

Episode #209 I Back Myself

Julie Smith

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Hello and welcome to episode 209 of Life Beyond the Numbers, and this episode is going out on September 14th, 2025. I don't normally do a preamble to episodes with a guest. I'm making an exception today. My guest today is Julie Smith, and earlier this week. Julie's book, coach Yourself Confident won the category of business self-development at the Business Book awards, and that is incredible. What an achievement. Congratulations, Julie. I'm so happy for you.

And [00:02:00] I'm also going to give a shout out to myself. I think even Julie reminded me to do this, because my own book Leading Beyond the Numbers, which was a finalist in the leadership category, won the Highly Commended Award on Wednesday night.

I am still over the moon, still beaming, still smiling so widely. And the book that won that category is a book called Leadership Transition by Michael Stanford. It isn't a book I have read yet,

and congratulations to all the other practical inspiration authors that night who were shortlisted and especially to those

Who walked home with an award. So now I will hand you over to the conversation that Julie and I had a couple of weeks ago. Well, today I [00:03:00] am delighted to welcome Julie Smith to Life Beyond the Numbers. Julie, you're so welcome.

Julie: Thank you very much. I'm smiling broadly. I'm very happy to be here.

Susan: That's great. Yeah, and I don't put the video out, but Julie is smiling broadly and hopefully we'll continue to smile throughout this episode. Julie, There's so many things I want to talk about, but I'd love to start with the name of your business Talent Sprout, because I just think it conjures up such a fabulous image of people sprouting everywhere and, Jack in the Beanstalktype, metaphor almost.

And you say that you are fueled by. Curiosity, a passion for learning and are all about growth. So what is it that ignites growth? Julie,

Julie: Goodness. That sounds like a good sort of question for heading for a dissertation, but let's see what we can, let's see what we can do with it. Yeah, definitely. first of all, thank you for making the [00:04:00] connection to growth because the first time I told anybody the



name of my business Talent Sprout, they laughed and the connection they made was like Brussels sprouts.

So I, you know, that it was not that kind of sprout. so what, yeah, what are the ingredients for growth? I think there's probably a few. motivation Is it important to me? Do I want to grow? Do I want to develop, do I want to reshape or strengthen the contribution that I'm making?

The impact that I have? So that feels incredibly important. probably tightly connected to that is awareness. So awareness of What am I good at now? What, what is the impact that I have? What is the level of contribution that I make? And a sort of realistic awareness, I guess. So you put those two together or I've got a sense of where I am now.

I've got a sense of maybe where I'd like to get to developmentally and want to get [00:05:00] there. I think support helps. So I guess that's sometimes why people might engage me as a coach, but also why we might, reach out to, colleagues or friends or whatever. I think that helps. and then I think there's probably, you won't be surprised if I say it.

There's probably something about confidence that I back myself that I can do more or I can strengthen this particular skill. I can learn to do a new thing.

Susan: Hmm, they're great ingredients. And as you're talking, I'm wondering like, do we outsource our growth at times and almost wait for those opportunities to come at us as opposed to search for them.

Julie: That's so interesting. gosh, there's two things that came to mind for me. One was, it's 15 years since I've worked at a corporate, but it sort of took me back to corporate days where I think the outsourcing was sometimes just sort of waiting for the organization to tell [00:06:00] us what it is that we need to do next or where we might be headed next in our career and what critical experiences we need or what training we need.

So I think there's, I think there's definitely a risk of outsourcing there in that context. I can't remember the other thing. I said two things and I can't remember what other thing

Susan: It might come back up as as we speak further, but I do think that is a risk, and it was only as you were talking. 'cause actually if we follow what we're interested in or motivated by then it's almost a natural progression, isn't it? You start to make those links and you want to learn.

Julie: Yes.



Susan: Whereas if you sit back and go, my employer is in charge of my

growth and development, you're missing a trick somehow.

Julie: Definitely. I think there's also something about how we conceptualize growth. So, roughly at the start of a year, I think about what's the, what's the development for me this year? What's the growth? And I think. Even a few years ago, that would tend to be in my [00:07:00] head, what am I gonna sign up to as a new accreditation or a program, a development program, that kind of thing.

Whereas I'm much clearer now that growth can take many different forms. So this year the growth is about the research that I'll need to do, the whole process to write the second book that I'm writing. there's lots in that. That's helpful for me and in part because it sort of, gives a dual purpose to what I'm doing and that investment of time, it's quite a big investment of time.

To see it as the results is not only a thing, a book at the end of the process, it is perhaps more importantly a growing a developmental process for me. I will learn a whole load of stuff and it's my excuse to research things and it's my excuse to talk to lots of people, so. Probably more important is the way that it will fuel my growth.

