

## Unlocking Leadership Potential Through Self-Awareness with Coach Sherry Winn |

### Part One

**Melody King:** 0:00

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is fueled by living your cause and purpose. This podcast will equip you with the tools to do just that. Live and lead with cause and purpose. And now, author of the book The Anatomy of Leadership, and our host, Chris Comeaux.

**Chris Comeaux:** 0:22

Hello and welcome. I'm excited today. We have a great guest with us. Sherry Winn is the CEO of the Winning Leadership Company. Let me tell you about Sherry. She stepped into the world as a leader. I love that line. First in sports, where she attained the highest level possible in athletics, the Olympic Games. She then led college basketball programs for 23 years, where she won a national championship, and she took teams to three Elite Eight. Since 2012, as CEO of the winning leadership company, she's delivered over 3,800 hours, and I probably should say counting, of leadership programs where she's developed Olympic level leaders. Sherry's spoken to audiences as large as 14,000 and has spoken for companies such as Dell, McDonald's, and Adobe. She's spoken in Gillette Stadium, airplane hangers, baseball diamonds, and too many hotel conventions to even counter mention. Organizations such as the Volunteers of America, Anytime Fitness, Edward Jones, and a host of multimillion and billion dollar companies invest in Sherry's teachings each year, which is why we're super blessed to have her with us today. Sherry, it's great, great to have you. What did I leave out that you would want our audience to know about you?

**Sherry Winn:** 1:29

Well, all that means nothing. So in the big scheme of things, let's talk about it. All that means nothing in the big scheme of things. What really means something is like I'm heart focused, I'm authentic. And uh what I care about the most is people. How can I elevate people to a new level so that they become the best version of themselves?

**Chris Comeaux:** 1:47

You may have just answered my second question, which I think I'll let you know I was going to ask it, but I kind of stumbled into this in a prior podcast, and it's just ended up being a blessing to me because I get to see this in action. But the question is this what is your superpower?

**Sherry Winn:** 2:02

Superpower. Self-awareness. Self-awareness is a superpower because it is what has transformed my life. It's transformed me from being depressed and suicidal to optimistic,

a motivational speaker, an author, a coach, a speaker. I mean, it's those kind of things that we often don't think self-awareness is a superpower, but look, only get this, this is crazy. But only 15% of the population is self-aware. One five. So 85% of the people out there don't ask questions like, why do I feel this way? Why did that trigger me? What does that emotion mean? What are the words I'm saying to myself really do to me? Like people don't do that. And the people who are really successful, the people who move on in life, the people who are the happiest, they have the most joy in their lives, are people who are self-aware.

**Chris Comeaux:** 2:55

That's so good. That's I've never actually had someone answer that way. And I've never heard that statistic before, but I totally believe that. Well, Sherry, first off, thank you. You uh you turned me on to your book. And so winning leadership, Seven Secrets of Being a Truly Powerful Leader. I'll try to draw from this, but I just loved connecting with you the first time we met and just this whole person approach. That's where I feel like I connected with you in a very deep, maybe spiritual level, heart level. But this does lead to a good first question. What makes you rare or unique is that you talk about leadership as an inside-out practice. What exactly does that mean? And how did your Olympic experience perhaps shape some of that belief?

**Sherry Winn:** 3:38

Well, first of all, I think that you can't give what you don't have. So that's number one. So if it's an inside-out practice, that means the more that you understand you, the more that you overcome your limiting beliefs, the more that you self-reflect and grow, the more you have to offer. So, for example, I've had I was coaching a COO, and he was in a pretty toxic environment and miserable. God was absolutely miserable. And he's he's telling me how you know his CEO tears him down and how he just can't he doesn't know how to deal with it, and he hates coming to work every day. And when I talk to him, he goes, Oh man, I'm just I'm just I wake up grouchy and I say, okay, let's let's reverse engineer engineer this. So go through your process when you wake up. He goes, Well, the first thing I do is I turn on this political, you know, podcast. And I go, okay, stop that. He goes, What do you mean? He goes, I love it. And I said, No, you don't. I said, it's feeding into this emotional addiction you have of being angry. So let's stop that. Let's just start there. And I said, if two weeks, give you two weeks. And in two weeks' time, if you know you don't feel better by listening to some inspirational, and I said, You can choose it. I'll give you some options, choose whatever, or find one on your own, and then tell me how you feel. And the next week I talked to him, he's like, I feel so great. This is awesome. And then he went on to, he eventually quit his job. I didn't, I didn't say to him to do that. He made a decision, and now he's the CEO of a company, a CEO, right? Well, why? Because he he understood something that was hurting him and he decided to make the change. And that's what's

