EPISODE 55

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You are 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 this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with people who have made a decision professionally and personally to raise their hand and get involved in some kind of projects and work that matters to them, that they think the world needs to be involved with. Today is a great opportunity to experience that.

I have the good fortune to have two guests on today, Tracey Camilleri and Samantha Rockey, who are the co-founders and directors of Thompson Harrison, which is a consultancy in the UK. They're going to talk a little bit about that at their leisure here. They have this really sweet book out that's just come out. It's called *The Social Brain: The Psychology of Successful Groups.* I read the book, and I thought they had a – I had bunch of questions, and I thought, why not get these two women on the field and see if they can help me understand better, and if they can help me understand better, you'll definitely understand better.

First of all, Tracey, Sam, welcome to the podcast. I'm going to give you a chance to tell people what you think you want them to know about you, and then we'll roll into the questions. Tracey, why don't you go first? What do you want them to know about you?

[0:01:25] TC: Thanks so much, Rick. It's a real pleasure to be here. Yes, and to give us the opportunity to talk a little bit about our book, nice of you to say it's a sweet book. Thompson Harrison is a leadership and organizational development consultancy. What both Sam and I really care deeply about is helping leaders to create environments within which people really thrive, and that's not just a nice to have, or it's – we're absolutely committed to helping people to

create environments, where people can perform and take risks together and innovate and have impact together.

We are optimists. We believe that you can have your cake and eat it, that you can be human, that you can enjoy work, and it also can be generative and productive. Our unit of identification, I suppose, is the team, and we'll talk a little bit more about that. How can a group of people be more than the sum of its parts? That is a question that both of us and our co-author, Robin Dunbar, have really thrown around between us and done a lot of research on.

[0:02:31] RT: Great. Thank you. Samantha, what do you want them to know about you?

[0:02:34] SR: Well, I want to build on what Tracey did, is that one of the quotes that we have in our book is around that organizations can give hope to young people, and that we should design better organizations for our young. I'm the parent to two young people, as is Tracey, so this work is personal for us. It's important. We need to think of a world in which young people can thrive. We certainly feel enthusiastic about that, both of us.

The second thing I think is really important is that the three of us have come together, Robin, Tracey and I, I grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, so it was an absolute joy to bump into Tracey and Robin, and then do this work together. I think that happens. Meeting people, connecting with people doesn't just happen. These things need to be created and designed, and our book really thinks a lot actually about how we can create connection that's meaningful and important.

I have felt very, very lucky in my life, actually, to be surrounded by people who I respect. A shout-out, actually, to make time to build relationships and connect with people, which is really a central tenant of our book. I have experienced it in my own life. I feel very lucky for that.

[0:03:43] RT: You remind me that you have a co-author who's not present on this call, Robin Dunbar. Would you mind just giving him some introduction to people, so that – because I suspect he's going to pop up again in a conversation. Why don't you just give people a sense of who Robin is?

[0:03:58] TC: Sure. Robin, the eponymous Robin Dunbar of the Dunbar Number, Robin is a colleague of ours at Oxford. Both of us are associate fellows at Oxford Site Business School. Robin is a professor at Woodland College, Oxford, in the Psychology Department of Evolutionary Psychology.

We came together with Robin, and it was one of – as Sam said, one of those serendipitous things, where it seemed to us he'd done the science behind our practice in a way, the science behind our art. It's a joyful coming together of both, he thinking about, actually, goodness, we were putting a lot of this research into practice. He is someone who is known. I said, eponymous Robin Dunbar, perhaps best known for the Dunbar number, which is 150. That's the number of relationships, of actual relationships that any person can hold at a particular time, given the size of our neocortex, given the length of a day, and so on. We really enjoyed noodling with Robin around numbers and scale and size and the importance of that.

Also, we'll talk about it when we talk about the book, but also, his real insights and research into what doesn't change about human behavior? What has remained the same for millennia? What rumbles beneath the surface of everything that we do? For us, certainly having a greater understanding of that has really helped our work, which is much more around what can people learn, how can people change, how can people transform? It's the yin and the yang, working with the grain and against the grain that is perhaps at the heart of our book. Robin has been an absolute delight as a co-author.

In fact, yeah, we've got a date with him next week. Yeah, it was a very fertile three in a way. Sam coming from a big corporate background, me having worked as a learning designer in a business school, and Robin, as an evolutionary psychologist, bringing all that practice together and was great. Although it's quite difficult to write a book with three people, I think.

[0:06:16] RT: You made some sweet music here, so let's get into a little bit. The first thing I want to ask you is, as you've articulated, you all have day jobs. Writing a book is its own piece of work. What provoked you to decide you needed to write a book on this topic? What was it you're seeing and experiencing that said, "We need to carve out time and address this?" Sam, why don't you go first?

