WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST

Episode 6
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Host: Annemarie Cross

Keep it Simple – from a recovering perfectionist

Annemarie Cross: You're listening to Women and Leadership Podcast, episode 8.

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Hi. I'm your host Ann Marie Cross. Welcome to another episode of Women and Leadership Podcast, the podcast that empowers you to reach your full potential, whether you're already in a leadership role or you are an inspiring leader.

Now, joining me on today's show is Lisa Askwith. Lisa is an experienced C suite business leader who has worked across a variety of global businesses. She also hosts several board decisions and enjoys helping companies and charities at this level. Lisa has a very strong belief in honesty and ethical behavior in business and always tackles situation from both a people and business perspective.

People are the soul of any company or business so without getting this area rushed, very few businesses will thrive. She also does her best to balance her work life and her personal life so that she can spend time with her two beautiful daughters and her husband. Whilst this is always a juggle, she has found planning ahead and being very flexible makes all the difference. Her life is very fast paced and she loves it and on today's show, Lisa is going to share the importance of people first no matter what, be a leader and only occasionally a manger and why it's so important to stand by your values. Welcome to the show Lisa.

Lisa Askwith: Thank you Annemarie. I appreciate it sure, I love to be here.

Annemarie Cross: So Lisa sadly, some women believe that they cannot have it all, a successful career, a family and of course, their personal interest. However, listening to your introduction, you are an experienced C suite business leader. You're working across a variety of global businesses. You hold several board positions. You got a husband and two beautiful daughters. So I'd love for you to share some of the insights you've learned along the way that have enabled you to balance all of these areas in your life.

Lisa Askwith: So I think essentially the first thing, particularly as a female in business is that I think you need to identify what you really want and then about a really good plan on how to achieve it.

Lisa Askwith: Yeah.

Annemarie Cross: Because we get pulled a lot of different ways and we say a lot of biological ways that we get pulled in this world and we've got to work how that's going to fit into our careers and our life and our needs and our wants.

The best I could say is you've got to work that out early and I know I did. I knew I really enjoyed management. I loved being in global companies. I had a lot to offer. I enjoyed the fast-paced environment, the travel and so I developed myself down that pathway with a very clear goal that I'll get to a point as with my husband as well where we will stop and have kids.

So for us it was very planned. I think being global managers, you have to be incredibly well planned to time management. It's just off the planet. People always look at me and go how do you manage to do all these things. For us it's second nature. We've planned everything and that sounds a little bit cut and dried in some respects, but I think if you really know what you want and we wanted to achieve our careers first and then have children and so we planned it that way.

Annemarie Cross: So many people if they don't set that intention, don't have that goal, they're not being proactive and they tend to be reactive and other things get in the way. You get distracted. You might spread yourself too thin and then you end up 5 years, 10 years whatever it might be kind of living with regret or thinking why didn't I -- why am I not achieving what I really want. So I love that that you've shared that. So that really is, identifying what you really want, set those goals, set those intentions and make a plan. Make a plan and follow that plan. So you said people first no matter what. So why do you believe as leaders, it's so important to recognize this and ensure that it's our people that come first.

Lisa Askwith: A lot of people initially when they start on a leadership or management career, they focused on management way too much and look we need to have clear boundaries. We need to have clear processes. People need to do things in certain ways and have responsibilities. But a lot of people forget that the actual thing that's driving everything is the people themselves and if we don't actually embrace that upfront and work with our people in a compassionate kind way with a high level of integrity, honesty and belief everything gets derailed and it happens really quickly in business.

Annemarie Cross: One of the things that I read the other day on one of the social media platforms was take emotion right out of it. It's just business. But if we take a step back and look at what you have just said about endeavoring to always, be compassionate to your team, to be mindful of the decisions that you make, to treat each person in your team with honesty and integrity. If we would take the emotion right out of that, I mean, that is not putting the people first attitude in place, is it?

Lisa Askwith: Right. It's so true and it's where the mistakes happen. I mean, it's one thing not to be overly emotionally engaged with the business decision absolutely, but you still need to look at that business decision and say okay, this is how it's going to affect our business and this is it's going to affect our key asset, our people.

Annemarie Cross: You mentioned something. People jump in and they're more manager first rather than a leader. Now, to someone listening today, can you define for them what is the difference in being a leader and then being a manager?

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely. I find particularly with people first time in these types of roles is they're suddenly jumping into what they see and believe at the senior position. So therefore they have a first to know beliefs and attachments to that role and they tend to always hold back to the grill okay, I'm a manager now. These are the things they have to achieve in this timeframe. Here's the criteria I have to work with. Here are the reviews I have to do on which staff or which product or which budget. They become very automated and they cut themselves off unintentionally from engaging with their teams.

