

#229 My Assumption is that ...

Archana Mohan

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[00:00:00] **Susan:** today I am absolutely delighted to welcome Archana Life Beyond The Numbers. You're so welcome

[00:00:08] **Archana:** Oh, thank you for having me, Susan. It's a pleasure to be here

[00:00:12] **Susan:** And I suppose we met, and this is our first time to actually see each other face to face, but we met

[00:00:19] **Archana:** 100%.

[00:00:20] **Susan:** Practical Inspiration Publishing. book, The Throughline How Understanding Who You Are Empowers How You Lead, last year been shortlisted UK the in Book Award.

congratulations on all counts.

[00:00:42] **Archana:** Thank you. I actually think the congratulations mean more for actually getting it out into the that was quite a thing, But thank you

[00:00:46] **Susan:** it is a big thing, it? it's something I to everyone though

[00:00:51] **Archana:** 100%. It is something everyone should try at least once in their life, if not more. and I think PI's amazing. Allison Jones is a, a force of nature, and I'd just like to give them a shout-out because they probably go through so much more than we see, and just to get these titles out there and to work with authors from all walks of life and all different stages of their careers and businesses, it's just impressive to see the quantum of what they do in any given year. So really impressive

[00:01:22] **Susan:** Yeah. wonder reads business books

[00:01:29] **Archana:** It's a great question. I don't know. Are you looking to me for the answer to that? I'm hoping everyone will read one one day.

[00:01:38] **Susan:** It's interesting I read a lot of and I have done for quite a few years, but some part, of business just don't interest me, but certain And I imagine, and I don't



know about you, but I was writing it for people like me, for leaders struggled in the areas that I have, who've triumphed in the areas I have, whatever. And yet, we connect with those people for them? Are they the ones reading

[00:02:08] **Archana:** I don't the short I guess I I would love to talk about this, 'cause I think it's such an important point or just an important observation really, which is are... I'm reminded... I'm gonna tell a short story if that's okay. I- I'm reminded of a moment when I started teaching, it was in the '90s, just to age myself real quick, and I was given responsibility for managing a multicultural, they called it a multicultural coordinator role.

It's just basically fancy language for a diversity, equity, and inclusion role within a private school in New York City. And I went to a conference to learn how to do this, 'cause I had never really thought about what that looked like for kids. And the first exercise that the facilitator had us do was she put a bunch of labels on the floor, and there were different things like rock climber, musician, woman, man, American, English, whatever.

And she put them all over around the room and she said, "Find a label which defines who you are." And I remember in that moment having a kinda deer caught in headlights situation, where I didn't know which label to pick And I, instead of being brave and staying in the room and saying that, I exited the room stay for the session, just to tell you how freaked out I was by it.

Anyway, the reason I tell that story is because our books get billed as business books, because somewhere along the line there is a relevance to how businesses operate in each of our stories. But I would that's not all they are. So to answer your question about who reads them, I would hope everyone would read them, because there is relevance in the stories we are telling in any walk of life to any human who is trying to navigate this path in the best way they know how.

And so while it has been labeled as business, I would argue it sits at the intersection of so many more things, and everyone's book will be slightly different, and everyone would like to think that their book is unique, and of course it's not, because we all write about similar themes. That's what makes them interesting.

But there's a viewpoint in there if you dig deeply that's potentially quite unique and personal to the person telling the story. So to close it out, and I've gone on a long ramble, I think there are two One, I had... My real desire was to connect with whoever may pick up this book in the future or has already from a human-to-human perspective, regardless of what you do and how you do it.



And I really wrote with that in mind. This is my story and my experience, but it's not the only one, and it's not right or wrong, it just is

[00:05:03] **Susan:** Yeah. Yeah no

you've reminded did a radio interview after the Business Book with station where I'd grown up And much trying humanize beyond title or the label, as you say, because is merit it, or in it, or life perspectives that are valuable to any time.

one of nicest pieces that I people saying that articulated they know to articulate yet

[00:05:43] **Archana:** How amazing. How amazing, 'cause once we name it, we can see it, right? It's really hard to see things we can't name. I think that's the power of I'm sure we'll probably touch on AI and all the things that it does to language. But it too is helpful. It too can live alongside us as writers and I can't believe I'm calling myself a writer.