being inside out. I mean, we we get addicted to our emotions, we get addicted to things that not are always helpful. Many of us get addicted to those things. And if we don't know we're addicted, we stay in overwhelmed frustration, anger, uh, you know, stress. We stay in those things because we don't know better and we're addicted to them. If you can learn to get out of those, look how much better we can show up in the world. So I think that answers your first question.

**Chris Comeaux:** 5:37

It does actually.

**Sherry Winn:** 5:38

And the second one you said, you you asked me about the Olympics. Like, what did I learn from the Olympic Olympics? Well, my coaches, unbelievable. Everybody always thinks, well, the best of the best of the best coach is going to coach the Olympics, and not true. And this was back, you gotta remember, so this is back when we were all amateurs. This is back before we were paid. And so our coaches weren't paid much, we were paid nothing. And uh what I learned from them was absolutely how not to be a leader. That's what they taught me. They taught me how not to be a leader, they taught me all the things you shouldn't say to somebody, um, all the things you shouldn't do to people. And I'll give you an example real quick. I had a coach, and so I went to him and I said, uh coach, you know, we're we're ex we're tired. We're all we all, I mean almost the entire team is showing symptoms of overtraining. We have constant headaches, inability to eat, uh, overuse injuries. And his this is what he said to me. Who are you? Who who you think you are? You are you a coach? No, you're not a coach. So stop, stop, not coach, stop. You'll know nothing. So um I learned how valuable it was to listen to people.

**Chris Comeaux:** 6:46

Wow. It's just that, just that like bootstrap yourself. Well, I was thinking of your first answer. Um, my mentor, I think I share with you the first time we met, a guy named Dr. Lee Thayer, he was Stephen Covey's mentor. And one of he wrote many books. He was writing his 56th book, I believe, whenever he passed away in 2020 at the age of 95 or 96. And but one of the books he wrote was mental hygiene. And I never actually heard that framing before, but you could probably get the from the title very quickly in your answer. I'm like, what am I feeding myself? And he turned me on to a book called The Information Diet. And this was the premise of the book. I don't know if you ever read it, but it basically said, we're alive. You know, people used to be starving. Reason why we have obesity now is we have more food available in the history of man. And then they drew a quick corollary to we're alive in the information age. So you have more information available in the history of man, therefore, you have to be discerning about what you ingest. And so that was one of then the core principles he kind of built off of in this book of mental hygiene.

And since this day, and then it's so easy to scroll on social media. And the downside is you could be ingesting so much junk food in the time of 30 minutes an hour, but yet that's what we do to distress and not realizing it's the mental corollary of stuffing a bunch of junk food in your body.

**Sherry Winn:** 8:07

That's a good analogy. I love that. I think that we don't understand that what we put in is what is who we are. I mean, we can't separate that. You know, every bit of information we ingest all day long, it becomes who we become, who we are, what we say, how we behave, what we believe. And eventually it is, believe it or not, I mean, you probably do because you're you know this, but all the information we put in can cause that thing called dis-ease.

**Chris Comeaux:** 8:32

Which is a really interesting word in the way you actually framed it. Dis-ease. Yeah. This might go to a really good next question. You wrote in your book about fear in a way that I feel like is different than most leadership books. How do you believe leaders should relate to fear? And then, you know, a lot of our listeners, because I live in hospice and palliative care, so they're a lot of healthcare leaders. So in high-stake environments like healthcare, how do they take fear and use it in the way that you're talking about?

