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# HOW TO LEAD PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT FOR YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE WITH LINDA WATT

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Hey there, welcome back to The Career Reset podcast. I'm your host, Mel Savage.

You are in for a treat today because we are talking about something that I am super passionate about. And that is people development. You might have guessed that I'm really passionate about that because that's really at the core of what I do. It's helping people take control of their careers, whether that be finding the right career for them, planning to be in the driver's seat of their career, or even learning the skills to develop their career, which is a little bit what we're talking about today.

A combination of forward planning, as well as taking control of your performance development. So I am super passionate about this, I could talk about this for hours. That's the first reason I think you're in for a treat because I have lots and lots of ideas on this.

The second piece is, that I'm not an expert, I am just someone with a lot of lived life experience. So I'm actually bringing in an expert today. It's Linda Watt. She is the Director of Training and Development at the University of Guelph, and I'm going to give you her whole bio in a second. What Linda and I talked about is how to lead performance development for you and for your people. Because while I normally really talk about you, and how you manage your career, a big part of you managing your career is getting good at growing your people. That is a leadership competency that everyone must have.

Today, we're looking at it from both sides for you. It's for yourself, and it's also growing your skills for your people. Lots of great information.

This podcast is part of a little five-week mini-series that I'm doing focused on managing development, both from your personal perspective, managing your development, and helping your people manage their development, because that, like I just said, is a leadership skill that everyone needs. Last week, we talked about how to effectively grow your people through feedback. How to really give effective feedback that works?


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Today, we're talking about performance development. And then coming up, I'll be talking about the three leadership competencies that everybody needs no matter what level you're at, hint, people development, one of those three things. I'll also be talking to Sharon Ramalho, who was and is a mentor of mine. She is formerly Senior Vice President, and Chief People Officer at McDonald's, Canada. I have worked with her for years. She has such an amazing history, such an amazing background, I'm not going to get into it. But she and I are going to talk about how to take control of your leadership style.

And then last but not least in this series, I want to talk about mentorship, what to use a mentor for, how to find a great mentor, and how to be a great mentee. I'm going to be talking about that as well. So much good stuff coming up on the podcast. Make sure that you sign up and subscribe for the podcast at thecareerreset.com/podcast so you don't miss a thing.

Today, we're talking about how to lead performance development for you and for your people. We're really lucky today because we have someone who is really a forward thinker in the people development space. Linda Watt is the Director of Learning and Development and Consulting Services at the University of Guelph. Her main purpose is to create the conditions for people to be at their best at work, and I love that she put that in her bio. Her main purpose is to create the conditions for people to be at their best. I love it.

And she has really upgraded the approach at the University of Guelph when she talks about it today. This is the kind of system that I would want to work in. The reason Linda can do this is because she is supremely educated. She has her Master's in Human Systems Intervention. I didn't even know that was a thing – Human Systems Intervention. She's a certified coach. She has advanced certification in conflict management and mediation, strength deployment, and leadership effectiveness. She's a trained facilitator.

Honestly, that's just some of what she's trained to do. You got to check out her bio, you got to go to her LinkedIn page. The woman knows her stuff. So I'm excited and we are all lucky for her to share how she has revamped the people management system at the university. She's not just all those amazing things I talked about.

And she has a little side hustle that she does as a humanist officiant of weddings and other life celebrations. A humanist officiant, love it. So if you are actually interested in Linda being an officiant for you, check her out because she is an amazing lady. Just to talk to her, I am definitely going to go out and have a glass of wine with her at some point. Now, I just want to get right to it because our discussion is about an hour. But it is chock a block full of great information.

Because it is an hour, I do want to give you a takeaway that you can use from this. As I said, we covered performance development systems in our conversation, we covered tips for the manager, and tips for the employee. The takeaway I have for you is focused on you as an employee and taking control of your performance development. So I'm calling it the five things you can do to make the most of performance development for you. This is not just a year-end tool, because performance development, as you'll learn from our conversation is not a year-end thing.

So these five things that you can do are going to be focused on things you can do throughout the year and you can get that download in the show notes at thecareerreset.com/12.


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Let's get started with this interview with Linda Watt, Director of Learning and Development and Consulting Services at the University of Guelph, talking about how to lead performance development for you and for your people.

Mel Savage: Linda, welcome. Welcome to the podcast today. I am so excited to have you here. Thank you for joining.

Linda Watt: Thank you for having me, Mel. I'm glad to be here.

Mel Savage: You and I don't know each other. We were introduced by a mutual friend, a colleague of yours, and a friend of mine. And I feel like when we had our pre-podcast call, I feel like connected to you. I feel like I want to be your girlfriend. You're such a fun person. You are so knowledgeable on this topic. I feel really privileged to have you here today.