[0:06:38] SR: Yeah, sure. I think in a way, it is the work that we do, which was really thinking about how groups come together, how to optimize group performance, how to think about behaviors. It felt very connected to all of our work, actually, and what we do on a daily basis. We also carved out time to interview the most wonderful array of people, of people who need organizations, from organizations across the world, actually. It really contributed to our own thinking about our own practice. As Tracey said, it was such a joyful coming together of the three of us, that in a way, it didn't really feel like work in the traditional sense. It felt like really interesting conversations, which then required us to do some serious thinking about what are the key aspects of the conversation that would be helpful? Then coming together to really expand that thinking.

It was an incredibly generative process, I think, because of that. In a way, I think the magic came from having three different perspectives. It was work, but joyfully, not in a very hardcore way. In an enjoyable way, actually.

[0:07:45] RT: Okay, cool. Tracey, anything you want to add to that process before we get into the details?

[0:07:49] TC: I think, there was a particular moment for us. I mean, we'd started Thompson Harrison, and there was a feeling that we needed to gather together, what we really believed in, why were we doing this? What have we learned? There was a sort of synthetic bringing together of ideas. I think, it also happened at a time when we were all flung apart by the pandemic. As Sam said, we had the great good fortune to interview lots and lots of people, most of them virtually.

There was a sense of a lack of that human connection during the pandemic, that actually writing this book mitigated in a way. Then we would have our days down in Oxford in Robin's ramshackle. He wouldn't mind just saying this room in modeling. We laughed a lot doing it. There were times when we agreeably disagreed and threw things around. There was, yeah, there was a vibrant feeling of us all working things out and working things from science through to practice. We enjoyed that. It was enlivening, I think, intellectually for us, and it's been helpful in us bringing together what we believe in and what we continue to think about and be curious about.

[0:09:05] RT: Okay. Let's start. What is the social brain? What is the social brain? Now, it's a concept that was not one I had until I picked up the book. What is the social brain? Tracey, you go first and then Sam, you jump in whenever you like here.

[0:09:20] TC: The social brain, we agonized over the title of this, but the social brain actually is a phrase originally coined by Robin. What it describes is it describes both the gifts and the constraints of the human brain and all the limits of it. I've mentioned a couple of those. One is the size of our neocortex and the fact that relationship, what we're doing now, the relationship between people is heavy cognitive work. It's not like we can have thousands and thousands of relationships. I think everyone will be feeling December, that sense of exhaustion. People often say, doing the tasks, even complex stuff, that's the easy stuff. The people stuff is hard. It takes a lot of us to do it.

That sense of the limit of our brain size, the limit of the length of a day, we don't have enough time to know everybody. I think, also, our need as human beings to be part of small groups we need and always have and Robin would say, always will need to be known and to know. That sense that some of us feel like we're part of these huge, huge organisms, or whatever, that we have no control over, where we feel lost. I think, both Sam and I are interested in neither rising and a sense of free riding. There's a lot of language around this, social loafing, quiet quitting, because people don't feel like they are known, or noticed as individuals. There's that.

Then the fourth thing is the hormonal effect that we have on one another. When we come together, eat together, laugh together, dance together, sing together, share experiences, we create social endorphins that are the foundation and the basis of trust and discretionary effort. Again, we're flung apart. Here we are talking with you in America and we're – well, I'm in North Norfolk. It's magical, of course, but we're not in a room together. There's some recent research just come out of the Oxford Martin School looking at actually, the decline in breakthrough thinking as a result of a lot of research teams, essentially, only connecting virtually.

Those are some of the constraints and I'll be quick with, they're also the gifts, the huge gifts of being human. The fact we have imaginations, the fact that we can inhabit a future that hasn't already happened, both conceptually, imaginatively. We have huge nuance in terms of how we

communicate with each other and our learning range, the idea that all animals learn, or most animals learn, but we can learn on the shoulders of people who are dead and have gone before us. We have this huge ability to take on the new.

I mean, we had a feeling that there was a lack of understanding of our constraints and many organizations are set up bizarrely to constrain our gifts, to limit the human imagination, to limit our ability to inhabit the future and to exchange in sophisticated ways. They reduce us. That really is the social brain. I'll just finish by saying, we were also interested in the moment that we were in, which was a moment of people being under stress and strain, because of the pandemic and we looked at the original definition of well-being by the World Health Organization in the 1950s. That was mental, physical, and social health. We really felt that the social side of business, the social side of work had been hugely under invested in and lacking the forensic attention that it needed. It felt in the end, like a good title for the book. Sorry, long answer. Probably longer than it needed to be.

