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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS THE KEY TO OPPORTUNITY WITH SHARON RAMALHO

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Hello there, and welcome back. If this is your first time here, I want to say welcome to you.

My name is Mel Savage. I'm your host of the Career Reset podcast. I'm also a career and performance coach and I help people take a leadership role in their career and really achieve the success that they deserve.

Today, we are talking all about leadership. The word 'leadership' is thrown around so much. But the truth is, if you are a really strong leader, if you've done your work to hone your leadership skills, then you can do anything. I mean anything, even if you're not trained to do that thing, even if it's not your true core functional competency, you can still be successful at it. Because if you're a strong leader, you can build the right team around you, and you can inspire them to get the work done.

This episode is part of a five-part series that I'm doing on the podcast, which is really all about helping you get focused on how to manage your own development. I'm taking a look at it from all sides, you as a person managing your own career, you as the 'employee,' and you as a manager of people. Quite often we're playing both those roles depending on your situation. It's important that you're not only thinking about how you're managing your own growth and your own career but also how you're managing and supporting the people you're responsible for and who you're accountable for.

So far, we've talked about how to effectively grow your people through giving feedback effectively. I'm telling you, if you haven't listened to that episode, it's Episode 11. It's really important because feedback is the foundation for how we communicate effectively with our people and how we grow them. So it's really important to get good at it. Even though we all have a lot of good intentions, a lot of us are making some very common mistakes. So make sure you go back and take a look at that.

A couple of weeks ago, in Episode 12, we talked to Linda Watt, who is the Director of Training, Learning, and Development at the University of Guelph. She is such an amazing lady, and she's really revolutionizing talent

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management at the University. She talks about how to lead performance development for you and for your people.

Last week, I talked about the top three leadership competencies that you want to develop at any level. And today, we're talking about how great leadership is really the key to your success, and being able to capitalize on opportunities that come your way. I'm talking about performance development quite a bit. Because as you're developing your performance plans for next year, it's really important to think about your leadership style.

Now when it comes to demonstrating how great leaders can really do anything, even if it's not what they're 'trained to do,' what their functional competency is. My guest today is proof that great leaders can do whatever they want to do. I'm really lucky to have her here today. Her name is Sharon Ramalho. She is a woman who has been a role model for me for many, many years. She has an amazing career. She's going to share her story with us today.

A bit of background on Sharon. Sharon is the former Chief People Officer at McDonald's Canada. She's going to talk about how to really take control of your leadership style, and use your leadership as the key to opening up doors of opportunity for you. Sharon was the Chief People Officer at McDonald's but her background actually isn't in HR. Sharon started as a crew, meaning, the front counter at McDonald's, worked her way up to managing a restaurant, and grew up in the operations end of the business.

Then she was recruited to actually go and open the very first McDonald's restaurants in Russia, which I'm sure was an amazing experience. What an opportunity. Then she stayed there for 10 years, came back, and worked her way up through various departments within the company, all the way up to CPO. I know her very well. She could have gone further.

When Sharon puts her mind to something, she does it. She could have gone further in the company. She could have been president of Canada or led another country around the world but she had a mission. She wanted to retire at 50, which is what she did. She retired, achieving her goals, retiring early, being extremely successful, and being a mentor and a role model to so many people.

Now she has a retirement side hustle that she calls *Six Words Consulting*. I'll let Sharon tell you what those six words are. When I think of someone who role models leadership, it's Sharon, hands down. I have to be honest with you, I wasn't really 100% sure what we were going to talk about, because I could take the conversation in so many different ways when it comes to Sharon. She has so much experience in so many different aspects of growing a strong career.

Where we started is really with Sharon's background, so you can get a sense of where she started, because I want to tell you that success is possible for anyone. Then we talk about what she believes are the biggest challenges with leadership today, and how you can take control of your own leadership style and use it to really maximize the opportunities that are presented to you. Even if you don't have training where you are now for leadership, even if you have a bad boss, and even if you're not sure where to start with leadership.

We cover a lot of ground in this podcast. It's actually a long interview. It's about one hour, but you're going to enjoy every minute of it. So let's get to it. Here's my conversation with Sharon Ramalho on how being a great leader is the key to opportunities.

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Mel Savage: Hello, everyone. I want to welcome Sharon Ramalho here today. It is such a pleasure to have you here, Sharon. Thanks so much for making the time.

Sharon Ramalho: It's great to be here, Mel, to see you again, and to speak with you again.

Mel Savage: I know. I always said this in the intro but I've always been a super fan of yours. I've seen you do amazing things in your long career. When I think about your career, it's actually short, and how much time you've packed in there. Even were able to retire early and start your own business. I've always looked to you as an inspiration as someone who goes after what she wants. I thought maybe we could start by talking a little bit about a synopsis of where you came from, and where you ended up before you decided to retire.

Sharon Ramalho: The career. Yes, it was just an incredible journey for about 35 years. It started when I was 15 years old, believe it or not, 35. I had a part-time job and that part-time job when I was 15 was at the local McDonald's. When I think back at my life and career and all of the different key decisions that I had to make, probably my first one was when I was 18. I had to make the decision to go to university and become a lawyer or accept the McDonald's management training program.

