

# TCM - EP# 112 - Kimberly Janson: Scouting Future Organizational Leaders Using the Four Predictors of Leadership Potential

**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 to Team Anywhere.

Are you promoting your high performers and then finding out that they aren't great leaders? How do you determine who has leadership potential? On today's podcast, Dr. Kimberly Janson, co-author of *Determining Leadership Potential: Powerful Insights to Winning at the Talent Game* shares what prevents us from recognizing our best potential leaders, and then tells us exactly what to look for. Kim is brilliant, has a ton of research to back up her expertise and provides invaluable insights as we groom our talent to Team Anywhere.

Hello and welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere. I'm your co-host, Mitch Simon on the West Coast and on the East Coast, our amazing co-host, Dr. Virginia Bianco-Mathis.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Ginny, how you doing today? I am good and excited.

Yes. Okay, so now let's get to the podcast. Today on the podcast, we have Dr. Kimberly Janson, CEO of Janson Associates, a talent and organizational development company. Dr. Janson was named a top 10 thought leader, Top 10 executive coach in 2021 and top 10 inspirational leader in 2022. Dr. Janson is the author of *Demystifying Talent Management*, the winner of the Axiom Book Award, and with Dr. Melody Rawlings, Kim just launched her new book,

*Determining Leadership Potential: Powerful Insights to Winning At the Talent Game.* Kim, welcome to our show. How are you?

**Kimberly Janson:** I'm terrific and delighted to be here. Thanks for having me.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Kimberly. I think they're gonna run out of these great awards to give you.

**Kimberly Janson:** That just means I need to work harder to keep winning different affirmations.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** All right. That is so gratifying for you.

**Mitch Simon:** Before we get into the book, which we're definitely gonna get into 'cause I know the book just came out really excited about, what is the one thing that surprised you the most over the last two years?

**Kimberly Janson:** I think the amount of challenges people point to as being so different or so significant for me have always been there. So, we talk about the challenge in managing remotely and having good expectations or feedback or how to create that connectivity. All of these things were present before we were just able to ignore them better because we could measure by FaceTime or do a drive by or something. And so, I am surprised by the degree that people are surprised, and I think if we just went back to basics and reinvested ourselves into things that work and just amped it up a little bit better, people would find themselves in a very different situation.

**Mitch Simon:** Oh, I love that. We were just able to ignore them better. I would guess, Kim, that you would say that we can't ignore them anymore.

**Kimberly Janson:** Well, you can, but it's gonna significantly impact your business success, your talent pool. *People have woken up to the fact that they are able to execute more choices. They can make different choices for themselves, and as a result, they're voting with their feet.* And that has consequences for people who are running companies, who are not willing to engage people in some of the fundamental needs that they have.

**Mitch Simon:** I'm just curious, if you were to rename the Great Resignation, what would you call the Great Resignation 'cause it sounds like it was coming?

**Kimberly Janson:** Yeah. I'd call it, the great lack of development. *The great lack of connectivity.*

**Mitch Simon:** The great lack of connectivity.

**Kimberly Janson:** Connectivity.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** I think that may I like the second.

**Kimberly Janson:** *People feel lost. They wanna be acknowledged.* They are having a unique experience because it's their only experience. And if we were better at meeting people where they are and understanding what they offer and being good at having conversations and developing them, doesn't have to be ascending an organization, it can be lateral. Then I think that people wouldn't feel compelled to leave.

They wouldn't feel compelled to make different choices to find some satisfaction. We're leaving a lot on the table. Low hanging fruit.

**Mitch Simon:** Okay. I just have to go there again, Kim'cause I love the way you see the world is we called them, before, soft skills. All these things that you're talking about. Not we, but people call them. Those people call them soft skills. It sounds like these soft skills should be renamed. What would you call soft skills?

**Kimberly Janson:** The hard stuff.

**Mitch Simon:** The hard stuff? Yes.

**Kimberly Janson:** Because if they were soft and easy then more people would do it with more aplomb and more vigor, etcetera.

