

TRANSCRIPT: AI Can't Replace This: The Leadership Advantage That's More Human Than Ever | Part Two

Sona Benefits Ad 0:00

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Why Self-Compassion Shapes Leadership

Jeff Haffner 0:40

Welcome to TCN Talks, and Anatomy of Leadership. We continue our conversation with Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth. In Part Two, AI Can't Replace This: The Leadership Advantage That's More Human Than Ever. And now, here's our host, Chris Comeaux.

The Inner Critic And Burnout

Chris Comeaux 1:02

So as we go to this next segment, you know, leaders, we're some of the hardest people on ourselves. But we extend grace to everyone else, but really to ourselves. Yeah. So why is self-compassion so difficult? And do you believe it's essential or is it optional for effective leadership?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 1:21

I believe it's essential for effective leadership. Um and I have personal stories to tell about this. I, I was a leader in my field in academia. I, I was studying and leading and teaching and researching at the intersection of religion and science. And I studied compassion, I published about compassion. Um and I had a very successful career, was leading many people, colleagues, um departments, students. And uh what nobody saw is that under underneath all of it, I was a large, a large portion of my success was driven by this strident, unrelenting, self-critical voice that told me that I really was a fraud and and I would never be able to live into the expectations and the potentials that I had. Um I, I would just never be good enough. And and so I should I should just stop either stop trying or grind harder.

And I ended up burning, burning out of academia. I, I walked away from my dream job at Boston University at the age of 36.

Chris Comeaux 2:25

Um Wow.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 2:26

So why are we hard on ourselves? Well, I, I mean, there's there's biological reasons, first of all. Um, we have evolved to crave um social support because you know, way way back in the the Paleolithic, when we when we were living in hunter-gatherer groups, if we messed up um and and and really you know ticked off our our group enough, we were at risk of being ousted onto the savannah all alone. Like if that happens, you're a goner, you know. And so when we mess up, um all of that ancient neurocircuitry kicks into gear, and we you know, our bodies are telling us your life is in danger, you you screwed up. And and so um that's one reason is it it's kind of baked in. It's very natural for us to be self-critical because it was it was a survival strategy um for us, kind of still is. Another reason that it's natural for us to be self-critical is that we live in a never enough world. That's Brene Brown's phrase. I, I mean, the standards of excellence that that that are out there for people are ridiculous, you know, how you're supposed to look and the type of perfect family you're supposed to have, and you know, the the ladders we're all supposed to climb professionally, and and how well read we're supposed to be, and how perfect our kids are. I mean, it's just overwhelming. And um, we all get this message that that really instills a lot of shame in us because none of us can live up to that, right? So there are various reasons, but um you're right, research shows that leaders are very hard on themselves. And um the thing is that when we don't develop the skills of self-compassion and being able to soothe ourselves and um instill a growth mindset that tells us, like, hey, this is a moment of of suffering or mistake. But you know what? Suffering and mistakes are part of life. I'm gonna be kind to myself in this moment, and I'm gonna see the lessons here, and I'm gonna learn how to do it better next time. That's what self-compassion does. Three steps. Notice the mistake and suffering, remember that that's normal. We're all human, you're not alone, and then consciously choose kindness and accountability. It's not just letting yourself off the hook, it's it's creating new patterns that are prevent the mistake in the future. That's kind as well. When we learn to do that as leaders, instead of ruminating, instead of self-flagellating, instead of getting addicted to things, instead of numbing out, instead of blaming other people, we become, we be, we become amazing. We become amazing mentors to others and models to others. When bad stuff happens, we're able to bounce back much more quickly. Research shows, I mean, self-compassionate leaders are less stressed. They're actually more motivated to achieve, not less. Um, they have greater well-being. They're, like I said, they're more resilient, they have higher standards of excellence. There's even some research showing that self-compassionate leaders make

better and faster decisions under pressure because they trust themselves that even, you know, even if this isn't doesn't go perfectly, there's still hope. And we're gonna get through it because I've done this many, many times. And so I would just say to anybody listening, if you struggle with a strident inner critic like I did, um, here's a little tool you can use. Um, put your hand on your heart in a moment of struggle, suffering, or shame or whatever, and just say, this is a moment of suffering. Suffering is a part of life. May I be kind to myself in this moment? Take a deep breath and see if that doesn't just help settle you a little bit in a difficult moment. So yeah.