I realized that at that time, I think it was about three years with McDonald's, that it was for me. There was the work that I was doing as the junior manager, let's call it that, was fun. It was engaging, I was learning a lot, and I was being paid money to be a McDonald's manager. So while all my friends went off to college or university, I accepted that position and became a McDonald's manager.

Mel Savage: I want to jump in there because you said something that's so important. I talk about it all the time if it was for you. The fact that you just connected with it. So many people, myself included, went off to university, not knowing what they wanted, not knowing what they wanted to be when they *'grew up.'* The fact that you connected with that job so quickly. How did you know that it was the right thing for you?

Sharon Ramalho: It was a combination of the learning and the opportunities that I was given at McDonald's, and the mentorship that I had access to. It was the abilities and what I was learning how to be a leader, how to set goals, and how to make decisions. I loved the restaurant business. I loved the idea of working with teams and serving customers and people coming in for that. I remember as a kid, we all do as a kid, going into McDonald's on a Saturday and that family time together. For me, it was just a continuation of that.

As I said, I learned how to be a manager. I learned how to become a restaurant manager and add on responsibilities to lead a restaurant, a team of 80-90 people, and a team of managers. I did that by the time I was about 20 years old. I think I always did things a little early in life. But really, I talk a lot about this when I speak to people about leadership and making their career decisions.

Life is going to give you opportunities. You've got those career opportunities that you're going to be given opportunities to do different things, to learn different parts of a business, or learn new skills. One of the first points that I reflect on is when I made that decision to accept a position in Russia and become part of the team that would go over and help build the business in Moscow. It was 1990 at the time, close to the end of 1990.

It was the fact that I was asked, and I was selected to go, I thought I was really young at the time, so why not? Go to Russia and not just learn and be able to teach. It was life-changing because it wasn't just about the

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McDonald's experience. It was a life experience, a life-changing experience to learn about a new culture, a language, the history of a country, and all those things.

One piece of advice I always like to give is when you're tapped on the shoulder for an opportunity to try something new or to take a lateral role or to take a promotion, just realize that there are people who see the abilities in you. Sometimes people don't see their abilities in themselves first, especially when they're starting off their careers. When you're with the right company and the right leadership, and they're providing that type of development support, take those opportunities.

So that was one of the big opportunities that I took was to go to Russia. From there, it just accelerated into mid-management and then to senior leadership roles. Coming back to Canada, I became a vice president here with McDonald's Canada, and then ultimately, a Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer. But at the same time, I was always thinking about what was next.

For me, the opportunity to retire at an early age was something I was working on for about 10 years. It just lined up perfectly in my opinion, Mel. It was 35 years with one company, and age 50 is freedom 50, let's call it, and realizing that I had achieved absolutely everything I wanted to achieve with this one company across the world, different countries, and different disciplines I worked in. It was great. I felt great about being able to retire.

Mel Savage: One of the many things I've always appreciated about you and I talk about this all the time is the importance of planning for what you want. I'm not talking about just setting goals for your next role or whatever, but planning what you want in your life and then going after achieving that, including your career and that's something that you've always done.

You haven't necessarily looked at your career in a silo. You've always looked at your career as part of who you are, what you want to be, and the life that you want to lead. I've always appreciated that about you. I know you have your ongoing bucket list.

Sharon Ramalho: You're close. There's a list involved, but I actually call it the Life List. It's not a bucket list. Why do you think because you're going to kick the bucket one day? You're doing things, you've got goals, you're living your life, and work is part of the life, the career is part of the life but there's so much more. It's your families, your friends, your causes, your hobbies, your wellness and your health, and the goals that you have that you want to accomplish.

For me, I'm a big travel bug so hitting all seven continents, definitely, that's on the life list. It's living a full-sun life with the work and the career being part of it versus the career driving who you are and what you do.

Mel Savage: Some people say, *'I don't live to work, I work to live.'* And I always have a problem with that because I think you can't separate the two things. Working is part of living and you have to put those two things together. So having joined your career is going to manifest in enjoying your life.

Sharon Ramalho: Absolutely. People also talk about work-life balance. There is no work-life balance. Stop looking for it, people. Please, stop looking for it. Because there's no balance and it's not work first. It's life management, life effectiveness, or life work management. Call it something else, please. Now you've got a challenge. You need to come up with a new name for that.

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Mel Savage: That's right. I'm going to coin something and I'm going to go on Oprah and talk about it.

Sharon Ramalho: It's life first.

Mel Savage: It's just life. Period. It's not bad. I want to come back to Russia for a second. Because you had a really unique opportunity, again, not just with McDonald's. But it was at that time when Russia had opened its doors to Western society. A lot of companies were coming in for the first time to open up, whether it's sites or offices, or whatever it was there.

Just learning to not only learn the culture of Russia but start to craft this business culture of Russia that was happening at the time must have really taught you leadership skills very, very quickly.