Susan: Wow. I, yeah, and I can relate to that having written a book as well. the unexpected joy and pleasure of the [00:08:00] growth of going through something like that and the accomplishment, it's, it's kind of mind boggling. It's something I'd recommend to everyone.

Julie: Definitely, and it, and it's as, I think a lot of, experiences that contribute to our personal growth. it's not easy. there's a reason why it is such a stretching, such a growing experience, because it's really hard in lots of, in lots of ways worth it, I think. I think you would say.

Susan: Absolutely. Yeah, but hard, and it's funny because it takes me back to one of the very first podcast conversations I had, and we were just talking about how long I've been doing this podcast because I was saying it's coming up on the fifth anniversary and. I think it was episode eight and the guy I spoke to, one of the things he said to me, we were talking about work life balance, and I would've revisited my thinking about that phrase and everything since then.

But at the time, his point to me was, would you grow [00:09:00] when you're in balance?

Julie: Oh, interesting. And my immediate answer is yes, and I'm wondering whether that's, because that's the answer I want it to be. whether that is the answer. I mean like I think I'd



have to say yeah, it is possible to be doing so it's possible to be doing really stretching work and have the kind of balance or blend of work and home that you want.

Yeah, absolutely.

Susan: I would think so too. and I've thought about this a lot over the years because it's one of those questions that stayed with me and I think at the time his point was if you go through something really difficult, which is what we're talking about, writing a book, you grow. But I still believe, yes, we don't have to be out of balance to achieve that.

And okay, yes, of course there are workplace things and there are life things that are hard and they knock us out balance and we grow through them as well. But I definitely advocate for growing [00:10:00] while in balance.

Julie: Yes, absolutely. And I think there's a sort of an idea that something challenging, a real difficult work is, somehow the volume is big, so it's the kind of work that doesn't fit in sensible hours, and I think that's just not the case. often with my coaching clients, I see that challenge comes in the guise of enormous volume, but that doesn't have to be the case.

You can have very difficult, challenging, requiring new thinking, deep thinking, work within a sensible daily, weekly pattern.

Susan: Yeah, well even like writing the book, because I think when you run your own business like you do and I do, and you're writing in a book, if you're not in balance going through that learning and growth experience, you're not getting anywhere, are you with either of those two things?

Julie: yeah, absolutely, absolutely agree. And I think it's probably [00:11:00] a microcosm of a bigger thing, but I know that I can't in a vertical as I'm not good at writing in an evening, and so I just. I have chosen to accept that rather than push on through and, and probably, me 15, 20 years ago, maybe not even that long ago, that's exactly what I would have done.

But what I realize I think now is that there is a connection between balance, my energy levels and the quality of what I'm putting out. Whether it's writing, whether it's the client work.

Susan: Man, that's huge, isn't it? when you use the word quality, it, it, it makes me listen even deeper almost, because that's the one thing we don't want to sacrifice, surely.

Julie: Absolutely.



Susan: And, and there is a, a myth isn't there, that you can keep going and produce quality and it just doesn't really work.

Julie: Yeah, I just, I, I have a coaching client right now who I think very [00:12:00] much is holding onto that myth and is doing enormous number of hours. And one of the things that's difficult as I work with them is seeing that at the moment it is working for them, but having the fear. I think them also having the fear, although they've put it in a little box and sort of locked it away, that maybe it isn't possible for very long that this is not a sustainable pattern, and even if there are currently able to deliver good quality work on little sleep, that's probably not going to be a pattern that sustains.

Susan: No. And it, no, and the science, I think it's always helpful to go to the science, and the science would say no. I mean, common sense would dictate no, but I think sometimes it's helpful, isn't it? That the science is the same. And before we digress too far, because I really invited you on after reading your [00:13:00] book.

Coach yourself confident, ditch the self-doubt, tax, unlock humble confidence. And we'll come into each of those parts a bit later on. But I would like to talk about that book, Julie. and first of all, I just want to say I really enjoyed it and I'm so glad I read it. So thank you for writing it and putting it out into the world.

And congratulations because it's had some lovely accolades, and that always helps, doesn't it? To get recognition from the world. And I'm just gonna read out what Julie's book has been awarded so far. the 2024 get abstract. International Readers Choice Award for Business Impact. I mean, wow. A finalist in the 20 24, 25 People's Book Prize nonfiction again.

Wow. And a finalist in the 2025 [00:14:00] Business Book Awards. What category is that one in? Julie,

Julie: In business self development.

