change in organizations which is top of mind. You speak about what it takes to be a leader during a change and to make it credible. What do you like to emphasize there since that's what you're called in to help with?

Nancy Murphy: Yeah. It's less about making the change credible per se. And more about what does it take to be a credible leader of change, right? Or a credible leader through change or during change. And so, I often say that— I mean leaders to be a credible leader of change, we need lots of specific skills and characteristics, but I always say we start with looking in the mirror.

So often folks will come to us and say, gosh, how do I get people on board? How do I get them to do what I need them to do? And, you know, it's all about the other. And I always say the secret is actually look in the mirror first. So, how open are you to change really? And how open do others perceive you to be to change? What behavior are you modeling?

And then we talk about three specific characteristics. So, one is the experimenter's mindset. And boy, oh boy, did this come in handy for a lot of folks during the pandemic, the ones who thrived or at least, you know, didn't go under, right? Which is try things out, play with stuff. That was my word of 2020. And boy, did I know that was going to serve me so well when I chose it in December of 2019? No. But being able to play with things, try them out, learn, iterate, adapt. So, that experimenter's mindset is absolutely critical.

The second thing I call the campaigner's commitment. We'd all love to say things once and be done, right? Proclaim our vision. This is our new policy for remote work, for hybrid work, for return to office and be done with it, right? But no. Like the candidate on the campaign trail, we must repeat our message, our mantra, right, over and over with the same level of enthusiasm as we did the very first time—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Oh, there's the trick.

Nancy Murphy: And be open to the questions that you've already thought of that you've heard a hundred times as if it was the first time someone raised it. Or the concern as if it were the first time someone raised it. So that campaigner's commitment.

And then the third one that is so important— and again, think about the last couple of years and how well this characteristic probably served a lot of folks. And that is curiosity. Get curious, not furious. What's going on behind or beneath that resistance? What can I learn from that? What am I missing here? Where are my blind spots? So, curiosity is a real gift and a real characteristic of credible leaders of change.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And it really coincides with your first one about experiment.

Nancy Murphy: Absolutely.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And it reminds me as it probably does you, when you said play, you know, children show the best examples of experimenting. Oh, well that didn't work. Let's, you know, go over here and do this.

Nancy Murphy: Yes. Absolutely.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Adults just have lost that.

Nancy Murphy: We get so obsessed with what didn't work and where we failed or what we lost as opposed to, huh, what did I learn from that? Oh, let me tweak this based on that and move forward and try it again, right?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes.

Mitch Simon: These are amazing examples. And I'm just wondering, how do you help people make the shift? I was on a call yesterday with a client. And I said, you need to share your vision every day, every week. And for most people, it's like well, I told them once. And then, you know, curious, not furious. I love that. How do you go to that place of something just happened. I'm not really happy with what just happened. And instead of going to furious, how do I move to curious?

Nancy Murphy: Yeah. Well, there are tons of tools and techniques that we teach in our Intrapreneurs Influence Lab. So, oftentimes getting people to want to make the shift. Like, I try not to say to folks, well, you need to do this 'cause they don't need another mother or another parent. And that's, you know, maybe that's what they think they're paying me for. But I don't think that's oftentimes the most effective.

So, I try to get people to come to their own aha. So great. You just want to say it once and be done. I hear ya. Don't we all? Like, yeah, it's frustrating. About the campaign trail, right? So that's why I try to bring in those analogies that give people, oh yeah. So, imagine how they need to do it over and over.

Is saying it once and being done with it, how well is that working for you? Are you getting the results you want, right? And so obviously not, or they probably wouldn't be having a conversation with me. So okay, if you want a different result let's play around with, you know, can you try it little steps at a time, right? So, that's kind of one thing.

And then for the curious, not furious. The second I put that out there, it's almost like I can watch the light bulb switch on in people's minds. They're like, oh

crap. Yeah. I tend to do that furious thing. Again, how well is that working for you? When you get defensive, what happens? Generally, somewhat, and oftentimes the questioning or the pushback is a key part of how people were trying to enroll in this change. Or get to do something differently. That's a key part of how they make meaning out of it. It's a key part of how they understand it. It's a key step in being able to act.

So, if we can start to see it as that, and instead of getting annoyed or frustrated, or why can't you just do it? Which, you know, you just put up the wall, their wall gets bigger. Pretty soon, we've got like this giant wall and there's no conversation happening. If instead we can say, oh, they're asking questions. They're pushing back a little. They're not sure. Awesome, right? That means they want to learn. They want to know more. They're on the journey to get to where I need them to be. Okay. Well, what can I learn here? What's ineffective about my messaging that maybe I can shortcut this process a little bit more next time?