It's a really dangerous trap to fall into because you tend to find people who do that. They keep pushing and focusing more and more on these outcomes, but they've actually forgotten to engage their people along the way because they're so focused on the black and white the work side of things and that's where I find the real differences.

You always expect first time managers to make a few of these mistakes. They always, they'll get into their head something they I have to get done and they forget to engage their people on the way. So the difference I see is a really good leader come out from day 1 they know the business, have never worked in it before, but been brought in from the outside. They take that first couple of weeks to meet their people speak with them, engage with them, actually ask what their concerns are, what their drive and passions are, how they perceive the business unfolding and develop that upfront relationship really quickly. Good leaders are great at that. They get in there, they meet their people, they understand the business much, much faster than a good manager.

Annemarie Cross: And you know we are as when someone is a leader and overseeing a team, you are as good as your team. So if your team is struggling because you're not listening to them, you're not being compassionate, there is no honesty and integrity that you're showing them and supporting them, it's going to really minimize their ability to do in often cases, to do what they need to do. Would you say that that's what you found?

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely and the secondary issue is that and a lot of people forget this. A lot of businesses forget it, is that not only do you need to engage your team, but your people really are your biggest asset. By that I mean the people on the ground

seeing what's happening in the business and you know sometimes, that isn't great and people don't like to hear it, but if you don't embrace them and let them tell you what's happening out there, you miss out on saving your business from a lot of mistakes.

Annemarie Cross: Absolutely. What you have said over the years that you have been a leader and I'm sure that you have worked in teams where you've had both men and women working together at leadership roles. Speak a little bit about what you found in terms of maybe those differences between how women and men lead. Why am I asking this question is that sometimes, I hear the people commenting well I'm now in a leadership role and this is a women and she tries to lead like a man and unfortunately, it becomes very difficult for her because that's not her style, that's not really who she is. I'd love for you to share some insights around that.

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely and look it's something we do see unfortunately and very much so. The good male leader can be quite low key at work is probably the first to develop these makeshift relationships as well as having a good business sense obviously to be in that role. I think it's very easy to have that mighty tough of discussion and catch up after work for a beer in the pub and have a quick chat and go home.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Lisa Askwith: It's a very easy flow. It's an expectation, so in the work place it transfers really easily. Whereas when women tried that whole same process, it does seem to be a little bit -- they start to liking to some people. They're wondering kind of what's going on and why they are being asked out for a drink in the pub and all these kinds of stuff.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Lisa Askwith: Whereas the ladies that do it really well back to that genuine engagement piece typical and not always say, look at your own personal strengths. For women, because normally, that real level of understanding engagement at the personal level and you can use that in a business sense quite comfortably by meeting your staff in the first few weeks, engaging with them, asking what their needs are, what their direction is and where they're going. You establish that same culture, that same close knit happy to chat talk culture that you see the men do as well, but if it's not necessarily driven by a beer after work. It might more be the coffee catchup after lunch for a quick chat about business priorities that also I had the personal elements to it.

Annemarie Cross: One of the things that you said and I want to just don't touch on that because so often, when people step into a leadership role, we put pressure on ourselves that we are expected to know everything. But I love the way that you've said as a leader go and approach your team, ask them what do you need, how can I support you. So I'm sure that there are instances in your career and maybe seeing other leaders not take up upon themselves that, hey I need to know everything. I need to have all the answers but really engage with their team and allowing them to step forward and use their skills and strengths to better the team and obviously contribute to outcomes. So what kind of insights and information can you share about that?

Lisa Askwith: I definitely agree and I think I'm more than comfortable having smarter people in the room. So I'm happy to be good at what I do, but I'm also happy not to be the smartest person in the room with the most knowledge. Need to embrace that and

if you're running a team of people, if you ever find people who know more about something than you do, grab them, hold on to them, engage them, make sure they're happy and help them develop and you're going to have a much better outcome for yourself personally, but so are they and so is the business work together beautifully.

And then on the flip side of that, you see those people who do feel they have to be the most important, the most knowledgeable person in the world and they're in that room and they can't complete the business and then make mess. It all starts to fall apart because they too busy trying to protect their own integrity and beliefs and their own knowledge rather than actually looking at engaging the whole team and delegating the appropriate tasks out to those who are best to achieve them.

Annemarie Cross: I want to speak a little bit more about this because I think it's so important and that it really does take the pressure off someone who maybe already in a senior leadership role or maybe aspiring to be a leader that we don't need to know everything. I love the way that you have said it and I think it's so true and I totally agree. Don't want to be the smartest person in the room and if your team have got skills, expertise and wits and brits of an area that you may not necessarily know much more about. When you've got a level of confidence and allow your team to shine in those areas, that collaboration benefits everyone.