That too is weird. It's a whole thing. But, I do believe that language is a portal to inspiration, and sometimes it's a portal to debate with yourself, with your belief system. Sometimes it's an acceptance of something you didn't know was true that you've finally been able to name, as you say. And sometimes it's just irritating, 'cause there are no words to describe what you're feeling.

But, but yeah, I think there's something in it. There's something about language for so powerful and so freeing.

[00:06:36] **Susan:** And yet also the label tension, because you told that story of walking out of the room because you didn't know which label, and label comes up a lot your book, and maybe even in the guise of or whatever

[00:06:55] **Archana:** Yes, 100%. Thank you for saying that

[00:06:58] **Susan:** And I love for me, I've, I am a, anti-label type person as well. But I get the importance of naming something, of giving words, of giving language to feelings that we keep to ourselves because we don't know... the label doesn't fit. Maybe that's what it is. Or the box doesn't fit. you write that you, the world has boxes or had boxes, and I didn't fit into any of them. So maybe we could jump off from there, Chana.

[00:07:36] **Archana:** I have a very squiggly line path to this so I'm Indian originally. I grew up in Switzerland because that's where my parents were working at a time in the 1970s when people who looked like me were few and far between in at the time. Now, that's not to say that I didn't have an amazingly glorious childhood. I actually did. I learned so



much about so many different people. I had the, luck to find myself in an international school with people from all around the world at a time when that was quite rare. So there were so many things that are amazing. But at the same time, I was slightly pulled between three worlds.

So it was India, the place of my parents' heritage, the international school, which followed an American curriculum, and Switzerland, which I was living in Geneva at the time, where French was the language that we communicated in.

So I found myself in this kind of weird, environment where whenever someone would say, "Where are you from?" I never knew how to answer that question. It was such a loaded question, and that's where my, questions about labels and definitions for me, researchers, they often say that the research that researchers do is a me-search rather than a research, because they're looking to find answers to their own questions.

And I think with me, this book was very much a, I was trying to write to find myself in or to better explain some of the things that I'd experienced, and this was one of them. It was this need to check all the boxes, to be good at school, to make my parents proud, to achieve the university degrees, to find the job, to whatever the next step was, until I decided that I didn't wanna do that anymore, and that at the end of the rat race, the winner is a rat as well.

So wanted to do something and share something different with the world, that's what I meant by I didn't fit. I've then gone on to understand that there's a very big difference between fitting in and belonging, and I think that there's something in that for me, too, in this book that is ex- an exploration of what belonging looks like for me.

But an acceptance that belonging looks like something different for everyone.

[00:10:01] **Susan:** I love write poetry, Archana, and I often have the line, don't fit in, but I belong."

[00:10:11] **Archana:** Oh, w- I, that's so good. Give me the chills

[00:10:15] **Susan:** and I suppose we isolate ourselves way thinking don't in and yet we belong, think we don't belong.

[00:10:28] **Archana:** Yeah

[00:10:28] **Susan:** And there is big difference those two things. And so Through Line or Line, which is you've called but it's also an exploration, And where that come how did come your as



[00:10:48] **Archana:** No, I didn't. Alison did. here I'm referencing Alison Jones, the publisher at Practical Inspiration Publishing. I was circling around lots of titles, and i - as finding a title, defining the cover, the work, the art, and all this is such big question. once y- when you've spent all of this time thinking about these things and you wanna share something worthwhile, you start to obsess over the details, or at least I did.

And so my titles always felt right, and I had so many leading up to this. I don't know if it was the same for you. But Allison said, you keep writing about the through line in the language. That's a really good phrase." And so then I went off and I started looking into where the through line came from, and I realized that so many cultures have words for that concept.

