

TCM 128 - Gustavo Razzetti: Tools for Fearless Remote Workspaces

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.

What's the key for building great remote teams? Create a virtual space that drives fear out of the organization. Gustavo Razzetti has written the book we've all been waiting for, it's called *Remote Not Distant*. A book filled with great tools to build a fearless culture so that your team feels free to say the uncomfortable, to share the unsaid, and to bring up ideas that could get you fired.

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere. I'm your co-host, Mitch Simon on the West coast where it's a blustery day. And on the East Coast we have our amazing co-host, Dr. Virginia Bianco-Mathis. How are you doing today, Ginny?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Oh, I am good. And it's not too much better here on the East Coast either, so.

Mitch Simon: All right, well then let's go to the Midwest.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah, let's,

let's go to the Midwest because today on the podcast. We have someone from the Midwest. We're delighted to have Gustavo Razzetti, author of get this 'cause this is a great name for a book, especially for Team Anywhere his book is called *Remote Not Distant*.

Mitch Simon: It's just a great fit for our show. Remote not Distant. Gustavo created Fearless Culture, a workplace culture consulting firm to help develop purpose driven organizations through facilitated service offerings such as culture design workshops, consultancy, and masterclasses. Gustavo and his team will help you map, assess, and evolve your workplace culture.

So, Gustavo, how are you today?

Gustavo Razzetti: I'm doing great and in order to keep myself consistent, it's raining here in Chicago as well, so we're experiencing the same weather.

Mitch Simon: Yeah. Great to have you on the show. Really excited to have you on the show, 'cause as we're saying in the pre-show, Ginny and I really started this podcast because we wanted to create, help create remote but not distant organizations and teams and leaders, yada, yada, yada.

So, we also like to open the podcast, which is Gustava. Tell us what's been one of your greatest surprises over the last two years, as so many companies have transformed to being virtual or hybrid?

Gustavo Razzetti: I would say, I don't know if it's a surprise or a surprise that became more evident. It's the *lack of trust that exists in the work*. So, this a topic that very few people want to address, but leaders don't trust their team members. They didn't trust them before, but it was a little bit of hidden and I became even more evident. So, we're seeing there's a lot of people being pushed to what's called *virtual presentism*. So, employees are working at least one hour more per day because they feel the pressure that they need to show, hey, I'm busy, I'm working.

If not, their managers are gonna think that they're not doing work. So that's for me the most important piece and one of the biggest challenges that we're facing during this dichotomy between, hey, let's go back to the office. Let's continue working remotely or a mix of both. *Its trust is the biggest component* is obstacle to have a good conversation, not to define which is the right way to go, but it's the main obstacle to have an open conversation.

And that's why many leaders are making decisions on their roles without actually consulting their team members.

Mitch Simon: So, you're mentioning that leaders don't trust their team members. What are you saying about team members trusting their leaders in this new world?

Gustavo Razzetti: That's a great point. *I think that trust is a two-way street and someone needs to basically take the first step. And if you're a leader, you need to model the behavior want to happen in your team.* So if your leader doesn't trust the team member, it's like if your parents don't trust their kids, how would you expect kids to trust their parents?

And I think that companies that are succeeding not only in this new reality, but have been succeeding for long, *is those who operate with this principle that assume positive intent.* So, if I send an email and someone doesn't reply to it. If I haven't heard from my team members, if someone shows late to a meeting, don't assume that they don't care.

Maybe they have some issue, maybe they have some problems. So, always assume positive intent, and also when there's something that doesn't go as you plan, ask a question before you shoot.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right.

Mitch Simon: So, tell us, Gustavo, I love the name of your company, Fearless Culture. So, can you give us a little bit of background and how you came to start Fearless culture and also where'd you come up with the name? Because I love the name. I just love it. I'm gonna steal it from you.

Gustavo Razzetti: Sure. I work for over two decades kids in the marketing and the innovation world. And as a consultant, I was helping mostly large global companies to become more creative, to come up with new solutions, new products, et cetera. And in the end, I realized that the issues, not that they need us to come with the ideas, companies have much more ideas than they actually need, but most of them never see the light of day.

So, there's a fear in place, fear of making mistakes, fear of the perfectionism that if we don't get everything right, we're going to fail. Fear of a red tape and politics and pissing people off. Because every time you come up with a new idea, with a new innovation, someone that's protecting the way things used to be. I gonna resist that change.

