

EPISODE 52

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You're listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world with Rick Torseth and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. this is Rick Torseth. And welcome to 10,000 Swamp Leaders. We are the conversation that takes place with people who've made a decision to raise their hand choose to lead on some very complex and challenging issues in the world. Today is not an exception. I am fortunate to have a friend and a colleague, Joanne Flinn, joining us today.

Joanne is an author and she is also the Executive Leader of an organization that is focused on environmental, social and governance issues, four boards. And we'll get into why boards matter in great detail here. But first, let me introduce my friend and colleague who I've known for a very long time and have actually served on the board with Joanne, Joanne Flinn. Welcome to the swamp. It's great to have you.

[0:01:07] JF: It's absolutely wonderful to be here with you, Rick.

[0:01:09] RT: Oh, good. Good. Good. Good. I'm going to ask you to get us rolling here by telling people what you think is important for them to know so they have context for the conversation we're going to have. It's all yours to give that information to them.

[0:01:23] JF: Oh, my. Oh, so many juicy possibilities and details. But I think I'll pick three that completely influence the work and I think why I do the work that I do and why I believe this work is not just that it matters, that it will make us this profound difference, is I spent 30 years in my corporate life working with senior leaders transforming organizations. The whole practice of my professional life has been around how do you lead change over not just within one organization, but often collections of organizations effectively. And I'll also use the two words that often don't come in the same sentence, humanely and profitably. Because, to me, it's always about people

and businesses thrive when they're profitable. That was a core part of what many people have known me for in the business world.

However, before that, I had a very unusual childhood. My father was a senior scientist in what's now called the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research. And so, we grew up in Canada. Well, Australian originally. Grew up in Canada. And then we moved to Africa when I was seven and then on to the Philippines.

And his core work was about how do you take great science from the labs and the research fields out to farmers, i.e. businesses, that will actually make a difference to what they do? To make them more productive? It was a fundamental thing around sustainability of both the farm, and the agriculture and actually the economics for the farmer. And this was dinner table conversation my entire childhood.

My dad would have postdocs over. They'd be talking all the science. Would have people that had been receiving the equivalent of Nobel prizes in agricultural research and scientists. And that was just dinner conversation.

Fast forward out of my childhood and as I finished university, I joined the corporate world. I would talk about these sorts of things and the power of people who are committed to make for action and how it would change the world. And they just look at me and go, "Joanne, boring." And so, I rapidly learned in my business life, "Do not talk about that part."

I bring those as, part one, I have a very, very deep business executive background. My first board position, I was 23. I was made responsible for an organization that was the largest trading organization in the state I lived. We had \$10 million worth of revenue, but we're in the unfortunate position of running out a loss. Not a good look when you take that on and you're 23 and you're going like, "Well, wait a sec. Governance 101. Pay your debts as when they fall due. How are we going to do this?" And I sat on the university council. So, very, very established long-term organization.

I learned the rigor of what's necessary to create successful businesses and successful organizations in quite a complex construct really early on. But I also learned in business that

they didn't want to hear about sustainability. Great. You don't want to bore people. So, you don't talk about stuff that bores them. But it's been a lifelong passion. Because that's just what I grew up in. That was the ethos of the world.

And so, a couple of years ago, I was working with a client and they were going, "You know an awful lot more about sustainability than our folk do. How come?" They were an organization that was making major change in the space. And literally, this is when I formally reconnected into, "Oh, yes. That's because I have a couple of postdocs. From having listened to all those postdocs all those years ago."

One of the things this particular CEO said to me, he goes, "You have such a level of confidence that we can make a difference." He goes, "Where on earth is that coming from?" And the piece is, Rick, where it comes from is I remember speaking with my dad just before he passed away. My dad passed away at 52. He was quite young. And it's very amazing now to actually realize I'm older than him. That was a very weird moment in life to go, "Wow."