So, if we can approach it with that learning mindset, then all of a sudden, all the conversations— You know, so somebody just has to do it once and they're like, oh wow. They can see the building the wall bigger, faster, doesn't serve anybody. And then nobody likes feeling frustrated, defensive, angry, and resentful.

I'll tell people, put a post-it note, curious, not furious, right next to your computer. Put a little rubber band around your wrist before you go into a conversation or a town hall meeting and just snap it the second you ride in it. And it's like, oh yeah, whoop slap me back into [inaudible]—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Those techniques work. That's why they developed over the years. Those are great.

And you did mention that word we all confront which is resistance. You speak about certain kinds. Can you share that with us? And what are the best ways to deal with that? Mitigate that?

Nancy Murphy: Absolutely. So, I've discovered three common types of resistance to change in my work with organizations and my own entrepreneurial experience over the years. So, the first are the what if-ers? Right? We've probably all encountered these folks that, well, what if everyone can work remotely? And what if we do that and nobody is productive? I'm sure we all heard that. Or what if we put this new diversity hiring policy in place, and we no longer hire the best and brightest, right?

I mean, there are all sorts of assumptions and beliefs underneath some of these things. But these what if-ers will go to the deepest, darkest places they can. They're the dooms day. They're the Eeyore folks. In my experience, they can often be the general counsel in the organization or the CFO.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: CFO. I was going there.

Nancy Murphy: And these folks serve a very valuable purpose. I've come to appreciate the what if-ers as someone who can be overly optimistic about the likelihood of change succeeding. I know I need these what if-ers to eliminate my blind spots to make sure I'm not putting the organization at unnecessary risk, right?

So, what we do with the what if-ers is we play to their strength. We invite them to do scenario planning. Go to that deepest, darkest place. Help me plan. What am I not seeing? What am I not anticipating? And then I always ask the question. Okay. How likely is that to happen? Now, typically these things aren't very likely. But even if they tell me, it's 50% or 60% likely, I'm like, okay, well then if it does happen, what would we do? Or what could we do now to mitigate that likelihood of it happening? So, engage the what if-ers. Play to their strengths. They can be your best partners in leading change.

The second type are the status quo defenders. These are the folks who use language like, well, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. And I will tell you the status quo defenders sometimes can be the most frustrating for me. And I also have a lot of empathy for these folks. So, these are folks who were a crucial part of creating the status quo. So, their identities are closely tied with the way things are.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Sure.

Nancy Murphy: And when we start criticizing the way things are, they take it as an attack on them. So, what we can do to overcome the status quo defender type of resistance is to be careful about the language we use. Well, things are pretty good now. But guess what? They could be even better or, you know what, this policy, this protocol, this way of working, this initiative, this program, the culture we've built, these things have served us so well up to this point. But gosh, the world has changed.

It's changing so fast. It's going to continue to change. Do we want this organization to survive, thrive, and continue to put good out in the world. Absolutely, right? So, we need to thank Marie Kondo. Our organizations, you

know, thank those status quo defenders for everything they've given us up to this point.

And then with some clear parameters and guidelines, you can invite them to do kind of a scan and assessment of the current culture, the current processes, the current ways of working, the current programs and initiatives, and say as we move forward with this change, what should we preserve and protect? What will continue to serve us well? Let's make sure we don't throw too much out or change too much. So, those are the status quo defenders.

The third type of resistance to change are the yes-no people. Now these are the folks who sit in our office or in our town hall meeting and they're like shaking their heads. And they're telling you, oh, I'm on board. Like, sign me up. And then they walk out the door and they do the exact opposite. And these folks are so frustrating because you think they're with you, right? You think they're going to do one thing. They do the other.

And so for these folks, there are actually four subtypes. I won't go into them all, but we want to distinguish— this is where the get curious, not furious can be really helpful. We want to learn, is this yes-no-ism due to a lack of will or a lack of way? So, if it's a lack of will like the stallers, we call them. These are the folks who, I've been in this organization long before you arrived. I'm going to be here long after you leave. I'm just going to wait you out. I'm going to drag my feet.

You're going to get frustrated and give up on this crazy idea. You're going to get so annoyed; you're going to walk out the door entirely. I get to go back to doing things the way I've done, right? So, I'm gonna say yes, but then I'm just going to make it so slow, my action, that nothing happens.