So at some point I realized, hey, not only that was an insight, but also my client started to ask me, Hey, can you help me with the client? Can you help with the culture? Can you help me with my boss? My team is resisting this. So, I realized there was a huge opportu to basically build what we call a fearless culture.

Fearless doesn't mean the absence of fear, because fear is a powerful emotion. We need it, it's like a traffic light. It indicates, hey, you can continue going or should stop and watch whatever's coming either way. To deal with that fear let's put the elephant in the room on the table, let's address the fears, what are we afraid of? What's the worst thing that can happen? And how we can manage those fears to make sure that they don't get in the way of bringing new ideas to the world.

Mitch Simon: What are some of the things that you've experienced in your consulting work that people are afraid of, but they're afraid to put it on the table?

Gustavo Razzetti: We talk about the relationship with your managers. We have leaders that come to us because they want to improve their culture, and their point is, oh, my employees are lazy. They're not motivated. They don't want to take risks.

But then when we talk to the team members, they say, no, no, the leader is the problem. My rule of thumb is always like neither one or the other, right or wrong. So, usually when there's an issue, I use this with my wife as well. *The 50-50 principle. Every time we have a problem and there are two parties, each party needs to own 50% of the conversation, not 51 of it.*

So that puts us in equal parts. So my role is try to understand what things can leaders improve and what are the things that team members can improve? Usually I found that many times people are afraid of, for example, getting fired or being punished, but actually there's no clear evidence that then has happened in the past.

So, it's more of a myth that we carry from one company to another. That's something that's really important for leaders to address the fear that existing company probably is not because you created it, but because people carried it over from previous jobs that they have bad experiences, so they don't want to get burned as well. *A fear of failure. I think it's, for me, one of the most paralyzing emotions in the workplace.* On one hand there's this huge part of, we need to get it right, and this is because people see, for example, Apple's, or Spotify or, Tesla's innovation and they see the outcome. They see what basically shows up in the real world, but they never get to discuss all the process and everything that happened in order to get there.

I always mentioned that the person who almost got the iPhone killed even before it was a concept, an MVP, was Steve Jobs. He hated phones. He was the

one who resisted it. This is the worst. I know exactly the language now, but he said, this is dumbest idea I ever heard of Steve Jobs and now it's the number one, the cash cow of that company.

So, we're afraid of what we don't know, we're afraid because in the case of Steve Jobs, he was assuming that because phone companies suck, that Apple becoming a phone company or a phone creator would suck as well, rather than understand his team, they actually push back and say, Hey. We can do it the Apple way; we can do it better. And this is where we are.

Mitch Simon: I never knew that 'cause I worked for one of those phone companies that sucked. Ginny never knew. I just, I did, I worked for seven years and one, how many that sucked.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

Mitch Simon: All right.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I have a question for you. So here I am. I'm in this organization and true or false? You know, I have this fear, that, well, let's say it's sort of true. People have brought up ideas and the leader, well, no, you know, I don't like that. Blah, blah, blah. And so, people shut down. What does it take for the leader to make that kind of idea, hey, bring it up, we're approachable. Put the ideas on the table. I have my answer. I wanna hear what you advise leaders to do.

Gustavo Razzetti: Absolutely. I think it's a two-pronged approach. On one hand, you need to work on the leader, but also people couldn't use the leader as an excuse to not push him back. I always say to people like, for example, one prompt that we use when we're facilitating and brainstorm is bring up ideas that could get you fired.

So, we already explicitly are enforcing people to think, okay, if you're not willing to take risks in your career, if you're not willing to die on the hill, metaphorically speaking for your ideas. Then how you like your leader to be convinced? So many people, when they get the first pushback, or maybe questions, maybe ignorance or avoidance, they immediately say, oh, my leader doesn't want to hear.

I remember, and I don't want to use myself an example, but I had a boss that was actually very good at avoiding conversations. So, everyone, everything went into the back burner and he was avoiding making decisions, and I was

looking for a gimme, a yes or a no. Can I proceed with this new business model? Yes, or no?

And I remember that I made so many presentations from using video. They post it to full power. I went from bringing people from my team, do it on my own. Like I keep pushing in all possible angle until at some point my team was telling me, you're wasting your time. But my boss, at some point, you know what, I'm done with you.