And I remember him saying not long before he passed away, he goes – and I'm called Anna at home. He said to me, "When we started this work, we didn't know if we would make a difference. We thought it was going to take three generations to be able to solve the challenge of producing enough food in the world. Three generations. 100 years." And he said, "We did it in less than one."

Our problems today are not that we don't have enough food. We have enough food. We may have distribution problems, and political problems and economic problems. But it's not a lack of food on the planet for people. And that is a phrase that he said and it really landed. Because if a hundred-year problem was solved in less than 25 and this was – why do we – I've lived seeing impossible problems solved in a lifetime. I know that in the next 20 years, with a group of committed people who just decide, "This is what we're going to do because it is possible. Because we choose and decide to make it possible," it can happen. Because I grew up in it. I grew up living, breathing and seeing it.

[0:06:31] RT: Back when your father was up to the work that he was doing, sustainability was probably a mild conversation at best. And now it's in our lives every day and it's been growing,

coming at us for a while. And it's here full force. And it's going to continue to get bigger and bigger. Let's get into it a little bit. Because you've written a book called *Greensight: The Sustainability Guide for Company Directors*. So, it's very specifically targeted. And not everybody who's listening to our conversation may have the distinction between the CEO, the presidents, et cetera, of the organization in a board.

Let's begin with sort of board 101 stuff a little bit so that people are with us in this conversation. Because it's an important distinction you're making in your focus of your work. Maybe you start by telling people what the role of a company director is relative to the organization.

[0:07:24] JF: The sum of it is this, is the company director, and they may go by multiple names. There's the legal role as being the company director. But you also have the same role as a founder or an owner. When we create a company, legally speaking, we are creating another entity. We're creating another being. It's an incorporate being and there is a responsibility to it. To look after it. To enable it to last. If you want to say it, it sustains. It is durable. That it fulfills the purpose for which it was created.

And as a company director, when we're in that role, and for some of you listening, you may be a senior executive reporting to a company director. You may actually be somebody who goes actually, "What I think of it? I'm actually one of the people registered at company's house or the SEC," wherever your business is filed. You're a company director.

And in this role, this is about setting the direction. What are we really about? What are we attempting to do? What's the border direction? What's the long-term horizon that we're creating this for and into? And that's very distinct from, technically speaking, management theory, is that the C-suite is delegated by the board to enact those decisions.

If you want to look at it one way, you can say the board is dealing with the macro decisions and the ultimate responsibility. For example, if something goes wrong in a company and they can't pay the debts as in when they fall due, which is like the most fundamental responsibility of a business is fulfill its commitments to others, then the board member, the company director is the one that will get taken to court and go to jail. It's not the CEO. It's a very different level of fundamental responsibility. And many people treat it as if it's a formality.

[0:09:13] RT: Okay. So, let's add to it then. That's the base function and has been the function that they've fulfilled for a very, very, very long time. And what wasn't necessarily on the agenda forever was issues of sustainability or the initiatives that you're involved with.

Let's gin it up a little bit. Now if I'm in that position, I've been focused on making sure not only did we pay the bills. But, actually, we made a profit and then we figured out what we do with the profits. How do we grow the business? Et cetera. Et cetera. But now along comes this additional responsibility that I am not able to negotiate away, delegate away. And that is we need to represent the organization and have a plausible response to how we're doing things around ESG or the environment, social and governance issues of the organization. Because the spotlight is much more on us today than it ever was before, right?

From your perspective, why write this book? And why do this work? And what is it that's going on now that you think you can help with?

[0:10:12] JF: Let me – we got several parts into that question. Why write this book? Before that, the preface piece is this, is that, historically, there was a view that as business leaders our first responsibility was to be able to keep the organization alive. Pay your debts as when they fall due. Fundamental. Make a profit as you so elegantly put.

And then as many people would also be aware, do things for good reason and good purpose. Most organizations frankly don't last terribly long when they're only driven by money. They usually have something bigger and greater that they're about. What I'm seeing these days in business is that there is an increasing call. And if you want to go through management theory, this goes back over a hundred years where there's been a debate about whether businesses were only about profit or whether the businesses also had social value and social purpose.