In the Western world, it originates in acting, actually, which I find quite ironic. It originates in performance because, Stanislavski, who was the first person to coin this, was in the world of theater, and he used to spend time observing the actors that could communicate a message well and those who could not, and identified this idea of the through line as being the core of the character they were playing both on and off the script, and how maintaining a line when playing the character was really important to communicating authenticity on stage.

And I thought, "Oh my God, that's what we're all trying to do." We're all trying to figure out who we are and translate that into how we lead, which is where the subtitle came from. So that's where the, the title came from, and that's really what I was trying to honor. I think it's also funny as the book has now come into being, I've been thinking about the irony of the performance versus just being, because in fact, what I'm hoping readers get from the book is that I'm actually encouraging folks to try not performing for once, to try not meeting the standards, to try not labeling the process, but just being in it and seeing how true it feels to them.

And of course, our truths are all different, but acknowledging that truth for yourself is a really powerful key to unlocking, I think, a lot more potential and We say, we use words like bring your whole self to work, and I think it's always bugged me, and I haven't been able to put words to it, again, to this point of not being able to name it.

And I think where I land on it at the moment, and that will probably change again, is of course, we want people to be themselves at work, but that's very different to saying bring your whole self to work. Because there are parts of me that are just not appropriate in the workplace that I choose not to hide or mask, but just not to share in every moment.

And learning to discern between what is and what is not true, I think is a really hard part of life. And I'm not dismissing the need for people to feel comfortable at work. I think both can be true. it's not an either/or. So I hope that answers your question



[00:14:20] **Susan:** and many more

[00:14:22] **Archana:** Oh. That's the beauty of this thing.

[00:14:25] **Susan:** Isn't it? Because you also use the phrase, "We rent our titles, but we own character is something you talked about when you were answering there. And performance and character are so intertwined, aren't they?

world is

isn't it?

if we go to Shakespeare.

[00:14:44] **Archana:** Of course

[00:14:45] **Susan:** And we do come with many parts. and it is a fascinating one I'm still in, somewhere in, part is my true self? And bringing my whole self does mean all the parts, and they're all welcome. But which ones are on show? Which ones are the performance, and which ones aren't? And I don't know that we always know that, Archana, because we've been molded over years

[00:15:24] **Archana:** Yes, I think we've been trained quite well indeed. we love to talk about and criticize education, and obviously that's my passion, that's my heart, that's where I started my career. So I feel like education actually does fulfill the obligations it sets out, the, the goals that it sets out to achieve, i.e.,

give kids a certain grounding and a certain set of skills to put in their toolkit. Whether they choose to use them or not is a different story. Are there things education could do better, better job at? Sure, of course, but we could all do a better job at things. It's just a fact of life. We learn as we go. I think... Who was it who said education is not there to fill the bucket, it's to light the fire? I'm probably misquoting the quote, but basically that's point. I feel like education gave me the, interest in learning more. Did it give me everything I needed in 12 years? No. but that isn't the point.

so I guess where I'm going with that is there's also been a lot of work done on the various parts of ourselves, right? If you look at the neuroscientific research and the psychological ones, you see that our parts show up at different points and different times in our lives depending on the context in which we find ourselves.

So context is really important, and it influences how we behave. Now, where does behavior come from? In my view, it comes from training in part. Sorry, that was not a



pun on purpose. and also emotion. So I think one of the things that in the corporate world anyway, my experience has been that we try to dampen out emotion because we don't always know in the context of business how to respond to emotions in the moment.

But actually, emotions are an incredible signal to us about which part is trying to show up, right? So if something triggers us, if something makes us angry, I think we should be doing one of many things, but here are two ideas. One is to pause and ask ourselves why we're feeling those things, 'cause there will be an answer to that, and usually it's a part of us that was in some way, asked to show up in that moment.

And then the second is to ask ourselves why. What is it that I'm noticing in this moment that is making that part stronger than it usually is? Because, again, I would say emotion's quite a, a strong leading indicator to why you're feeling what you're feeling. And I think those things, when taken together, lead to character.