Chris Comeaux 6:10

That was a master class right there. You reminded me I was on the interstate a couple weeks ago, and this guy just passed me almost like I was standing still, and I was going pretty fast. And he was in a red sports car, and the personalized license plate was never enough in UFF. And so I'm a little, I'm a little competitive. So let's just say I stumped on a little bit and I finally caught up with this guy a little bit later. And I looked, I looked at him, and the poor guy looked so rough. He looked like he was put up wet and just like it been through the ringer. And I just had this moment of going, yeah, I don't know if he's actually read his own license plate, but that was that was a masterclass.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 6:47

Wow, what a moment.

[Values That Steady You In Crisis](#)

Chris Comeaux 6:49

One of the themes in your work is that when people were deeply grounded in values, they could weather extraordinary uncertainty. Can you talk about that? Why do values become important during times of crisis disruption?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 7:05

Sure. Um, so first, what are values? Um sometimes people talk about values and purpose, and they use the same word, but they're they're different, just like compassion and empathy are different. Um, so value your values are those beliefs and principles and behaviors that that guide you and define you and give your life a sense of meaning and fulfillment. Purpose is how you live that out. You know, you wake up in the morning and say, This is how I'm going to live forth my values. This is what I'm going to do with those beliefs and principles, right? Um, and so values are the work of a lifetime. And getting conscious, getting grounded and conscious about your values means you have to think about, you have to think beyond the current stress you're facing. Um you have to think,

just like you were talking earlier about your time travel to back when you were a four-year-old and you did something incredibly courageous and you reread that in your mind and found some strength there, right? When we think about values, um I do think it requires that we sort of go forwards and backwards in time, which gives us a bigger perspective on life. Because we have to think about when we're defining our values, you have to think about, well, what lessons have I learned in the past about what a good life and good leadership mean? What are what are the past exemplars I've admired? Um, and you have to look forward too. I, I have this exercise I do with coaching clients and with audiences, actually, too, or it's called Future Me. And I have, I have everybody sort of get into a calm, like meditative um space, inwardness. And I, I ask them to picture themselves 90 years old, sitting on a park bench, looking back on a life well lived. You've seen it all, done it all, survived it all, like grown through, struggle, crawled back from all the hardship. And you, you're so proud of the person that you've become. You, you've become a hero to other people, you're a hero to yourself. And I have people just settle with that vision of themselves in the future. And then I say, what value words most describe this ideal future you? And and I give some examples, like maybe it's wise, maybe it's courageous, maybe it's humble, maybe it's, you know, maybe it's frugal, maybe it's funny. I don't know what your values are. But like what are what are maybe the top two that come to mind? Don't think about it too hard. And it's amazing what happens because all of a sudden it's like you can reread what actually matters, and you have this much bigger picture that comes into view in the moments that matter. So, again, let's say you're overwhelmed by budget cuts at your hospital or something, and and you just feel this sense of fear and dread in your chest. How are we gonna get through this? How are we gonna do more with less yet again? And rather than letting it paralyze you, you take five or 10 minutes in your office, you close the door, you consciously recall your top values. Let's just say your top values are courage and compassion. I bet there are some listeners out there who would say, Yeah, actually, those are my top values. Um, suddenly you know that staying connected to your team matters. Staying vulnerable about the stress here matters. Um boldly, but but the courage, boldly believing the best in them, encouraging them to innovate and flex and bend in new ways as they try to fill the gaps, you know, really believing, hey, this is hard, but we're gonna do the absolute best we can with what we've got. And suddenly your team does feel a little bit scrappier, a little bit more creative, a little bit, a little bit more of a fighter because they know what counts. And they're getting that energy from you because you know what counts. And you can't fake that. You cannot fake that. But when you are strong and grounded in the values that drive you in your life and your work, and and I people disagree on this. Um, some people say you can have your work values and your and your like home values in life. I believe that they should integrate. Um, and so uh when when that is happening and when you're being conscious about it, um it's just an unstoppable leadership force in terms of its ability to inspire people around

Future Me Exercise For Clarity

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 11:08

you.

