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MANAGING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

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Hello there, my friends. It's great to talk to you this week.

This week, I'm talking about something that so many of us struggle with, and that is managing our relationships at work. Relationships make up so much of our enjoyment on the job. They make up so much of our life at work. They are a big part of our enjoyment, they're a big part of our stress, they're a big part of our success. Knowing how to manage those relationships, make the most of those relationships, and minimize the number of challenging relationships is a big part of enjoying the job.

No matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, learning to manage those relationships is going to go a long way toward changing your perspective on your work right now. So the focus of today is we're talking about how you can change the way you think about working relationships to help you enjoy them, help you get the most out of them, help you create a lot of impact in a short amount of time, and really improve the quality of your life because you're improving how you feel about your job, how you show up at your job, and how you manage the relationships at work.

What is a working relationship? How do you know if a working relationship is good? How do you know how close the relationship is? How do you know if you can trust somebody? How do you know if they're on your side? How do you know if you work well together? How do you know all these things? The answer is that these things are based on how you think about these things. The relationship exists 100% in your own mind. You might be like, *Wait a second, relationships are a two-way street. There are two people in this relationship, at least.* And I say, No, your relationship with someone is based on your experience of them, which is based on the way you think about them 100%.

As an example, if your boss walked into your office, interrupted a meeting that you're having, and said, *Look, I need to see you right away.* You could think, *Well, that was really rude.* Or you could think, *Wow, there must be an emergency.* Or you could think, *They just don't respect me and what I'm doing.* Or you could think, *That sounds interesting. I want to figure out what that is.* You could think of any of those things or more. I'm sure there are more thoughts out there and anything that you think at that moment is going to impact your relationship with your boss.

Even if what you're thinking is totally generous and productive, it's impacting your relationship with your boss. Let's say you were mad at the interruption and you thought, *They just don't respect me.* How would that impact

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your relationship with your boss? How you show up in their office when you get there is going to be determined by your thinking.

Let's say you show up impatient and annoyed. How's that going to go over? What's that going to look like when you get into the office? How's that going to impact that interaction which ultimately impacts your relationship and how you feel about that person? The relationship is built up in your own mind. This is why it's possible for one person to say, *Oh, I love working with so and so.* And then for someone else to turn around and say, *No, I don't like working with that person.*

That's why it's possible for two people to have completely different reactions to the same circumstance of the boss walking into an office and interrupting. One person could get upset, the other person, not a big deal. That's why it's possible for one person to think they have a close working relationship with someone, and the other person to think, *It's not that close. I mean, it's okay.* Who's right in all those circumstances? The answer really is no one is right or everyone is right because the relationship exists in each person's own mind.

I think as adults, we understand that we have a role to play in our relationships with people like we take accountability for how we show up, what we say, and what we do in those relationships. At the same time, we also seem to think as adults, that the other person has a role to play in how we feel about them in the relationship. We blame others for how we act, we put the accountability on others for how we show up. I said this because you did that. I am annoyed because you disrespected me.

In this case, I'm not taking accountability for my choice to be annoyed. I'm saying it's your fault. I'm annoyed, when in fact, the other person has zero control over how I feel and how I show up. Even if your boss actually disrespects you, you get to choose whether you're annoyed by that or not. They have no control over that. But even though we're choosing to be annoyed, we don't know that we're choosing to be annoyed. We think it's caused by them. So we try and change them. We try and tell them to stop doing what they're doing. We try and control them.

I had a client who told me that her boss was discounting her thoughts in the meeting. And she wanted to go have a conversation with her boss, to ask her boss to stop doing that. I understand the intention, I really do. At the end of the day, though, she can't change her boss's behavior. She has no idea why her boss did that. And even if her boss acknowledged that it was wrong to do that, that doesn't mean her boss isn't going to do it again. Her boss did that for a bunch of reasons that are unproductive.

In her own head, it has nothing to do with my client. All my client can do is decide how she wants to handle that situation in her mind and how she wants to think about that situation in her mind. We cannot control how other people act, we can only control how we think about it.