One level you could say that the dial up of that social value and social purpose is coming in. But what shifted significantly over the last, I'm going to say, small steps back when I was a child. I remember when the Rio Conference talked about core principles of sustainability. I was a teenager. I remember reading it actually on Stars and Stripes, one of the newspapers we

actually managed to get where we were. Sustainability has been around in the science world for a long time. It has not been in the business world for very long.

But as it's entered the business world and as we've seen greater impacts, be it from climate change, different social issues, more and more recognition has been going and saying, "As businesses, we have a role to play. We have a role because we're creating impact." And also, we need to respond to the impact of changes that are happening.

When I was looking at where things were at and this way these two parts of my life sort of collided with this one client, what I realized was there was a lot of absolutely brilliant work and brilliant science expressed in scientific language around sustainability. Be it in the environmental space or be it in the social space.

And the implications of these were really poorly expressed in business speak. I wrote Greensight to create a pathway for senior leaders who are looking at their businesses and saying, "How do I make sure my business thrives not just over the next 90 days? But how do I make sure my business thrives so that it's here in five years and doing well? That it's got good odds of being around in 10?"

And for anyone who's doing legacy-based work or has a family business, that this thing is actually still going to be standing for the next generation. And that requires taking a much bigger horizon of what we look for and what we care about.

Now, Mark Carney, who is the head of the Central Bank of England or the Bank of England put it really succinctly. He said, "We have a tragedy of the horizons." Much of our management thinking and leadership thinking is focused on the near-term. And our economic calculations of what creates value is focused on the near term. It goes we need to actually formally put these other horizons in.

I wrote Greensight to give business executives, boards and C-suites a simple framework to be able to go, "Sustainability, ESG, which starts off with three confusing letters; environment, social and governance, which seems like it covers the universe." Because you're going like – and we have this economics implicit in that. And governance is the economics, and the profit and

purpose side of things. How do we actually understand what many people look at and go, "It's an alphabet soup of different acronyms and science that doesn't feel like it's meaningful to me as a business executive."

The first part of Greensight was written so that we literally had the ABC, the guide to demystifying that alphabet soup so it's meaningful and expressed in our language as business leaders for the issues and the responsibility we have as board members and CEOs.

For example, as a business leader and board member, we're looking at where might the world be in five to 10 years? I.e. where do we want to put our capital investments? Very, very pragmatic type things. Where do we want to put our capital investments? Or where might our assets be at risk and where the world might change? We need to have a construct for going, "How does this other stuff actually come in so that we can make better decisions into the uncertainty, that is the future?"

The second part of Greensight was going like, "There a massive data set." You and I both had wonderful time with Raphael Ramirez and the whole scenario of futuring type processes. I took that richness of that work and said, "Okay, if we create a very pragmatic model for us as business executives, there's two major dimensions that we're working with." One, we're working with what is our organization's capacity to change? If you want to say resilience. Our ability to build into something different to our present.

And COVID was a wonderful experience in going those who had resilience and adaptability did a lot better than those who are very, very rigid. How capable are we of changing? Because that tells us how far our lead time we need to pay attention to. If we're very slow at changing, we need to be much better at looking further ahead because we're only going to be able to make incremental steps. Whereas if we're very fluid and able to change rapidly, we're far better responding into near-term issues. One dimension is our capacity to respond to change.

The second dimension is to what degree are we seeing stakeholder pressures coming at us? I use the word stakeholder. Not just shareholder. You got shareholders who have an opinion. Investors who will have an opinion. And there's different profiles coming out. There's what is happening on the regulatory trend side? And I'll touch back on this one. What's happening in

terms of customer and customer expectations? What's happening in terms of suppliers? What's happening in terms of employees? Social sector and other sorts of influencers and stakeholders.