Yet you have some people who may not have that level of confidence and I know myself that I've got a couple of colleagues who work with leaders that have no interest in their team member sharing, hey, maybe we can do this in a better way, we can cut cost, we can save time. Because these leaders feel challenged and

confronted that they didn't come up with this idea themselves which really as you've said, it really minimizes how the team's working together, yes?

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely. And the thing that those top leaders need to realize is that you can have the best ideas in the world and if you're not confident in saying that it was your and you're going to say it was yours. It's the implementation set that tends to kill most ideas and good ideas in business. So as a good leader, you're not trying to find the idea yourself, you need to be able to implement it and make it work.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Lisa Askwith: And that's way your skill set should actually fit. So that's I always say be more than happy to have your staff being smarter than you in some areas because you can work with them to make that wonderful for everyone.

Annemarie Cross: I can't remember, Lisa, who it was that I heard said this. Someone mentioned, a leader mentioned that the team members would often come oh we got a problem or this is a challenge, this is an issue. So she said to a team, you know what I appreciate that there are challenges and there's things that happen during the day where we do need to identify a change or we need to do something differently but what I want you to do, I want to encourage you to have a sit down, think about what are some different things and options that you think we could do to change.

So in other words she really empowered her staff do some brainstorming beforehand so that when they approached her--so this is the issue, they had a bit of think about it, I think these are the different ways that we can address this and then they were able to brainstorm together, make a decision. That really made a huge difference to the point that often any problems or issues were already

managed and didn't need to be brought to her attention. And I think that's really signs of a confident leader.

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely. And it's something I always say to my team because you know we're going to have lots of problems along the way. Things will go wrong or what is going to happen, we expect that. But let's think of some solutions first before we get too stressed about it all and start looking at how we can fix them. That level of engagement would make everyone much happier than just saying oh heavens, not another complaint. Let's ignore it.

Annemarie Cross: Yes or your team may want to approach you to let you know that there is a challenge but if you're a leader that doesn't welcome those and your team is almost fearful of approaching you because oh you know she going to bite my head off or he's going to bite my head off then you don't want to create that sort of environment either.

Lisa Askwith: No and absolutely and that type of environment just startles everyone very quickly and not just the business but the people. They're not going to stay around if they like they're not value and they're not listened to, they will leave.

Annemarie Cross: Yeah. Now Lisa, one of the things that you have said is that it's very important to stand by your values. Let's talk a little more about that because one of the things that I often find is that we don't often know what are key values until something happens in the workplace. There's a change. There's a takeover. And all of a sudden, we're unhappy and often that's to do is because our values have been challenged. I'd love you to speak more about this.

Lisa Askwith: In today's workplace, people are very--wanting to be very engaged on what we're doing. It's not the workplace of 40 or 50 years ago where you came to work, you did what you're told, you left the end of the day and that was it. Technology has entirely turned the workplace upside down back with everything else. So people are part of their workplace outside of the 9 to 5 hours most people are these days. They commit to technology as well.

So we need to actually look at people's values because it's no longer just do this that's the end. It's okay, you can do this but how doesn't it affect everything else around you? How does it affect you personally? So I think with that engaging with our values, we run a very big risk with the disruptive technology that's running through every business these days. I've actually been missing how we actually keep our staff in the business and keep them working well in the business. I see people all the time leave companies because they value the challenge and it's certainly the right thing. When comes right down to it actually doing the right thing by people.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Lisa Askwith: Really looking at that closely is very important for every business moving forward.

Annemarie Cross: As a career consultant, I have often been approached by people who are working in a company and they said I love my job. I absolutely love it being here for a long, long time yet the management has changed or there's been some significant changes made in the workplace and how work is completed and the demands and so they're now unhappy.

I think--You know studies have shown that when someone's wellbeing and they're not met can be causing stress for the individual. When people are stressed and unhappy that is when you'll find the productivity decreases and often they will leave and you could potentially as a leader lose a team member who has certainly contributed and can continue to contribute had the workplace been conducive to their values, yes?

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely. And it happens unfortunately so often and this is where a lot of mangers or leaders missed the whole cultural engagement piece. You need to develop a workplace that has a positive culture. Now that's sounds like a really easy thing to say. Let's all work, we're going to be happy at a positive culture. But it's a lot bigger than that that you covered every single aspect of your business now and help that culture actually grow. It's all about not just engaging staff but allowing staff to feel that they matter, that their values are important, they can talk to people but also that the management team has that direct communication back to staff.

Now I'm not saying that the GM has to pick up the phone to the radio on the retail floor or something like that. But the GM and the whole business leading unit has to actually communicate whether it be by email, announcements, post outs whatever it is. Communicate regularly so people know that they're actually listened to, they're valued, where the business is going, what the expectations often are. Because without all that thing very transparent and very regular, people values feel compromised. They don't what's happening. Change scares them whereas most time these days change quite exciting in business and most employees they get a real benefit real out of it.