Sharon Ramalho: I'll give credit to a lot of great leaders that I had an opportunity to work with early on. A handful of people, especially, those that became and still are today, dear friends of mine, mentors for me, real true mentorship I received. We've had an opportunity to learn from the best people in business.

One of the main things that I took away from that whole experience, especially early on in the Russian development, was that they were looking at us and there was a handful, maybe two handfuls of Canadians that were over there, they were so proud to work in an organization with people from Canada.

They found it fascinating that we left our country, the safety of Canada, to go to this foreign country, with the political dynamics that were going on back in the 90s. The life challenges with food shortages, and not everything was readily available. The Russians found it fascinating that we would want to be there.

For us, at the same time, it was and for myself, specifically, it was seeing how their lives changed year after year after year as the country, as business, as the middle class was born and seeing how the Russians had, the people that we worked with, had an opportunity to develop their careers and opportunity to now travel, to introduce the concept of charity and giving back in their communities, in their country, to help children with challenges and disabilities.

That, for me, was bigger than learning about leadership. It was a life-changing opportunity to be there for those people and to help them develop. One of the proudest moments was when I actually left Russia in 2005. The total time was about 10 years, and knowing that the country was being now run and led by a group of Russians that included myself and many others. We were able to nurture and grow these people. That, for me, was a piece of fulfillment that is still with me today.

Mel Savage: I totally understand that it was a life-changing experience. But I know that you learned a ton of leadership skills there. So I want to start to segue into that. I've seen so many challenges come your way, just in the time that we've worked together, and you've always handled them so gracefully. It's like you never let them see you sweat. You should probably make those T-shirts. You should start a podcast called, *Never Let Them See You Sweat*. You would be great at that. You're going to have to have me as a guest.

Talk to me a little bit about what the challenges are for developing strong leaders.

Sharon Ramalho: Let me come at it first from a personal perspective. I'd like to also address it from a corporate perspective. So the challenges, and let's talk in today's business environment, I think for people today, the challenges they face, they're learning their skills, they're going through college or university, they're getting

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opportunities to take their first jobs or second jobs, they'll start to build their career, the trajectory of their careers. What I'm seeing is, at one point, at some point, they're given an opportunity to be a leader, to manage people.

So they're managing a department or a group of people within a department. What I'm finding is one of the big challenges is that they're not ready for it. They haven't learned or they haven't taken opportunities to learn what true leadership is. Not management, you can be a manager, you can manage paper, you can manage processes. To truly lead a team or to lead an organization or to lead a department, people aren't taking the necessary steps to do it right.

Mel Savage: Would you say it's the people or the companies or both?

Sharon Ramalho: Absolutely, both. I'm coming out of people's perspective. People are given these opportunities, they're taking on the opportunities, but they haven't done the hard work, which is to really learn how to lead. There's a lot of great leaders out there, absolutely.

How do you learn to lead? You learn school, you learn when you're playing sports, you learn maybe if you've got a part-time job as a young adult or a full-time job early on, and you've got natural abilities, you're to take the opportunities. How do you do that? You've got to embrace a few things. You've got to embrace mentorship.

Mel Savage: I think a lot of the time, people don't know what they don't know. They don't even know that they need to go out there and do this work because they're in there, they're doing their job, everyone's patting them on the back, *you're doing great* at whatever it is that role was.

And all of a sudden, you get promoted into this leadership role. Although you should be acting as a leader in any role that you've got, now you're in a position where it's counting on you to be a strong leader, and you never even knew that you needed to have these skills in the first place.

Sharon Ramalho: No, and I think we see that a lot now, where people appreciate the praise, they appreciate the promotion, or a lateral move or the opportunity to lead something bigger. So people are taking that on. But the other part of it is the learning that they've got to be committed to doing. This is where I'll pull in the company perspective, big onus on the company to help develop those skills in people.

To learn how to be a leader, you've got to have, first of all, seen it in action. Think about what type of leader you want to be. Think about those leaders that have inspired you. And I use the word inspirational leadership quite often because I always bring it back to my experiences. I was inspired by several leaders. What makes up an inspirational leader? What are the characteristics of that person, of that individual?

Just even for ourselves, think of that person in your head who you think was the greatest leader that you've ever seen. A face and name pop into your head. What were their characteristics? What were their skills? What were their behaviors?

Mel Savage: What would they do in this situation?

Sharon Ramalho: What were they doing? Absolutely. And you come up with those words of, they cared, they coached, they've spoken in a way that connected with me, they walked the talk, they worked hard, they had fun. You find all those things that inspired you. That would always be for me, a starting point for anyone that's working on their leadership skills, and then moving from being a manager to a true leader.

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Think about those people and connect with those people, those great leaders, and have mentorship from them to be able to learn.

Mel Savage: You were saying if you want to go out and start thinking about how to be a great leader, you had said mentorship is a big one. You're saying maybe role modeling is another big one.

Sharon Ramalho: Yes. Mentorship, role modeling, and the third I would add is the ability to listen. Listening. What's that saying?

Mel Savage: God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason.