And as a board, what's the cumulative pressure that these are putting on us? For example, if you take a business that sees themselves as a small to medium-sized business, and I suspect quite a few people who are listening here are going, "Look, I'm not a big multinational. I'm not a billion-dollar company." Possibly in brackets yet. I'm a smaller business. We're under a couple hundred million. Why on earth do I need to even care about this?

And very pragmatically, for example, is this, is that businesses in several regions who are over a billion-dollar have to report environment, social and governance. Have to report. They have to report what their supply chain is doing and, to some extent, what their customers are doing, which means those of us who trade to bigger organizations need to report.

Now in some jurisdictions, it's not just if you're a billion-dollar company. It's if you're a hundred-million-dollar company. For people who are here, I was working with a group of executives just yesterday on this one. If, say, for example my business is not a "hundred-million-business" and I'm trading to a larger business and they need to report on their environment, social and governance impact? How they contract with their suppliers? And what their suppliers do does actually count.

This is a very big fundamental difference in traditional management thinking. And I'm wording it this way because people kind of go, "Well, on that one." I'm going like, "This changes who we contract with. It changes who we put on supplier list. It changes our ability as a smaller organization to be on a top tier organization supplier list or in their supply chain." It's hardcore value right here right now. As a human being, who wants a planet – Rick, quick question. And everyone here who's listening, quick question. Would you like to be alive in seven years?

[0:17:50] RT: Hey, I ask the questions on this podcast, ma'am.

[0:17:54] JF: No. No. It's a conversation. It's a conversation. Do you want to be alive in seven years?

[0:17:59] RT: Of course. Yes. Yes.

[0:18:00] JF: Me too. And so, I don't even ask it – I kind of ask it semi-rhetorically. But I ask it actually with intention. How about 26 years?

[0:18:08] RT: As long as possible is my answer to these questions.

[0:18:11] JF: Which is cool. For me, 26 years, I'll be as old as my mom. And my mom is absolutely rock. She does yoga. She plays tennis. She plays a pretty mean game of bridge as well. My mom is in her 80s and absolutely rocks. And I ask these questions these this way, because when people talk about environment, environmental change, it's easy to look at it as something that's way out. But seven years is 2030. You and I had lived seven years. You got kids. You got them through undergrad and masters.

[0:18:42] RT: Let's take this at a different angle though. I'm thinking about people listening here. Because a lot of our conversation here is occurring inside organizational structures at a very high level. In part because that's their responsibility for their position. And what we also know is that throughout the organization and people who interface with the organization who are not in those positions have great concerns about sustainability and all the associated elements to it as well.

From my orientation around this conversation in 10,000 Swamp Leaders and operating off of what I believe is the working premise that's important for this kind of stuff, which is leading is a choice in an activity. It's not a role in a position. And so, therefore, embedded in the organization are lots of people who tend to maybe wait for requisite authority that may never come to them. But they could always choose to use themselves to raise their hand and take on some aspect of this. In this case, sustainability.

From your experience, and not only helping other organizations, but in your own life. I mean, it started at the dinner table and then has been progressing from there. Let's talk a little bit to those people and say, "Okay, I'm with you. How do I help the system? How do I nudge the system given that I lack this sort of capacity of authority in a position? But I feel strongly about

sustainability. And I want to do my part from where I'm located in the system rather than waiting till I become something higher." How do you help those people? Because they must be in the room with you from time to time when you're working in client systems.

[0:20:18] JF: One of the lovely things about this is actually there's quite a few in the room. And one of the reasons why I share about my childhood is though it was sort of a very, very different kind of one, was that many people actually go and relate to that I too had this belief that we can do more, but I feel constrained in the structure that I'm in. That phrase you use. Do I have the requisite authority?

this is between not you and me, Rick, but everyone who's listening is I didn't have the requisite authority. I just decided. I just decided. I just decided. I just decided. I was tired of waiting for other people to go and go, "I bless you my child. You have authority to go and do good stuff." Really? I really hit a point where I was just going, "I share this because it's like I'm tired of waiting for someone to say I'm allowed to go and do good work."

