

Leaders in Conversation presents

FINDING YOUR TRIBE: THE LONELINESS OF LEADERSHIP

In this episode of Leaders in Conversation, **Jeanette Head** (host) is joined by **Elona Ndlovu** (speaker), as they unpack leadership loneliness, and the causes, and effects thereof. This is followed by exploring how one finds and builds your tribe.



QUOTES BY ELONA

“BE A HUMAN BEING AND NOT A HUMAN DOING”

“BE SOMEONE THAT OTHER PEOPLE WANT TO BE AROUND”

I CAN BE ALONE BUT NOT LONELY

LEARN TO LIVE WITH YOURSELF!

NUGGETS OF WISDOM

Leadership Loneliness

- ◆ Leadership Loneliness may include feelings of isolation, disconnection, and emotional detachment from others. It is related to the emotional depth and intimacy of interactions, rather than how many (quantity). So, Leaders may feel lonely even when they are surrounded by people and have access to extensive networks.
- ◆ Various studies (HBR, CCL, KPMG) conclude that isolation of leadership, the pressure to be strong and decisive, the lack of confidants, and the absence of a sounding board, are key contributors towards leadership loneliness.
- ◆ There may be parallels between young leaders and executive leaders but the feelings are the same.
 - 🕒 New leaders feel lonely experiencing grief, loss, abandonment, and rejection, as they transition out of their peer circles and not yet fit into the established leadership structures.
 - 🕒 Senior executives feel lonely experiencing being misunderstood, anxious, fearsome, pressured, and overwhelmed as they steer the ship while not being able to divulge all information at all times, navigating complex relationships with shareholders, stakeholders, teams, and staff who may have competing interests.

GUIDELINES

- ▶ Resist *BUSYNESS* to camouflage your uneasiness about loneliness. Be still, pause, reflect.
- ▶ Spend time with yourself. Get to know yourself better. Challenge yourself to shift habits that are not serving you.
- ▶ Self Awareness: Be honest about your level of loneliness. Am I feeling lonely? What is causing the loneliness? How am I showing up as a result of my loneliness?
- ▶ Acknowledge that you live in a trauma-informed society. Do NOT desensitize yourself as it will reduce your ability to be vulnerable, authentic, and to demonstrate empathy. Be your whole self.
- ▶ Be intentional about what you read, listen to, and observe; how it shapes your perspective, and how you intentionally build your resilience and adaptability.
- ▶ Debunk Superpower syndrome. It creates anxiety, self-sabotage, and imposter syndrome, leading to alienation and isolation. It fuels anxiety, which is a ticking time bomb.
- ▶ Find your tribe!



NUGGETS OF WISDOM

Finding your Tribe

- ◆ You are the first member of your tribe. You cannot connect with others if you are not connected to self.
- ◆ You may have different tribes for different reasons and seasons. To stretch the basics of a professional and personal tribe, use these guidelines to assess your tribe:
 - 🕒 Who helps you to execute (get the job done)?
 - 🕒 Who supports you to innovate (solve complex problems, find possibilities)?
 - 🕒 Who supports you to scale yourself (identify and grow your potential)?
 - 🕒 Who supports you to learn and adapt (build your capabilities)?
 - 🕒 Who supports you to thrive (looks after your well-being)?
- ◆ Be intentional about the quality of your engagements rather than the quantity of the connections. You can have a large tribe and essentially be very lonely.
- ◆ A tribe, also known as your Social Capital Network, comes with commitment, responsibility, accountability, and reciprocity.
- ◆ You cannot just WITHDRAW from the tribe, you need to INVEST/DEPOSIT into the tribe. *It is not what you can get from it but largely about what you can give to it.*

GUIDELINES

- ▶ Reflect on what kind of a tribe member you are:
 - Are you ready to connect with others?
 - What is the purpose of wanting a tribe?
 - Are you willing to invest into the tribe?
- ▶ Be purposeful and intentional about how you find and build your tribe.
- ▶ Create a tribe mentality at work, a space for reflection, feedback, ongoing learning, innovation, creativity, making mistakes reviewing, and reflecting, for you and those around you.
- ▶ Develop your engagement and connection skills.
 - Apply emotional intelligence by demonstrating you are attuned to your own and others' emotions.
 - Practice vulnerability by sharing your struggles and challenges to attract genuine connections and support.
 - Foster a culture of psychological safety that values openness, honesty, and authenticity, and encourages people to express themselves without fear of judgement or reprisal, and builds trust.
- ▶ Take up any opportunities for coaching and mentoring, but do not wait or rely purely on organisational interventions. Invest in yourself.
- ▶ Seek professional help from a therapist or a counselor if you are struggling with loneliness or mental health issues that go beyond networking in a tribe. This is NOT a weakness it is part of your tribe.



- 🕒 Are you experiencing leadership loneliness? What are your intentional actions to overcome this so that you can lead to your best ability?
- 🕒 Do you have a tribe that fulfils your connection needs, in all spheres? What are your intentional actions to find and build your tribe?



Elona is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at WITS Business School, with a focus on Business Coaching and Entrepreneurship. She is the lead in the Masters in Management Business and Executive Coaching program at the Wits Business School and sits on the board of the Research Portfolio for COMENSA. She holds a Master's degree in International Business Management from Liverpool University, and an Advanced Diploma in Life, Executive, and Business Coaching. Elona's qualifications are paired with over 15 years of experience coaching business executives, senior managers, and entrepreneurs.



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