Susan: In business self-development. So, wow. How does all that feel? Because like writing a book is one thing, people reading it another, but also getting that, recognition, validation, I don't know whatever word you choose is a different experience again.

Julie: It is. I mean, it's been fabulous. And the, I mean, I'm speaking before we know the results of the Business book award, so I might change my tune on what I'm about to say. But right now I would say that the Reader's Choice Award, the first one that you read out means an enormous amount be because of the fact that it's a reader's choice.



So it was a, a vote and, thousands of people voted and. That to me is speaks to impact. I think also the fact that some of the. Most incredible moments in the whole book process [00:15:00] have been getting messages from people who I don't know, who've said, I read your book and this bit, I really loved this tool and I tried it and it worked.

Or something like that has been brilliant because, I mean, lots of people I know have told me they love the book. That's nice. But there's a little bit of me that's thinking, well, you would say that, wouldn't you? You're sort of primed to like it actually, I don't think they're lying, but they are.

They are primed to like it, whereas somebody who's got no connection to me whatsoever. So whether it's, one person getting in touch with, saying something about how it has helped them or whether it's topping the vote for the reader's choice that makes me feel brilliant. I mean, fantastic.

Susan: Brilliant. And, you described the book as a handbook for individuals who recognize that their confidence lags behind their capability. And I found that like, that's quite reassuring. So [00:16:00] I suppose, even after reading your book, I still think confidence is one of those words that that almost polarizes us.

And it can be taken, misconstrued and, and, and so much so in your own humble words, Julie, what is confidence?

Julie: Yeah. So I'll start with confidence and then I'll talk about the humble bit, which is one of the things that made it into the subtitle. so confidence, I think of it as trust in yourself, and I think That's the best synonym, you know, kind of confidence and, and self-trust. And the, the way that would describe it is a kind of quiet assurance or a steady feeling that I've got this, that I can draw on my resources.

I can find a way through whatever it is that comes at me from work or whatever life throws at me. And. I [00:17:00] think this is an important sort of corollary to that, that whether things go well or not, whether I get in a comm success or not, I'll be okay because my sense of self, my trust in myself is not tied to success and proving through results or qualifications or promotions or.

Whatever else. So that's the first bit is sort of confidence as trust in, in myself. and I would say that one of the things that. It is certainly at the heart of the book, is the idea that it comes and goes for most of us, many of us. that it absolutely, I don't think that you are a confident person or a not confident person or even that, you know, with work you can become a confident person.



I think you can feel confident more of the time and you can maybe have a little bit more control over the ups and downs of confidence and self-doubt. But. I don't think anybody, even if [00:18:00] outwardly they look confident, I'm not sure anybody is confident all the time.

Susan: And, and it's not even all of the time, is it? It's almost with everything you do, because I think we can be very confident in certain aspects of our life and really lack it in others. it's not something that is a permanent state, is it?

Julie: No, absolutely no. I think one of the things I think I put it in the book that it sort of sounds, contradictory that I feel confident in myself on stage delivering a talk to a, it could be a huge room. Full of people. It won't be the, I'm not saying there won't be any nerves, but I back myself to do that.

I actually feel less confident walking into a pub to meet somebody or a party or something like that, particularly the idea of going up to somebody I don't know, in a social setting and starting a conversation fills me with horror. I don't back myself [00:19:00] to do that, and I, I think there's something about.

Role. So there's something about I'm, introduced, not only as Julie on stage, but you know, here's Julie, she's a coach, she's done this, she's a author, whatever it is. Whereas I am in inverted commas, just me in that social setting. but yeah, I think it's just one of those illustrated, everybody will have their own version of confidence being more present in one sphere than in a, in another.

Susan: And I am sure the majority of people listening, maybe the majority of the world will have heard, you should be more confident.

Julie: yes, indeed.

Susan: And how does that go down?

Julie: Yeah. I mean, it's well intended, right? it communicates something lovely when somebody says that, but unfortunately, it doesn't make a blind bit of difference to how you internally feel. About yourself. and that I, I think you used the phrase earlier, the books to help people whose [00:20:00] confidence lags behind their capability.

it doesn't do anything to close that gap. don't get me wrong, I would, I would never say to a, a leader, you know, don't say those words. Say it, but you need to do more. You need to do much more to help somebody to recalibrate and bring their sense of themselves, their confidence in line with the reality of their skills and capabilities.



And that's the definition for me of this idea of humble confidence, is this grounded sense of I know what I can do, I know what I'm good at, I know what I'm not good at, and I don't need to beat myself up about that. I know that there's always room to improve. We're never, we're never done back to growth.