And I think if I look back to my younger self, that younger self probably had a fair amount of that attitude too. I far prefer to be working from a space of irrespective of the role of how do I do great work? And sometimes the great work has been learning. What are the leading questions I can go and ask my boss? To leave the witness, your honor. Very, very deliberately.

Some of it will be I read an article. Or, you know what, this seems to be – how are we responding to this? Hey, I see this comes up a lot. I want training." Now, look, one of the wonderful reasons of when you go and say I want training is this, implies to your boss you don't know everything. And look, some of you will know an awful lot. This is more about a change tactic than it is about necessarily as much as anything else. I would like to be trained on this one.

Because one of the lovely things is when the organization officially trains us and brings in it as a formal knowledge, it gives us permission to talk about what we learned in that process. And so, part of it is I use that one as a way of giving me permission to say, "Okay, on this course, it came such and such." Okay. When I go on a course, can we agree that I bring things back that we put into action? Because you know what? I don't want to just go on a program and just like

fill in three days or two days and come back and do nothing. I want to go on a program and go like, "I get insight." We come back and we have a 90-day plan or 100-day plan. I like using hundreds personally just because I get bored with the 90s.

I do thousand-day plans. Set off on a thousand-day plan. Break it in 10 sets of 100 days. When you listen to – if you go and say, "Can I go on some training to get authority?" You can bring it back with authority and then you can put things into action with authority because you've already set up the permission system in the way you asked for it.

[0:22:52] RT: Assuming the system is willing to grant that permission. That's a negotiated aspect as well.

[0:22:57] JF: Let me jump in on that one. The perception around sustainability is often that it's huge and it's expensive. And I'm just going to put that one right in here. People perceive that training is going to be costly. And, therefore, cost is both part of the negotiation.

The piece is the permissioning to go learn something and bring it back is the key point. That's the key point there. And, yes, there's programs out there. There's different price points. There's different ways they bring you return. But it's getting that permissioning to bring the idea back in. Otherwise, you're a virus. Otherwise, you're a virus. And we know what happens with viruses. We go into react mode.

[0:23:30] RT: Inside this conversation about sustainability, let's talk a little bit about, A, what you do to help. Let's start with that. They've read the book, or they heard you speak, or somebody reference you and you get requested to come in. How do you help these organizations specifically?

[0:23:52] JF: We help in three very, very practical ways. One – and it's really come in from realizing where many businesses are at rather than a theory about what's possible. Because lots of things are possible. First one is working with senior and middle management. Just saying, "Okay, what's a practical road map to take?" It's always a lot easier on any journey when you've got a sense of, "Okay, this is the direction." "Oh, these are the choices we have." "Oh, we could go that way or that way. This is what the journey looks like."

Part of what had been putting some organizations off, it was the overwhelm and the unknown. We have road maps that people can customize and basically pick and select from to say, "This is right for us. This is where we want to get to. This feels right."

And from that road map, then we create action cycles, those 100-day cycles that I spoke about, for organizations and teams to be able to put them into action. Really, practical. As you can see, it's about not so much about the theory. It's about how do we go into action? People ask about the institute. And is it a think tank? I'm going, "No. It's actually an action tank."

[0:24:55] RT: Joanne, I'm intrigued by the mapping process. And I'm particularly intrigued how you chunk it out into 100-day increments. But I'm also imagining that people who are listening are saying or thinking, "Well, we're pretty unique. We've got some kind of things that we do in our organization. Or the sector we work in is unique compared. How is it that the model that you bring to the conversation can be organized, or customized, or fitted for our unique way of doing business or the market we fair?"

[0:25:23] JF: Wonderful question. The way we've designed it, we've designed a bit like choose your adventure. Remember those books where you'd read a section and then there'd be a question with a couple of questions about what do you want? You could see the entire landscape is one great big road map with lots and lots of choices.