**Sherry Winn:** 9:03

Well, that's a good question because I don't remember what I wrote in my book. I've written two more since then. But I will say this about fear is that fear is the absence of love. And so when we put it in that context and we understand that fear is the absence of love, then if we were to align more with love, we'd have less fear. If we truly believed in love, right? What is there to fear? Because there's if we get that we are love, we come from love, there is nothing else that we can be. And the only way that we separate from it is we make the decision to do so. What is there to fear if you're love? What if you're the what is there to fear if you know that you are loved, that you came from love, and therefore you absolutely own that and are that, what is there to fear? And I think that we get sucked up in all these things, unearthly things, that if I don't get this job, then that's the end of me. If I don't have this title, who am I? If I don't have all these kind of scenarios in our head, but the truth of it is once you just really accept, look, I'm love and I'm always going to be loved, and I'm always gonna be loved, then fear disappears. So it's the absence of love. So I don't know what I wrote, but that's one of my beliefs is right there.

**Chris Comeaux:** 10:12

Well, it was a it was basic along those lines. And it's so this kind of feels pretty profound in my quiet time this morning. I'm reading Inner Excellence. I'm sure you're probably familiar with that book. Got very famous because a Philadelphia Eagles football player in the Super Bowl was literally reading the book when he was on the bench when he was not in the game. So people are like, what is he reading? Like, who, what football player reads the book? I had heard about it prior, but that was kind of the catalyst for me amongst a bunch of other people to purchase it. It's a fascinating book. And so I'm on the chapter about the guy who wrote the book, um, Jim Murphy, I think is his name. He had a family member in his lineage that actually was a uh samurai warrior. And so there are three kind of key things in the code, which is love, courage, and wisdom. And it's interesting because I was thinking about, like, you know, you use the word love, like, oh, Sherry's kind of being fluffy. Okay, yeah, you know, love. Literally sitting with that, like the capacity for love, and what does that actually really mean? And what are the actions that reflect that? And how much of my life reflects that? You know, we live in a time when um there's so much left brain activity that if you just sit with that, like I did this morning, and like the like, what do I do that produces love and shows love to others? Am I increasing in my capacity or decreasing in my capacity? All of that made me very uncomfortable, actually. And it's funny, and the whole time of that conversation in my head, fear was nowhere near in that conversation.

**Sherry Winn:** 11:41

Yeah, no. And so when I say it's funny because you said, uh, if you say love, it sounds fluffy. And it's exactly who I was maybe 20 years ago. I go, oh, what am I talking about? Love, this is so stupid. Like, and somebody says they love me. They don't even know they love me. Like I was just so like anti, this is stupid, silly, stop it, get out of my face kind of with it. But it's not romantic love I'm talking about. I mean, it's really about compassion, empathy, gratitude, joy, peace, surrender. It's all the positive emotions. When I say love, I mean all those positive emotions. Who doesn't want to feel those positive emotions? Who who would say no to that?

**Chris Comeaux:** 12:23

Right.

**Sherry Winn:** 12:23

Right? So when I say love, I'm not talking about, you know, the romantic love we often associate it with. It's so much deeper than that. I mean, the love that I'm talking about is with, I think about my father who um and he remarried, my parents divorced one after 23 years of marriage, and he remarried a woman. And he, her last 10 to 12 years of her life, he was, he was her caretaker. I mean, he did all the cooking, he did all the cleaning, he's the one that got her out of bed, put her in her wheelchair, you know, rolled her wherever

she needed to go. He's the one that took her to the bathroom every single time to go back, gave her baths, dressed her, you know, changed her diaper. Like, look, I'm telling you, like, you can't do that if you don't have love in your heart. You just can't do that. I mean, you would hire somebody in, and I'm not saying if you hire somebody you don't have love, because sometimes your circumstances are different. But um, you know, when I'm talking about love, I'm talking about that kind of deep compassion that you have, A, for yourself and B for other people. How you show up in the world. And so, you know, what's opposite of that? Well, greed, anger, frustration, you know?

**Chris Comeaux:** 13:28

You just made me think about, so you know, we work with a lot of hospice empowered care leaders, and we we walk alongside those caregivers doing exactly what you're talking about. Never thought about framing it this way before, but in many situations, we are the facilitators of love and and showing love and the care that we're providing, but also facilitating that caregiver to keep showing up. Because I love how you kind of reeled it back because there's some people that absolutely need those caregivers to come in. I mean, there's only so much as humanly possible. And a lot of these caregivers are, I don't know how old your dad was, but like they're 85, 90 years old doing stuff that would be a strain on someone younger than me. Um, and it so I I love that. I'm actually going to use that. We're we are facilitators of love. Well, you are.