It's very similar to when I was talking about boundaries a few episodes ago. Lots of people think you set boundaries by telling people how they need to act to make you feel better. But that never works because people don't like being told how to behave. They get resentful. How often does that work? They might do it because you're their boss for a while, but they're not going to like it and they will complain about it.

Instead, the way you set boundaries is by telling people how you intend to behave if they do something. So you say, *If you're going to yell at me in this meeting, I'm going to get up and leave.* I'm not trying to control the fact that

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you're yelling, yell your little heart out. I wouldn't say it that way but yell your little heart out. But when you yell, *I'm going to leave.* That's how a boundary is set up. You're not telling the person how they need to behave, you're telling them how you intend to behave because that's what you can actually control.

So telling people how you want them to behave in a relationship also never works. It doesn't work when you're trying to build a relationship with them, not when you're managing them, not when you're married to them. It doesn't matter what kind of relationship it is. It never works to tell people how you want them to behave. That's how we create feelings of resentment. We have to choose how we want to show up when other people behave a certain way.

Let's talk about work relationships a little bit. There are actually three kinds of thoughts that you're having in a relationship. And this is true of any relationship. But today, we're talking about it in the context of working relationships. So the three things are: *what I think other people think of me, what I think of other people, and what I think of myself in relation to other people.* If you want all this, it's in the show notes at thecareerreset.com/26. Let's talk about each one briefly.

The first one is *what I think they think of me*. What I think they think of me, not what they think of me. It's what I think they think of me. Because again, our relationship exists in our own mind. We experience a relationship based on our own thoughts. We don't experience their thoughts. They have their own experience based on their thoughts. We're having our own experience based on our thoughts. And even if your boss comes out and explicitly shares their thoughts, they say, *Look, here's a thought I'm having about you.* You still get to decide what you think about it.

Your boss could say, *I don't think you're very good at your job.* That is a thought they're having. It's not a fact, necessarily. That's a thought they're having and they're sharing it with you. But now that they said it out loud, you could actually say factually, *My boss doesn't think I'm good at my job. I know my boss is having that thought because now they've said it out loud. So it comes as a fact that they think that.* Even though they've said, *I don't think you're good at your job.*

Now it's out there to circumstance in the world, that your boss doesn't think you do a good job. It's still neutral. That statement has no power. Totally neutral and doesn't have any power, yet. It only gets power once you decide what you think about it. And whatever you think, impacts your relationship with your boss, and probably also impacts your relationship with yourself. Now, you could think of a bunch of different things that is a tough thing to hear for sure. It really just depends on how you take it.

You could say, *I love that tough love thing.* You can say, *Wow, I'm totally screwed now.* Or you could think, *What a jerk for saying that.* Or you could think, *That wasn't really a great way of framing it but I better find out what they think and why they think that.* Or you can think, *Wow, it takes a lot of courage to say something like that. Maybe I should figure out what's in their head. I want to learn more.*

There are a million things that you could think and whatever you think, it's going to impact what you do next. It doesn't matter that your boss says that to you. It doesn't matter whether they were right or wrong to say that to you. It's what you do with it now that impacts your relationship with your boss and ultimately, your success in your career.

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Similarly, let's talk about one of your reports. Maybe one of your reports says, *I just love working with you. You are the best boss ever.* Again, now that they said that, you know that they think that but that statement is a neutral thought. It doesn't mean anything until you think about it until your thoughts give it meaning to you. You could think, *Wow, that person is so great,* or, *they're so smart.* Or you could say, *What a brown noser.* Or you could be thinking, *Oh, that's really nice. But I don't love working with you.* There are a million things you could think about that statement.

In the end, it doesn't really matter what they think of you. It matters what you think about what they think of you. Sometimes, we make what people think of us mean painful things. Sometimes, we make them mean productive things or less painful things. You get to decide what you think of what people think of you. You get to decide what you make it mean. Bonus. You don't have to make it mean something painful. People show up with a bad attitude. give it back to them. People make mistakes, give them back to them. It's their crap, it's not your crap. You do not have to own it.

You'll hear me say this again later on, I'm sure, in this podcast. What people think of you is none of your business. Their stuff, whatever. You're going to go on, you're going to choose your thoughts, you're going to choose how you show up. Okay. So that one is what you think about what people think of you.