[0:13:31] RT: Sam, you may have more to add to that question Tracey's answering. But I also like you to maybe put forward some of your thinking about this focus on groups. I'm also noticing, you didn't call it teams. Throughout the book, it's mostly groups. I'm interested, is that purposeful in thinking it is, but I don't know? But make this linkage between the social brain and the groups and why that became the orientation point for the two of you.

[0:13:56] SR: Well, that's such a good question about teams versus groups. But the psychology of successful teams will draw in people who see themselves really as leaders of teams and will feel like, if you're a leader of a team, this book is for you. But actually, we feel the book is for anyone, actually, who is a member of a group, either as a self-declared leader, so somebody who might, for example, lead a choir, somebody who might lead the library group that talks about a book every Wednesday, which happens at the library, at my local library, for example. They wouldn't necessarily relate to themselves as a team leader, or as being leading up a team.

I think, group for us feels expensive and it feels like, everyone is part of a group, whether it's a friendship group, whether it's a group in your local community, so it felt a much more important word, actually, because groups are so contributing to community health and well-being and to how organizations function, and they're not always teams. Teams have a very specific definition.

As you know, **[inaudible 0:15:02]** in the world of leadership development for a long time, you know that teams are in somewhat a loaded word. We wanted to focus on the idea of groups coming together.

Particularly, that humans really need to be part of groups. It's such a strong human need. The idea that it's actually for one's own health and well-being. Being part of a group is critical. Robin's research, we also talk about this in the book quite a lot. Actually, there is no greater gift, actually, than being part of a group that is a healthy, functional group and really works positively for you. We know the long-term effects of that. Yeah. For us, group is an excellent word.

[0:15:41] RT: It is an excellent word. You actually highlighted the distinction I wasn't making when I was trying to sort it out, but you talk about it in a way that I'm very familiar with. My wife and I lived this on an island off Seattle, and we've been part of a community of people of couples, probably eight couples for a long time. There is a rhythm that is undefined, but it's like, enough time has gone by and we've not been together, and somebody musters a gathering, whether it's watching a sporting event, having dinner, playing golf, something comes up that gathers, and you talk about tribes. This group is a tribe. We'll come to tribes here in a little bit. I think you're spot on here.

Let's get into this deal. You've mentioned the Dunbar number. Tracey, you said a 150. I was familiar with Robin's work before I read the book, and I've always been struck by 150 seems over the top from me. I can't manage it. But there's something to what he's saying here. Help people understand why numbers matter, what the Dunbar number is, and a little bit about how that shoots you forward into the work you're doing. Sam, I'll start with you. I'll change the rotation. You go first and I'll let Tracey go second, how's that?

[0:16:48] TC: When we think about the Dunbar number, there are various interpretations, and when we're talking about it in the business sense is sometimes we describe it as the number of people through which information can flow pretty freely. We've worked with many, many organizations, where you might have a department which is around 150. The managing director, or the general manager, or the team leader would really know people. They would know who's in that community. There would be a real sense of – almost a sense of really, these ties that create, dare I say, a family feeling, because everybody knows each other.

Of course, what happens is the tip over when the group becomes bigger than that, and actually you start to see the senior lead of the team, or the team leader unable to really name the different people, because it's become too big. In the work context, we often talk about this could have danned on a chair moment. When you've got 150 people, you can talk to everyone and you know everyone.

The Dunbar number is how many relationships you can have at any given time. By relationships, we mean bumping into someone in the street, you know a little bit about, enough about them, in the sense that they might invite you to their wedding; what's going on in their children's lives, you ever seen that their dog recently, they've just bought a puppy and it's driving them nuts, or whatever it is. You have a sense of relational connection, but this doesn't mean that every single person in the world has a 150 really good – it just means we have the capacity to have a 150 relationships.

But more than that starts to become a struggle. Tracey and I have had so many conversations with people in business, where sometimes you have to stop people out. People moving from team to team, we just don't have enough time in our day, and the size of our neocortex just doesn't allow us to have meaningful relationships with endless numbers of people. That's not the purest definition of the Dunbar number, but that gives a sense of how we might apply it when we're working in organizations, or we're trying to share with people the relevance of it as a number. Tracey, I'm sure you've got something to add.

[0:18:50] TC: Well, I was just going to say, once you know that number, it comes up again and again and again. My daughter's getting married next year. Robin always says, well, it's the most frequent number of guests on a wedding invitation list. I'm just hoping we don't actually quite get to a 150, but we seem to be getting pretty much there. Whether it's congregations in a church, whether it's military units, and it comes up again and again and again, and there's a fracture point it seems, as Sam said it, that some people call it the stand on the chair number, or I mean, W.L. Gore, who originally, when he set up making Gore-Tex every a 150, he started a new plant with a new everything, new financial controller, new everything, feeling that he wanted work to be relational. The minute it got beyond that, actually, we interview someone from W.L. Gore in

the book, where she talks about how this has evolved, but it's still very much at the heart of their philosophy around people.