Chris Comeaux 11:08

Gosh, that's so much wisdom. Jeez. Um, suppose one of our leaders is listening or also leading a hospice, hospital healthcare organization. We've got leaders in all those different segments, and they're just feeling completely overwhelmed. What are two or three practical habits that they could begin tomorrow morning that will immediately improve their resilience and their emotional well-being?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 11:32

I, I might circle back on a couple of things I've already talked about. Um the first one is um is the self-compassion break. If you're feeling overwhelmed, um maybe you're grieving, you know, maybe overwhelm can come from many different places in our lives, not just our professional situation, but um life is hard on a lot of levels right now. I think I think there's actually a lot of grief out there. And I know we've got um I mean, grief is the work of hospice, you know. Um and so tuning in first of all, just becoming aware of your own suffering and noticing it and um and then remembering that to be human is to suffer. Um, and then to choose kindness for yourself instead of your default. Um kind of, you know, it looks different for everybody, but it can be as simple as, you know, a I'm not gonna sit here and and ruminate on what all could go wrong here. Um, I'm gonna get up, I'm gonna take a deep breath, refill my water bottle, and and say a couple of mantras that help me. Like maybe, you know, I'm a supporter, not a savior. That's one of my favorite mantras to give to waiters because um, especially in healthcare and hospice fields, you know, it's just a lot of caring people already, and and you have to remember like you're a supporter, not a savior to the people that you're that you're showing up for. I guess I would double back down on your values, taking some time to consciously remember what your values are and to go a little deeper with that. One thing that's really valuable, um, most of us have a, you know, you've talked about a couple of your mentors, your exemplars, your teachers. And if there's someone in your life or in your past who has deeply inspired you to be um a competent, capable, bold, caring leader, think about that person. Pull out their picture, text, text them if they're still with us on this earth. You know, like do something that can sort of conjure up their energy and their inspiration for you because none of us can do this alone. And, you know, the trope about how, you know, it's lonely at the top is is overworked. But it is still kind of true. I mean, we all need to be able to connect to the people that inspire us and can bring us into our best, even when we're feeling at our lowest, at our most stressed out. And then another thing I would suggest is to do something unexpectedly kind um for for for somebody. And I know this sounds

maybe kind of um off the wall or odd, but you know, even like the barista, like a bit of an extra tip. Or, you know, I love Ted Lasso. I'm actually re-watching Ted Lasso right now and his his relationship with Nate, the, you know, I don't know if you're are you a Ted Lasso person? I am actually so you know, Ted Lasso is one of these guys who um is just always looking, he's he's looking at the servers at the restaurants as people, you know, that that are there for a conversation and for a real connection. And and the the kid in the locker room who collects the towels is as much a part of the team as the top scorer on the on the Scots, the soccer team. It's like when leaders can step out of their own misery and be like, hey, can I do something for somebody else today that's unexpected and that will make their day? I just feel like, and there's research showing that the small acts of kindness can give us such a boost in our emotional resilience. Get out of your own head and and just do something, do something wild and crazy and and kind for somebody else today.

Habits For Resilience And Well-Being

Chris Comeaux 15:09

Awesome. Gosh, so much wisdom. Um, you've spent your career helping people navigate stress, uncertainty, and change. As you look ahead over the next decade, AI, workforce disruption. We have an incredible podcast coming out with an economist about the straight up the data of the workforce. It's pretty eye-opening. And just the accelerating rate of change. What gives you hope? What are you seeing in people that makes you optimistic about the future? I'm assuming that's true.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 15:40

I do, yeah. Well, I mean, hope is what we all need. Uh, Gallup last year came out with a maybe you've seen this, um, a poll showing that hope is the most desired and needed leadership quality um that that workers are wanting globally. Um they want they want leaders who can inspire hope. I will say that I, you know, I travel a lot because I'm a keynote speaker, and I've gathered a lot of hope from my travels because I, I interact with a lot of strangers. And what I see out there in airports and coffee shops and Uber rides and hotel staff and conference attendees and meeting planners and you know, just I'm out with a lot of people that I haven't met before. And there is so much goodness out there. There is so much humor, there is so much um joy that can be found. There, and we don't all agree on all the things. You know, I I think sometimes, you know, doom scrolling is a word because because it it does, it's a thing. Like there's so much doom and gloom when we just get our sense of reality from from the news and from social media and from scrolling. Um, when you get out there in the world, people aren't losing their ability to connect with one another at the rate that I think some of us fear that they are. Um people