Sharon Ramalho: Yes. Use it wisely. Listening is one of the most important communication skills that a strong leader needs to embrace. Throughout a leadership evolution, there's always going to be three groups that I always say are so critical that you're listening to your team. If you're managing now and leading a group of people, don't be afraid to seek input, seek their advice, ask them how you're doing as their leader, have that transparent type of conversation, be open to it, and listen to what they have to say.

Listen to your mentors. You see, there's a theme here. I think I said the word *'mentor'* so many times. To develop leadership, you need mentors, you need those people around you who have done it before and have made mistakes that you can learn from and listen to what they have to say about how you're doing as a leader. They can also be your eyes and ears also, to help you understand how you're doing.

Mel Savage: I just want to say that I think the real foundation of this is that you really have to want to be a good leader. At the very beginning stages, wanting to be a good leader is going to help spark all those initiatives that you're going to take. Mentorship, read a book, listen to a podcast, find the right people to inspire you, etc. If you're always looking for those opportunities to help you, that's going to be great.

The other thing, for myself, where I found the most challenges for being a leader was when I didn't believe in myself. When I didn't believe in myself, all of the bad behaviors started coming out like feeling competitive with people, not supporting other people, and maybe not giving my team a chance to fail, because I felt like that was going to make me look bad, and all of those things. Working on that mindset of believing in yourself and having the confidence that you can do it, I think, is also part of the leadership training.

Sharon Ramalho: It is. I think leaders are going to go through different stages and different emotions, depending on the business challenge, or even the life challenges that they're at, that they're faced with. But I'll always bring it back to the listening part. If you've got a transparent, open style that you understand why it's important to embrace, you'll be more open to listening to what your team, your mentors, and the third person or people would be your leaders, your boss, and having the courage to seek feedback.

You may not agree with everything that you hear. But if you're using those active listening techniques, and you actually are hearing what they're saying, if all three groups are saying the same thing, chances are, that's an opportunity for you to work on as a leader and vice versa. You're hearing the positive things. You're hearing what your people appreciate, what your mentors are saying that they're seeing, and what your bosses are saying.

That's a great thing as well, and those are the skills that you then continue to accelerate and teach to others so that they can become great leaders.

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Mel Savage: I think it's a great point to ask for feedback. The key to that is you're trying to keep yourself emotionally detached from what you're hearing. Don't take it personally. These are people's pieces of feedback and don't count on everyone to give feedback well. You are the feedback receiver.

Someone said to me today, I was talking to another lady I'll be interviewing. She's a director of HR at the University of Guelph, and she was talking about how they don't call it feedback anymore. They call it feed forward. She's reframed it. Simply say that the past is only for context so let's not stay there and talk about that. If this and this happened, how can we learn from that to move forward and work on it as a feed-forward situation versus staying locked in the past?

Sharon Ramalho: I love that thinking. It just gives a different impression of the type of communication session that you'd be having. That's where we talk about the responsibilities of the person. I always say it's on you first and foremost. It's on you. You've been given a role, you've been promoted into something, it's on you to want to take that ownership of it. But then let's shift it over to how organizations or corporations are doing in this area. And great companies do it well.

Great companies are investing in people. They're sending them on training sessions, they've got programs in place, mentor mentorship programs type in place as well. Great companies are doing it well. There's a lot out there that are struggling with it. They're really struggling with either investments or understanding of themselves within their own corporate world. Where do they fit in terms of that responsibility to give the feed-forward or have those listening sessions, the communication sessions with employees? It's on both sides.

I think the perfect world is when you've got both the organization as well as the employees all wanting to be in that same mind space of helping each other develop. Someone once said to me that there's no finish line to continuous improvement. There's always something that someone has to work on. And that's okay.

Mel Savage: I asked you this the last time we talked. Let's say you are focused on wanting to be a great leader. You've got a great mentor, you're listening, you're constantly looking to improve, and you're doing all the learning that you want to do. But you work in an organization or you have a boss or whatever, you're in an environment somehow that doesn't necessarily either support or isn't living their leadership principles as well. What do you do?

Sharon Ramalho: First and foremost, it's the corporation or the organization or the company's values. Do they have values? Do they talk about what's in their culture? Does their culture embrace the support of people development? Even within an organization, you can have different managers and different leaders who are embracing the values. So what do you do? I think that's a big challenge that people are faced with every single day.

I've always been a true believer in communication. I really think all of the world's problems can be solved with better communicators out there. We see that today in politics and what's going on. It's two people. It's like you're in a relationship. It could be a personal relationship, could be friendship, could be family, work, and other relationships as well. I've always believed that you've got to talk to the people who are going to be the ones who can help solve the problems.

Talking behind people's backs, complaining to your workmate about what's going on, but not wanting to or not feeling that you're maybe having the fear that you can't bring it forward could be harmful, certainly, within

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organizations. Think about who you've got to talk to. It could be your boss directly if your boss isn't aware. It could be the HR department. It could be one of the senior team members who really is a great leader who might be able to help give coaching to the other person.