He also said, we read an interview with him quite interestingly, he said, he absolutely recognizes at the moment, where we becomes us and them. We have become interested in the leadership implications of that, because you get beyond a 150, and Sam talked about the way information moves around a group, which is also very interesting. We talk about that in our book. Where the leadership takes on a symbolic element beyond a 150, and people don't really know you as a leader, and they project onto you their hopes and their fears. Getting your head around that as a leader is really important. Also, wanted to say, we don't only look at a 150. I mean, we became very, very interested in numbers, and optimum size of team.

There's a Dunbar graph in there, and it's as if you've thrown a stone into a pond, and as the ripples of your relationships go out from there, and we spend about 40% of our social time with five people, and then about 60% with 15 people. The 15 is very interesting to us. I mean, of course, Robin's talking about it in a personal way. But if you map it into work, those 15 that include the five are not static. As Sam says, you need to swap people in and out at times, depending upon if you're working in a project-based environment, or the context changes. That's hard, hard work to do.

At five, you don't need a leader. We have this ability to mentalize, which is to hold the mind state of others in our own minds, to hold their motivations as well. That really is tough work. Women are better at it than men, I hate to say, Rick. But they are.

[0:21:44] RT: I believe you.

[0:21:46] TC: Much beyond five, it's exhausting to think not only what does Sam think and what does Rick think and why does Sam think this and why does Rick think this, and three others, that you start to then have to have a leader, so that you can say, okay, let's pull our thoughts. Actually, up to about five, you can just move forward together, knowing one another's mind states, and that can be hugely efficient in a creative team, or in a crisis team. But of course, if you want to then make complex decisions, you need more people, you need diversity of views,

you need 12 to 15, and you need facilitated leadership at that point, because no point having 12 to 15 if they don't have share a voice and you don't have time to listen to them.

I won't go into it all, but in the book, we look at mapping team size to task, and look at the leadership implications at different sizes of teams as well, and looking at what works and what doesn't, and where you have to start putting in structure, and how information moves around the groups, or teams of people. It's not just a 150, and we don't stop at a 150. Apparently, we recognize the faces of up to 500 people, and it goes beyond that. But behaviorally, structurally, and strategically, numbers matter. I think, too often, people don't think about the size of teams.

Just last point, we've certainly been conscious during the last few years that actually, too many teams are too big to be productive, and particularly virtual teams, half of them with their cameras turned off, they're just, I don't know, stones have gathered moss over time. Actually, really thinking about who needs to be here, and what's the point of us being in this meeting together, and what's the right size, I think is part of leadership, and we talk about that very much in the book.

[0:23:48] RT: I will say for listeners, in the book you have some wonderful graphic presentations of this separate, or this chunking down of groups of people based on tasks and functions, so there's some real practical, accessible ways in which people, I think if they're unfamiliar with the premise you're putting forward, can get some grip on it based on the way you described it verbally written, and also graphically. There's a good start there.

I want to go to another couple places in the book that really jumped out for me. I've operated off on an assumption that relationships are primary and everything else is derivative. I learned that as a kid. I learned that growing up with coaches and teachers and stuff. You have a chapter. You have two chapters that are dance partners in my mind. Bonding and belonging. Sam, can you help? It strikes me that if we're at a 150, if we're at 75, or if we're at 10, there's still work to be done for keeping these people, or what you call tribes, bonded and connected, so that they're able to do work and actually enjoy life, etc. Give people a vibe for the importance of bonding and the importance of belonging. Be ready, Tracey, you're going to come back in here with the backside of this.

[0:24:59] SR: Rick, I don't know if this is the right vibe, but I love this phrase that one of our colleagues shared with us, when describing the idea of bonding, is that connection, which is another way of describing bonding really, is free energy. When we connect with other people, and it's done in a way which is trust-based, so we feel all of those wonderful feelings when you're having a great conversation, or you're sharing insights and somebody else is really listening, with thoughtfulness to what you're saying, and I'm not trying to hurry the chat along.

Well, you're going on a fantastic walk with your teenage son, and he's sharing his day with you, and you're not having eye contact, but you're just walking along. That is bonding in its best possible form. Then, I always come back to this idea of creating free energy. Because we are social creatures, and because we are designed in a way to connect with others, is that building space for bonding is so important to our well-being. That it can't just be left to chance. We encourage organizations to do something called social strategy, which is, with all the well in the world, when you've got people coming into the office on different days, and they're sitting behind a screen, it's a slightly pointless exercise.