They are not leaned upon because people don't feel comfortable in them. They don't feel like they have the competence. Even good feedback. They don't feel competent to give good feedback. They're awkward.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yeah.

**Kimberly Janson:** That's so upside down. But it's like anything else. If you want a good golf game, work on your swing. *It's not hard to give good feedback. You just need to have good technique and practice. You gotta grind, you gotta put in the reps in.* You wanna be a good basketball free thrower. Spend a thousand shots at the line every week and get competent at it. And so, I think if we put the same level of rigor, people could develop these skills, but the

soft stuff is the hard stuff because we don't set them up in the same way we do for accounting skills or marketing skills or things of that nature.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Right. And I'm so excited about reading your book and building that infrastructure to practice those things that make us uncomfortable.

**Kimberly Janson:** Right—

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** seems to be what is missing. Be more empathetic, please. Use all this emotional intelligence stuff, please. And, conceptually leaders are going, yeah, yeah, I get it. How do I go to the ball field and practice that?

**Mitch Simon:** Let's get in there then. So it seems, you know, with this magnanimous introduction that your book, now I have a huge expectations for the book. So, the book again is called *Determining Leadership Potential: Powerful Insights to Winning at the Talent Game*. We've already just kind of presented this new window on how to look at great leaders and great managers. Why is this book so important right now?

**Kimberly Janson:** There's several reasons. *One is we are absolutely in a leadership crisis*. As you just mentioned, the Great Resignation has resulted in droves of people leaving the workforce. Millions of women have left the workforce. The baby boomers are turning 65 at a rate of 10,000 a day, so the pool is shrinking.

We also have been distracted the last couple of years, so while this problem has been compounding for quite a while, we have been distracted by other things, and frankly, we've spent two years or three years telling people, be afraid, be conservative.

Worry about your health, your family, your job, your finances. We haven't been pushing them to develop. So, the shrinking pool now has been at best frozen and at worst, taken a step back because of these things. I think if you add in a couple of additional reasons such as the world is more complicated, the world is complex and there's so many external factors influencing your business success today that you need a higher level of sophistication to be able to manage it well, that's why it's important. Leadership has always been important. We've had great examples through history and time, et cetera, but *I think this is an inflection point for us that says we need to up our game and we need to start by choosing people at the onset to be better leaders*.

**Mitch Simon:** So tell me more about that. We need to be better at choosing our leaders, which is really, I think, what struck us, about the uniqueness of this book. Can you give us some insights into how to choose those good leaders and why people struggle to pick the right people to be future leaders?

**Kimberly Janson:** Well, I think there's a number of reasons why that's happening. **The first**, it harkens back to what we mentioned a little bit ago, *which is we don't put the same level of focus in developing competence in how to understand these things as we do functional skills.*

**The second** is I think *it scares people a little bit.* I think there's a little psychology to it. There's a little behavioralism to it that we need to understand better, and we haven't trained people and that feels a little crunchy, so they move away from it or leave it to others.

I think **the third** is *when people think about determining leadership potential, they think about either what made them successful or they used their own framework or lens.*

But I've done three research studies and I can talk about those more if you'd like in a bit. But those told us people aren't using a similar framework in the same company. And the amount of criteria they are using varies greatly so we have a root cause problem where we don't look at the same lens. And if you're trying to build a pipeline, how can you build on those skills as people go up in an organization, if at every level and every leader, we're looking for something else. So, it's a mess at the front end.

And then at the back end, we try to solve it by throwing a lot of money at it with leadership development work. I think the recent estimate I read was last year we spent 366 Billion \$ on leadership development work. *Leadership development works if you have the right core components in the person.* It's just like an athlete. You can throw a ton of money at a great athlete and you're gonna get a high return on their performance. But if it's someone who has two left feet and can't find their way out of a paper bag to perform, that money is not gonna make a difference.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Thank you. It goes back to, is leadership innate or learned?