Some organizations start from the end in mind. They go, "You know what? This is what we want to be." And they highlight the key sections on the end game and say, "That's what it is." Others say, "This is where we are and this is what's important." Then we literally pick up the pieces that allow that journey to hold together. And that's got two powerful things. That means it's completely unique and customized to the individual organization. Because they're picking the journey. They're designing their own road map from this bigger meta map that has been put together with – just so people understand where it's come from. It's come from working with 10 CEOs from major organizations and some smaller ones to say, "What on Earth would it really look like if we're aiming at the endgame?" To say, "If we were defining the future and we're being regenerative and circular –" which is the kind of business models that people are leaning to is the more advanced, newer forms. That sort of like really getting out there.

But before that, if we're trying to transform into being an ESG and sustainability-based business so we've actually got this baked into who we are, what would that look like? That's sort of getting a little bit closer to here and now. And in our work, we found that there are 17% of organizations that are currently aiming and operating to that.

And then there's quite a big bunch that are saying, "You know what? I just want to be ready for the kind of future we see coming toward towards us in the next 3 to 5 years." Where do we think customers are going to be? Suppliers? Regulators? It's a much more nearer-term picture.

And then there's some that are going – so we're picking for the ambition and for where people are at. Some just look at it and go, "I like that definer idea. But that feels way away." And then there's some that are going, "You know what? We just want to get started. We want to put our toes in the water." We call those pledgers. Like, they're making a pledge to get started. And there's some that look at it and they go, "You know what? In thinking this through and what's going on, our smartest move is going to be being an observer. There's still things we need to watch."

But what that does is it means, for each business with that board framework, leaders are making really coherent decisions around what's right for them as a pathway. Because they can see the choices in front of them, and make those decisions, and then communicate that and then the action plans make a lot of sense. And then any of the learning cycles that are needed around that are really oriented around what do we need for the next 100-day cycle? But we've got our big picture.

[0:27:59] RT: You and colleagues of yours, but Joanne Flinn in particular here, because she's the only one represented in this podcast right now. Put yourself out there on a very important initiative globally. I mean, we know that if this isn't near the top of the list of most large organizations that they need to tend to, then they're just simply not paying attention to the world. And there's not many of them that can fall into that category. Everybody's got a stake in this game.

And so, in you come and you have some ideas and some ways in which you can help them. I'm interested in finding out what you're learning about how you're doing the work. Because we need more Joanne Flinns in the world doing stuff like this. And so, this is kind of a personal side of our conversation, which is what you're learning about yourself. Let me start with the base question. What is it that is hard for you in doing this work?

[0:28:54] JF: Oh, reminding myself to trust that this works. As an individual, I tend to be the – we've known each other for a long time. I like diving in and I like creating and getting things done. I'm very much one of those funny people who's a combination of a creative type and an implementer.

What I found in this work is I have to lean back on my childhood on that, yes, this does. I have to go back into it does. But I have to have the patience to go. It's not overnight. It's not 190-day or 100-day cycle. Which is why I've had to like – literally, for myself, I have a little notebook. I call it my thousand-day book. To give myself a frame of reference of going like big things are built by a constant series of small actions.

And I'm the kind who wants to have this great, big massive thing. You see me in my artist mode. I do big art. Big pieces. But they're truthfully actually built by lots and lots of small things being put together to create the big piece. At the personal level, there's this I do really have to manage myself when – I'm better at laughing at myself now than I certainly was on hold the vision, but take the simple daily action. Have the vision, chop wood, carry water each day.