So what is character? Character is who we are underneath the surface, all of the parts, but also what really makes us unique. What's our sort of fingerprint on the world? And - I think the etymology of the word character is really interesting because it comes from the old Greek word meaning the imprint left on a coin after manufacture.

So if you think about that in the context of it's kind of the imprint we leave on the world after we're made, and we're constantly shaping and shifting and moving and being made. So there's some imprint that we leave, whether we like it or not, good or bad, and neither is better, just to be clear.

so I spend quite a lot of time when I was writing this thinking about my own character, what forms it, what is it? How would I define it? And I think it's a really interesting exercise to excavate that and think about it. 'Cause while we love to think about who we are and define who we are by labels, maybe a different way of approaching it is to think about who we are in character, who we are aiming to be as well. it's not a limiting factor. Rather, it's a expansive one. Because, for example, I'm a real... I love order. that's probably why I work in operations. I love structure and process. Those things make me happy. In fact, it extends to my personal life. What's my happy place?

Cleaning my house. I know that sounds really silly, but that is, when my house is ordered, I'm clearer. I think better. there's a reason people like Marie Kondo and all sorts are making millions out of this idea, because I think there are a n- number of us who enjoy having ordered houses. And it's not because of the order, it's just, it's predictable.

You feel like you're in I mean, there's all kinds of things about that. So I gave that example only explain that my character is very fundamentally defined by that in part. I



like repeatability, predictability, certainty. But I also know that I live in a world where uncertainty is actually the only certainty, right?

And that's really hard for me emotionally. When I go into a room where the answers are not clear, I get nervous. I might feel anger. I might feel, dejection. might, there could be a lot of emotional names for what I feel, but I now understand the part of me that is being brought to the fore is this part that is seeking control, and I can't have it.

So just accept that. Name it. Say to the people, "I'm getting stressed right now 'cause I don't know." And that does two things. It brings the part into the room, it acknowledges that part, but it also gives a view to the others of the vulnerability in which I find myself and the true humanity of the fact that I may be called to make a decision, but I don't know the answer.

there's a certain connection in that and a certain truth in that that allows others to step up and say, "Wait, I have an idea. We could do this." Because leadership's not a solo venture. It just isn't. It's a communal one. And if you don't have community, you don't have leadership. That's my view. It's quite certain...

That's quite a certain statement, so I know that's a problem. I'm just naming it for the impact

[00:21:17] **Susan:** Absolutely, and it's funny, isn't it? I think it's funny that we define leadership characteristics, what the character of a leader should look like. And, and then a, a lot of us perhaps try to mold ourselves And in your book, talk think, 61% of people shift their identity

to

[00:21:40] **Archana:** Yeah

[00:21:41] **Susan:** we expect them to be. as about knowing who you are and who you want to be, your character, there's the flip side of that, of who people think you who people think you want to be, they m- not always meet either. And I think that's something a lot of us don't know and

don't

[00:22:04] **Archana:** I think there's a... Yeah, 100%, and I think we all have that, right? we interpret. We walk into rooms and we think everyone's looking at us, but actually what we forget is that everyone's thinking the same thing we're thinking, which is everyone's looking at me. And I think as creatures, we are much less aware of our



own, of both the group and how everyone is showing up in the room, but also our own personality and how it shows up in the room.

And a friend of mine, who exposed me to this exercise called the Johari Window. Have you heard about it? And I think it's so useful to do in teams and individually. It's this idea that we have these four quadrants. Not it's simplified, but I think it's a lovely way of seeing it.

It's the things we know about ourselves that others know fully, the things we know about ourselves that no one else knows, the things others know about us that we don't know, and the complete blind spot, things about us that no one knows, not ourselves, not anyone else. And just quantifying that for yourself, seeing which fits in which quadrant, is a really useful exercise to self-awareness.

The, Tasha Eurich is a professor and a researcher, and she's done some work on self-awareness, and she's got this incredible statistic, which I will... You'll have to fact-check it, but broadly, 90% of leaders think that they are very self-aware. Basically, if you ask an individual on the street, "Do you think you're self-aware?"