We're never done, we're never the finished article. but I can see my strengths at sort of full size. I'm not diminishing them. yeah, and I think it's unfortunately, they're kind of, you should be more confident sort of seems to imply that it's a choice not to be. And if someone tells [00:21:00] me to be more confident, oh, great, okay.

I hadn't had that idea. I'll do that then, shall I?

Susan: I'll flip that, switch, that confidence switch and off I go. And it's a funny one because, and, and you might actually agree with it yourself as well. You might go, yeah, I should be, but that doesn't mean I am, or I, I know how to be. and I think that's the, like you're saying that that gap. That needs help oftentimes to be closed or at least reduced.

and then the, the flip side of that, and if this is something I've been told all my life is, you look so confident. And that's the other thing I think we can portray confidence, we can have that air of confidence. Doesn't mean that that's backed up either.

Julie: No, and there are incredibly successful people who lack confidence and that's sort of invisible, [00:22:00] and part of what they work harder at is hiding that self-doubt. but there's a cost to that. I think so. I think some, one of the patterns I see is people who overwork over prepare, over deliver on everything they do.

And their motivation for that is to sort of assuage their self doubt. It's, it's almost replacing their confidence, filling that gap in their confidence with enormous amounts of effort and commitment and determination. and it works in that it gets results and others they successfully hide their doubt from others often.

but there's an enormous cost and the cost is overwork, exhaustion, potentially even burnout if that's a pattern that continues over time. So that's one of the ways we, I think, self-doubt tax that you talked about earlier again, in the, in the sub, that's one of the ways that that can get paid [00:23:00] through compensating for a lack of confidence with sheer effort.

Susan: Which may still not be the required effort, and, it, it is time better spent. Often as well, the self-doubt tax, because I love the, the financial language and the use of that and, and I think it's something we can relate to as well, the cost of things, because we talk about how we spend our time.



Julie: Yeah,

Susan: A, as if it is a financial resource, and so then when it comes to ourselves, how we spend time on ourselves, developing confidence, it's like you said earlier about the research for your next book is an investment in

Julie: Yes,

Susan: your own growth,

Julie: yes.

Susan: so.

Julie: Yeah.

Susan: Back to the [00:24:00] outsourcing. I often think we wait for people to tell us where our growth areas are, and we might go for that course or the accreditation actually working on some of these self-doubt taxes, and we could maybe go into a few more of them so people see themselves in that will be a fantastic investment in your career.

Longer term, I believe, or your life even.

Julie: Yeah, I agree. And it makes me think of one of the case studies that's in the book, somebody called Miranda, who, Set up and successfully grew a charity with no experience, either in charities or in, it's in the tech, medical, sort of healthcare tech space. And she had no experience in.

Any of that. But what she had was the confidence, this self-trust to back herself to go, actually, I don't know this world at all, but I [00:25:00] do know something about my skills. I do know something about the way I'm able to influence people, the way that I'm able to take complex ideas and make them simple, the way I'm able to get momentum behind something as a.

Marketer for consumer goods, which is what she'd done before. And I think that's really interesting. And what she didn't do was go and, say, right, what are the many, many qualifications I need? What are all the courses I need to go on to do that? She'd instead lent into a real, realistic view of her capabilities and the confidence that gave her.

It was a great example of this sort of humble confidence where actually she was seeing herself clearly, she was seeing her capabilities clearly, and it was enabling her to say, I'll bat myself. I'll give that a go.



Susan: she also recognized, didn't she, that the people who had asked her to do this saw that in her too? I think so. That was another vote of [00:26:00] confidence, so to

Julie: Yeah, and I think that's an important, it's another vote of confidence rather than the only vote of confidence. So I think we might get, it's a bit like the, you know, you should be more confident. Comment, we, we might have, a huge supporter who says, I'd love you to do it. You know, go for this promotion.

I really think you are ready. I think you can do a great job. If, if you don't feel that yourself and sort of rely wholly on that person's evaluation of you, that feels risky. particularly if they move on and it's also terrifying 'cause you don't really believe it yourself.

I think in Miranda's case it was an extra vote of confidence. It wasn't a substitute for her vote of confidence in herself. She voted too.

Susan: Yeah. No, absolutely. And, and I remember that case study and yeah, it was, it was that recognition that those skills are transferable.

Julie: Yes. Yeah.

Susan: I think it, [00:27:00] if we look at a lot of industries, Julie, when they're recruiting and so on, that's not a given. Often it's like we want the experience in this industry, which I always think is very, very narrow minded because.