[0:30:13] RT: I'm thinking about what you just said here in the context of it's a long journey. And the measure of success in these kinds of challenges I think is making progress on it. You got a thousand days. You got 10 years. You got six years. You and I may not be around to see the end of the plan. What's your counsel to your clients about this distinction between their reward system that they're very much accustomed to, which is hitting things in very specific timelines? Like a sports match of some kind with a beginning, a middle and an end. And this work where it's going to be a journey? And we're going to go forward. We're going to go backwards. Measure success being progress. And how do you coach and advise those people for the kind of stickiness that they need to stay in that when the results are ambiguous as they go along?

[0:31:02] JF: I actually also love the fact –

[0:31:04] RT: I got to say, that's a very leading question. But I still think it's a relevant reality for these people.

[0:31:10] JF: Funny enough, you use sports analogies. I will come back with a sports analogy in this one. The most powerful way that I have found – and it's funny enough because I actually also realized my gorgeous niece lives and breathes this one. And she's quite a sportswoman. Is this one. What we're doing is we're choosing to play a better game in the business context.

We played the game of business with a certain set of rules of what it would look like. And now what I feel we're being asked to do is play a better game. And in playing the better game, there's different things we're looking for signals of success.

Let's take rugby as an example. For anybody who's listening and who does not follow rugby, you've been deprived of a super powerful sport. Instead of getting all patted up, you have very, very fit men throw themselves at each other and tackle them to the ground, but no padding. So, lots of fun to watch, let me tell.

[0:31:59] RT: I'm not vibing.

[0:32:00] JF: You're not vibing. Well, okay. It's a bit like that. You probably don't like it either. But that's okay. In the sport of rugby, there's this idea that used to – back when I was a kid. Actually, I remember watching when I was a little kid. And as a little girl, I worked out that one of the best ways of getting a Saturday morning cuddle from my dad would be when he was watching rugby.

My other sister and I, she'd go under one arm and I'd go under the other and my dad would be watching sports. We both get a good cuddle out of dad. I learned rugby as a little girl watching my dad's running commentary of the sport. And, of course, my dad knows everything about rugby. But he did actually play it at state level. He wasn't incompetent at all. He's quite good at it.

And I remember him talking about how they were changing the rules of the game. Back in those days, you used to be able to do what's called a neck tackle. So, you have full grown man, big muscle man. Again, the not padding is important. Who could throw themselves at another human being around the neck to tackle them to the ground? Consequences, people coming up with quadriplegia and paraplegic out of it.

And so, the game literally said, and this is going back 30 years, "This is not who we are. We do not want our players destroyed like this. We need to lift the rules of the game." They changed the rules of the game so that it became illegal to do neck tackles. You could only tackle shoulders and below. That changed the form of the game. It lifted its pace. It lifted its quality. It made it actually a more interesting game and also a less damaging game.

And to me, environment, social and governance is essentially us doing the same in business as going, "We're not just measuring our success by one metric, the financials, which is an important one. We're also measuring our success by these other qualities." I.e. initially doing less damage. And then the advanced players doing more. Because those are all now measures of success. At one level, it's not at all ambiguous. But it's expanding our repertoire of what success looks like to play a better game.

[0:33:51] RT: Yeah. I think it's useful. I think it's useful to proactively pursue the design of that better game because the game's changing under their feet at another level anyway. How adaptable will they be? And some, maybe with your help, will be in front of that adaptation and others who don't get your help pay a price for that.

This a question I ask everybody who's on the podcast. From a leadership standpoint, we tend to learn more from our leadership failures than we do our successes. They stick with us. They have long memories. They sting. We can show the bruise marks where we incurred that from the failure.

For the people out there who are a little further behind us on this trail trying to build their leadership craft, what can you share with them? One or two mistakes you made from leading that you've remembered and you carry with you? Because if we can save them from making the

same mistake, let them make their own original mistakes. Not repeat what we've done in front of them.

[0:34:48] BH: The journey of evolution. The one that – I mean, there's plenty in mind. I'm going to share two. One, because some listeners and possibly there'll be more than just one or two on this one, the idea that I had to get everything right the first time. That I defined an awful lot of my learning as failure because I didn't get it right the first time.