I worked for an organization in which two things were absolutely constant, and this was a FTSE top 10 company and the second-best performing company on the London Stock Exchange. There were two things consistent, no matter where you were in the world, talk about bonding. One was that there was a pub. It was a brewing company, and people came together after work. It opened after work for a couple of hours, and it was a place in which people met. I do just want to say, Rick, it was not about drinking the alcohol, because you didn't have to do that. It was just about coming together and knowing that there was a place of collection. I love this idea of creating these spaces in which people can really come together and connect. There was that.

The second was that there was always a canteen, which I never fully recognized the real impact of that, but we used to go down in our tribes, you've used that word before, every day to lunch when we were in the office. I believe that that was the kind of a – that was the royal jelly to the organization's success. Whether I went to Mumbai, or Lagos, or wherever, Bogotá in Columbia, I always could rely on those two aspects; being able to eat together with my colleagues, break bread, have interesting conversations, and know that at a certain time of the day, late afternoon, you'd be happy to know, I could join those same colleagues in the pub and have a drink.

When we talk about bonding, that's what comes to mind, because that is my experience in a large organization that was multinational across the world. I hope that describes. I hope that gives the vibe.

[0:27:44] RT: I'm going to steal the phrase, royal jelly. That is brilliant. I like it. I will say, having spent a lot of time in the UK, I really understand this collective gathering at the end of the day in the pub, whether they drink beer, or tea, but the sense that there's a communal gathering point, even briefly before you transition to the rest of the day is pretty cool. Tracey, anything you want to add to that, or the belonging aspect that you think is relevant to stack on top of what we talked about already?

[0:28:15] TC: Yeah, and the England football manager, Gareth Southgate, always says, that he wants anyone in his football team, even if they're on the bench, or however young they are, to know that if they're not there, the whole story of the team changes. In other words, every single person contributes something very particular to the collective story. Sam and I have become interested in our work at Thompson Harrison. How do you fast track, not to cheap, but how do you fast track belonging and bonding? Sam mentioned drinking together, eating together.

We just did a series of workshops in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. One of the ways of really fast-tracking a sense of bonding and belonging is to share experiences, visceral, immersive, lived experiences. We think about learning as a arc, and particularly, learning where behavior changes. Beginning with a provocation, then having a shared immersive experience, then having a chance for sense-making, then a chance for peer reflection.

Finally, we will always create an opportunity for people to design behavioral experiments. In this case, the immersive experience that we had all over the museum was we would work with the keeper of arms and weapons, and people were lifting up medieval swords and daggers, and thinking about how we do inadvertently, carry – we carry weaponry, whether it's the words we speak that offend people, or whether it's things we have hidden about us. We use that immersive experience as a way of thinking about how we sometimes exclude people.

We worked with the medals department, thinking about what we don't give medals for anymore, what we used to that we wouldn't want to give medals for. We had one session called How to Say I Love You in Greenlandic, which was extraordinary. We worked all over the museum, trying to get people to unlock, I suppose, new ways of thinking about how they could create a greater sense of belonging in their organization, and how when we design programs, as Sam said, we always design all the spaces in between the sessions as being just as, and probably more important than the learning sessions themselves, down to designing how wide the tables are, so that people are having menus of conversation, as well as menus of food, designing workshops, rather than workshops at time. Because again, as Sam mentioned, synchrony, hugely important, walking together in terms of creating bonding and a sense of the tribe, as you said, we will have rituals. Both of us work at Oxford, which is a wonderful place for rituals and traditions. We've taken a lot from working from many years in that environment as well.

[0:31:33] RT: Sam, anything you want to add to that?

[0:31:35] SR: Yes. I did want to add something, is that sometimes when we describe bonding and belonging, it can feel like it's a lot of work, but actually, it's deeply efficient. Because doing these pieces as Tracey described and the bonding, synchrony work is incredibly efficient and time-saving. Just a really simple example, Rick, is, and it's taken us a while to figure this out, but difficult meetings go much better when the night before you've had a dinner together. People are amazed that they come into the difficult meeting and they – there's a sort of generosity of spirit towards their colleagues that perhaps wouldn't have existed if they hadn't had an opportunity to break bread together the evening before.

Rather than doing that at the end of a long, difficult day where your frustrations have built up, I mean, these are small, but rather magical interventions, and we know they work. We have experienced the efficiency of these approaches in our years and years and years of working in an organization in difficult, transformative moments. These are small life hacks.

[0:32:43] RT: Life hacks. Does this connect to, I have a question here, because you have this interesting provocation that you said. You make a case that organizations and groups put too much emphasis on personal development. Are we talking about the alternative to personal development here when you talk about these things in groups? Why, if we don't do personal

development, which is almost like the third rail of organizational life for people, what do we substitute in instead of personal development? Why do we need that instead? Tracey, you go first.