Linda Watt: I really appreciate that. Thank you. You called me at a good time when I really, and as I told you, I had been home for a few days recovering from something and it was so lovely to engage with someone so curious, like you.

Mel Savage: Thank you for saying that. Today we are talking about, it's called so many different things, performance development, people development, review time, all that kind of stuff. All that fun stuff wrapped up into essentially, how to manage your growth within the organization that you work in or overall. So, Linda, you have a really unique background, private, public, and all these different kinds of education that you've had that brought you today. So talk a little bit about your perspective.

Linda Watt: My perspective on all of that, from my years gone by?

Mel Savage: Yes, perspective on when you came into this particular job. What was your perspective on performance development?

Linda Watt: So you had mentioned my education, I would say that one of the things that the master's that I did, something called Human Systems Intervention really helped me or invited me to start to look at things from a more macro perspective and understand that there's a lot of systemic things that go on in an organization that supports or may detract from employee success.

While it's wonderful to invite managers one-on-one or employees on their own to think about their own development and how they do it, it's also really critical to take a look at what are the practices, what are the processes that are being used, hopefully consistently across the university or an organization that was put in place to support the kind of conversations that help development that promote development. Just not once a year, but throughout the year. So that was something that I came in with that lens.

When I got to the university, when I first started there, I heard from the leaders that we really needed to take a look at how we were doing so-called performance management. And because it wasn't existing in some places and it wasn't consistent in other places.


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Mel Savage: I think you really touched on something that's so important. Because I talk a lot. All of my messaging is really geared towards the individual and how they can help drive their take control of their own career. But a lot of these individuals are managers as well. So as a manager, in terms of growing your career, being a great manager, and helping people develop their careers, knowing how to do that is a real gap in how we train our people.

Linda Watt: One of the things that I have found is really important to clarify. And we've started to make this a bit of a mantra for employees and managers that there are three levels of development, let's call it. So the first priority is investing in an employee's development that helps them do the job they're doing right now even better, or even look for opportunities for continuous improvement in the current job.

The second level of priority is to prepare them with new skills, knowledge, and thinking attitude for any new innovations that are coming down the pipe, or new technologies that are coming down the pipe that they need to feel comfortable with or to be able to utilize effectively to feel good about their success in their job. Then, the third priority is investing in them for career-oriented things that they themselves would like to move towards in the future. And I think it's important that managers and employees get aligned around that.

Those things don't have to be done sequentially. But I think they have to be done with an awareness that if you're not meeting expectations currently, then, between an employee and a manager, we have to figure out how to invest in you so that you are successful right now, even while you're looking towards your future.

Mel Savage: I think whether you work in a company, or you don't, those are three really great things. How to do your job even better? You don't have to wait for your manager to tell you how to do that. But it's important that your manager, if you're a manager, that you work with your team for that. Prepared for a new technology. So just always thinking forward about where your next step is, what your next goal is, whether it's career-oriented, life-oriented, or whatever. And then investing in your own development.

Don't wait for your company always to be the one to tell you, send you on a training course, although as a manager, you should be thinking about that. So there's a duality to it.

Linda Watt: I really liked how you situated that because what we are trying to share with all of our managers across the organization is because we're the person in authority or with power, it is your obligation to be opening up those conversations and to be having this dialogue. Wow, is it ever amazing when you have that employee who feels self-empowered, and actually has been enabled by the manager or the organizational system to actually feel that they have a say.

So that employee that shows up and says, *I'm so excited, I've done some thinking about this, and there are a few things going on,* it also takes away the pressure that the manager feels to share information or open up a discussion that they feel may put the employee at some level of disease, and we have managers who often feel that way because they don't want to hurt someone's feelings. They don't want to insult them. They want them to feel good, but they're always being told they have to have sometimes these tough conversations.

When the employee shows that with that awareness already, then a manager can just take a big breath and breathe a sigh of relief and then have a really good discussion and a two-way conversation.

Mel Savage: You just said something that I really want to dig into. It's a good segue into the conversations that you have with your employee or your manager. Because I would say, the review conversation, I want to call it


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review, the development conversation depending on where you work, is tough for both parties. It's not just the employee, it's also the manager feeling uncomfortable, sometimes having those *'tough conversations.'*

And even as we frame the conversation as tough, that alone makes us feel a certain way that there's a threat involved in all of this. Talk to me a little bit about how you want to change the types of the tone of the conversation and what you're doing at the university.

Linda Watt: We have undertaken this work and have been at it for some time, because, in a way, it's a change in culture. You had mentioned the review, the performance review conversation, or the development conversation. The unfortunate thing is, often it's just called the review conversation. The development conversation's left out of it, or it's thrown in there in one little bit, and so it becomes a concept of review. That is a threatening feeling for an employee who's going in to speak with someone who's in a position of authority and has some level of power over what happens to them.