**Sherry Winn:** 14:13

You absolutely are. I mean, that's what that's what healthcare should be about. It's what the the center it should be about. And especially when you're in the care, the type of care that you are, it's at that place where people have it, you know, they're reflecting, they're looking back, they're they're either living in regret or they're living in gratitude at that age of their life. And I would much rather at that age live in gratitude than regret.

**Chris Comeaux:** 14:36

Yeah, very much so. In fact, quite often what we'll see is you'll see lifetimes sometimes of those negative emotions and the miracles that happen under our care. We're facilitators of that sometimes, is sometimes there is that shift from regret to forgiveness to healing. Um, it's just beautiful when you see it because it's almost like a lot of stuff in the story. In fact, we did a podcast a couple weeks ago, and a great physician who actually lived in Missoula, Montana, um, actually he said, we get to restory. Like there's something that happens under our care that sometimes that whole story, yes, it wasn't good, it was negative, but there's a rest story that's told. And some it doesn't always end up being the beautiful ending. Um, one of uh one time this lady came up to me at a fundraiser when I was a CEO of a hospice and she said, You need to understand what y'all do. And I thought, oh my God, this is a service recovery issue. But it was not that. She ended up

sharing this amazing story of care of her mom. And this was the punchline in what she shared. She said, This care, this experience is now going to change the trajectory of the rest of my life. And I thought, all right, I'm now so bought into this cause and purpose that we're a part of that I'm still a part of it. Because that was probably 20-something years ago when that happened.

**Sherry Winn:** 15:49

Yeah, and that's exactly that's exactly what I do too. I mean, uh, you know, people will go, well, you're a leadership coach, you're a speaker, whatever. But what I'm doing is helping people restory, you know, they reframe their stories, they reframe the way they believe in themselves, they reframe old things that they haven't gotten over, which is now impacting their ability to move forward or even to be in the present moment. So it's it's you know, we're we're in the same business, which is helping people find their inner peace.

**Chris Comeaux:** 16:19

That's beautiful. And I'm writing my second book, and it's a lot about what you just said, about that kind of reframing and kind of restory. Well, let's keep going here because I will want to get to some of the other incredible tools in your toolbox as a coach. Um, one of the things in your book, one of the most compelling ideas is that leadership victories happen long before the results show up on the field. Explain what did you mean by that and how should leaders think about maybe those invisible moments when you're not on the field presenting to 14,000 people?

**Sherry Winn:** 16:51

Well, I mean, to me, it's a victory every single day of who you are and how you show up and what are you gonna be able to give to somebody else. So, you know, many times when I coached basketball and I coached for 23 years at the college level, it would be 10 or 15 or 20 years later before I got a message back from one of those players who then would say to me, I just want to thank you. I want to thank you because what you taught me about never having an excuse, about always finding a way, has changed my world. Or I just want to thank you because I had never heard focus on the controllable factors. And I didn't know that if you focus on the controllable factor that you're gonna find more happiness and you're gonna find better things in your life. I didn't know that, and you ch totally changed my world, or whatever they're telling me. So it's all those moments that you're spending doing what you do, saying what you say, leading how you lead, and just being who you are. I mean, just the essence of you, how you show up, is a victory in the fact that every single day somebody takes a piece of that. And then it could be that seed you're planting, it could be that something that shows up in them in two weeks, it could be two months, it could be ten years. But those are the victories that a leader really is going for. I mean, what better legacy than have to somebody 20 years after the fact take

the time to write you a note or an email or to call you? Those are the those are the true victories. I mean, we all forget, look, people are probably gonna figure out if you're in business how much money you made in one year, or what what did you meet all your goals in that year? Or those things are easily forgotten, but you never forget when one of your team members come back to you and tells you how how in a positive way how you impacted their life. You never forget those.

**Chris Comeaux:** 18:36

Yeah, 100%. I have a lot of thank you notes in my office as those kind of refeeding those moments back to me. You're right, those are probably the things I treasure much more than the others. Well, in in your book, there's a chapter on slashing excuses to double productivity. And you make a surprising argument about the real damage that excuses cause. Just walk us through what leaders often get wrong about excuses and what changes when they finally take full responsibility.