Like everything's the same in one way, and it's often people you're working with, and that's where you need to bring the skillset, regardless of the, you know, you'll have technical people around you that can help with whatever the industry specifics are, but oftentimes in leadership, it's those skills that are broader and can be transferred that are so important.

Julie: Yeah, I agree. some organizations take a much narrower view than that and say, you've got to have, experience in this industry. I think also on the other side, some candidates or leaders would say. I can't possibly step across an industry boundary and do that thing over there.

This is what I know, and there's something there perhaps about [00:28:00] some of where they get their confidence is from the knowledge and the familiarity and all of the experience, and I'm not knocking that, but it is possible there might be underestimating their ability to take everything they've learned and apply it somewhere else.

Susan: and that often then leads to different growth as well, I think, because you'll make connections that other people wouldn't make, and you're suddenly maybe like a kid again with your curiosity and your love of learning, and you ask the questions. That people might



think you don't have any confidence in yourself for asking those questions, but they're the beginner's mind questions, and I think it takes a level of confidence

Julie: Yeah.

Susan: be able to ask those at any age in life as well.

Julie: Agree. Yeah. I think it's also what struck me when you said making connections other people wouldn't make that. There's something in that as well about what happens to people when they do that. They make that connection. Do they think [00:29:00] I'm bringing fresh thinking to this? This is a valid connection to make?

Or do they think, oh, I probably just don't understand, or I've got it wrong, or I'll defer to somebody 'cause it's really. yeah. there's a connection to innovation clearly here, isn't there? About actually, you get somebody, you sort of take them over the border into a different context, into a different industry.

They might cast an incredible new light on ways of doing things, but they've got to have the, but. Self-trust, they've got to sort of back themselves and be okay with actually some of the things they might ask stupid questions and that's absolutely fine. They might make a ridiculous suggestion and again, that's absolutely fine.

Susan: it's better than staying quiet. I think, you know, that's the thing. Isn't it? And, and often I think in my own, thinking back sometimes you're like, they, they have to have thought of this before. you kind of go, there's just no way that this hasn't happened because it's so obvious.

But, but that again, is about you. And not necessarily who was there before. [00:30:00] And back to backing yourself, I guess, and having confidence in your observations and the confidence to be knocked back and, and knocked back. Not like knocked out, but actually to take it. Yeah, we've tried that before and it didn't work, and you kind of go, okay,

Julie: Yeah.

Susan: next.

Julie: Yes. And I think there's something there about not fearing judgment of others. So like, what am I imagining is going on in the mind of the other people around the table when I make the suggestion, it's pointed out that we've done this before, or. That I, that I'm able to just sort of sit with that and go, okay, that is what it is.



I've made a suggestion, I've had a response. I'll think about something else. we'll go in a different direction. Not to get mired in, oh no, they all think I'm an absolute Muppet. they're wondering why on earth. They've brought I'm here without this experience, I think we can [00:31:00] get in that quagmire of worry about what is going on in other people's heads and a sort of site fantasy that we're important enough to take up a lot of space in other people's heads.

Susan: I know and that actually yeah, that, that they're that smart as well to, you know, to kind of go outta their way to, to make this a big elaborate thing to kind of undermine us or show us up or whatever. And yeah, it's, and, and it's one of the self-doubt taxes you talk about is that outsourcing of your sense of self.

Julie: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. it's one of the things that can knock our confidence one of the ways I talk about that is, fopo fear of other people's opinions and it. As with many of these things, it's very nuanced, so. It's an overdone version of caring what people think

We want human beings to be caring. We want to pay attention [00:32:00] to the connection that we're making or not. An overdone sense of care about what people think can become this fear of judgment, this fear of evaluation, this fear of being disliked even. And all of that leads us to shrink. Down. it is a diminishing thing.

It can shrink our confidence and it can get in the way of us saying maybe what would be helpful or, or asking the stupid question. That's exactly what is needed at that moment in the conversation. or saying no when it's right for us to do so. so it can be a real. That overplayed concern about what's going on in other people's minds, what are they making of this?

What are they making of me leads us to shrink back and not take opportunities whether those are the literally the smallest opportunities in a conversation to say what's needed or all the way through to opportunities to [00:33:00] stand on a stage and deliver something or go for the next job, et cetera. You know, what will they think?

They'll think I'm, getting ahead of myself. what will they make of it? if I put my hand up, they'll think I'm being ridiculous.

Susan: Who does she think she is?

Julie: Yeah. Oh, yes. And this, yes, indeed. And there is something interesting now, I think in the, the, who does she think she is? It could be a massive, we could go on a, a big.



Path. I'm not sure it is a tangent around gender, but there is something interesting I think, particularly in there that we might have some programming about who does she think she is?