A lot of times, we don't know what we're getting in for what's going to be said because conversations haven't been had with us throughout the year. And so I think the history has been you show up and on that day, you hear mostly all the bad things that you've done over the past year, and what you do to improve, but you don't hear how to go about improving, or what's the investment or the plan for you in development. We know now that a lot of work has been done, and research has been done in neuroscience.

In particular, I really enjoy the work of a man named David Rock who started the NeuroLeadership Institute. He talks about how these five domains in our brain create this opportunity for threat or reward. And particularly, one of those domains is status. And when you are an employee going into a performance review with your manager, you are in what's called a threat state. And when we're in a threat state, our brains are not firing on all cylinders. We feel overwhelmed, oftentimes, with anxiety, we can't think straight, we're not being very rational, we're being very emotional, and apprehensive. We're not in a good position to even be co-creating the next steps or situation.

Yet, a lot of times we're being asked, *'So what are you going to do now? What's next after we've just heard that our customer service skills aren't up to par and we could probably do more to be a better team player.'* These kinds of things and you're feeling overwhelmed and threatened. And then you're supposed to be part of the solution. What we're trying to do is reframe that whole process.

We've renamed our model the *Performance Success Framework*. It's about performance success, and everybody's involved in it. And it's conversations throughout the year. And the review conversation, we're now calling the *Performance Summary Conversation*, because it should just be a summary of the things you've talked about through the year.

Mel Savage: I love that. I love the idea that it's framing it as success and that it's a summary. Because again, that just changes the tone of the conversation. It takes it from a threat to almost a reward, or an ongoing commitment and ongoing responsibility of both parties to show up and have that conversation.

Before I go on and talk about how the managers actually have these conversations. What I want to just stop and say here is that even if you're in an organization that Linda doesn't run because she's doing a great job at the University of Guelph, and you don't have these ongoing conversations in your organization. Don't be afraid to instigate those conversations with your manager because they're going to find it easier. They might feel a little


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apprehensive at first, but as the conversation continues, they're going to feel thankful because it's going to be easier for them. What experience have you had with that, Linda?

Linda Watt: I think that's absolutely one of the things we're also trying to help our employees understand is that they want to take some ownership over inviting the conversations with their manager. One of the things that I found having listened to many managers talk about their experience with that, and employees talk about how scary that is to do is, from a manager's perspective, I think, for the most part, willing to hear it, there are two main things that have to be considered.

That is the approach the employee takes. So that's not one of aggressiveness, or *'Hey, you need to hear me or I'm really mad about this, you need to listen'* as opposed to *'I am having some challenges here, or I don't think we're on the same page with our priorities, can we sit down and talk about it?'* So it really has to be one of *can we really work on this together,* as opposed to any kind of accusatory, or judgmental tone.

The other thing is for an employee to do their thinking beforehand. Get some clarity. It may just take him five minutes to say, what is it that's going on for you you want to talk about? So just get clear? And what is it that you want? And what do you think? Sometimes how you feel is important. So I would also add that into the equation so that you can prepare yourself for the emotions that you might feel and how you'll manage them. And then what do you want?

So think, feel, and want, instead of showing up at a manager's office, and then spending 15 or 20 minutes telling stories, getting caught up in the story, and not getting clear. That would frustrate a manager and take up a kind of time that they would prefer they speak about the issue and how they're going to solve it.

Mel Savage: I love that. I want to come back to that. First of all, I think that, if you're clear with what your growth objectives are with your boss, and your boss knows them, too. Having an ongoing conversation becomes easier because it's you can even frame it around the things you're doing well, and the things that you can say, *'This is where I noticed, I could have some opportunity for improvement. This is where I think I got it right.'* It's more of a dialogue.

But if you're going to have a tough conversation, like something happened, and you need to talk about it, the think, feel, want is a fantastic framework for that, because it does help neutralize a little bit of the anxiety around it.

Linda Watt: That's a really good point. I think you've mentioned something that I think is good for clarification. There are some development objectives that a manager or an employee may sit down on, and we have something called the development conversation with the learning conversation. We could set some goals, which are our year-long goals, and that the employee wants to work towards building a particular skill, or whatever. And there may be some strategies we implement.

But the development continues in each situation, in each week, and in each conversation. So there's also the development that comes just from a conversation about the way work is being done, or the process that we're using, or the skills that I'm engaging in order to try and be successful.

So I like framing those conversations also around the learning as opposed to, improving or getting critical feedback. The more often we can frame these things into *let's help you learn or we're in together so that you will*


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*be successful and that would be the end goal*, I think the more engaged the employee will be in getting where they need to be.