[0:33:14] TC: Well, I think it's a great question. I think personal development is important, but it's not everything. Again, what we make an argument for is that there's been a lack of focusing on the group. I think all of us know of people who've done incredibly, incredibly well, been promoted out of their group, and really, really failed. No leader is complete. No one is complete. You're often in a beautifully functioning group. You complete one another. You fill in the gaps for one another. It's like home, sort of a breakfast with a family. It's a beautiful dance, where you're doing things and without even thinking about it.

I think that too rarely do we think about groups and how we could help and develop a group in a way that could have an effect in an efficiency, Sam's word, that's much more than the developing the individuals within that group. I would say, you need to do both, but I would say that the group side of things been hugely overlooked.

I think there is a trend now to perhaps, sharing chief executiveships, or having top teams that are much more deliberate about how they're splitting their roles. The old idea of leader as heroes, sitting at the top of the deck and looking out and saying, “Avant, growth for all of you.” I mean, that is less and less the case. I still think, we do have an idea somehow in the back of our minds that leaders should have all the answers, that they should be complete, that they should know. That's where, again, the unit of identification that we're really, really interested in is the group. How can we work alongside them as leadership professionals? How can we really help them? Because if you do, you get, as Sam said, that free energy that comes from the group being more than the sum of its parts. That is when a group really sings and really, really can have impact.

When it's so exciting, you can have an exhausting day at work and emerge from it actually refreshed, because it's been so enlivening to be part of that group. I think that's what we're trying to say in the book is that somehow, we are obsessed with the individual. We are obsessed with the hero, or the heroine. Wish we were a bit more obsessed with the heroine, but mainly the hero. We have not found a way really, to build the group, I think. We're constantly

dismantling groups, constantly chopping the head off, constantly chucking people into other groups and thinking it doesn't matter. Not doing proper beginnings. Not doing proper endings. Not doing that social stuff that Sam's talked about, where we really create a foundation for all the difficult stuff that does happen in groups.

We disagree with each other. We compete with each other. All those sorts of things. Without those foundations, those things can become toxic. With those foundations, they can become hugely generative.

[0:36:28] SR: No, I completely agree. What was fascinating, actually, in our research is that bringing people together really quickly to work on a project, building cross-functional teams, for example, we've seen some of the consulting firms do this, or the professional services firms do this brilliantly. The underlying foundation always is that there's a series of small rituals that take place, that people come into the team really quickly, and it may be a completely new team, but there's small rituals at play, the ways and principles of working together. It can be very effective. This doesn't need to be a long story. You don't need to be with the same team forever, but there has to be something that builds a sense of cohesion at speed.

I think, as Tracey said, we're certainly not arguing against personal developments, but we're just saying, let's get the balance right. I think there has been an over-indexing on potential, and seeing potential as an individual gift, rather than the gift that the team has given a particular individual.

[0:37:32] RT: Yeah. That’s a good distinction. All right, so I have a question that I'm going to ask you. It may seem a little beyond your scope, but I read your book and I thought, man, given the conditions, I think these two could do something useful. I'm going to ask them the question. When you look around right now, the hotspots, Ukraine, Gaza, climate change, all the things in my country, with elections coming, how do you think the work that you've done and the learning that you've had around the social brains and groups and belongings, how could that be brought to bear and maybe reduce some of the tension in some of these kinds of dynamics?

I'm not expecting you to solve Ukraine, or Gaza, or any of those things, but I mean, you've done good work here, and this stuff's going on in groups of people. How could this work help in a

heated environment, do you think, so that they could take the temperature down and perhaps, begin to make progress? What would you do as consultants and interventionists to help these people? I'll give you a second to think, Sam. I'm going to ask you to go first, Tracey. You get lucky here.

[0:38:40] TC: Solve the problems of the world. Thank you, Rick.

[0:38:42] RT: It's all I'm asking, man. Take a shot.

[0:38:46] SR: I suppose, I'd begin by saying that what our book has hoped to do is raise a consciousness about both the traps that we fall into as humans, all of us, every single person homophily, which we talk about in our book, which are the seven pillars of friendship. Our need to connect with people who are similar to us. I mean, in a sense, once again, it's a fallback on efficiency. It's much easier to find an instant point of connection if you share the same music, taste, or worldview.

Raising the consciousness of what our almost default human behavior is and recognizing that that is present whenever we are in relationship with anybody else. Otherwise, we would not be complicated as human beings. It's astonishing how little people really understand their motivations and what's going on in a group context. We've certainly spoken to some fantastic people, including someone called Professor Paul Gilbert, who wrote something called *The Compassionate Brain*. How can we practice compassion both for ourselves and others?