**Sherry Winn:** 19:06

Yeah, so excuses are are, you know, first of all, it's something that we use to blame outside events, other people or circumstances. So that's really being a victim. As soon as you put into an excuse, you become a victim. And that's not ever going to move you forward. So when we blame, you know, when I was young and I grew up in a victim household and I didn't know it, because you don't know it when you're growing up, you have no idea. Like my mom was one of them, my dad was one. I didn't know. And so I grew up blaming outside events, other people and circumstances for why I was, who I was, what was happening in my world, et cetera, that meant that I had no power to change anything. The moment that we take our responsibility, it doesn't mean entirely, like if I'm in a situation and I'm in a situation with another another person, I can't take responsibility for who they are or how they show up. I can take responsibility for who I am and how I show up, how I navigate that conversation. So when we get rid of those excuses and we start saying, what could I have done better? How can I improve myself? Yes, I take responsibility for this. We have power. And the power is what moves us forward. Excuses don't move anything forward. You can, you can have an excuse for why whatever happened in your world, right? Whatever that excuse is, you can have the excuse, but nothing's changed. So you're gonna go to your grave saying, Well, you know, I could have been this, but X, X, and X happened. And the truth of it is X, X, and X happens to every single one of us, without exception, because it is the human experience that we had multiple challenges in our life. So do you want to learn from them, grow from them, take responsibility from them, get yourself the power, or do you want to always have that reason why you didn't get what you wanted?

**Chris Comeaux:** 20:42

Jerry, what was the catalyst in your life to go from that victim reality that you were brought up with? With I imagine those paradigms were deeply seated in you. So, and I imagine it wasn't like an overnight where you went and went, okay, well, I'm gonna change that. I'm gonna be different. It probably was more of a process, but was there a catalytic event that was kind of yeah, so tell me about it.

**Sherry Winn:** 21:06

Ooh, well, you know, all events kind of kind of end up of stack events. Like so one event happens and it stacks on the next, it saps, you know, they just keep stacking until there's like a power, like a boo, like a dynamite event. So that event for me was um, I'd had several things go wrong. Like I'd had all my life I grew up as as the ath the athlete. I was good, right? You don't get to Olympic games being bad. I thought I was a good athlete, but it seemed wherever I go, whatever team I played with, there was always this um, it always ended up chaos. It always ended up with this conflict between me and other players. Every single experience. And so then my head, because I was a victim, is like, well, they don't like me. It's them, they, whatever. And it ended up sophomore year in college, uh, I was leading the team at points and assists. Team goes to the coach and says, We can't play with Sherry. The coach, not knowing better, like really. Not understanding how to deal with conflict, took me down the locker room and says to the team, tell Sherry what you think about her. So they did, unfiltered. Wow. Now you have to imagine I was already broken. I already had a lot of self-esteem issues after all these events, you know, growing up. And it I mean, it it was brutal to me. I was brutal. And um so next two weeks I drank. Like, I mean, I drank until I would wake up and I would before I could even get sober, like I'd wake up and I'd just start drinking again until I passed out. That was the only that was the only way I knew how to deal with it. I didn't have any of the tool sets. That's the only tool set I had. And then I woke up one morning instead of putting a beer bottle or whiskey, um whiskey bottle in my hand, I had my 38 Snub No Special. And I was like, okay, like I got three choices here. One, pull that trigger and hope it's true, aim it's true. Number two, keep living the same miserable existence. Or number three, change. And I go, hmm, change sounds best. Like, you know, I've no duffy. I was like, change, that sounds better. And so what I did at that point is I I started reading self-help books by the dozen. And one of the things that that I that I read that stuck with me was you don't get what you want, you get who you are. To get what you want, you have to change who you are. And I was like, ba-boom, right? All right, so if I want the goal of being Olympian, it means I have to change me. Like I have to change the essence of me. And there was a lot of work, you know, done with reading, journaling, you know, getting mentors. There was a lot of work to understand even what I was doing to myself. But what I knew from that, and what's so essential, and when I coach people, I tell them that same thing all the time. You don't get what you want, you get who you are. To get what you want, you have to change who you are. So, what pieces of you do you need to change to be in alignment with what you

want? And that's what we have to work on, no matter what your goal is, because you can change, but it's not like people want to change, like they want to change things they they can't change, which is other people. No, no, no. Like you have to look at you, and once you do that, you get more and more and more power to end up with the goals that you want, right? That's where your power comes from. Your power never comes from an excuse, it never comes from blaming. That's not power, it never comes from putting somebody else down. Not power. Your power is you. The power is in how you decide to elevate yourself, and it's always a decision.