Mel Savage: I think that the way the manager handles this conversation is so critical. There's this some good and bad side of being a very open-minded employee to say, *'I want to grow, and here are the things and I'm open to feedback.'* Sometimes, managers can take that to the dark side. This person is so open-minded to hearing feedback that every time the manager hears a piece of feedback from somebody in the organization, they feed it through to the person.

As a manager, you need to be curating and the filter because not what everyone says in the organization is valuable to that employee or relevant. One more thing, because I'm on my soapbox now, because this was always frustrating for me. Employees are responsible for how they show up and the things that they do. They're not in charge of other people's feelings and thoughts. So sometimes what happens is you'll have somebody over here who's maybe less secure or less confident.

Then maybe they feel intimidated by someone or scared by someone or didn't like the way someone said something. And that information gets fed to the employee. Well, so and so didn't like the way you said that. That's their problem. You need to be conscious, but you can't be responsible for how everyone else's development is going and how they take everything. So as a manager, you have to be cognizant of those things.

Linda Watt: Wow. We could have a whole other podcast just about that. What do you do with the feedback? And this is a lot of learning that I've done over the years. And that is, I use the expression for myself. What is mine, what is yours, and what is ours together? If someone shares something with me, I want to be receptive. And I do my best. And I'm not always great at this, but I do my best to hear it. And then I take it away, and I'll sit on it for a little while and say, *Is there something that I need to do differently in order to ensure that I have a positive relationship with that person?*

The key is, do I want a positive relationship with that person, and if they've shared something with me, that I can do something about to ensure that positive relationship, then then it's my work. If I think it really has more to do with them, which it usually does, anything that affects us, because it may not affect other people, it really is about the meaning that we personally are making up what's inside of us. I may choose to go back to the person or not and say, maybe we could just have a discussion about how that affects you, and what's behind it. But that takes a lot of courage and a lot of practice.

Finally, maybe it's our work together. If you and I are having some tension, and you share some feedback with me, I may choose to say, hey, you know what, I want a good relationship with you. Do you want to have a good relationship with me, then let's talk about what we each need to be doing differently to make sure it works. Sometimes, it's just hours. Your weak spots and where you are triggering more than one person. I think then, you got to have some really good things I'm to say, what can I be doing differently?

Mel Savage: I agree. That's a really good filter, too. Are you triggering a lot of people on the same type of thing? Are there certain kinds of people being triggered by you? You have to really think that through and as a manager, you need to think about that as well. You can't just pick up the feedback and then be a voice for everyone.

Linda Watt: You and I talked beforehand about the feed-forward. Feedback shouldn't just be given to someone just to say, *Hey, look, what you did, that wasn't good*, or even, *Look what you did that was really good*, which I hope


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and I think doesn't happen as often. We want to give people that positive reinforcement. But to understand that feedback is in order for someone to learn from so that they can do something differently more effectively better the next time.

If we spend less time having a discussion around the details of what you did, that wasn't so great, or that was so good, and more around how can you do that in a way that really helps every one to get their goals met or is effective? Then, we've got a forward-thinking view, where people can say, *Oh, that's where we need to go next.* And even better when you let the employee get there.

So if you can say to them, *Do you remember that conversation you had with Mr. James that didn't go so well? Take me through what happened there. How are you feeling? What did you think of the outcome? What would you do differently next time?* Because any insights you can generate from the employees themselves are way more powerful.

Mel Savage: I agree. 100%. I know that takes skill that you need to learn to work up to, but just being open and curious and feed-forward. I love that. Again, these are small reframing since sometimes, people think of these things as cynical corporate folks will think of these things as spin. And it's not spin, it's really thinking differently. It's going into your review. It's not a threat, it's a reward. It's a performance summary. It's an ongoing conversation.

It's feed-forward that helps you all of these little reframes that you've done with your team have really helped people's perspective on how to go into whatever task they're trying to do with their employees.

Linda Watt: I agree. We hear it's the flavor of the month. When I hear that, I want to try and help educate people to say there are some human dynamics that are to play all the time. And it's about people's needs. It's about people's sense of purpose and meaning in their life. These are the things that are going on in the very heart of positive relationships, and also at the heart of people being successful in the workplace.

If we can help them really understand what's going on here, that if they can just meet those people where they're at and help move them towards success, and that's what being a good leader or manager in organizations is about.

Mel Savage: I love it. We talked about feed-forward already, but just closing down on the kinds of discussions that employees have with managers. I don't want to make this all about the manager but I know that a lot of people listening are managers. But employees have with managers, managers have with employees, we talked about all around generating insight, so helping these people being curious, helping them get their own insights about what's going on.

The other thing that you mentioned last time, too, was in order to have a great conversation, make it judgment-free. It’s so hard to do.

Linda Watt: Yes, that's so hard to do. And a lot of this stuff is hard to do because we have our own feelings about what's going on. And what's really important is to acknowledge what you're feeling, because we don't like everybody. We don't connect automatically with everybody. It's about the work that we have to put in, in order to find that connection, in order to support or work effectively with someone or as a manager to actually help them to be successful.