But I will say at the end of it, if it's a corporation, it's an organization that just isn't valuing this part of their business. Like every relationship, it doesn't last. Not every relationship is going to last. If you've done your work, if you've tried your best and you've been open also to accept what they're telling you but it's just not working out, then people have to make their life decisions.

Maybe that's an organization that's just not right for an individual during this particular stage of the journey that they're on. You've got to want to talk to it, you've got to bring it out to the others that can help you, you've got to give it a try, you've got to not give up. Keep trying. But you've got to also realize that there comes a point in time also where you've got to say, *I've tried enough*. That's like every relationship that's out there.

Mel Savage: Last time we talked about leadership, you talked about the four pillars of strong leadership. Let's let's talk a little bit about those. How would you describe these pillars of leadership in your mind?

Sharon Ramalho: There are different styles of leadership. I think there's like a gazillion books you can read on leadership. The styles that I tend to talk about would be where you can be one of four quadrants. A coaching style, an empowering style, a directing, or a delegating style. If you think about the style of leadership that you lean towards, just know that depending on the situation, depending on the level of your expertise, and your team, it could actually work against you.

Let's say, for example, you lean more heavily into the directing style. You like to give direction and give it well, you set the goals, you're following up on people, and keep directing them. If it's a team that is at that stage of a startup, you're a new team, you're coming together, or you might be dealing with a crisis situation, that style of leadership is probably very much needed. But if you're a leader, and you've got a team that has developed into a high-performing team and the team's looking to take on new challenges.

If you're just continuing this directive style of leadership, what's going to happen is you're potentially running the risk of losing great talent. That's one of the several reasons why people leave organizations today is that they're not given the empowerment to take on a new project or an opportunity to grow within a company because the leaders are stifling that type of development. I think as a leader, you've got to just really look at which style of leader you lean towards and which style is more comfortable for you.

But just know that you've got to adjust that, depending on the team dynamics, depending on the business dynamics, the business is not doing as well, they're not hitting their targets while continuing to empower people, and just sit back and let the team figure it out. That's not necessarily going to work, either. It's just adjusting your leadership style for the business circumstance and the team circumstance as well.

Mel Savage: I think that's a really, really smart thing. As a leader, you're not just one kind of leader, you have to learn to pull on it. As a leader, I can learn to amplify certain elements of my leadership based on where the team is, or if I'm someone who's just really, really good at directing. That's my leadership style. That's where I really shine and continuing to look for opportunities to lead teams that need that kind of support versus putting myself in a position where, because of the season team that really just needs coaching and empowerment.

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They don't need direction, necessarily, and that is going to set me up for failure even though I'm a great leader in other ways. So you want to really consider that and be honest with yourself.

Sharon Ramalho: That's right. Bring it back to a sports analogy. You look at a great coach like Mike Babcock. There's a lot of discussion about the Toronto Maple Leafs right now. Is he the right coach for their situation today? He was that type of coach for when the Leafs were just starting to turn things around and get the talent on board and nurture that talent in their first one or two years. Well, this is the team now.

Does he have that ability to motivate them in a different way to adjust or is he still a very directive type of coach? Time will tell, I guess, but that's an example of just to really understand it. I'll bring it back to communication and listening to your team and wanting to better understand how your team's doing, how they're feeling, what's working well for them, what's not, what needs to be adjusted in the team dynamics, and in the leadership.

They're going to give you the goods, if you ask them, if you've developed that style of trust, and credibility with them. They'll tell you everything that you want to hear. They'll tell you, not what you want to hear, they'll tell you what you need to hear.

Mel Savage: I was going to say another way of handling it as the leader, Mike Babcock, I don't know, if he has his option. Of course, I don't know a lot about hockey, and I was wondering how long it was going to take for Sharon to mention the Toronto Maple Leafs. Let's say, you're not good at everything and maybe you're not everyone is. So you can use your team to a certain extent as well, depending on what the challenge is.

If you have someone on your team who is a really great, empathetic listener who knows how to coach people effectively, you can empower them, if you like to take on certain aspects of it. You don't have to be great at everything to be a good leader, it's about getting the right people around you to build a strong team overall.

Sharon Ramalho: One of my positions when I became the vice president for the anterior region of McDonald's business where I grew up in the business is I would lean towards more of an operations expertise. But for me, surrounding myself with people who were actually better than me and smarter than me in certain parts of the business, I wasn't a marketing expert, I wanted to make sure I had one of the best marketing brains on my team from a finance perspective.

I did pretty well with finance as well but having that strong financial expert on my team and recognizing that means that you don't need to be the expert on everything. In fact, the best leaders are able to pull the best people onto the team and the people with the expertise that they may not have. What's that saying, *if you've got 10 people in the room and they all look the same and speak the same way and say the same thing? So you've got nine people too many.*

So just building out the diversity of knowledge. Building a diverse team is super critical as well and building on the strengths of others helps you as a leader learn. When I became Chief People Officer leading HR and Learning and Development and Talent Management, and all of that, I didn't have an HR background. I didn't have compensation or benefits. But I relied on my team of experts to teach me, as well as to learn from them. I was very open and you got to be open as a leader. You've got to be open to learning from others.