Susan: Yeah, and I think what's interesting in your book, and what I really like is you don't focus on women and confidence in women because, I have worked with so many people in so many parts of the world and everyone lacks confidence at some point. I've never met anyone who wasn't lacking in some confidence somewhere, and that's men and women and sometimes it would floor you to see [00:34:00] how much people can lack confidence, but there is much more of a perception, Julie, that it is a she or a her or a female ping.

Julie: yes. I think there's some unhelpful sort of social constructs around confidence or self-doubt being a female thing. imposter syndrome being something that applies to women solely. And it just isn't. And I think it can be. Doubly unhelpful for all genders, in fact, because it sort of, implies to women that they should lack confidence and it implies to men that they shouldn't.

And so when they do it, there's a sort of double layer of kicking themselves. Not only do I doubt myself, but I shouldn't. and I'm with you. I've worked with so many people over the years, who have lacked confidence. And back to that idea we touched on earlier, that sometimes it's invisible.

It's, it's absolutely not only the realm of women. I think women are more likely to name it [00:35:00] because of this social connection that it is about women. I think it's harder, it's just harder for men to name a lack of confidence, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. I had a chat to a CEO the other day.

He's a, you know, incredibly successful, big global organization and one of the first things he said to me was that he describes himself as a, a classic insecure overachiever. And I think, yeah, there it is invisible from the outside, but he knows.

Susan: He knows. And,

Julie: Up and down.

Susan: and I think, we all do, don't we, to a certain extent where we may not have the language and I wonder if it's a language thing sometimes, Julie, so it's interesting. He didn't say he lacked conf. Evidence. he said he was an overachiever who was insecure or whatever, and then when you have the overachiever, it already sounds like he has confidence because,

Julie: Yeah.



Susan: so I wonder as well, is it the language we, [00:36:00] that shapes how we communicate that and do women.

Latch onto confidence as being the thing, because that's what people say about us.

Julie: Yes. I think that's probably right. That language is what's offered to us and so maybe we're more likely to use it. Yeah.

Yeah. Whereas the man is the overachiever who's, And ing the, I think that insecure overachiever could be another way of explaining this idea of, self-doubt, tax paid through over work. It's like I'm working more, I'm going above and beyond on everything because I'm seeking to assuage the doubt that I have in myself. That's the insecurity that I'm seeking to assuage and hide by overachieving.

Susan: Yeah, and it never let it be said. I couldn't do this, and I didn't know how to do that. and it makes me think about rehearsals and practice and I'm all for practice, the [00:37:00] right type of practice, deliberate practice for wanting to improve something. But I think we've become so polished often in workplaces, and

we spent a lot of time rehearsing how that talk should go to the staff or compiling notes rather than actually speaking and being confident in our voice, in our words, in our wisdom, because we've also worked hard, many of us, to get where we are. And yet we still doubt that and we don't wanna make a mistake.

Do wanna, say something that's too from the heart or too vulnerable. That too, that word drives me nuts when it's.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's right. It makes me think that, we've sort of. Assume there's a formula for particularly set piece sort of communication things in an organization that a, you know, a leader sort of needs to do it in a certain way and it involves rehearsal. it strikes me this, the same CEO who I [00:38:00] mentioned a moment ago, talked about what he does as he goes around the global sites and how when he's in communication sessions, the most important thing and the bit that he gets most from and thinks that his, colleagues get most from.

Is the bit that is completely open q and a. And he will not do the sort of fake q and a of kind of, you know, a few questions have been seeded around the room. he would rather risk a whole, five minutes silence and nobody has anything because his preference is for a real conversation and if that's awkward 'cause there's silence or if it's awkward because somebody asks the question, that's really hard to, or, or actually you talked about, somebody said, you came here three years ago, I asked this question, you said you were gonna do this thing and you haven't.



And he was like, okay, good. I need to hear that. It needs to be voiced and people need to see that I'm okay with answering it and saying [00:39:00] sorry. In that case.

Susan: he doesn't sound all that insecure then, it takes a lot of courage, doesn't it, to do that too? Yeah.

Julie: my sense from the conversation is actually he's found, he would probably describe confidence as comfort in his own skin and that is what has shifted for him over the years.

Susan: So that's interesting as well, is what we think confidence is what that word means to us. Yeah. Words are fascinating, aren't they? And how we interpret them to mean what works for us as opposed to maybe what another person standing beside us might think the same words means.

Julie: Yeah. And how often can we, again, this may be a conversational tangent, but how often are we in conversations where we think we're talking about the same thing, but actually our mental construct is, like, they don't even overlap. They are something different.