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It really is understanding that the judgment of that person is actually coming from inside of you. You're judging their ability to perform something. You are judging how they speak or moan. There's a lot of judgment around employees who tend to be more on the negative side. So then we want to shut down and not hear what they have to say. And yet a lot of those employees can be really good performing employees who just happen to see things in a very critical way, oftentimes.

One of the things that we implemented at the University of Guelph is to try to look at these. We call them the *3 Core Practices of Effective Performance Success*, enabling performance success, and that's Connect.

Find a way to connect with your employees, no matter who that employee is. One of the ways to connect, of course, is to see them as a person and to understand better what's going on with them. It doesn't mean invading their personal life or their privacy, it just means understanding that it's the whole person that's coming to work. Just learn what you can within their boundaries, whatever they are, and see them as a person. We all have stories, and we all have challenges that are going on. Just be really mindful of that. So that's Connect.

Another one is Adapt. That is to understand that change is happening on a continuous basis. There are always things that are happening and changing on a weekly basis, and to have those conversations regularly, and saying, *Hey, we've got new priorities that just came down from above. So we've got to shift your objectives for the next few months.* And, *Hey, we've got some new technology that just got introduced so we have to implement it right away. How are we going to get you those skills that you need to feel comfortable?* And so on. Adapting is a continuous process and should be a part of the conversation on a regular basis.

The last one is Align. The Align piece is really always connecting the employee back to what it is they're doing, and how it impacts the larger goals and vision of the organization so that the employee understands them showing up to work and doing the work well matters in the overall picture. We also want them to align the employee skills to their strengths, and to leverage those strengths on an ongoing basis.

Because research has taught us and all this positive psychology work in research that's out there right now, is really helping us to say there really is good evidence that shows when people are using three or four of their top strengths on a regular basis, their happiness at work increases, and their engagement at work increases. So we need to understand from the employee if they know what their strengths are. To employees, we say, *learn about yourself*.

There's nothing more powerful than knowing who you are, what is it that you like doing, what are your strengths, how would you like to engage them, and how you want to grow them. That's key to being successful at work.

Mel Savage: Oh my goodness. You just said so much stuff, I'm exploding. My head is exploding with things I want to talk about with you on this topic. There are so many things. So I want to come back to a few things and I'm probably going to not get to everything but connecting, adapting, and aligning. Beautiful. Connecting, as a person, I think they call it empathy for the folks out there.

The other thing that I find, too, that works in that is, to get the judgment out of it, and stay focused on the results. So if you can agree on what the results are just talking, almost in an emotionally detached way sometimes works, as well as being empathetic, to agree to what the kinds of results we're looking for and what we have to do, and think, feel, change, adapt, whatever, to get those results.


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And the alignment piece. I think it's great that you talk about employee-first and alignment and listening, being curious about how the employee feels, because sometimes managers can treat alignment, like, do you understand what I'm telling you to do, versus actually aligning on an agreement on how to get something done, and getting that employee to speak about it. So that's a little watch out, I'd say, for both the employee and the manager.

Linda Watt: I agree. I like how you said, getting them to that point. There are a couple of things that bring up for me, and one of them is every conversation that we're encouraging managers and employees to have we're creating a way of conversation. Alignment happens when you build a shared understanding of something. So that alignment is around building shared understanding, and it's around clarity around expectations. It's clarity around outputs, objectives, and so on.

This is where the coming together of the two, the manager's perspective and the employee's perspective is critical because the employee knows what's happening day-to-day. And what efforts are almost ridiculous because they don't make a difference. They really understand the day-to-day operation. However, the manager has often a perspective that's coming from above, where we're trying to get to, and what are some of the new changes or expectations at a macro level.

Those two things together, when each is listening to the other are powerful. Those two things together, when no one's listening, are really detrimental. Because they can seem to be worlds apart. So that's really a critical part of that conversation or ongoing conversation.

Mel Savage: There's so much to talk about in terms of how to be a great manager as the leader, removing yourself. A lot of the time, these conversations are hard because the manager is thinking about, *How does this reflect on me? They're going to tell me to get the results and so I need to tell you how to get the results.* How do you remove yourself from that and, trust your people and manage up and manage down?

Linda Watt: Absolutely, and managing self. So absolutely, all of those things.

Mel Savage: And then the only last thing I want to say about strengths, because this is the other passion point I have is in terms of strengths as a manager, and as an employee, your strengths aren't always something that you're good at. It's something that you really love doing. So it might be something that you're still in development, you're still growing, but you love doing it.