Mel Savage: I don't know how you would describe yourself in your own leadership style. But one of the things I always noticed about you is the reason that you could go into all those different aspects and all those different

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departments that were a part of McDonald's, you could have run any of them, you could have run the whole company if you wanted to, was because you empowered people around you to make decisions.

You are ensured you are informed. You took the time to understand what they believed about things and their expertise in it. You helped make the right decisions. You knew where to empower people and you knew where to help them stand back and take a look at the bigger picture. But anyone who I've ever spoken to who has worked for you felt trusted, felt appreciated, knew where their boundaries were, and didn't feel confined into your box, and I think that's what made you a great leader.

That's not the way every leader should be, but I think that's why you were able to work in so many different departments and do so many different things.

Sharon Ramalho: Thanks for that, Mel. I always brought it back to how I want to be treated. As corny as that might sound. How did I want to be treated? How did I learn 15 or 20 years ago? I had these great people who trusted me and gave me an opportunity.

I remember back in the Russian days, my boss, who is a great mentor and a great friend today, asked me if I wanted to, again, operations background, if I wanted to lead the equipment department. I was like, what the heck did I know about equipment other than how to turn things on, turn things off? But he wanted to give me that opportunity to learn a new part of the business, to develop service companies, and to bring some organization and structure to how we pick and choose the different types of equipment.

At the time in Russia, bringing in European equipment was not easy. But building relationships with service vendors was incredible and he gave me that opportunity to do it. He wasn't looking for someone with an equipment technical background, he was looking for someone who could bring organization structure to it.

I'm using that as an example as when I grew up in a system and great leaders who gave me those opportunities that transcended when I became a senior leader and executive leader, I wanted to embrace that and embody that as a leader to help others to be able to learn and grow. I remember we brought in a finance person and gave him the opportunity to become an operations leader. People were shaking their heads at the time saying, *Why are you doing this?* Well, here's someone with talent.

When you find people with talent, teaching them new skills, that's the easy part. It actually is the easy part. It's finding people with talent and the desire to learn and being the support mechanism for them. It's a beautiful thing.

Mel Savage: When we say talent, I think the biggest talent you have is how to be a strong leader. If you're a strong leader, you can do anything. To your point, a finance person can lead a region outside of finance, and lead a region of restaurants.

Sharon Ramalho: It's being able to influence also. As a leader, you've got to be able to lead through. You look at the different competencies that are important for a leader, leading through influence, being able to influence the business, being able to influence the CEO, being able to influence suppliers and franchisees and other department leaders and your peers. How are you able to do that? You just don't show up one day and you influence. It’s through having credibility and knowledge.

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You're like depositing it into the bank, so to speak, and you're building that level of trust. If you've got trust, you've got respect, you uphold your commitments, you're a team player, you support, and you're not out for yourself, those are the characteristics that make you then be able to influence the organization. That's also a beautiful thing, being able to influence.

I remember when I became the Chief People Officer, and really, it was about modernizing HR, so to speak, and people resources and the organization, and really evolving from a more traditional type of HR people resources department into really, truly being business partners and thought partners for the business. I remember my first 90 days, I always recommend that you go on to any new role, do a 90-day plan, and what do you want to accomplish in the first 90 days.

One of the things I wanted to accomplish was to just get out and listen. Get out and listen to our staff, our franchisees, and restaurant teams. Listen to what they have to say. Listen to what's working well and what's not working well. What are some of the challenges they face? I actually shared this at a speaking engagement I was at a few weeks ago, where I learned about how long it takes people to get to work.

I learned about how much dry cleaning costs across the country. I learned some of the challenges people are having when they're trying to manage their life and their work and the effectiveness and how they could work and be more productive. I listened and I learned a lot. From there, I was able to help influence our leadership to make some changes.

If you remember, Mel, those changes were centered around alternative work arrangements, accepting that it's okay to work from home, you can trust your employees will be working if they're working from home, introducing short Fridays, all year round, not just in the summertime, because traffic getting home on a Friday in January is horrendous for people so let's close the offices early. Dress for your day. It's okay to wear jeans dress to have a more business casual type of dress for an office environment.

Those things were not my ideas. Those things were born out of just listening to some of the challenges that people faced. Some changes we made afterward to vacations and holidays and some of our benefits program. That all came from just listening to people, and then being able to influence the organization to for them to know that, you can trust what our people are saying. These changes wouldn't cost us a heck of a lot more.

In fact, a lot of these changes that we made don't cost us anything more but it improves the lives of our people and is able to influence, build trust, respect, and uphold commitments.

Mel Savage: That's really the key thing. It's building that listening, building that trust, having integrity to do what you say you're going to do, and continuing on that cycle, essentially. If we're going to give people three things to think about in terms of their own leadership and what they can do right now, what I'm listening to and hearing from you is to just start listening to your people.

Whether it's your people that you're managing, or if you don't have anyone you're managing right now and you're hoping to be a strong manager one day, start listening to the people that you work with. Start listening to the team that you're on. Start practicing listening and hearing beyond what people are saying. What do they really need and what's really important to them? Try to mine that out. That's what I'm hearing from you.