To do that, we really have to understand where our motivations and behavior came from. I would say, I can't put out any definitive problem-solving options, Rick, I'm afraid. But what I would say, is raising consciousness and really understanding what's going on for me as a human and the traps that I could potentially fall into as much as we don't have to. We can be – Steven Pinker, I think, termed the phrase, 'the better angels of our being', if I've got that right. I mean, the wonderful gifts that we have, how do we channel into those gifts? At the same time, acknowledge that we are also human.

We often use the Face of Janus, and this is the moment I'm going to hand over to Tracey, looking both ways. We can both be the most magnificent creatures in the world and the most awful. Tee, over to you, the stakes.

[0:40:40] TC: I mean, we were actually talking this morning to a group of female humanitarians. Some of them really, really suffering in a moral crisis about their lack of agency. I actually do think we need more women at the top of these organizations. Not that all women are brilliant, or anything, but that sense of the moment that we're flung to polarities and there's a – the need to be able to find ways – I mean, I know this sounds like an old cliche to disagree agreeably, to at its bottom, what we're talking about here is as Sam said, greater understanding of what it is to be human, of what matters.

But really, greater understanding of each other and finding places and spaces where we can actually lower the veil of demonizing of one another, of demonizing the other, and actually be curious about how people can have different points of view, different religions, different ways of looking at the world, and yet, we can live alongside them, respect them, learn from them, and that requires so much at the moment of power over power over one another, whereas power through power with, power with is, I think, what we're talking about in our book is huge power with one another. It doesn't mean to say that we have to agree at all. In fact, disagreement is hugely creative and generative.

I don't think that even comes anywhere near, but I do – both of us work on a program in Oxford called the Oxford Strategic Leadership Program. All of us are always struck by how the women that come on that program are often quite self-effacing and feel like, maybe they shouldn't be there when they come through the door, but how magnificent and amazing they are. They end the week feeling almost amazed by themselves, that they are amazing. We often think, gosh, if we could get those women together and give them a world-scale problem, that they'd solve it. Yeah, it's not just women, but I do think we need a few more women at the top.

[0:42:53] RT: Thank you. Okay, so I have a question for you. We're going to step out of all of this, into a little more personal. My father was a writer. He's a newspaper writer for his whole life. He used to tell me, I may crib what he said a little bit to be specific to your – first, you write the book, then the book rewrites you. My question is, how are you different because of your efforts

to write this book? How you've show up in the world? What's different for you based on what you've learned in the experience of writing this book?

[0:43:25] TC: Certainly, for me, I've always been somebody who has been somebody very prepared to go down all kinds of blind alleys. I love a blank sheet of paper. I love, “Ooh, that's a beguiling idea. That's a beguiling idea.” I think what it has given me is a narrowing in a really positive way. A narrowing of focus into where we can have a voice that can have impacts and that can really help people help themselves, and where we can bring a body of research to an area that often has been hard to measure, hard to get hold of. It feels like, it's in the ether. Has been dismissed as soft skills. But that we through decades and careers of practice, know to be hugely, hugely important.

I think, for me, bizarrely, it's narrowed my focus in a useful way and helped me to think where I want to put my time and attention. Stop me being too much of a butterfly, I suppose, which is a good thing. Clip my wings.

[0:44:37] RT: Thank you. Sam?

[0:44:39] SR: I think it's had an effect in the sense of, if you have put your thoughts into a book like this, and you've taken it seriously, and others have taken it seriously, is that you have to practice what you've written about. I'm daily struck that I need to – my actions need to be aligned with what we've actually written about, and which we believe in. We know not that there's any absolute universal truth, but we have enough research and enough backing and enough scientific rigor, plus, we've spoken to enough people to, and our own practice.

I'm really conscious that the way that we run our business is in line with what we've put in the book. That if we're going to encourage others, I mean, really, it is about practicing what we're preaching. Not that we're preaching, by the way. We are just sharing ideas into the world, before it sounds like we're on our pulpit. Yeah. I think that that has really been something we've spoken about a lot in our business, is making sure that whatever we do is absolutely aligned to what we believe in our book, in terms of our behaviors and our engagement with the world.

There's a liberation to that, by the way. It feels really – it's really understood. It's part of our DNA. There's something wonderful about being so, in a sense, not that we were ever completely clear, but we have a sense – there's a clarity around how to have the impact that we'd want to have with our limited time on this little, likely made-up planet.

[0:46:06] RT: I don't know if you two commits on this, but there's some common DNA around what you're both saying about who you are now at the backside of this book, focus and clarity and things of that nature. That's pretty interesting.