The key thing out of that, in terms of the positive psychology around it as well is what energy is being generated by that employee? Are they excited to do it? Because when they're excited to do what they're doing, whether they're good at it, or they're in development mode on that thing, that energy is going to permeate through the whole team, it's going to make them drive better results and drive an overall better feeling within the team itself.

Linda Watt: Yes. Definitely, this is one of those tough conversations because as you said, managers also need to get the results that are required out of an employee in a particular position. Then the employee comes in and says that they really want to use their strength in facilitation, but they don't have a facilitation credential when that employee may also not quite be meeting expectations around some other work that's really critical.


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So we are trying to encourage managers to listen because that's how you can help create that kind of energy. But it's also incumbent upon the employee to show what can be the business result or the output of engaging them in that strength. And they need to do their work on that. It follows through.

Where can you get that experience so that you can continue to work on some of the other areas that are an important part of your job? Who can you be talking to, to move in that direction? So that you're not asking your manager to make all the space in your workday to build that, but you are strategizing together how you can fit it in, as well as you do your work. So it really is about being open and seeing that both of you have a role to play in this.

Mel Savage: One of the things I talk about when I coach is how can you neutralize your weaknesses. There are lots of different ways to do that. One of them I always say is to get certain things that suck up your energy off your plate, and get help with some other leadership competencies that maybe you need to be able to demonstrate. What we talked about was when it comes to a unionized environment, you can't always make those decisions as an employee or as a manager to take certain things off people's plates.

Linda Watt: Yes, there's less movement to be creative in a job description, or clarifying the expectation. For sure, there's definitely less room.

Mel Savage: So it must be really hard, not only the employee and the manager to really maximize the output from that employee because sometimes they just have to do things that suck up their energy. That will be great. It's great, and maybe even easy to pass off to someone else on the team who's really good at it. But that's not possible in your environment, necessarily.

Linda Watt: For me, I always think things are possible. It's about how you approach them, and the conversations that you have. Nobody's being seen as trying to take advantage of the other or the situation, but it’s presented in a way that says, *Can a bunch of us get together to have a conversation about how this could work?* It's funny, and sometimes things come across like they're adversarial, when it's almost like a traditional approach that this is going to be tense.

I have to pick my position, trying to ask people, managers, and employees, to take less of an adversarial approach, and really start to take a partnership approach. We're all in this together and we all want to be successful. So how can we open up these conversations? I get to explore what's possible. I know it's not easy because we're going against years of top-down management that is still being used in a lot of cases in a lot of places and managers are held accountable.

It's just that we want them to understand that you will be more successful when you engage people, and bring them along with you, as opposed to telling them what they need to do.

Mel Savage: It's so hard, but you're going to get the best return on your hustle and the better results on your team that way. It makes it tougher, because these days, there are fewer people doing more stuff. Even though we ended up saying technology is helping make our jobs easier, it feels like there's never been more on our plate than there are these days. And it makes it even more challenging to sit down, get calm, and give your employees the space to get there, to learn, to give them time to grow, to try to fail.

It's tougher to make the space than it has been historically. That brings me to the employee. If your manager is feeling that pressure, don't forget, it's not totally on your manager to make your job wonderful. That's actually in


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your control as an employee. You get to decide what you do, how you show up, how you think and feel, and what you say about the things that you think are breaking your own boundaries. Setting those boundaries and understanding what it means, and what you're going to do when those boundaries get crossed.

I know we talked all around it, but what are some of the things that you think employees can be doing to not only take control of their own development but help their managers input into their development?

Linda Watt: As I said, we could spend a whole program on this one. Totally.

Mel Savage: Just the top tips.

Linda Watt: One of them is, that it's important for an employee to understand their manager's sphere of control. It means understanding what's on your manager's plate, and understanding what your manager's priorities are because their priorities probably come from the next level above. And they're responsible or accountable for ensuring those things happen. They're not always aligned directly with what you as the employee think is most important.

Your manager is often in the middle trying to navigate what you want with what their bosses are asking for. So as an employee, it's important to understand the position your manager is in. It helps you to be more and to be less judgmental of your manager's decision, or what you may see as a lack of support. I think that's one. Another one is to really feel the fear or the intimidation, and do it anyway. It's never easy to go to someone who is in authority to talk to them about something that's important to you.

There's the fear of rejection and the fear of being mocked or made fun of or what were you thinking. But you will be respected when you can speak up for yourself. And you probably have heard the term, *we teach people how to treat us*. If you can show up with that sense of confidence and commitment to something that's important to you, and you're able to articulate what you want, even if you don't get it, I think you can win over some respect for the fact that you've taken that initiative.