What do you want to do? Whatever. Stop coming up. So, you want, I'm not saying that's always the case. No. But, many times people don't fight for the ideas as much as they should. And that's a way to show the other person that you're convinced where at least to, hey, maybe you're missing something. And I think that's really important.

So, we shouldn't just blame the manager because the manager doesn't want to pay attention. But to your point, of course, we need to work on leaders as well. We need to train them to, hey, the role of the leader is not to lead with answers. You shouldn't be able to come up with a solution. You should be the one who ask the right questions, right?

That what you're hiring bright people, let them do your job. It's not about, telling them what to do. Of course, push back. Make sure that not only they are excited about the idea that they're convinced, but also your role as a leader is to filtered, not to proof that idea, to make sure it's really good.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: In some organizations, when I confront the leader on that. And the leader will say, well, I expect the person to come back and push back. And I say to them, well, he said, I'm paying them tons of money, you know, to fulfill this job. And I said, have you ever listened to yourself?

You know, have you ever thought of the other person, what it's like when you say, I don't like that get out of here. You shut them down. And so how are you going to invite them so I find myself engaging both leaders and the teams into, well, we have a great idea, even not a great idea. Whatever it is, what are the four, five things that needs to have for us to go?

You go through those four or five things because we now are gonna listen. We've agreed these are the four or five things that gets it on the table. So there is at least a process that we've agreed to for pushing back. It's almost like we now all have permission and here's the roadmap. Have you seen that kind of thing work?

Gustavo Razzetti: No, absolutely. I think that what you're bringing up is the idea that we need, that's why we call culture. We need to qualify the culture. So when it comes, for example, to discussing ideas how we want to do it, I remember that I tend to come a little bit harsh because I'm unfiltered. I just think like I talk to think I'm centered for certain people.

To your point, it was intimidating. So, one moment, someone tell me hey, you are sounding really harsh and say, well, that wasn't my intention. I was just providing feedback. And also, my feedback. It's not the truth, it's simply my perspective as a leader. I see a different angle, but I'm not right or wrong.

I'm just saying. At some point in building on what you just said, Ginny, I told him, Hey look, moving forward, don't take that as intimidation. Don't take that as an no, but also, if you want me to wire on something, if you want me to support your idea, you need to convince me.

So don't just share the idea and wait for me to say yes or no. Like, build your case, put the energy. So that changed the conversation a lot. But also, I started like, adjusting my own behavior, my language, my tone to make sure it wasn't as intimidating. And so you have to work on both ends.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Exactly. Yeah. Perfect.

Mitch Simon: 'Cause everyone comes in with their stories, you were sharing Gustavo. The company I was at before, the company I was at before that or before that, you know, a culture full of fear. So, what are some of the steps that you're doing to work, especially with the team members and especially in this virtual world where you know. My background is we never said anything at work. We never challenged anybody. I'm at my little house here in Wyoming or Iowa. And how do you make it safe for me to share my opinion when that's just something I've never done, and we're not getting together as a team too often. So how do you make those breakthroughs?

Gustavo Razzetti: Yeah. One thing that's interesting is that working in a hybrid or remote work, it feels safer for most people. So, for example, if your boss, or a colleague says something, or there's some kind of microaggression in the office first, if people, let's say they get upset, they cry, whatever the emotional reaction is, they get on the spot in front of everyone, they don't have like a safe heaven.

In your house. You turn off the zoom call once the meeting is done, but then people can go to your kitchen, they can do something else and they recover that sense of normalcy. That's just one point. But then when it comes to hybrid

meetings, we are more, attentive to cues to how we facilitate, for example, when we're managing brainstormings.

We do what we call like silent brainstorming. *The first minutes this is the question, we allow people to write their ideas on a mural board or some other tools on their own, so that allows people who are more introverted. Or maybe less confident to do their work without the intimidation of our staff.*

Another tool that we use a lot is *turn taking*. So, make sure that you ask each of the person to share their questions or the ideas and the people that are the most vocal or the most senior people that each are intimidating. We have them speak last, so they have to listen. They don't have to interrupt. We also manage interruption as well.

There are many tools that we use and I think that building that, what we call psychological safety, you know, that feeling that the team is safe for people to participate, to speak up has three levels.

Level one, we need to make sure that people feel safe, that they're welcome, that they belong to a team as human beings. So, we need to work on the personal relationship a lot to make sure that we know each other. We shouldn't be friends; we don't need to be friends. We can, but that's not a mandatory. But the more we know our colleagues at a personal level, the better we're gonna perform as a team. There's plenty of research that validates that.