The answer is generally gonna be yes. But what the research showed is that only 10% are real- of us are really self-aware, and I think that's just the opposition and the paradox of this. We think we know ourselves better than anyone else, 'cause we live in our bodies and our minds, and we should technically know ourselves better than others.

But in fact, we don't have the full picture, and that is what I think we should all try to constantly be asking ourselves about. I think I show up in rooms in an optimistic, positive way, but maybe that drives you absolutely insane, and you need to tell me that, and I should be open to that, because I learn something about myself and also how I show up, right?

So

[00:24:18] **Susan:** and what you're talking reminding do you know David Whyte, the poet?

[00:24:22] **Archana:** Yes. Oh, I love his writing. I love his writing

[00:24:26] **Susan:** got Constellations books right beside me

here,



[00:24:29] **Archana:** Oh my goodness. His poetry is absolutely spectacular

[00:24:32] **audioSusanNiChriondain21871856014:** isn't it? And he talks about, he has a whole seven step to conversational leadership thing, but the first one is to stop having the conversation that you're having in your head. he said, "And if you don't know what that is, just ask the people around you and they'll be able to tell you."

[00:24:53] **Archana:** Isn't that brilliantly put? we need to step out of ourselves to understand ourselves, and the best way to do that is in connection with others. And it is something that I really wanted to leave readers with in the book i- is this idea that we don't operate in isolation. Of course, we have to do the work ourselves, but ultimately this is about reaching out.

This is about connecting. Because it is through connection that we don't just get stronger, but we operate as part of the collective. 'Cause I think it is quite easy in our society today, and I think COVID was a perfect exemplification of this for me, which is why I talk a lot about COVID during, during my exploration of this leadership idea.

We were... We found ourselves alone, truly alone, right? With our families if we had them, but otherwise in our apartments, in our houses, in our spaces of living. Working, caring for others, doing the day job and doing the night shift all in the, at the same time. And it was in this moment that I think I realized, and maybe it's my truth only, it's that I needed other people, but I couldn't see them.

I was limited in my ability to see, hear, touch, feel. There was none of that. It was, we were in w- lockdown. we were socially distant, and I felt true sadness at that because I was lucky. I hunkered down with my family, and I enjoy being with my family. But for others, there were other constraints, other things that made it hard.

so sorry, that's a kinda rabbit hole, but I guess what I was trying to say is I do think we are beings who need connection. The volume of that connection will vary for every individual. Some people need a lot of it, others need less of it. But I think saying we can just live on a mountaintop by ourselves, I don't think that's the full picture.

I think we do need connection, and I think we should encourage and nurture that

[00:27:07] **Susan:** Absolutely. and, it's one of the points in your book as well, and in indeed in my own, it's about that things can't be transactional all the time. This interaction is really key to who we are. And, the happiness index, when they do their data collection, they always find that relationships at work are the most important factor towards people feeling happy at work. and that we are in a relationship with ourselves at work, with our work, with our colleagues, everything is relational. And I



think because you also make the point that it's easy to undervalue what you don't see, and I, and this is beyond the metrics, isn't it? Beyond the numbers, essentially.

That often we focus on what's tangible front of us, how do you define a relationship? it's not that tangible. I can't touch it

[00:28:07] **Archana:** So that's so right. It's so right, and it's such an important thing to I don't have any answers for that 'cause I, I guess the way I might respond to that or think about that would be I know relationships are important in my heart, like in my I... W- one of my happy places is having 50 people over for dinner, it being loud, noisy, not having enough food, laughs a go, go, and tons of music, right?