The next category is what you think of them. This totally affects us, too. This all totally affects how we show up in the relationship. Sometimes, when we talk about, what I think of you, we can be critical, we can be judgmental, we can think negatively of certain people, we can think they're awesome and so smart and better than us, we can think we're better than them. Whenever we think negatively about other people, we are the ones who feel the impact of those negative emotions.

I want to say that again. When we decide we're going to think negatively about somebody, whether it's someone we work with – a peer, a report, or our boss; whatever you decide to think about them, we are the ones who are feeling the impact of those negative emotions. Those people don't feel anything, they're fine. We're the ones who are stressed out, angry, or frustrated. We're creating these emotions inside of us. They feel fine.

I remember I worked with this woman at McDonald's. She was mean. She was horrible. She wasn't my boss. She was another woman that I worked with. Everything that came out of my mouth, she would tell me I was wrong, or I was stupid, or I wasn't being strategic enough. She was just not a pleasant person to work with, or so I thought. So I spent a lot of time angry and frustrated and not wanting to work with her. I even asked to stop working with her because I couldn't deal with the emotions that I was creating and the thoughts that I was creating about that interaction. She felt fine.

So when you're feeling these angry emotions that your boss or anyone that you work with, they're not being punished. You are punishing yourself because you're the only one who can feel those emotions and you feeling these emotions doesn't get them to change. That's another big point. It's useless negative feelings that we are generating and we are feeling. They don't change at all. But we're the ones suffering the effects of that, which includes taking actions that maybe don't demonstrate ourselves at our best.

Because we are stressed out or angry or whatever, we may not be taking it out on the right people. I don't even know who the right people are, in this case, because we've chosen to think these things and create these feelings

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for us. But we could take it out on others. We lash out for no reason. We might be impatient with one of our reports or impatient with a client or a boss or whatever, based on something else that's going on.

That's when people say to you, *What the heck is going on with you?* These thoughts you're having about other people not only impact the relationship with the person that you're actually having the thoughts about but also, all that negativity, all that stress, and all that anxiety that you're creating is actually creating collateral damage for you and relationships with other people. The second one is about how you think about others.

The third category is what we think about ourselves in relation to other people. Now, we could stop there because what we think about ourselves, how much we love ourselves, and how we treat ourselves totally impact how we show up for other relationships and other people in our lives. Oftentimes, what other people say to us is only hurtful because of how we think about ourselves.

But in the context of relationships, I think it's important to add this little piece of how we think about ourselves in relation to other people. Because you'll notice that sometimes with some people, you are super confident and you're totally together. Then with other people, you are super insecure and not at your best, fumbling over your words. With some people, you might act without compassion, and with other people, you are super compassionate. Why? It's because of what you're thinking about yourself in relation to that person.

When you act without compassion, you might be thinking that you yourself are someone special who doesn't have to care about this other person. That happens a lot when people start to get power and authority. They let it go to their head. They start thinking, *Oh, I'm so much more important. I don't have to give time to all these people.* I certainly fell victim to that in the beginning as well. Certainly, maybe a little bit here and there and even later in my career. Absolutely.

When you're being insecure, you might be thinking, *I don't know as much about these people.* Or, *I'm not as good as these people.* Or you feel threatened, *These people have authority over me. They're going to judge me*. But you're creating all of that in your head. You're creating anxiety around the fact that they might be more senior to you. It doesn't actually mean anything. It's a neutral thought. This person is a Senior Vice President. So what? It doesn't have any meaning until you give it meaning. You're creating all those thoughts in your head.

There are some people I know who are great at talking one-on-one. They are a master of what they do. They're just this wealth of information. And then you put them in front of an audience and they get totally stressed out. why? It's because of what they think of themselves in relation to other people in the room.

Here's another example. When you go to networking events, we all end up staying with the people that we showed up with. We don't leave our table and we don't go out there on our own to meet people. Why not? Because you're more comfortable about who you are with the people that you know. You belong in this environment, and you feel comfortable in this environment, versus the people that you don't know, who may not be welcoming, or who may be welcoming. You don't know. It's scary so you don't go after it.