Mel Savage: I agree. I think it comes back to that think, feel, want. That's how you have that conversation. The topic I want to talk about is, Here's what I'm thinking, here's how it made me feel…

Linda Watt: Exactly. That's a good segue into the third point that I would make, and that is, *do the work to know yourself.* There's nothing more refreshing for a manager or leader than to have an employee who knows themselves. Understand what you contribute, understand where your challenges are, and what you can do, as you said, to mitigate them, or to actually develop them. Understand your strengths and how you leverage them. Own your contributions, own what you've done, be proud of them, and even learn how to talk about them.

We are story people. We learn through stories. Your manager doesn't know what you've done day-to-day if you don't share the stories, with your employees, and your colleagues unless you share the story with them. Not in a bragging way but, *Hey, I had this great experience with Joe the other day. I helped him solve this technical problem and he was so grateful. I felt great. This is why I do this job.* Really take the time in small little bits to tell your own story of things that are going well, or when you've learned a lesson.


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Mel Savage: Yes. I think just sharing that and being open about that, it takes a little bit of the threat out of that. Every time you talk, you say so many great things that make me want to go off on tangents. I 100% agree, knowing yourself and knowing what your boundaries are.

Boundaries are not about what other people need to do when they cross your boundaries. Boundaries are when someone crosses your boundaries, what are you going to do? How are you going to handle it because you're the one in control? Remember that you talked about leadership competencies a little bit, I'm summarizing it that way, but just because you're not the manager, you still can demonstrate your leadership competencies.

Like you said, be curious about what your manager is going through, try to understand their point of view, be confident, show up with great listening skills, and great communication skills, take the emotion out of it, and care about people and their growth. As a manager, I learned so much. I always said when I was talking about mentorship, some of the people who reported to me I considered mentors because they were teaching me how to be a great manager.

Linda Watt: Absolutely. This is like the other end of leadership, which is followership, and learning how to be an effective follower. Some of the best managers or leaders that I've met also know when to follow and sometimes, it's following a very strong employee that they have. So as an employee, you can be passionate about something. I really care about it. It's those situations that create leaders, not people saying, *Hey, I want to be a leader, what can I lead today?*

It's more of what I really care about. What do I care about right now? Where do I want to take this situation or people around me in a particular direction that I think will be good for them, for us, for the organization, and for the team? Whatever you're leading. Effective managers and leaders know how to follow employees when they find something that allows them to take them there.

Mel Savage: The way you said that, too. What can I lead today? A lot of people confuse leadership with control. Leadership is almost the opposite in many ways. It's about relinquishing control and listening.

Linda Watt: Yes, it really is. It's about taking the risk and moving toward possibility and a vision. It means letting go of consistency, quality, and effectiveness. It's not easy to find a balance in any team or organization between those two things, but they need to coexist. We always need to be changing, adapting, and moving forward, while we're also trying to produce consistently good quality, good service with really good management. So those two things need to operate with one another.

Even as employees, I would say, we need to exist within that paradigm, those two opposites. How can I be consistent and effective and provide good quality while I'm also learning how to adapt to things around me, do new things, and take on new skills? It really is a dance. But I think it's a dance when we learn it, that's really key to success.

Mel Savage: I love it. I have two more questions for you, then we're wrapping this up. Just to give you some sense of it, we talk a little bit about performance summaries, development review time, depending on where you are, what organization you work with, and some of the things that employees can do to prep for that just as a summary. And then we're also going to talk about any places that you're itching to take performance development in the future. So to start, what can people do right now to get ready?


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Linda Watt: I would say the key is really reflection. I would love to see people take little notes throughout the year, but I know that's difficult unless you're a super organized person. But really do your best to reflect on your year. Be prepared to talk about whatever the key talking points are the key points in your performance, summary, or review sheet.

Take the time to go through it and be prepared. Be prepared to share what the learnings that you had, maybe that came up with challenges. Be prepared to talk about your successes and things specifically around the things your boss may not know about.

I highly recommend people talk to their colleagues, before they go into a conversation to say, *Hey, listen, what would you say were my best? When was my best this year? What stood out for you? What things do you think I could change? What's the one thing you think that I can do differently?* There's nothing more powerful than being able to go into a conversation and say, *Hey, listen, I talked to my colleagues. What I found out from them was I can improve my moods in the morning. Apparently, I'm quite moody, and I'm not very engaging, and that's difficult for them.*

Talk to your clients and some of your best clients just say, *I'd like to know one thing that I could do differently that would serve you better.* That information just gives you a sense of power so you don't feel like you're a victim to your manager's perspective only. You're ahead of the game.  You know a lot, you've talked to them. So I'd say for sure do that. Bring notes that you want to talk about and bring questions that you would like to ask your boss.

Not that goes into big depth, but just a question about getting priorities set for next year. What do they want for you? Those kinds of things. Most definitely, give some thought to the year ahead and try to keep the big picture in mind. Think beyond what you want for yourself and your job, and do a little bit of work to understand the bigger priorities, the manager's priorities, the organization's priorities. When you can plan and talk with that perspective in mind, that's very impressive.