Okay, we're coming to the end here. First easy question, what did I not ask you that I should have ask you? Did I miss anything? For sure, I missed something, but what is it that we didn't cover that you think, “I want to get this in here for this conversation”?

[0:46:31] SR: Well, I was just thinking, you've been in leadership development for so long. What moved you, given that your own practice has been so expansive and this is an area that you really, really know well? I would have loved to have heard what moved you?

[0:46:47] RT: It's against the rules to ask the podcast host questions, by the way –

[0:46:50] SR: I know.

[0:46:51] RT: - but I'll make the exception. I'll tell you what? I don't think I knew this, until I got into the book and it connected the dots. Something pulled me there, but I wasn't sure what. The greatest, the best experiences I've ever had in my life have come by having achievements with teams, in teams, as part of groups, far and away. There's no comparison in my life to those experiences. There was something in reading your book about this collective capacity, in this potential, finding a way to actually be able to be accessed for what I now call common good. How do we get people coordinated in a way to do something for the common good?

Because like you're saying, I've spent a lot of time, unfortunately, probably I did a lot coaching. Coaching's one-on-one. That's pretty narcissistic time spent on the individual, if you will. You got to really work as a coach to get the group into the conversation with the individual. It's not easy. I think your book is starting to bang on my point of view and philosophy about how I engage in

the world in a more deliberate fashion. Thanks for making my life a hassle, but it's a good hassle, Tracey.

[0:48:07] TC: Yes. I mean, it perhaps would have been nice to talk about our model, our thrive model in the book, which has as its base, the six elements that we see as being the foundations for an environment for thriving. Just to take your last point about the best experiences having been in teams, and also, how do we use this for social good in some ways. Right at the end of the book, we interviewed the great historian Theodore Zeldin, who wrote an intimate history of the French people. He said, “Well, what's the point of business? Surely, it's to create environments within which the next generation can thrive and can grow.”

I thought there was something so hopeful about that, and so right about it. We've just done some research around the next generation. We can't get into it now on this podcast, but the sense of what's the environment like for the young people coming into work? How are they learning? How are they getting involved and excited by work? I think, where perhaps the next thing that we'll be thinking about is how to help organizations with that very question.

[0:49:20] RT: I'm so glad you bring this up at the end, so I'll give you both a chance. Because I wrote this down when you said it, Sam, talking about your kids and organizations that can be a healthy place for them. I know you're apparently going to travel this road, sounds like. You’re headed down this way. Just top line, why invest time in this personal? Why do you want to go do this? Sam, I mean, I know you got kids, but what's the poll here?

[0:49:44] SR: I mean, I've been very affected by some of the people who work for organizations, like Mars, for example, like Gore, that Tracey mentioned, these organizations that had principles. Those principles were put into play decades ago with the intention that you might plant a tree, but you're not necessarily going to sit under that tree. The young people, the future generations. I think we've been influenced quite a lot by the work of Owen Eastwood, around belonging, the idea that actually, we are custodians of a future. We are stewards of, not ourselves, obviously, but I'm saying, there's an element of stewardship in thinking about the future organizations and what they could look like, and what they could give to the world.

We are at a moment, at a perfect point, there's a paradigm shift. Really hoping that our work will contribute to a new paradigm, actually, a better paradigm of what work could be, for everybody who is part of the future, really. I think, both Tracey and I are of an age where we can imagine our work hopefully having some lingering effect, because we can look behind us. I mean, we're so old now that both of us – the roads behind us is so long, so many people.

[0:50:59] TC: Sam, if you're old, I'm really, really into it.

[0:51:03] SR: Yeah. I think there's a moment that happens in your life where you can actually imagine yourself no longer as being the same to all, but more as a facilitator for future generations. This is why this work is so important.

[0:51:15] RT: And Tracey?

[0:51:16] TC: Yeah, and we both have worked with students, we both work in a university. We're both the parents of young adults. I think we sit and listen to their friends, and so on. There is a sense of quite a lot of them still working in their bedrooms in a 2D world with spreadsheets and Excel sheets and work being quite boring, actually. What do you need as a young person in order to learn, in order to feel engaged, in order to change the world, which is what they want to do?

I think it requires our generation to think differently and to design work differently and to be really, really conscious about when we bring people together and for it to matter, when they do come together. Yeah, so that's what some of the work we're doing now, working also with leaders, working with boards, designing leadership programs as well. The young people stuff is important to both of us.

[0:52:11] RT: Tracey Camilleri and Samantha Rockey, thank you so much for coming into the swamp and spending time ensuring your ideas. Go do the research on the young people book and then let's come back and have another conversation. That'd be cool. Thank you very much.

[0:52:26] TC: Thank you, Rick. It's our pleasure.

[0:52:27] SR: Thank you so much. It was lovely talking to you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:52:33] 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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