Susan: Exactly, and that's fascinating and that's why we always have to check for meaning. I [00:40:00] think.

Julie: Yes. And I think one of the skills from coaching that probably is a incredibly useful experience for life is just, is slowing things down sometimes in a conversation and just getting really curious and say, so what does that mean for you? Or when you use that word, tell me a bit more.

Tell me what you are. Tell me what's in your mind. Those, I think are, I'm sort of making a mental note to self as I'm speaking that the sorts of things that I do without thinking about it in coaching would be really helpful in day-to-day family conversations, for example.

Susan: It reminds me of at work, especially, I think. perhaps in my last role, more so because I was more mature and had, more years of experience, I would always ask that, like, can you explain to me what you mean? Because like you said, we might be speaking in tangents. And I think all of the work I do with [00:41:00] organizations and with people coaching as well, it always comes back to communication.

Julie: Yeah, definitely. Gosh, there's another confidence play there. 'cause if I think about myself back in the day, back at Pepsi, so, you know, over 15 years ago, oh my goodness, how many times would I have been in rooms pretending that I understood what someone had just said, sometimes it might be a term or an acronym or whatever, but sometimes not even that, somebody would be making a point and I'd be sort of nodding and as though I was



understanding, thinking, I have no idea what you're talking about, but not asking because the narrative in my head was

i'm a bit stupid or I've not quite caught up or whatever. It would be more of a internal criticism rather than a kind of curiosity and, and I wanna just get Okay. Now could you just, yeah. say that again. Or just tell, tell me that in a different way or, or even, I think you might be saying this, but I don't know,

Susan: and I think [00:42:00] what's fascinating about. That is if you are in a meeting room like that, Julie, you are not alone.

Julie: No.

Susan: You are not the only one who doesn't understand and I think maybe the first time you ask a question like that and then somebody comes to you afterwards and says, thank you for asking I had no idea either. Then that again gives you the confidence to do it again.

Julie: Yes.

Susan: And so you mentioned the word risk. The earlier that, that the CEO risks and, and again, I think often we do take a risk, and it's funny again, the terminology because risk sounds scary and sounds a bit treacherous and it could go wrong, and yet it's very empowering to take a risk.

as I'm speaking, I'm wondering, does that word need a reinvention?

Julie: Yeah, because I think you have to risk something in order to [00:43:00] grow. there's definite connection between risk and growth, but you are, you're right, risk has sort of, well, it has a negative connotations or it has a, you know, again, people will make maybe something slightly. Different, but I, I think it, yeah.

Inbuilt. it might work, it might not.

Susan: Yeah. And we say the greater the risk, the greater the reward. you'll think of it like that, but asking a very. Small for want of a better word. Question Like, could you say that again in a way that I can understand? It

Julie: Yeah.

Susan: feels too risky. there's almost like a, a gap between the level of risk involved for the answer I might get or



Julie: Yeah,

Susan: being I might get, or the ostracization I might get.

Julie: absolutely. And it connects to psychological safety, doesn't it? The, the, you know, an environment in which I can take those small or might not feel small, interpersonal. Risks. I think the other thing that comes to [00:44:00] mind for me is seniority is often at play. So I, certainly, again, going back in time would have been even less likely to ask a question or to check or say, I don't get that to, to the person who's most senior.

and, and I can see now that. That's a sort of, there was something going on for about a sort of, more than less than that. Them being senior wasn't just about, they've got a different role in the organization that are at a different level. There was also a sort of an assumption that they must be better than me in many, many ways.

But by just nodding along, actually, I was doing them an enormous disservice. So, if I was finding it on what they were saying, unclear, there is at least a possibility that that's because they were being unclear and in not sort of helping them to see that and not inviting them to articulate it differently.

that's a massive disservice to them.[00:45:00]

Susan: And I think lends itself in future to you almost tuning out from the get go when they speak. 'cause you kind of go, here they go again. I didn't understand them for the last three meetings may as well think about something else.

Julie: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Where, and that is not contributing to actually, well, how can we get greater understanding in this conversation? How can we get towards greater understanding?

Susan: and that word contributing. 'cause I definitely think that is so important. It's like, what is my contribution to this situation

Julie: Yes.

Susan: when I don't understand something, I have a contribution to that.

Julie: Yes. Yeah. And the slightly different, use of the word maybe, but saying that I don't understand in itself is a useful contribution and probably useful for other people as well as myself.



Susan: Exactly. And I think workplaces could be a whole lot easier [00:46:00] if we all. Fessed up at times

Julie: Yes.