If it's a lack of way, it might be what we call the stragglers. And these are folks who might need some training, might need some skill-building. They might really want to do what it is you've asked them to do or change, or behave differently. But they don't know how. They don't know where to start.

And so how do we create safe space for people to say, I need a little help here. I need some upskilling. I need some training. Whatever. These folks oftentimes are experiencing the reason that we say change leaders need to operate more like Indiana Jones. Because as we've moved forward with change, we've left behind artifacts that tell us who and what we value, what matters and how things really get done around here. And they often conflict with the change we want.

And I can give you some examples of those if you'd like. But these artifacts send signals that are in conflict with what the leaders are saying. And so they start to erode trust. So people like, I don't know. Like, is Mitch really serious about this? I mean, what if this isn't really going to happen? I go to all this effort. And so they're sort of like, they're really struggling. All the processes, protocols, checklists, and things are designed for the old ways of working. So, you're making it super hard for somebody to do the thing you want them to do. So, they're really struggling. It's like too much friction.

We have to go on a quest on an archeological dig to unearth those artifacts that might be creating unnecessary resistance. And then instead lay down some new ones that are aligned with the change we want.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And I can see that also coincides with some of your work when you talk about the stickiness of change. You need to put in the sticky stuff to align with the change. So, the checklist, the processes, and the technology have to be redone to create the stickiness for the very change. The band-aid approach. It doesn't work at all for the very things that you have been saying.

Nancy Murphy: Yeah. I can imagine that someone just heard you say the technology and now people are freaking out. Oh my God, we got it. Because now we improve with technology. So, let me just say along those lines, the proprietary excavation process that we use with our clients is very clear about let's look at all the artifacts. And which ones you have direct, indirect, versus no control over, and which ones are the easiest to change and will have the greatest impact on reducing that friction and increasing the trust.

So, if technology isn't aligned, but my God, it's going to take three years and hundreds of thousands of dollars and even more pain and suffering and it may not have that much impact. Well, that's probably not one of the first things we're going to encourage you to address. So—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes. I love that. I'm extrapolating from what you're saying. This is the kind of dialogue. You get the folks, whether they're all in the room or spread around the world on Zoom.

Nancy Murphy: Absolutely.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: To have that discussion. Why isn't it sticking? What do we need to have happened for six months for us to see it? Well, you know, that's going to take three years. So, what's the short term? What's the long term?

Nancy Murphy: Yeah.

Mitch Simon: I would think also in a virtual world, the leader would have to—going back to being enthusiastic, right? To say, look, here are the changes that are actually occurring. Because for a lot of us, because we're working from home, we don't really see it.

It's almost, again, it's like you said, like a political campaign. So, the leader would share we've made this change. Here are some of the facts, the data that came from that change. Just to kind of invigorate people to understand that we actually are, let's say turning the ship a bit.

Nancy Murphy: Well, I would challenge that a little bit. Not the concept, but the execution. So, you were like, here's a change. Here are the facts. This is the data. In my experience, this is where a lot of organizations get it wrong. They think they need more data, more facts and figures to demonstrate the change.

Typically, it's not an informational problem. It's an emotional problem. So instead, how do we tell stories? How do we get that call to emotion? What's the emotion you need people to experience so that, they will heed your call to action. And then how do you come in after that, with the data, the facts, and to give people comfort for the decision they've already made based on emotion. Which we know is how 99.9% of decisions are made subconsciously.

But so oftentimes starting with the facts and figures, you lose people—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: you lose—

Nancy Murphy: They don't get the why. It doesn't make the emotional connection. Or they don't really understand what the data means. So, it's not as powerful.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: They turn off. Do you find yourself? I have. I was forced to learn it because I had two clients asking me and I said, I better learn these stuff. And Mitch, you may not, totally realize this given some of our guests actually coach them in how to tell stories. Well, I don't know how to tell. Well, I have no stories. And then you begin, they begin to see, oh, you, there, you have some rich stories.

Nancy Murphy: One of the things that we actually teach in our Intrapreneurs Lab is, I encourage people before they get all tied up about telling stories— and they think, first of all we need to have 20-minute stories. And I don't have time

in a meeting to do a 20, you know. And so, I encourage them to keep a story journal and I actually have mine. It's in my drawer here. A super tiny notebook you can keep with you everywhere. And it's to train your brain to notice and think in stories.