I'm also hearing about the importance of having good role models, whether that's a formal mentoring relationship or informal or just watching someone who's a good leader, and role modeling their behaviors, having

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like a North Star on the kind of leader that you want to be and building that out. Whether it's just in your mind, you're thinking, *I want to be like this*, or it's whether it's really building it out, writing it down, taking what you're learning from the people that you're seeing or mentoring you or books and podcasts and whatever and saying, *this is the kind of leader I want to be*, and building that North Star for yourself.

Is there anything else that you would add to that if someone was thinking about, what are some of the things that I need to do right now to help improve my leadership style?

Sharon Ramalho: Well, those are the first two. Absolutely, I think you nailed it. I would add to take opportunities that are both given to you and are not given to you. Take on opportunities to lead. Before you're going to lead a team of 20 people, lead a project, lead a cross-functional team, and take on assignment after assignment. Especially if people are early on in their careers, that's how you learn, that's how you can grow. Take those smart risks that will give you those opportunities to develop your skills.

Mel Savage: And even if, by taking that risk, maybe it doesn't turn out the way you thought it was going to turn out. That's still learning. It's still development for you, thinking about it now, you know more about where your territory is and where you want to go or how you would do it differently next time, No risk is going to ultimately be a bad thing if you don't want it to be. The other thing while you were talking, it just came to me.

A fourth thing I would add is don't underestimate the importance of having a strong competent mindset. I think we spend a lot of time focusing on some of the more functional things like being a good listener and working on that and getting a mentor and building that plan, etc. But oftentimes, we forget about the importance of building a strong mind which means you believe in yourself, you're confident in yourself and you don't get caught up in petty BS that's happening around, politics, and everything. It's just really feeling confident in your own skin.

I recorded a podcast last week about this. Sometimes when you're not confident in yourself and this happened to me, you start thinking, *Well, they're smarter than me so they must be right about who I am or who I need to be* versus taking that feedback, feedforward, whatever you want to call it, and deciding what works for me, deciding what I want to integrate into who I am versus changing who you are. And that comes from confidence because you're going to get feedback from so many different kinds of people and you can't incorporate all of it.

You need to decide what feedback is right for you, who you are, and where you want to go in your life. And that comes from, again, having a confident mindset.

Sharon Ramalho: I was going to add confidence. If you think about it, there are people who are naturally confident in their abilities, there are people who struggle with it. They're just like introverts and extroverts, so that adds to it. Your personality comes into play a little bit sometimes.

But the one thing you have to remember is if you think about confidence in yourself, if you don't trust yourself, if you don't understand yourself, your strengths, your opportunities, we all have opportunities, and we all have something that we can work on to be a better human being. If you don't know those things about yourself, seek out the professionals that can help you. Seek out the people, if it's a professional mentor, if it's a friend, family, or someone that can help you.

Confidence takes time to build. But remember that you've got to know yourself, first and foremost. If you don't believe in yourself, why should someone else believe in you?

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Mel Savage: Exactly. I would say, if you want to be a strong leader, not only to get people to believe in you, but to really be able to display work through demonstrating a strong leadership mindset, then having a strong belief in yourself is critical to that. So believing in yourself, listening, getting good mentors and support, and taking opportunities that come up. Those are things that we can all do.

They don't have to be big steps. You can start really small. Just focus on maybe tomorrow, being open-minded to an opportunity that might come your way. Even a small one, even if it's just going to sit in a meeting that you wouldn't normally be invited to or chatting with this person in the elevator that you may not normally snap or whatever. Just constantly take advantage of the opportunities around you.

Sharon Ramalho: Also attending networking type of events, finding people within your industry, finding your peers, going sitting and having a coffee talk with people. When you think about the areas, and the skills that you want to work on developing in yourself, think about who role models it for you. Who's doing it right, that you see that you have access to? And go buy them a coffee and spend time with them. Pick their brain and learn from them. You learn from people who made mistakes so you don't make those mistakes.

Mel Savage: There are so many different ways to learn, or even just start listening. Tomorrow, when you go to work, just start listening a little bit more, and ask a few more questions. Ask someone, *Oh, really? What's making you think that? Why do you want to do it that way? Oh, that's interesting.* Just listen. I think that's really, really important. Sharon, so we talked about the people. I'll ask you one more question, and then we're going to wrap this baby up. What advice do you have for corporations to help their people be better leaders?

Sharon Ramalho: After I retired, I always knew that I would do some consulting. Consulting is not my life. I love doing speaking engagements and helping business owners and business leaders really fulfill their potential.With any assignment that I take on, I always talk about my six words. I named my company Six Words because I've always truly believed in the notion that *you can't do it without people*. *You can't do it without people.*

For corporations, the leaders within the corporations, please remember, please recognize that your business goals, the financial health of your business, and the competitive nature of your business are dependent on your people. It's dependent on your ability to build a strong team, to attract great talent, to retain the talent, and to develop the talent. The onus is on you as a leader.