**Kimberly Janson:** It's both.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** I know.

**Mitch Simon:** Tell us about that more. Because I'm looking at this number 366 billion, that's a lot of billions. The people need to have the proper core competencies that you said, What are we getting wrong and how do we get this right?

**Kimberly Janson:** Yeah. So, let's start with how to get it right. The four predictors of leadership potential based on thought leadership and the work that I've done in my research studies is *intelligence, personality, learning agility, and motivation.*

1.) *So, as things become more complex, we need to have the mental capacity, cognitive elasticity to deal with complexity, and things only become more complex as you go up in an organization and **intelligence is fixed.** We have what we have when we're born. You can add knowledge, but you cannot increase someone's IQ.*

2.) The **second component** is *personality* and like intelligence, it's fixed. There's centuries of research that support that. Some people will argue the point, it's a very small majority. If you are viscerally committed to details and you revel in them and you need them, that's almost impossible to change. But my point on personality is that, a lot of personality types can be good leaders. Watch out for the personality derailleurs. *Severe negativity, incredible self-absorption. Extreme introversion.* Introverts are good leaders all day long. Extreme introverts, they won't be able to be what other people need for now. We kid ourselves most commonly, in my opinion, on the personality piece.

3.) The **third one** is *learning agility.* My goodness, how do you survive in this world if you don't have an insatiable need to recreate yourself? To pivot? To react to the market, to assimilate information quickly because we have so much information coming at us. So, learning agility is a non-starter.

4.) And then *motivation, you gotta hire people with a big engine because as a leader we need to manufacture energy. Sometimes we need to have capacity to bring people together.* Learning agility and motivation isn't fixed, but it's only controlled by that person. I can't tell you how many leaders I've worked with who said, oh, that guy's so good, but if I could only get him to take initiative.

Guess what? You're not. My other business is a horse farm. That whole bringing the horse to water and making him drink.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yeah—

**Kimberly Janson:** it's so true. That's the same for learning agility and motivation. Those are the things we should be looking for.

**Mitch Simon:** So, first this is really great and it's not complicated. Many leadership models are complicated. You're basically saying mental capacity, personality pretty much fixed. And then learning agility and motivation not fixed kind of interesting. I'm kinda puzzled with, you know, is leadership born or is it developed? There's many things that you show here. As you know, if you don't have mental capacity to have personality, if you're not interested you're never gonna be a leader.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** How are we getting it wrong?

**Mitch Simon:** How are we getting it wrong? Why do we mess up so much?

**Kimberly Janson:** Well, let's start with human nature. 1.) *We are wired for biases*. If you were to independently analyze every piece of data that came across your desk every day, we wouldn't be able to operate. So, our brain has been created to have sorting mechanisms to make us go faster. Unfortunately, that also applies when we don't want it. *And so, we have preferences and we gravitate towards what we know*. So, for example, if someone comes from the same university as I do, I know that it's easy to lean towards that.

Those are *implicit biases*. We also have *explicit biases* where people have a lot of crazy ideas about things, and they're generally because they haven't taken the time to look at those things. *So, one of the biggest impediments is ourselves*. There was some great work I did early on at Bank of Boston as I started to get into diversity work, and it was called the *Assumption Model*. And the way I talk about that is I say, *think about the old coffee filters, those paper filters we put in and we put the coffee in. And when you put water in, you get coffee out. If you were to lace that filter with chocolate or raspberry, you would influence the outcome*. The chocolate raspberry those are all the things in our filters.

I'm the youngest of 10 kids. That skews how I look at the world.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yeah, I think that really does.

**Kimberly Janson:** I'm married to a police officer. That's where I look at the world. I have two children where we run a high end show jumper business. We jump really big horses over really big fences.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Whoa

**Kimberly Janson:** There's neither good nor bad about that but that influences the coffee, i.e. The data.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yeah.