Susan: to not knowing things and Yeah. I do think things are changing and at least we're talking about this more and it's out in the open more, there are more resources about it, and the more we continue to say it, the more helpful, hopefully that can be.

Julie: Yeah.

Susan: Julie, we're not quite outta time, but we're getting there. And before we get outta time, I really wanna hear about book number two.

Julie: Oh gosh, yes. I also think there's another book that I think maybe you could write, Susan called Best Up. I think from what you were just saying, how can we help people to just say, you know, I don't get it. I don't know. Anyway, I. so book number two for me is called Contagious Confidence.

A Leader's Guide to Building Belief and Powering Performance. the premise, is that there is a connection between confidence and performance. I think we can see that in individual level. if you believe in yourself, you're more likely to be successful at [00:47:00] whatever the thing is that you are doing.

That mindset matters. and I think you see it collectively. I think I can go into organizations and you get a sort of felt set. You can pick up the extent to which this is an organization that is backing itself, or it's an organization where, doubt is sort of dripping from the, the walls. you can feel it.

so. Book is intended for leaders, and there's sort of three layers. What can we do to help individuals find their self-belief? So get to the balance between their confidence and their capability. how can we build belief and confidence in teams? So, what does that look like when you.

Have a, challenge that team is facing and they, how do you inspire them to think we can do this. We've got this, this is the right team. I'm confident in my, in my peers, I'm confident in what we can do together. and then the sort of broader question about how do we fuel organization belief and a sense of, kind of [00:48:00] believe the, the, the, what we're here for is something to believe in, that we've got the right strategy, we're confident in that, and that we've back ourselves, that we've got what we need to deliver it.

So it's those sort of three levels.



Susan: And contagious confidence is great And you talk about that in your book, don't you? And so maybe just describe what contagious confidence is like as well.

Julie: So I think the starting idea is that emotions are contagious. So, you know, excitement is contagious, panic is contagious. calm is contagious. And so we, we pick up from each other.

It's unavoidable that we, we pick, up from each other and we can. Convey to each other confidence. So at one level it is contagious that if I doubt myself and I can spread that doubt to you, I can cause you to [00:49:00] doubt in me by almost telling you that you should. So I might, pepper my words or my emails with may.

Just, just a, just a little quick, it's probably not worth thinking about, but, or you've probably thought about this already. Those sorts of things make my self doubt contagious. Equally, if I speak with a level of assurance and owning what I'm saying and owning my expertise, then you are likely to find that confidence contagious.

You are likely to believe there's a reason for my confidence that that's not based on nothing that that's based on a decent level of capability. it's contagious in multiple ways. And I think that whole idea about if the leader of the team says, here's this challenge, and oh my goodness me, it's, oh dunno, how are we gonna deliver those numbers next year?

Then that is going to spread defeatism. whereas if they say [00:50:00] it's a big stretch, I'm not quite sure how we're gonna get there. I can't see the path yet, but I'd back us. just look at what we've done in the last few years. We've got this. Then that really does spread it. A feeling of positivity, optimism, and confidence.

Susan: And they can lead beyond the numbers.

Julie: They can indeed be done.

Susan: Julie, if people would like to know more about you, what's the best way of connecting with you?

Julie: yes. So I hang out on LinkedIn a fair bit, so, if Julie Smith Talent Sprout will find me on LinkedIn, or otherwise, my website is talent sprout.co.uk and people can find out a bit more about me and the work that I do there.

Susan: And when is the book coming out? The new book.

Julie: It's gonna be end of June, 2026.



Susan: Wow. And a fair place you, congratulations for going again. That's amazing.

Julie: Thank you. [00:51:00] There's been moments where I've wondering what on earth I'm doing, but on the whole, I'm pleased to be doing it.

Susan: Yeah. Well, you've taken your capability and you're putting your confidence behind it.

Julie: Yeah. I have to say in that sense, it's easier second time around just that I know that I can, not only do I know what's coming, like I know the process, it's familiar, but I know that I can do it. So that I think is really helpful. And in those moments where think, what am I saying? what is this paragraph I'm trying to write?

Just seeing there's a stack of my first book on my desk. Well, I can, I I can do that. I can get that.

Susan: Yeah, I've got this. I've got this.

Julie: Yeah,

Susan: Julie, thank you so much. It's been an absolute pleasure chatting to you today.

Julie: it really has. Thank you very much for having me.

Susan: You're welcome.

Thank you for joining me today on life, beyond the numbers. If something in this episode resonated with you, I'd love to hear your thoughts. And if you've enjoyed this conversation, Please take a moment to leave a review. It helps others like us. I discover this podcast and join in our conversation. Until next time. Keep exploring the human side of work life.