Only when we get that personal connection, we can move into, okay, how can we facilitate courageous conversations, which are not easy. We do, we use a tool that's called the *Stinky Fish*, and basically the things that we don't address are not gonna disappear. They're only gonna get worse. They're gonna start to smell, they're gonna rot, and at some point they're gonna contaminate everything that's in the fridge, not just the fish.

So, we tell the people that you have two choices. Either you speak up or things are only gonna get worse. And you can blame it on the leader for so long, but in the end, you are complicit the moment you're not sharing with your colleagues that, so one tool that we used to facilitate that this comes from a book that's called *Liberating Structures*.

We facilitated like progressive conversations so people complete their stink fish on their own. Then we group them in teams of twos. You know that when you are only talking to a colleague, it sees here, you feel safer, you feel more

comfortable to share about what's going on. Then those two people elevate three topics, three stinky fish.

They want to move to the next round. So, we move, so we merge to teams of twos. Now we have a team of four. They keep the conversation that we merge so we start building those conversations at a smaller scale until then everyone in the room can share with the larger audience. So that helps a lot. It's really practical, simple, and people really love it.

Mitch Simon: Yeah, it does seem that with remote and with virtual, we need to just be better facilitators overall. As you know, as a leader, we have to be a facilitator to say, okay, we're gonna break out. We're gonna have these rituals or these tools where we'll start with two, then four, then six and eight.

We will, you know, take turns. What are some of the things that you're doing to build personal connection over virtual?

Gustavo Razzetti: First I wanna clarify that we have become more aware that we need facilitation, but we also need that facilitation enough in person environment. No, it's not that the virtual has make it because it was so chaotic at the beginning, we become more intentional about creating those experiences, we could bring those experiences to the physical workplace which actually sucks.

Because people feel interrupted ignoring meetings in the room. But, but to your question, there are many things that we do. There's one exercise that I can share the link if you want. That it's the 36 questions that turn strangers into friend. Yes. And really, really great questions that a writer published in the New York Times actually couple of years ago, and their questions they are not just who's your [inaudible]?

What's your favorite? So, they talk about. What's the one thing that you don't want to regret if you die tomorrow? So, they're very powerful. Kind of who is the person who you like to have for dinner and why? So, questions that really drive into understanding of the human being, beyond if you have kids, pets and that kind of stuff that it's nice to have, but it's more of a typical remote group conversation.

There's another tool that we have been using a lot and I developed like a framework, a canvas for that. It's what's we called the washing instructions. So we were taught that we should treat others the way we want to be treated, and that's incorrect because people are different. So, we should treat them like they want to be treated.

So, we should follow their washing instructions the same way your clothes comes with a label that say, Hey, don't do this, do that. So, we invite team members to capture their own washing instructions to share with your team members so everyone understand their weakness. Now, for example. I'm more of a night owl.

I can, I mean, if you wanna talk to me at midnight, that's okay, or I'm actually not, because that's when I do my writing. But early in the morning, I'd rather not have any meetings at all if possible because I'm not in full working mode and different stuff. And of course, this is not about entitlement.

It's not about saying, well, everyone has their own quirks, but also, we need to find common ground. So I need to understand each team member. But as we are gonna collaborate, we also need to find some agreements. So, it's not that everyone's gonna work at their own pace, their own way. We need to understand in the realities, but also, we need to agree on certain common rules so we can operate as a team.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Thanks for sharing those.

Mitch Simon: Tell us about the Culture Design Canvas which is on your website and how you show that with teams.

Gustavo Razzetti: Yeah. The Canvas is, I don't know if you're familiar with Alex Foster Welders, a business model canvas which is a Canvas that helps organizations define their business model, their innovation strategy.

So, I came up with an idea, six years ago which they need a tool to make conversations around culture more tangible. Every time we talk about culture, we say, well, culture is something fluffy, something abstract. We cannot define it. And that's not true. So, the Canvas is a tool that helps to qualify what's your actual culture?

What's the current culture? It helps you assess to see which elements of culture are working, which are not, and which are halfway there. And then only then you can jump into the design, which blocks we call them now because the Canvas has 10 blocks. For example, a feedback decision making team rituals, a purpose core values.

So you can capture what people experience today, not the official culture, but the culture that people really live on a daily basis. And then define what's not working and then work on designing a better future.