**Kimberly Janson:** And so, we're all doing that, and we're doing it at an unconscious level, *so bias is a big impediment.*

The 2.) **Second is** that *we're using so many different criteria to make those decisions.*

The 3.) **Third is** *there's no accountability for it.* Coaches don't coach the coaches on how to do this well. And so, not only are we not making it a craft like an electrician or plumber, we are not holding people accountable. Those are top three reasons.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Those are excellent. And also if, a comment here is too many criteria or as you pointed out, the process is broken on the front end even if we have a set of criteria, as you said, we have different definitions of what that looks like behaviorally.

**Kimberly Janson:** That's right.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** And speaking in behavior terms is where I feel we are not helping organizations. Yes. You can take a behavior and put it in some concrete terms if you take the time to do that.

**Kimberly Janson:** That's right. And people move fast. They think they rely on their HR partners a lot of times for this. I'm hard on HR. I know what great HR looks like. Most of it isn't great HR. We've got posers who are using templates to mask deep competence in this area. So, you have someone relying on someone else who's not the true expert we need.

But the CEOs who get the joke on talent are behaviorists. They do look to line those things up. To your point about the variation, I did three research studies and the intent was to see what criteria people were using. But that framework, by the way, is predicated on work that Allan Church and Rob Seltzer did in the Leadership Blueprint. And Allan is the head of talent at PepsiCo.

Unbelievable. Great guy. But to your point, it's intuitive, it's simple, it's obvious. So, I said, What are these people using? And my first study was to look at a number of companies in one industry, and I interviewed leaders at four different

levels in the organization. And I then compared the results within each organization and then to each other.

The CEOs were more similar in their answer from company to company than they were with their own people. *So, the impact is that people don't know the framework. They're not agreeing on technology to your point, Ginny, they are not consistent in the criteria. And that leads to variation. And variation is a bad thing.*

**Mitch Simon:** Let's go. Help us understand, I know I'm in San Diego, so for the most part I'm working with smaller company whose HR departments are small. How would you help those of us who are either team leaders or working with small companies, how would we actually go ahead and find our best leadership potential? What should we do?

**Kimberly Janson:** Yeah. I'm so glad you made that distinction, because it's easy to think about this as big company things. It's not, and it becomes actually even more important for small and mid-size companies or teams. So if you're a team leader, I would suggest the following.

The *first is to do a deep dive to understand this topic*, have a clear framework for how you're looking at this. And don't look for things like decision making. Because if you have the rest, I can teach you decision making. 1.) *So, **look for things that are predictive of potential** because if we grab people early in their career, they're not going to be demonstrating leadership skills.*

I want you to say that again? Say that again.

Yeah. If we're looking at folks who we can make *big bets on earlier in their career, they will not be demonstrating the expected leadership skills we need.* But those are teachable if you have the right core components. Intelligence, personality, learning, agility, motivation.

So get deep on it, 2.) ***Have a clear set of criteria**, get great at using assessments.* There's so many assessments out there that can compliment your perspective, but make sure you also have a multi-rater perspective.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Exactly.

**Kimberly Janson:** Because you're only one lens.

3.) *So, understand people's experience and perception of this person, 4.) And then practice having hard conversations, because a lot of times people move away from doing the right thing because it's a difficult conversation. Make your bets and then develop the heck out of 'em. That's where you spend your money.*

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yep.

**Mitch Simon:** I'm interested, you did not mention emotional intelligence, mental capacity, personality, learning agility and motivation. I think many of us on the call would say, well, where's, where's EQ?

**Kimberly Janson:** It's such a great question because it's so important. Sometimes people will put EQ in with intelligence, but that's not where it belongs. It's not a measure of cognitive effectiveness and capacity. It's a measure of interpersonal capacity, which is personality. And so, we're folks, and, and just so we're on the same page.