Complete and total chaos, which ironically is the complete opposite of that control piece that I earlier talked about with you, like wanting order. One of the things I find the greatest joy in is disorder with people I love. and is I guess that's sort of the metaphor for the relationship factor isn't a data point. It's a feeling point. And of course, corporations have had to quantify everything because at the end of the day, you are judged by your numbers and your performance as a business, right? Because if you're not profitable, you can't and there's some real life lessons in that. But I think businesses are stronger quantitatively when their underbelly, i.e.

the relationships that power them, are strong as well. They don't have to be in opposition to each other, and sometimes I think you, you hear commentary about, "Oh, that's too soft," or, "That's too hard," or, "It's not about the people." But it, of course, it's about the people. b- people are what make the thing work, whatever that thing is.

So whether that's the client you're facing off with or the teams you work as part of or the idea that you're having in a meeting, it's always around other people. Can technology help us with that? Of course. It can be a partner in that. It's not about it's either this or that, but it, both can be true. And so I guess I completely agree.

It is beyond the numbers, and I love that word, by the way, that, that title. I think it is so appropriate in the world we're in. This isn't about numbers. This is about feeling. And without wishing to get too philosophical about this, I think it's about who we are as beings, not what we do, but how we do it and why we do it.

[00:30:40] **Susan:** Yes. And the both/and. Today you've given me a, a new perspective actually on because it's, business, it's people and money. as you were talking about character and the etymology of that coming coin, is the imprint of- after the coin, that's my whole...



That's the circle there of people, and the imprint, and the money, and it's given me a new dimension on

using

[00:31:09] **Archana:** I have one more for you, 'cause it, I find this absolutely and quite fascinating. The etymology of words has always been something that I... I'm just drawn to it, I don't know and the word wellbeing, comes from the old English word for wealth. And isn't that fascinating? I think... So what do I think?

I think so many things, and I would be so curious to hear what you think. But I think isn't it interesting that we have tied wellbeing to wealth, but we have inferred somewhere that wealth equals money, and therefore money is linked to wellbeing. But actually, what we are learning slowly, and the happiness index is one example of that, but there are others, that wealth can come from so many different pillars in our lives.

It can come from financial security, of course, and I'm thinking Maslow's hierarchy. If you don't have enough to eat or a place to live, you're not thinking about anything else because your basic needs aren't met. But let's assume for a second that we could meet everyone's basic needs. Wouldn't that be an amazing world to live in?

Then what is it? What is wellbeing? What is wealth? Well, I think it's about relationships. It's about who we know, what we do, how we do it, why we do it, the impact we have, and it extends beyond the quantity, beyond the numbers, right? And it extends beyond the money because... you've got me going now, and so I'm, like, hyper-energized by this conversation.

I- if you look at the data, what the data show you, and if you did care to look at the numbers, you would see that there comes a point in a financial remuneration equation beyond which people don't care anymore. You can pay them, but you would pay them, exponentially more than what they're currently earning for the money to have a real impact.

What really matters to them is am I seen? Am I heard? Am I connected? Am I... Do I have friends at work? Do people give a shit? Sorry, I don't know if... Sorry.

[00:33:19] **Susan:** This has got, an rating, this podcast.

[00:33:22] **Archana:** Okay. cut edit me out. I have a tendency to swear. I was trying to be good. do other people care that I am here? and that isn't that the point of What is the biggest fear that people feel all the time? It's a fear of irrelevance. It's a fear of not mattering, right?



People have written about this for centuries. We want to be seen. So that, for me, is what wealth is. The people who are really wealthy are not necessarily the richest, and that's the point

[00:34:00] **Susan:** In fact, I, there's a story that, Michael Neill, he's a- an author and coach tells often about how guy rings him up and wants to b- do coaching with him, and I don't know, he mentions nine times in the first 10 minutes that he has 27 million in the bank or something.

it's a different number.

but he says that this guy mentioned so many times about all this money and Michael Neal is thinking, "Wow, you must wake up every morning feeling, wealthy and secure." and his was that he didn't. Every morning he woke up thinking he was going to lose it all And you're like, "What's the point?" so suppose, we don't that through line perhaps, Archana, well. don't time think about what matters most to us, what our life about. we look back and go, "Oh, that made sense." But we don't look forwards going, "Well, if that makes sense, how do I continue that through line, or it because this is what I'm really looking to now?"