So, I encourage people like you're watching TV and somebody, a character in a movie or a TV show in 30 seconds. Oftentimes, 30 seconds. We'll use a quick story that embeds in your brain, the point they were trying to make. It doesn't have to be a story about the thing, right? It can be a story that is representative of.

I also encourage people like you're standing in line at the grocery store and you observe a funny interaction or an odd moment. Or an unusual exchange of dialogue. Just write it down. And then later on you could play around with it, right? How could I turn this experience or this thing I observed into a story that is relevant for making the point I want to make influential from.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes. Right. And then if you can do that with a group on Zoom or whatever, then they just explode with ideas. I'd like to end with you please sharing what is intrapreneurship and what are the tools and habits of it? And how do you do it, this is a loaded question in the virtual?

Nancy Murphy: Ooh, that's a big question. Well, let's start with the easy part, which is what is intrapreneurship? So, intrapreneurs are folks who bring entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, that disruptive mindset to change legacy organizations from within. So, entrepreneurs have that disruptive mindset, that innovation. They go outside organizations and systems to change things.

I am an entrepreneur myself but I came to this from intrapreneurial experience. And the reason I focus so much on intrapreneurs is because— especially if we think about this in the social sector, in the social impact space. This idea of social entrepreneurs which have been the big buzz for I don't know, the last 15 year, 20 years, they start small.

And their impact may never grow. Even if it's a fabulous, amazing idea or solution to a challenge. Imagine if we can get our large legacy institutions to be more ethical, more environmentally sustainable, more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, more innovative, right? Well, we can have the world we want at scale much faster.

So, I am all about how we get intrapreneurs the tools, techniques, and support they need to succeed. Because when they do, we all win. So, what are some of

the things they need? So, what are some of the tools and techniques when we've covered a lot of those things here already? I believe that intrapreneurs are the unsung heroes of organizational change.

Because whether it's the intrapreneur herself, themselves, himself, or, you know, somebody higher up in the organization who makes the grand gesture, the bold proclamation, right? Net zero by 2030, or, you know, 50% of our board will be people of color by 2023 or whatever these bold proclamations are. Somebody needs to lead the charge of the small strategic sustained actions that make that change real.

So intrapreneurs need the kinds of tips, techniques, and tools to show up day after day. And oftentimes feel like they're beating their head against the wall. And get up the next day and do it again. So, some of that sort of self-care around some techniques to reduce the resistance, the frustration, the pushback that they're getting. All those influence techniques about how we map the stakeholders and the power centers, the informal and formal power centers in our organizations.

How do we enroll others? How do we create a cadre of champions inside the organization to carry some of the weight, to create that ripple effect? So, these are all things that intrapreneurs need to succeed. I mean, I think the last one I'll say is just the commitment to the change they're leading.

Because otherwise these other things, you'll never sort of stick with it long enough, right? Given that this can be a lonely isolating experience sometimes. You won't stick with it long enough to learn and deploy those other tools and techniques. So, getting really clear on your own why for the change or that you're leading people through, right? If it's change that's sort of happening to you versus proactively leading change. And then figuring out how you sustain that commitment over the course of the implementation.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: So, you take all the techniques that we've talked about. You'll have to tell the story. You have to get the emotional buy-in. You need to help and bring together the stakeholders that are going to help it be sticky and so forth. To make it a campaign again and again in each meeting. This has been wonderful. I really love the twists and turns that you have been able to bring to a topic that there's a million books on, right?

How can our guests get in touch with you?

Nancy Murphy: If listeners want to learn more about me or connect with me, you can go to csrcommunications.com. And I'm very active on LinkedIn, Nancy A. Murphy or CSR Communications, our company page on LinkedIn, and would love to connect with folks there as well.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Thank you. Exciting work.

Mitch Simon: Thank you, Nancy. Before we close, I just love your opening. Your opening was about know what's important to you and then make it happen. It seems that change is hard. That is so cliché. Change is sometimes almost impossible. But I do think in the world we're living in, where you do need to extend yourself. You have to be— you know, work with enthusiasm.

I do think that the most important thing is to get really real with yourself to understand what is truly important to you because you're going to move people through very uncomfortable situations. And you're going to need to wake up every day and say, I know exactly why we're moving the ball forward. And we're going to get everyone on board.

So I want to thank you for that. I wanna thank you for joining us. I want to thank you, Ginny for doing such a lovely job, co-hosting. I want to thank our listeners and if you've loved this episode like we have, please share this with your friends, colleagues, family. And we look forward to seeing you next time on our next episode of Team Anywhere.