So if you communicate it properly and you let them know what's happening, you let them be involved, you hear their concerns and you help them deal with that then probably their values and their internal value of feeling comfortable at work is right on top of their list and everything moves forward much more smoothly.

Annemarie Cross: So if someone recognized that the team was something that was not quite right, behavior and performance is certainly being impacted and after hearing some of the things, insights that you shared today that they recognize oh, maybe I do need to take a step back and start to really allow my team to voice some of the things that perhaps some of the changes made an impact on their lives. What would be the first step that you would encourage these leaders to do to start that dialogue with their time because that can often be difficult.

Lisa Askwith: Absolutely. I think it's particularly if that someone who's been disconnected with their team for a while and they've missed their initial chance to really connect with their team, they're going to go back and work a little bit harder to get there.

Annemarie Cross: Yes.

Lisa Askwith: And it's quite often is the really simple things. Let your team know there's been changes, be open especially if people are unhappy or the business is heading in a different direction. Whatever it happens to be let your team know that you're aware of it and you want to help them fix it, be very transparent. In order to do that you're going to chat with each of them over the next week, have an open chat. It's all about sharing ideas and letting people to bring thoughts to the table

whatever you like. Make it really open, make it very personal, make it pleasant and start to develop that relationship from scratch.

So start to know you team properly and also let them know they are being heard. They're not being ignored. You do want to actually brainstorm together and that should help those one on one meetings. Let them know you're going to have a great meeting and you all going to put it on the table and start working towards whatever the end point happens to be. But it's going to be done from a team's perspective with the support of the company and the management team. So you're not taking anyone off, you're not scarring them, you're trying to embrace them let them move forward and you're making it very open and transparent and that's actually the case.

Annemarie Cross: Yeah. It's so true. So what would be one last word of encouragement that you would like to leave with people today, Lisa?

Lisa Askwith: There's quite a few. I think if you're moving into a new leadership role, it's really crucial that you get to know your people and wherever possible you empower them. Embrace the fact that mistakes will be made but if you empower your people to actually achieve and move forward under their own steam, they're going to be so much happier and so much more engaged with both you and the workplace that you will actually be able to get a much better result and fix any problems that do occur.

Annemarie Cross: I love that. Thank you for sharing that. So, Lisa, for people who might like to find out a little bit more about you, how could they do that?

Lisa Askwith: Certainly, the website is very simple. It's www.ApexBRS.com which is A-P-E-X-B-R-S dot com. So jump online by all means and there're all my contact details there. I'm more than happy to take a call or direct email whatever it's easier for people to have a chat.

Annemarie Cross: Terrific. And of course we will put all of the details on how you can contact Lisa on the show notes. So to go to the show notes all you need to do is go to AnnemarieCross.com/podcast8. That's AnnemarieCross.com/podcast8.

Thank you so much for coming on this show today, Lisa. It really was insightful.

Lisa Askwith: Thanks so much, Annemarie. I hope I helped a few people out there.

Annemarie Cross: Now, it's over to you. Lisa and I want you to join the conversation to let us know what was one biggest ah-a" that you had that you're taking away from today's show and what's the action step you're going to take within the next 24 hours to get moving on that a-ha. Now to join the conversation go to AnnemarieCross.com/podcast8, leave your comment below the show notes and Lisa and I look forward to reading your comments. That link again, AnnemarieCross.com/podcast8.

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Today's interview tip comes from our sponsor, AceThatInterview.com.au. Never discredit previous experience even if it's not in the same industry or similar to the role you're applying for. What you need to do is pinpoint how this experience has developed strengths and of course the value that you offer and how they are valuable and relevant to the role that you're applying for. Every single piece of experience, every challenge you've overcome, every concern that you handled well

whether it was in paid employment or even voluntary work has developed you into the person that you are today and you've got to remember that. Now if you got an upcoming interview and you want additional support in this area so that you can communicate with confidence and negotiate a salary that pays you what you're worth. Check out www.AceThatInterview.com.au for more information.

Now that brings us to the end of another episode and I do hope that you'll join me again next week. Remember, subscribe to our iTunes channel, AnnemarieCross.com/podcastiTunes. By doing that means that you're going to be the very first person to learn about when a new episode is released and you can be inspired and empowered each and every week. That link again AnnemarieCross.com/podcastiTunes. While you are over there if you've got a couple of 3 minutes, leave a comment, what was the greatest a-ha from the show, write the show too. That would be awesome just to get us out in front of more inspired empowered women in leadership out there on iTunes.

See you next week. Make it a great one. Bye for now, everyone.