**Chris Comeaux:** 24:23

That's that's solid gold right there. That was a master class. So, Sherry, my next question is you know, many leaders in healthcare. I I've I've probably seen over hundreds and hundreds of leaders, many of which I've coached now in healthcare. But today, especially, um, the time that we live, they feel overwhelmed and understaffed. I don't know if you know this, this is a huge issue in healthcare. And the silver tsunami of baby boomers has not quite crashed on shore yet. So this is only going to get more acute. So these pressures are real and almost unimaginable. How do they discern between a legitimate barrier and a limiting belief as a leader? I know that's a tough, isn't it?

**Sherry Winn:** 25:05

That's a tough. Yeah, thanks for throwing me the softy. I appreciate it, Chris. I appreciate it. So here's the thing. You know, when when uh I mean I think it's always comes back to your to your mindset and what you really want to do. So if the world is showing you something, you're like, this is real, it is real for the moment, until you make a decision on how what are we gonna do with that. So, you know, we're under step, okay, so how are we gonna approach that? What are some opportun what let's let's sit down and figure out the best ways to approach this? How are we gonna approach this in such a way that people can live with this and figure out a way through it? And this is a short-term, this is only short-term, right? Because we know the world changes. We know this is just this could be a year, could be two years, but we also know the world changes and we know that we can do many things beyond what we think we can do. You know, there's a really close tie to what's real and what's what's not real, what's a limiting belief. But to me, there's always an answer because to every every problem, there's a solution, or there wouldn't be a problem. There's the equal and opposite effect. So, what are you gonna do with what's in front of you? What are you gonna do with your overwhelm? How are you going to teach people to get through overwhelm? What are you gonna teach them that's gonna allow them to understand their mind is what creates the overwhelm and not just the situations because look, we're always gonna have situations every day, there's gonna be a situation. So, how do you teach yourself to get overwhelm overwhelmed? Do you teach them breathing techniques? Do they know that if they stop and they will take a

minute to really breathe? And one of the gr best breathing techniques I know is to inhale slowly three, hold for four, and release for six. In that, you are if you do that for a minute, I guarantee you whatever you think about is hard, it feels a little bit easier. So I don't know, I mean, you know, if I say spiritually, there is nothing that we can overcome. I believe that's true, but I also believe it's really hard for us in the human experience to get to that spiritual concept.

**Chris Comeaux:** 27:06

Yeah, that's so well said. I'm I'm reminded of the Stephen Covey's story of the USS Nimitz off the coast of Maine and the Nimitz signals and the light signals back and says, Hey, you probably want to turn and the Nimitz gets all upset and says, you should turn, and the light signals back and says, We're a lighthouse, you probably should turn. And that's where Covey taught the concept of principles. And I love you you were drawing from some great wisdom even earlier about what you can focus on, what can you control versus what you can't. Well, he framed that as if you understand principles, you're gonna have to navigate around those as lighthouses. That to me is like I don't even know how to answer my own question that I asked you. And your question, your answer was brilliant because it got me thinking that quite often we don't know what the principles are. But the second thing is we probably have convinced ourselves that there are limits that are almost imagined. And you just reminded me in your answer, there's an amazing leader that we work with, her name is Tracy Dobson. And because this you know staffing issue is prevalent everywhere, she said recently, she goes, I no longer even use those words about staffing shortage. She goes, I've been a nurse for 40-something years. There's never been a day that someone called and said, Hey, I just want you to know we got all the staff we need today. So at some level, this issue, yes, is it becoming more acute, but we're not even gonna name it that anymore because of how it creates the mental construct of how we think about it.

**Sherry Winn:** 28:30

Right.

**Chris Comeaux:** 28:30

That to me is exactly what I thought of when you were saying what you're saying. There is a math problem, but there may be ways to think about our work that we've never thought about before. Um, if you do what you've always done, you're gonna get what you always got.

**Jeff Haffner:** 28:46

That's part one of our conversation with Sherry Winn. Part two drops this Friday.