***EQ, emotional intelligence is comprised of four things. Self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and trust.** Those are the components combined to create a highly engaging, relationship or connection. People are hired for IQ and fired because they don't have EQ. It's the what and the how of performance that's important. The what is often the intelligence piece, the how is often feuded by, by the emotional intelligence piece. I just came across a really good research piece that looked at CEOs and how they're turning over every three years. And the reason why they're turning over is lack of EQ.*

So, the differentiator is that EQ can be learned. So think about it, *self-awareness*. You may not have an easy or quick access to self-awareness, but you can do things and surround your self with people who can give you input on that, right? So, that's developable. *Self-regulation*. Extreme emotional volatility is a derailer, right? But learning how to channel your emotions, pulling yourself out of things.

Many of my CEOs, I say, do the world a favor and go running in the morning. We can do different things to help with that. *Trust*. There are very specific ways we can develop trust and empathy is the ability to emerge yourself in other people's experience. I consider myself an empath. I know it before I know it.

We call it black magic in my house. But if you don't have that access to those intuitive connections, then you can certainly ask people, *you can develop empathy by asking questions and then understanding things from their*

*perspective*. So, not only is emotional intelligence critical, I bucket it under personality, but it's also developable.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** I love that. I have never heard that explained so clearly, and I know that I'm gonna probably see some of the older research, even from the Center of Creative Leadership in your book, where they followed groups of like 50, 60, quote unquote high potentials for 20 years. And yes, they all got to a certain level.

But those, that went even further. It was because of the emotional intelligence piece which more recent research is also playing out. That's fabulous.

**Kimberly Janson:** Thank you for that, Ginny.

**Mitch Simon:** And then Kim, the last piece was under personality. So the last one, it was self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and trust.

**Kimberly Janson:** Yes.

**Mitch Simon:** And I'm asking is, can trust be trained or learned as well?

**Kimberly Janson:** You can be trained on ways in which you can create trust. So what is trust? *Trust is I am going to behave in a way that you can rely on me.* That I'm not gonna put you at risk, that I'm gonna show respect.

So, how do you do that? Well, consistent delivery of performance is one. Having a conversation with you before you go talk to others is another. You can learn different ways in which you build that connectivity that you then become someone who's reliable, dependable, you're not gonna create issues and blindside people. Those are the ways in which trust is eroded. If you are not someone who trusts naturally, and you need a pattern to be able to say, Okay, I'm willing to take a risk on that. You can articulate that and we can teach people on how to articulate what their needs are.

**Mitch Simon:** Great. If I were determining who I want to promote into leadership, are there any assessments that you either have created or you suggest that companies use?

**Kimberly Janson:** I think that if you use a combination of assessments, you get the best picture. So, first a some type of multi-rater. I like a *qualitative 360*, so I get to the true things that are hard for people to talk about, but are present in holding people back. They have often a stream of consciousness experience in a

qualitative conversation that is hard to manufacture when they're sitting down and typing a response because they become hyper aware of what they're typing.

So I think that multi-rater, *The Hogan Executive Assessment*, the world's most common executive assessment, more than 10 million people have taken it. I think it gives you a great understanding of where you're lining up, because anything too far is an impediment. Too much of a good thing is a bad thing. The Hogan helps us understand based on our choices, where we line up on a continuum, but then it also helps us understand how we compare to the norm and that's powerful.

I'd like a personality assessment. An easy one is right out of Dave Mitchell's book, *The Power of Understanding People*, it's very accurate.

It's done in five minutes. It's free as part of the book. My next one to go to is **DISC**. That's one that can be used well with teams. *Myers-Briggs* is often used. You need a little bit of a PhD to interpret deep on the personality, there's a great, learning agility assessment available for intelligence.

I love the *Wonderlic*. I'm also a crazy football person, so the fact that they use it with quarterbacks goes a long way with me as well. So, I like the combination of data, but here's my caution. *Behavior trumps data*. So behavior trumps assessment. Assessment should be the indicators for you to look further into.