And therefore, I held myself back from learning because I didn't want to take that emotional judgment either from peers or myself on I wasn't perfect yet. My inner perfectionist certainly was a big one on that one. I put that one out as one of just create a structure for yourself so you can like learn and not be great to start with.

[0:35:32] RT: Mistakes are part of the process to be embraced then.

[0:35:35] JF: Or at least tolerated. But, yeah, embrace is a great idea. But learn to love your mistakes. Now I'm not quite there, I could say it. But I could learn. In art, you do a lot of drafts to get to the final product. And I've had to go and say, "I'm in draft mode. I'm in draft mode." And then to get to the final product, it was sort of a lot about me managing my psychology.

One of the huge ones that I would say that, from the point of view of like pieces where I just would not wish this on anybody else as a learning, is if you're at all type A as a personality, which anyone whose listening is probably going out, "Flinn, you clearly are," I will throw so much in that I burn out.

And having burnt out several times over my career, one of the biggest, most painful learnings has been I have to manage my own personal sustainability. And I deliberately use that one. Because, I mean, one burnout – I would have said it. Took me probably 10 years to fully physically recover. The damage that I'd done to my body.

And you actually met me fairly early on those recovery years. I could come into places and I could pull enough energy together to function. But then I'd have to go home and collapse to

recover. It took so much out of me in my life that the practice at the personal level as a leader has been – these more recent years has been how do I do the great work and sustain me?

[0:37:04] RT: Yeah. I think it's a very useful distinction you're making and it's one that I think it needs its own constant regeneration as premise to be able to check-in. And I would add to that checking in part, I think it's really important to have people around you who know you well enough to be able to read when I'm getting tipped a little bit out of shape and off-kilter. That's not always the best time to engage with me, or you, or anybody in that situation.

But I do think it's important to have people around for whom they'll persistent and have permission to persistently engage to catch it earlier rather than get so far down the road before – that's the design. And I think it's a piece that we're ideally more confident about placing in a development process than what we were in the past.

[0:37:53] JF: The other piece of that, to sort of loop back to what we were talking about earlier, is the – having those early warning signs. Therefore, be far more appreciative that the journey of environment, social and governance has to also have its own sustainability and learning cycle in it.

The possibility of hitting the equivalent of burnout or going, "Wait a second. We're seeing those signals." This is about us moving forward and lifting the game and staying well and healthy as well.

[0:38:24] RT: Let's end with a question that I wrote down here based on something you said. I'm thinking of your father now. Actually, I'm going to work off of what you told us about your father. From your perspective on this issue of sustainability and your experience and working with it now for a while and helping and sometimes maybe failing to help people get with it, for businesses and people out there who work in businesses, what actually is possible if they spend time on this?

[0:38:56] JF: What actually is possible? And I'm as much responding to this when I think about how my father saw what he did as I can say what I've seen people do here, now and today.

[0:39:09] RT: Yeah. I'm interested in you. I'm interested in you.

[0:39:13] JF: Because there was a legacy. But from what I've seen here and now, doing great work, doing the magnificent. *Magnifica* literally means great work. Is something that each and every one of us can do when we choose to step into it and step into doing the work.

I find for me that there's a space of this is when I'm working with a group who are going like, "This is great work. How do we stay in creating the magnificent?" *Magnifica*, literally, from the Latin. And sometimes I'm tapping back into the archer side where that kind of languaging vision is so much more tangible. But it's the energy that allows even in the business world. And I think, particularly, business is a huge creation and it can be a great creation. Yeah, it's magnificent. Great work. Creates the great work.

[0:40:11] RT: Well, let's end it on that note then. Business is magnificent. Thank you for spending time with us in the swamp. I appreciate it. It's been good to see you again. We haven't seen you for a while. So it's good to see you in this format. Thank you very much, Joanne Flinn.

[0:40:25] JF: Thank you very much, Rick Torseth.

[OUTRO]

[0:40:28] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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