Those are the three things that impact your relationships with people. What I think they think of me, what I think of them, and what I think of me in relation to them. Here's the best news I have for you, my friends. All three of

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those things are in your control. Do you know what's not in your control? I think you know already – what other people think of you.

Like I said before, what other people think of you is none of your business. And you might be offended by that. Or you could think, *Wow, that is such a freeing statement. I don't have to care what other people think of me. What they think of me is none of my business. I can't control what they think of me. If they want to chat with me about it, then we can have a discussion and create shared expectations or get clear about boundaries.*

The key is, that you can't be responsible for how other people think about you. You can only be responsible for how you think and how you're showing up. So does that mean you can yell and scream at everyone in the office and not worry about what anyone thinks? Yes, it does. You may not like the results that you get from that. But yes, that's exactly what it means. You don't have to think about and worry about what anyone thinks.

When it comes to feedback, like in your job, we all get feedback about how we can improve, etc. When you get this feedback, it's important to understand if is it just one person having this piece of feedback. Is it a lot of people having the same kind of feedback? Because when a lot of people feel a certain way about you, you can reflect on that. You can get curious about it. Then you can decide what you think about that and what you want to do about it.

You can decide, *I do want different results in this situation so I'm going to change the way that I think so that I can get different results in this situation because enough people have said this to me, but it's important for me to reflect on it.* Again, you get to decide whether or not you care about what other people think about you. And I'm saying it's none of your business. You can listen if someone wants to choose to tell you something and then decide what you want to do about it.

There are really two kinds of working relationships that create the biggest challenges for people. Your boss is one and your direct reports are the other ones. I invite you to take the time to really explore each of those three thought patterns in the context of each of those relationships. Your boss has been given certain responsibilities. That's a fact. That fact is a circumstance, something that you can't control. They have a style, they will say things, they will do things, and you can't control any of it.

If you're having challenges with your boss, you can take control of the relationship by exploring some of these questions we just talked about and then really understanding what are your thought patterns that are impacting your relationship with your boss and how you show up in that relationship with your boss.

I know a coach who does relationship coaching in marriages, but she only coaches one person because it only takes one person to show up differently in the relationship to start impacting how the relationship changes. She's full of clients. She is creating so much amazing stuff with these people. It only takes one person.

When you explore what your thought patterns are around what you think of your boss, what you think your boss thinks of you, what you think of yourself in relation to your boss, and when you pull all that apart and start taking accountability for how you're thinking about it, that's how we can decide, *Do I want to keep thinking this? Is this useful to me? Am I creating all these negative emotions that I'm hanging on to that are just really affecting me? My boss doesn't feel any of it. My bosses didn't go into change because of it. I get to have choices here.*

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It's the same with your reports. Why do you gravitate to some reports versus others? Why do some people get on your nerves and some people don't? Those people who are getting on your nerves, how can you think about them differently to create a more productive working relationship? Can you be more compassionate? Can you be more understanding? Can you be less judgmental about these people? When you break down your thought patterns into those three buckets, it really helps you separate facts from thoughts.

Remember, if you haven't heard me talk about this before, circumstances are facts. That means they're indisputable, no opinion allowed. They are what other people think, feel, or do. The past or random events, like the weather, or someone's knocking at the door. These are things that are happening that you cannot control. That's what circumstances are. The fact that maybe your boss yelled at everyone in a meeting is a circumstance. How you think about your boss and yourself in that situation is going to impact your relationship with your boss.

I'm not talking about tolerating unprofessional behavior, I'm talking about understanding that you are creating the experience that you're having in that relationship. You can choose not to make it about you. You can decide that you're not going to take it personally. You can decide that your boss's freakout is totally on them and none of your business. And you're going to focus on what you need to do next and you can decide what kind of emotions you want to have based on the thoughts that you're having.

So I invite you to get really clear and do the work. Get clear about those three questions. Again, I will put them in the show notes at thecareerreset.com/26.

Just take it one relationship at a time. Start with one that you really want to start with. Dissect it, understand it, make a few small changes, and see what happens. If you like it, keep doing it.

If you want to talk about it, send me an email. I'd love to chat with you about it.

That's it for me this week, my friends. I will talk to you next time. Have a great week. Bye for now.

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