Mel Savage: I love that. Bigger than just you. You're important, but it's also the team that's important as well. One last thing I would add to that, if that's okay is the mindset. Back to what you talked about with the threat versus reward mindset. I think it was David Brock. If you go into this with a threat mindset, feeling intimidated, like there's a power authority struggle going into this, you're going to feel like the underdog, you're going to feel apprehensive and intimidated. If you go with the growth mindset, even if your boss starts going there.

If you don't have the best boss, you're the most educated leader and they go into a threat mindset, you don't have to go there. You can be calm, you can still set your own boundaries, and you can set the tone for how you're going to handle this. They don't have to set the tone, you can set the tone for your review.

Linda Watt: Yes. I think that's so important, that idea we have called growth mindset versus fixed mindset. Sometimes you have a fixed mindset about yourself. I'm not able to, I'm not good at it. It's in our minds. Sometimes it comes from an early age. Sometimes our boss has a fixed mindset about us. You'r right. If you can go in there and open yourself up, be aware of where you might put barriers up where they don't need to be, and really be open to possibilities and to listen, I think that would be really important.

Mel Savage: Don't go in there feeling like a victim. Even if your boss is a bully, you don't have to play the victim. Just be yourself. Be open, be calm, know your boundaries back to knowing yourself. And you can go there empowered as well.


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Linda Watt: Sometimes that's a process, isn't it? We give up our power to our bosses way too often. It's not an easy fix. It's a process and just be aware of when you're doing it.

Mel Savage: It's a practice, like everything else. All this mindset stuff is a practice. So where are you itching? I know you've been making so many great changes at the University of Guelph and your team is really implementing those. You've spoken so highly of them. If you could do your little bewitched nose twitch, or whatever. If you could do that, where would you want to take people's development for the future?

Linda Watt: Wow, so many places. Two things that come to the top of my mind right away are I really want to continue to help our managers and our leaders develop their coaching capacity because this really is about understanding performance success as an effective coaching of others. Coaching really is the ability to hold up a mirror for someone else who can see themselves for the reality, and then create the conditions for them to want to grow and develop and see how they can best do it and to support them through it.

I definitely would like to see our managers and leaders out. I also want to see our employees also learn more effectively how to self coach, and to really build those skills in themselves to look at their current reality accurately. And to say, here's my reality, here's where I'm at what do I need to be doing? How can I be successful? So they're not reliant on a manager or a leader taking them places, but they can create their own sense of ownership over their development with always the bigger picture in mind. But they can feel empowered by doing that for themselves.

We have a program at the University called *Personal Leadership at Work*. It really is about helping people understand that they can lead themselves from wherever they are, with some really good insights into their sense of purpose, their values, their experiences in life, and what they can learn from them. It's a super popular program because people really do feel a sense of empowerment at the end and feel like they can look at things differently with a new perspective. That's helpful for them to have a sense of power.

Mel Savage: I love it because you're preaching to the choir here and that is the big one. I've talked about my membership program. The biggest part of it is helping people understand their values because it helps put some guideposts in place in terms of what's important to them,  how they're going to show up, and how they're going to live their lives and create meetings. So many people don't take the time to do that.

For those of you who don't have a great program like Linda has, come into the membership, even if you just come for a month and do the values part of it. It's so important to be able to really understand your values. I'll put a link in the show notes. Linda, we have to get there. I'm so sad because I love talking to you. I can talk to you for hours and hours. I am definitely putting it on my schedule to reach out when we're back. Because we're going away for the winter when we're back, we can have a coffee because I love talking to you.

Linda Watt: That's wonderful. Thank you for having me Mel. I love your questions. I love this idea that you have of having workshops, or a membership where people can learn about their values. I think that's so important. So thank you, thanks for inviting me.

What can I say? I love Linda. I am super passionate about performance development. I just love the way Linda thinks. She's a forward thinker and she passionately cares about people. I would say those are the two key ingredients for being great at what she does. If you're going to have someone in charge of performance


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development like Linda is at the University of Guelph, having someone who looks forward to constant improvement and who passionately cares about people are the two things that you definitely want.

I am going to find ways to have her on this podcast again. If you have any questions about anything Linda asked, leave it in the show notes as a comment or reach out and connect with Linda on LinkedIn. And I'll link to her as well in the show notes. You can get everything in the show notes at thecareerreset.com/12.

So far in performance development, we've discussed how to get feedback, and how to manage performance development ongoing. Next week, we're talking about leadership competencies, three leadership competencies you want at any level of your career. As you're planning forward for your development, these are the competencies that you want to craft into your own style as early as possible in your career. So we're going to be talking about that next week.

In the meantime, thank you for being here. I appreciate you. Bye for now.

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