[00:35:05] **Archana:** Exactly. And it will, and that's such an important point, Susan. It's about this idea that it can shift, and it is ever evolving. I think the idea that the through line is static is one I was really trying to, um, explore and try to explain that it doesn't have to be fixed. It can be moving. I think the best analogy I could give for this is skiing.

I don't know if you ski, but

[00:35:29] **Susan:** A bit.

Not well

[00:35:31] **Archana:** a bit. I'm not a good either. I'm basically not a sporty person, but I really enjoy going to the mountains, and my daughter loves to ski. And one of the things that you learn as you're learning how to navigate these different slopes of different difficulty, is that you have to fix your gaze on a fixed point as you go down the mountain.

The reason for that is if you don't, you lose your balance and you fall. So why am I telling that story? I guess the reason I'm saying it is our through line is a similar kind of exercise. We don't know what stumbles and what moguls we're gonna find in our wake, in our path, but what we do know is a fixed point.



If we understand what that fixed point is, it will help us navigate the bumps more easily. Does it mean they're not hard? No. Does it mean that everything is all of a sudden clear as a bell? No. But we are centered in our understanding of where we are trying to go, and the through line gives us, a light guidance to where we might wish to go

[00:36:34] **Susan:** And a way of helping us when we're off track.

[00:36:38] **Archana:** Yeah, 100%.

[00:36:39] **Susan:** Yeah. reason I reached out to you recently to have this conversation was a post you did on LinkedIn about a leadership retreat that you had attended, and you wrote a lovely article about how, you noticed something about your own assumptions in that room, or in that...

I think you might have even have been outdoors. But maybe you'd just t-tell us a little bit about what shifted for you then, Archana.

[00:37:08] **Archana:** I can't remember which post exactly you're referring to, so you're gonna have to remind me. Do you remember it?

[00:37:15] **Susan:** think it was just that we assume that other people are thinking similarly to us. And when you realize that actually you've got all these different perspectives, which one of them is the perspective follow, or how do you navigate that with people? And that we can assume all think the same

[00:37:38] **Archana:** Yeah. Absolutely ri- wow, those are wise words, and I should have remembered that.

I have been exploring this idea of perspectives because I think that as I talked earlier about my need for certainty, I s- I make a lot of assumptions.

Th- that's the fundamental truth about who I am, and I'm really working quite hard to try to not assume anymore, or at the very least, to name what I'm assuming so that others in the room can disagree or challenge my assumptions, which I'm finding to be quite liberating, both for me and for them. so a simple example is that in a team situation, when you walk in, and if you happen to be the senior person in the room, people look to you for commentary, input, guidance, coaching, answers, or any of the above, all of the above.



And sometimes that means that I can assume everyone's on the same page. I can make a statement today we are gonna go right, and I will just assume everybody wants to go right with me. But if I never ask the question, I will likely never get the input because they see me as the leader in the room, therefore they have to follow.

That's kind of the inherent assumption in, built into leadership, right? And what I've noticed is by saying that, using the words, "My assumption is that," leading with that, what I find is a lot more openness and a lot more dialogue amongst teammates about what they disagree with, or indeed what they agree with, and that does two things.

It brings the team closer together as a unit because it's not about me, and it gives me confidence that when we do end up making a decision, everybody's on board. 'Cause this idea of not having a meeting after the meeting, I don't know how many of you have experienced this situation where you go in a room, everyone nods, they say they're agreeing, they leave the room, and then everything s- **kicks off**. I'm so unhappy. How could they do that? I didn't agree," blah, blah, blah. So this saves that problem. there still might be conversations after. There still might be debate. In fact, probably good and constructive debate about what was decided and why, but at least the people while they were in the room were held.

And I think that's the point I'm trying to make about perspective, and it's what was clear to me in the retreat, which is we come into rooms and we make all sorts of assumptions based on what we see visually. But by doing that, we are limiting ourselves in what we might be able to hear if we asked different questions. Now, I that makes certain assumptions.