**Mitch Simon:** And you mentioned on the multi-rater qualitative 360. I'm assuming we would get this from the book, is be careful what you ask. So, if I'm asking for all of those things, which basically I'm asking, you know, has this person shown leadership attributes and I'm not looking for leadership attributes, I'm looking for leadership potential, then I might find the wrong people, right? I'm gonna have, positive and negative mistakes here.

**Kimberly Janson:** You should put that on a bumper sticker. It's just so brilliant. It's exactly right. Yes.

**Mitch Simon:** Yeah. I'm gonna miss, my core future leaders. Cause I do think about the companies I'm working with, and we really are, we're working with like 25, 24, 23, 24 year olds.

They haven't had that time, but I'm always asked by the CEO, what do you think? Does this person have leadership potential? And, now going forward, I'm gonna be asking myself different questions.

**Kimberly Janson:** And I think in that scenario, the CEO will rely on performance

**Mitch Simon:** Yes.

**Kimberly Janson:** To give you an answer. And *performance is not a predictor of potential unless it's the same exact job.*

**Mitch Simon:** Yeah.

**Kimberly Janson:** That's where we get trapped as well. Performance should be the ticket for you to have entry into the conversation to be considered to do something else because we need people who are doing their job in a very robust way.

But it's only the ticket in the door. It's not the lens by which we should evaluate them for future leadership potential.

I think every single second of this podcast is gold. I don't want it end, but we must. Where can we find you and Dr. Melody Rawlings? Where can we find this book? How can we hire you?

Thank you so much. So you can find me in a number of places *jansonassociates.com* is my company website. Our number is 866 W-E U-N-L-E-A-S-H.

**Mitch Simon:** Nice

**Kimberly Janson:** because that's what we are about. I also can be found at my email, *drjanson@determiningleadershippotential.com* or *kim@jansonassociates.com*. You'll find me on Instagram, Janson Associates, LinkedIn, both with me and the company. Melody and I also created a website that we want to go in tandem with this book, we had a word count that we railed against. And so, to combat that, we have provided a tremendous amount of free resources. Case studies for you to use.

List of assessments to give you some background on different assessments, interview questions, et cetera. So, you can find us on that website. It's *determiningleadershippotential.com*. You can find Dr. Rawlings on LinkedIn as well and then, *drrawlings@determiningleadershippotential.com*. You'll also find us out with a relaunch of my first book because there was a need to come at this

moment and come back to some of the fundamentals. So, within the next two weeks, *Demystifying Talent Management* will be out with a second edition.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Great. My God. What a busy lady.

**Kimberly Janson:** Never busy enough.

**Ginny Bianco-Mathis:** Yeah, it's been wonderful. And I really wanna thank you—you hit all sides the academic, the practical, the tools to use, you know, the concepts behind it. Thank you. You're the whole deal.

**Kimberly Janson:** It's really kind. I am really frustrated for people.

**Mitch Simon:** Yeah.

**Kimberly Janson:** We have to be better. Yeah. We have to make this world better and we can do it by picking better people. And so, I'm dedicating my life to doing just that. But thank you so much for having me and allowing me to share this passion and have this great conversation. I'm really indebted to both of you, and you made it a blast as well.

**Mitch Simon:** Great. It's always great to find someone who's just brilliant and I just, you know, walking away my thoughts and I'm hoping you know, the listener's thoughts is, you know, there are many companies I work with where they're incredible at finding the right people to bring to the company.

and the work now is figuring out in growing the company, which of those people did I bring in are great or could be great at leadership, and which should we just kind of don't promote those people. Let those people do what they do and kind of keep that and reward those people as well, in the conversation.

So, thank you so much Kim for your time, your intelligence, and what you're contributing to the world and your great care. Thank you Ginny for again, another incredible conversation. If you've loved this episode, which we have, please share this with your friends, your family, and your colleagues. And until next time, we'll see you, again on Team Anywhere.