It's a big dilemma right now, I think a lot of corporations are facing where they struggle with, whether they should invest in people because they're just going to leave in three to five years. Well, they're going to leave in three to five years, if you don't invest in. You invest in them and you show them the career path ahead. The values and the culture of the company are for them. Why would they want to leave if you're providing those opportunities?

But even outside of all of that, as a corporation, to nurture the talent, it's like, being a teacher, your responsibility in life is to help the next generation, to help the generation that's there already. Corporations have to better embrace the notion that it's their responsibility to develop the talent versus always going out and wanting to buy the talent.

Mel Savage: I would say too, those three to five years that you have those people, whether you develop them or not, you're going to get a much better return if you actually grow stronger leaders within your organization. Even if they leave after five years, you're still going to get a better return on your bottom line. If it's about money, you're going to get that return because those leaders are going to breed leaders.

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Sharon Ramalho: Exactly. If you think of society as a whole and we're better at leaving and listening, aren't we in a better place? It could have been my fantasy world, I guess, hoping for that to happen one day. One person at a time, one company at a time. That would be my advice to leaders and corporations. You can't do it without people. Whenever AI, technology, or robotics are kicking in, there will still be a need for people within an organization.

And the cost in the companies today to attract, recruit, get on board, build the productivity of an employee, for that employee to leave relatively soon, it's costing companies a lot of money today. So why not take a chunk of that money and put it into your employees, your employee value proposition, the learning and development, and the investment into people?

Mel Savage: I agree. And don't just look at your top people like creating that mindset of teaching people how to communicate effectively, listen effectively, not be judgy, and believe in themselves. That's going to go a long way. Even to help you build strong leaders, even when they aren't managing people yet. That's one of the things I love about McDonald's. I didn't grow up through the restaurants, I grew up a different way. I came in later.

But anyone I worked with who grew up in the restaurants, you could see that they were bred to be leaders. Not everyone was great at it. But I'd say a large percentage of the people who grew up in the restaurants, you could see that through the training like you were saying since you were 15. If you were being trained to be a leader, even before you're running a restaurant, that goes a long way. When you start at a junior level to train your people, it makes them strong in the long run. Look, you stayed at McDonald's for 35 years. That still happens.

Sharon Ramalho: Yes and I'll bring it back to the values of our company. You stayed for many, many years, over 10 years.

Mel Savage: 12 years at McDonald's and 10 years at the agency before that.

Sharon Ramalho: So you think that the values of a company, and if a company is clearly valuing the people in the learning and development of their people, then that's a great thing. I remember, we always preached that at the corporate staff level, 40 hours a year, you've got to invest in yourself. Taking a course, taking the time to learn and develop a particular skill that you want to work on for the existing role or a future role in an organization. That was always made available. I think we all benefited from that, certainly.

Mel Savage: I'll just say this, it's so easy now between books and books on tape, and YouTube and podcasts. If you want to learn something, if you want to get better at something, even technology, if you want to find someone in your LinkedIn network to become a mentor or a partner or a teacher, it's so much easier than it used to be. You just have to want it.

Sharon Ramalho: You have to want it. You're right. People want to help others. There's that human nature. Someone reaches out to you and gives you a pat on the back to say, *Hey, Mel. You're really good at putting strategy together and building these plans. I really want to learn from you.* Of course, you're going to say, *Oh my gosh, absolutely, yes. Let's have a coffee every Friday for the next six weeks.* And you're happy to do that.

People are so willing and open to helping others. I think there's a lot out there that are afraid to make that first step. *We're going to make me look like I don't know what I'm really doing in this job.* Put that aside.

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Mel Savage: Because ultimately, it's going to show that you're interested in getting really great at what you're doing in your job. That's what leaders do.

Sharon Ramalho: That's right. I use that example because I always respected that about you. Your ability to take some big ideas, and build bigger strategic plans, be a marketing plan, or the work that you did with the Women's Leadership Network. You're very organized from that standpoint. And, there are a lot of people that could use those skills. I'm sure your phone's ringing off the hook, too.

Mel Savage: It's my privilege. Again, thank you so much for making the time today. I really appreciate it. I know that anyone listening to this podcast is going to appreciate you sharing your wealth of knowledge and experience with them. So thank you.

Sharon Ramalho: Great, thanks a lot, Mel, my pleasure.

Soak up that experience, my friends, Sharon knows what's what. I feel so lucky to call her a friend and have had the opportunity for her to mentor me. If you want to learn more about Sharon or check out her consulting business called Six Words, I'm going to link to all of that and all about Sharon in the show notes.

As I said, Sharon has been a really great mentor of mine. Speaking of mentors, that's what I'm going to be talking about next week. It's the last part of my Performance Development Series. Then I'm going to switch gears a bit in and talk more about finding the right job for you.

But next week, I'm going to be talking about finding the right mentor for you. I also have a really great takeaway for you on being a fantastic mentee, which is a big part of getting the most out of your mentoring relationship. So don't miss that one. And as Sharon mentioned, mentorship is a critical element in developing your leadership style, which is why we're talking about it next week.

Thank you to everyone. Have a great week. Bye for now.

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