It makes assumptions about what people are willing to ask, what people know and have to hold and can't share, what people come into the room with that they don't wanna share, and the difficulty of navigating all of those things. So it works in some situations, it doesn't work in others. But I think all we can do is walk into rooms knowing that our perspective is not the only one, and it's certainly not the best one.

And this is the last thing I would say. The other thing I'm trying to really do is step out of comparison and using comparative language, so we're back to the language point. So much of what we do is anchored in more or less, i.e. relativizing performance, perspectives, behavior, learning, career, and I'm really trying to push myself not to do that anymore.

It's really hard 'cause it's so well-trained in me. But even saying I am better than or I am less than. Those words immediately anchor me in comparison, and I think do, do harm, they rather than doing good. and it's not encouraging of potential yeah



[00:41:48] **Susan:** when we are all unique. every single one of us has our unique gift, if will, to bring to the world. And so therefore, positioning ourselves against another in any way, shape, or form is comparing apples and oranges

[00:42:04] **Archana:** 100%. So true

[00:42:07] **Susan:** we're brought up and, we talked about education earlier, from a young age you're getting a gold star or you're getting, yeah, the top of the class. And so comparison is, they say it's the thief of joy, don't they? But

it's just how we're conditioned. And we have the freedom to choose differently, don't we, Archana?

Even if it's difficult, but we have the freedom to choose every single time once we notice we're in comparison

[00:42:39] **Archana:** I recently have been, observing my daughter. Kyle, m- she probably thinks this is a bit freaky, but I've been listening to what she's been saying more, let's put it that way. And she's going through her GCSEs at the moment, and it's an intense time. There's quite a lot of pressure.

And one day we were driving in the car, and she, saw this woman walking on the street, and she said, "My gosh, she has amazing hair. what glorious hair." And it's true, the woman had incredible hair. Yeah. I think that's amazing 'cause I have none. So I was like, "Wow, yeah. So do you," I said. That was my response to my daughter.

And she said, "It was a compliment, not a comparison." That's all she said, and I thought, "Girl, you have totally nailed this thing." I hadn't even noticed that I was doing it, and I guess that's why I'm saying I, I'm really trying to notice the things I say. And half the time it's not using any language that's comparative, but it is in effect communicating a comparison.

And isn't it interesting that the youngsters amongst us or certain people just have a knack for noticing that? For saying, "No, you know what? She has nice hair, and I have nice hair. But it's not relative game. I'm not trying to have nicer hair than her. I'm just saying she has nice hair.

It was an observation."

[00:43:58] **Susan:** insecure about my hair. You don't need to, mother me



extra

[00:44:01] **Archana:** No. Exactly. but it's just fascinating. it shows up in all different wa-kind of contexts

and then we're back to that word context. And that is where we're going to have to leave it, Archana.

Yes

[00:44:14] **Susan:** an amazing conversation. Thank you so much for your time today

[00:44:18] **Archana:** Thank for me, for being in conversation and for doing the work you do. I appreciate it

[00:44:23] **Susan:** And if people would like to know more, read your book, whatever it

is,

how can they find out more about you?

[00:44:31] **Archana:** You can find me on LinkedIn, you can find me on my website, that's archana mohan.net, and of course, always happy to have a chat for any ideas or thoughts or challenge,that anyone has. And

[00:44:42] **Susan:** you have a podcast.

[00:44:44] **Archana:** I have a podcast, yes, available. It's called Where We Place Ourselves. I'm doing a bit of a more introspective season this month, called Echoes from Els.

That's a shout-out to my daughter, and it's,just noticing small stuff that I think hopefully might unlock things for others

[00:45:01] **Susan:** Lovely. And I listened to one of and maybe that's where I ... 'Cause that story, did you tell that a podcast

episode

about



the

[00:45:08] **Archana:** Yes, I did

[00:45:08] **Susan:** I heard that, and, I love the style that you've adopted for those short solo, episodes

[00:45:15] **Archana:** Oh, thank you. Thank you, Susan. Thanks again for inviting me to talk to you