look me in the eye. People are kind to me when I need some directions and I'm I'm a little bit lost. Um the other day I was at the airport with my son. We were going on a trip, and um we were in line to get some breakfast, and the guy in front of us started chatting with us, and my son had had um not made the soccer team at tryouts, but um for the league he wanted, but he had made the team for uh um another league. But anyway, we started talking about soccer, and this total stranger was we he ended up giving us his phone number and saying, hey, I can help coach this team if you if you need a coach, your your new team. And I was, you know, we didn't end up calling him, but still, like I just I'm encouraged by just the native sense of connectedness that is still out there with people. And and I don't think we should be overdoing this, like, oh my God, we're you know, we're all losing the sense of of how to connect with one another. Um the other thing I would say is I love this trend of Gen Z sort of going retro with things. Um, you know, there's this craze of in New York City, a lot of Gen Z are, well not a lot, but like there's a group of Gen Zers that are getting rid of smartphones and going back to landlines. They like, wow, they don't, they don't answer the phone at home. Like a lot of them still have a smartphone, like when they're out working, but when they get home, no one can contact them unless they call the the the the landline. And um, I just I, I like I like trends like that. You know, there's this other trend of like 90s parties where, you know, kind of like friends style, that old show friends, like where people are just going over to each other's apartments and potluck and like leave your devices at home. Like I think we're all realizing that like, yes, technology is taking over the world, but we're stronger than that. And I see it everywhere.

[Hope In A Disconnected World](#)

Chris Comeaux 18:50

That is so cool. I was actually encouraged. I we we have five kids, I have two girls. Our girls are the last, and they were doing a technology fast a couple weekends ago, and I thought, and you know, we didn't ask them to do that. And so I thought, that's so cool. And I did not know about any of those trends. I saw one in my feed the other night that some people are getting the old headset of the landline that you could connect to your smartphone and sit there like you're on the old telephone, but it's actually on your smartphone. And I actually thought I'm like, that might be a cool stocking stuffer actually this year. Yeah, absolutely.

[Compassion Intelligence In The AI Era](#)

Chris Comeaux 19:23

Um, so throughout history, Andrea, we've measured intelligence primarily by IQ. And emotional intelligence was definitely kind of a big deal. EQ is the acronym. So as AI becomes increasingly capable of cognitive tasks, is the next frontier of leadership maybe compassion intelligence? Um, will the leaders who flourish be the ones who know how to combine technological excellence with profound human connection? How would you state it?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 19:55

Compassion intelligence. I've never heard that phrase before, but I like it. I'm gonna have to think about that and kind of try it on and see what that might look like. But um just 1,000 times yes, in answer to your question. I think, I think um, you know, I go back to the story of sitting in my doctor's office last week. You know, um, my doctor was able to combine artificial intelligence, this amazing tool that was, you know, creating the doctor's notes that she didn't have to do, um, with that human presence and connection. And I think I think the leaders of tomorrow that are going to be the most powerful are gonna be the ones who can utilize technology to free up their cognitive load, not add to it. Like I there's a danger here. Let me pause. There's a danger here because sometimes the more technology we get and the more productive we can be, the more we just fill up our time with more tasks. And I think that that is something to resist. And that when when you get free time uh from a technology, utilizing it to be more present and connected to others is what's going to be most valuable. Um not just for others, but for you as well. Um and so, yes, 1,000 times yes to your question.

Chris Comeaux 21:18

My gosh, there's so many pearls in everything you're saying, Andrew. You're such an amazing woman of wisdom.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 21:22

Thank you.

Chris Comeaux 21:23

Free up your cognitive load. Yeah. I just want that to settle upon people. I'm like, are you watching me? Because you totally nailed me. Because I've heard this before that the human soul was never meant to go at the speed of technology. And I'm one of the I love to get, excuse my French, I love to get shit done. I'm I'm like, I could knock man good days, I lock, knock a lot of tasks out. And I have I found I like to go at the speed of technology, but my soul, it's like I lose part of myself. And so I think I've fallen into that trap of going at the speed of technology. Technology. I'm just loading my cognitive lobe with more, not using it to create margin. Have you ever read Swenson's book on margin? Um, it's interesting. I don't know if you you're like me. I swear sometimes books will fall off