Mitch Simon: That's beautiful. Okay. And then I wanna just kind of close out here with your book. So can you tell us what was the impetus for writing a book on remote cultures? , and what are your readers, getting out of your book these days?

Gustavo Razzetti: Great question. It started like a quest for me to better understand. So, I was helping clients really like build a remote culture, but I felt, okay, I need to take it to a next level.

So, writing a book helped me clarify my own practice, my own experience, but also interview a lot of people and see who were doing it right, who were in conversations to learn from different people across the world and develop also like a framework. And I think that's what people are applying. Some people are using.

I always say there's no one size fits all and that's the beauty of the hybrid work. Each workplace, each company has to define their own approach. And that's something interesting for me. Some people write like the formula, but that's not the case. And some people, to your point, they're using the whole framework to rethink and redesign their hybrid workplace culture.

And some others are simply taking certain tools, like some of the ones that we mentioned, some tips or facilities and stuff, and they're experimenting with that. So, either at a strategic level or a more day-to-day level, they're experimenting, which is for me, the proposition of the book. So, I'm not here.

When I wrote it, I wasn't looking for the perfect solution. I was just giving people like a journey map for them to create their own path.

Mitch Simon: I love that. What are some of the things we should be thinking about that you're experiencing out there that we're not spending enough time on or we're not thinking about it all in the area of enhancing fearlessness in hybrid and virtual environments.

Gustavo Razzetti: For me, it's like, the conversation, especially in the media, it's all about Elon Musk canceling Twitter and bringing people back to the office. And then people say, well, if he does that because he's the richest part on Earth, I'm gonna do the same. And I think that we're missing the point, rather than talking about schedule, rather than talking about where people work from, we need to center a conversation on work, quality of work.

So in the end it's how can we help our teams do their best work and what are the right conditions? And then we come back and design if they're working in the office remotely. A combination that doesn't matter, but I think that we're getting the conversation wrong because we're jumping into the execution.

But we don't know exactly what we're trying to achieve. And that's, for me, the most important piece. There are many companies like Airbnb, Spotify, even Allstate, which is traditional. Hopefully they're not this insurance company from the Midwest and they're now global that they have adopted a work from anywhere policy.

And they're seeing not only that people are happy, which is one side of the story, and sometimes leader resist that. But they're seeing that their innovation, that their diversity, and many other people have skyrocketed Spotify used to have 25% of their leaders were women since they adopted this flexible, 40% of leadership positions are women.

That's gigantic. Basically, they have accelerated their diversity, which companies weren't able to repeat in the past. So I think those are the great news, but no one is talking about that. They're talking about people who say, we need to go back to the office or I'm gonna fire you.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right.

Mitch Simon: Yeah. It is. You know, it's ironic that we've been at this rodeo for almost three years, and people are going back to the binary conversation.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I know.

Mitch Simon: Are you in the office? Are you completely a hundred percent in the office like Twitter, where you're sleeping at your office or we don't even have an office.

Right? We're completely virtual. And it's just so interesting because it's, first of all, it's not the right question, it's not the right approach. and people have just, not everyone, but they just haven't picked up that what we really should be talking about is creating a canvas.

What is our culture about, right? Let's start all over. Let's just kind of see where we are and where we wanna be.

So where can we find you, Gustavo? Where can we find your book? Where can we find fearless culture? Your thoughts and ideas on the web.

Gustavo Razzetti: My book is Remote Not Distant, you can find it in many online retailers like Amazon, target bars and Nobles and so on and so forth. But there are also some brick-and-mortar retailers. If people want to reach out, we have over 600 articles with tools that are free for people to download and experiment.

They can go to our website, which is fearculture.design. So that's important and you're gonna find a lot of content there. And also if they want to reach out, there's a contact form and they can write if they're looking for training, advice, coaching, consulting, whatever, and see what happens.

Mitch Simon: Great. Alright, Gustavo, this has been so informative and very inspiring.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes.

Mitch Simon: And it sounds like you're a man who has all the answers at least, or seems to. So, thank you so much. For our listeners, I think these are great resources. I did see the culture design canvas on the website, which is [fearless culture.design](http://fearlessculture.design).

So, thank you so much, Gustavo. For coming onto the podcast. Thank you, Ginny so much for co-hosting. Thank you to our listeners. Please share this episode with your friends, your colleagues or family, and we look forward to seeing you next time on our next episode of Team Anywhere.