the shelf that have been there forever. Yeah. I'm like, oh, I'm supposed to read that book right now. And this was someone had given it to me as a gift whenever. So I was 25 when I came into hospice. I was 30 when I became a CEO. It was my parting gift from one of my team members at the age of 30. And I had not picked up the book probably in 20-something years and was leaving and it kind of fell off the shelf. And I started reading it. And he actually went in Africa. And what while we feel like we're so much more advanced, what he saw was a society that had margin built into society. And he was criticizing the American society because we just keep trying to go faster and faster and faster. Yes. And there and there's no margin. Yes. And that is a growing edge of mine. So I just love what you just said. That um feels like that in itself is almost a masterclass of are we trying to go at the speed, or are we using this to create more margin to free up that cognitive load?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 23:08

Exactly.

Chris Comeaux 23:09

That's just profound.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 23:10

Well, I'm so glad we keep we keep just the there's there's such amazing synergy in this conversation. I feel it too. So

[Compassionate Culture And Leadership Close](#)

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 23:17

it's fun.

Chris Comeaux 23:17

Very cool. Well what final thoughts do you have? We could probably go on for two hours, but I just want yeah, what what what final thoughts do you have?

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 23:25

I started out defining compassion as to suffer with and to do something to help. And I think that we can sadly, I think we can expect suffering to increase in the future. Um and I, I think we're gonna need each other as never before. Um and so workplaces where people feel seen and they feel safe and they feel supported in the in their full humanity, even amidst their stress and their suffering, those are the workplaces that are gonna draw top talent and keep top talent. Um those are the workplaces where people are gonna feel well and resilient enough to handle the challenges that come with the pace of the world as it

as it's exploding in front of us. Like, and so um I would just end with a real injunction to every single leader listening. Um, this is not soft. Um, this this is the most crucial and some of the hardest work that you might ever do, but it will be the most rewarding work you'll ever do as a person. But also in terms of your bottom, your bottom line. Um, in workplaces where there's compassionate leadership and self-compassionate leadership that's modeled, um, you're gonna have fewer problems with turnover, you're gonna have more engaged employees, you're gonna have better problem solvers and innovation innovators. And there's so much research to support this. And so if anything that we've talked about today is hitting home with you, I just want to urge you to sit with it and dig deeper and ask how you can start to develop these skills in your leadership. Um, because it's not just going to make you happier and more fulfilled as a as a as a person and a leader, it's also going to help drive your business in the direction of success.

Chris Comeaux 25:30

So incredibly well said. When I was just listening to you, one of the things that so I try to meet with all of our employees on our team within about first month, first two months, and to get to spend time with them, they tell their story, they get to listen to my story, and we talk about the values of our organization. I usually end the meeting this way. I say, I hope this is the place that you retire from. And then I lean forward because this is the real punchline. And I hope you look back at your time in this organization and you've grown more as a human being here than any other place you've ever been. But then I also say that and I cringe a little bit because I realize, okay, we've got to live into that. I don't want to say live up to that, but we have to live into that. Um I will tell you, someone who who is striving to be that type of CEO leader, it's hard. It is the road less traveled. Yeah. And now that I have kids going into the workplace, it is the road less traveled. Yeah. So I love that you're out there. Thank you for the work that you're doing. Thank you for who you are.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 26:30

You're welcome. Thank you for who you are as well.

Chris Comeaux 26:32

Yeah, we'll we'll we'll try to figure out a way how to connect. And again, I know there'll be lots of listeners that want to connect with you. So thank you. Appreciate you.

Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth 26:39

You're welcome. Thank you for the honor of being on the podcast today.

Subscribe And Brain Bookmark Quote

Chris Comeaux 26:43

Well, to our listeners, we want to thank you. At the end of each episode, we always share a quote, a visual. The idea is to create a Brain Bookmark, a thought prodger about our podcast subject to further your learning and your growth. We're hoping it sticks, almost like a brain tattoo. Be sure to subscribe to our channel. We don't want you to miss an episode. This is one we know you want to pay forward to other of your coworkers, your friends, and the hospice and powdered care space. You know, it's so easy for us to reel against the world and be frustrated by things. Let's be the change that we wish to see in the world. So thanks for listening to TCN Talks Anatomy of Leadership. And here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner 27:20

"Wounded people, Wound people. Transformed people, Transform people. Therefore, Care. Don't carry." — Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth