

EPISODE 59

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:06] 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]

[00:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. As you know if you're a regular listener, this is the podcast where we have conversations with people who made some decisions in their life to raise their hand and lead on varying challenging initiatives. That is the theme of the podcast. That's the point of the podcast. And our goal here is to learn from our guests about what they discovered about themselves when they choose to lead. What lessons they've learned? Maybe mistakes they've made.

Today I have as my guest, Natalie Trotta. Natalie is living in New York City. And she comes to me through this very tight network that I have in my life, which is my daughter. And those of you who are regular listeners of the podcast know that Annika Torseth has been on the podcast before. She referred me to Natalie. And I was interested – Natalie, I'm going to get you in here in a second. I was interested in talking to you because of the journey you've traveled most recently. And we're going to get into that. And then we'll talk a little bit about what you're up to. First of all, welcome to the swamp, Natalie. It's good to have you here.

[00:01:21] NT: Thank you so much, Rick. I really appreciate the invite. And I'm excited for our conversation today.

[00:01:26] RT: Okay. As you all know, the question that I ask everybody to start is what you want people to know about you before we get into the specifics of your story.

[00:01:35] NT: Yes. It's a great question. I don't know if it's ever been phrased to me that way before. Like you mentioned, I'm a friend of your daughters. A dear friend of mine. And I am really

excited to have this conversation because I think that there are aspects of my background that many different people can connect to. Whether that's transitioning industries. Whether that's figuring out what I really want from the bottom of my heart, which I know we'll get into in a little bit. But also, what it's like to navigate so many transitions within, in my mind, a short period of time.

I've been in the workforce for about a decade. And there's been a lot of changes throughout my career since then. And so, I think, at the end of the day, my story is maybe one of curiosity, and perseverance and continued growth. And that's what I'd like people to know.

[00:02:23] RT: It's an excellent start. Nice lead. The place I'm picking to begin our conversation is I know that you spent in your most recent time about 5 years at Columbia University in a couple of different roles working in leadership advisory and collaboration roles at the university. Let's just begin with this topic of leading. From your perspective, what is your definition of leading?

[00:02:48] NT: Well, I grew up as the oldest daughter in my family. And so, I think I've been a natural leader for the better part of my life. Whether my parents would call it leading or something else might be a different story. But I think when it comes to leading, I always knew I wanted to make an impact. And whether that was an impact in thriving the choice for the school trip when I was in high school. Whether that was making the decision to leave my hometown and move to a different state for college and then stay there.

I think being a leader and raising your hand for these experiences is understanding that you are making the commitment to make an impact. And an impact to many people is different. But to me, leading meant that I was taking control of my life and where I was spending my time. And how I could impact other people and in a positive way. I always wanted to be the one that was able to make a difference. And leading seemed like a way for me to do that in different areas of my life.

[00:03:52] RT: Okay. You've been at it for a little while now. What are the couple things you've learned about yourself through your choice to lead that surprised you?

[00:04:00] NT: I think the first thing I learned, and this is an ongoing journey, is that I needed to become a better listener. When I was early on in my leadership journey, I think I equated being a leader to being in charge. And the more I grew in my career and the more leaders I interacted with on a regular basis, I learned that leading by force or by my vision alone wasn't necessarily the most effective in, A, getting the project done. But, B, also having people want to continue working with you and being a leader in that way. Because if you wanted to lead by being in charge, sure, you could do that for one project. But if you wanted to have continued impact, it wasn't just about you. It's about the team and how I led the team mattered.

And so, I think, maybe when I was younger, listening wasn't really on my high-priority list of leadership skills. And now it's probably one of the top that I really focus on as I continue to do so.

[00:05:06] RT: Share a little bit then about what your leading responsibilities were at Columbia University for the five years you were there. How did you use your craft of leading inside the specific work that you're doing with the university?

[00:05:17] NT: Absolutely. When I first started at Columbia, I was working for one of the newer divisions within the organization. It is a neuroscience institute led by former Nobel laureates. And I was working underneath one of the executives of the institute.

There was a lot going on here. It kind of had a tough beginning due to some leadership challenges. And so, when I was brought in to support this executive, there was quite a bit of change. This was the second job I had out of college. And I was reporting to someone who had been a senior leader for quite a bit of time. She was really looking for someone like me to be her thought partner both in growing her own initiatives but also increasing the scope of the institute as a whole.

And so, when I joined, I was working very closely with her. And she and I are very dear friends to this day. And what I learned from her and what I then took throughout my time at Columbia was this necessity to be able to understand where so many different people are coming from and what their goals are. And how we can align individual goals with organizational goals and then kind of grow from there.

And so, at Columbia, there are so many different community groups that you need to find alignment with in order to move certain initiatives forward. Whether that's the student population, the administrative population, the leadership teams and even the administrative staff. Connecting all of those.

And so, when I was there first at the Neuroscience Institute and then for about a year and a half after at the climate school, it was really important to use for me the skill of listening and being able to really understand where people are coming from to build that alignment to, in my case, build a team around going after a grant that was worth over \$7 million. And which we did end up winning or creating programming that was designed to bring the community together and have continued conversations about the growth of these organizations.

And so, I learned from the leader I supported why it was so important to understand individual group dynamics, and what drove them and their motivators. And pulling that all together to then further, ideally, the growth of the organization.

[00:07:38] RT: Okay. It strikes me because a lot of people listening here are probably thinking what I'm thinking, which is how did you handle the gap between you and your boss, let's call them based on all the kinds of differences is this experience in the work, age, those kinds of things. And they want a thought partner. Oftentimes, we hear they want a thought partner. But really what they want is an affirmation partner that they're thinking doesn't need to be challenged. How did you manage those moments when you needed to be a little more direct or a little contrary to what your boss was asking for or thinking about? And how did you navigate those differences?

[00:08:17] NT: That's such a great question. Because in this instance, I was her trusted thought partner. But her team also would come to me with concerns and their issues. And so, I kind of sat in this weird limbo hearing both sides of the story very frequently and having to sometimes not step in in some scenarios. And then other times, using the influence I did have to impact decisions.

But I would say the first thing that I did was I knew coming in that I was not going to be the most knowledgeable about this organization or the dynamics. And that my first goal was to really learn as much as I could in the shortest amount of time to be able to advise my boss.

Feeling like I go back to listening. But really, that's what helped me get up to speed very, very quickly was just observing and processing internally and asking questions, of course. But trying to understand the dynamics before coming to any judgment or providing any advice.

I would say I did that for maybe about 3 to four months upon starting was really try to understand the dynamics across the entire organization. I never worked in a scientific research area before. But then I think the way I would begin to kind of maybe not share my opinion. Would be to ask kind of direct questions about a situation.

Say, there was a hiring decision that was going to be made. And we were interviewing candidates as a group. And then after the interview would be over the tradition – or the typical process was for all of us to stay on the call and then share our thoughts about the candidate in a group setting and attempt to make this decision by committee.

Now there are a lot of heuristics here that would work against the candidate. Like, group think, the power dynamics of my boss and her partner and everyone else in the group wanting to defer to what they thought because that's just a power dynamic. And so, instead of having the conversation of I think we should share feedback individually and then have a discussion a few days later about the feedback that maybe everyone submits to me and I bring it together and present it to my boss anonymously. Instead of saying something like that, I would say have you considered that maybe there's a way to corner more honest feedback from the rest of the team in a way that's different than a shared forum immediately after the conversation?

Maybe asking questions as opposed to just coming straight out with my thoughts. And of course, since we were working in science, data is very impactful to those leaders who are saying, "X% of hiring feedback is shown to be more effective when shared anonymously with –" or maybe not anonymously. But shared directly with the hiring manager and then discussed later. I would kind of maybe not just share my opinion flat out unless I was asked. But then kind of ask intriguing questions that would trigger a different line of thinking.

[00:11:30] RT: Yeah. I think it's interesting the power dynamic, the order of rank in the organization and associated authority that goes with those positions is real. And it takes a while to cultivate a culture inside a small team where candor is actually a cultivated value rather than an espoused value that rarely shows up. It's interesting.

You also remind me – I don't know if you're aware of the work of a guy named Barry Oshry. Oshry has done a lot of work around human systems. And he's got a very complicated model as it relates to a team of people. He calls them tops, middles and bottoms. Highly complicated technology.

The middles have the hardest challenge because they are oftentimes a go-between between the tops and the bottoms. Oshry has done a lot of great work that sort of defines those distinctions and also provides resources and moves for the people in those varying roles. And we are always in an organizational setting. Sometimes we're a top. Sometimes we're a middle. And sometimes we're a bottom. Having skills in all three of those domains is really useful because we'll frequently find ourselves back there again. Maybe I should have Barry on the podcast here before too long.

On it goes for five years. And then you experience the hard edge of an organizational reorg. And, boom. You're out of a job. When you were talking to me about this the question I wrote down I want to ask you now is how did you respond to that change in your life?

[00:12:51] NT: Yes. It was something I had never experienced before. I had worked I thought very hard to be as indispensable as possible. And some things are beyond your control. And looking back, I knew that academia was not going to be where I continued my career forever. And I felt really lucky that I've been able to experience so many different aspects of the academic world while completing my MBA. That there was definitely a benefit there to getting my MBA from the university I worked for.

And so, when this change occurred shortly after I graduated with my MBA and after I recently passed my 5-year anniversary at the university, I could read the writing on the wall a little bit. But I did not know that my role was going to be affected. And then when my manager told me

about the impending conversation that would be happening, I experienced a few different emotions at that time. But I was lucky in the way that I knew there were a few other people going through this. Not necessarily within the organization but in the broader community I'm a part of. It's a time where there are reorganizations happening across several industries.

And so I didn't feel as alone as maybe I would have felt. And even if I didn't know every single person that was being impacted, just knowing that there were other people that had gone through this before was really helpful to me. And I definitely leaned on some of my business school community because some of them had experienced layoffs as well. And so, they were able to provide support and advice. But I was really, really thankful that this came at the time that it did. I knew this was already a time where I was looking for a transition in my life. Whether that was career or otherwise. And then this kind of actually gave me the start I needed to make that transition.

[00:14:53] RT: All right. I hear what you're saying and I want to push on this a little bit.

Transitions always come with loss. Loss of something familiar, something comfortable, a platform for recognition and acknowledgment and et cetera. Now as you have some distance from it and you process, and we're going to get on to what you actually then did as a result of this, what would you define as one, or two, or three losses that surprise you that mattered that maybe you took for granted and suddenly you didn't have? And now you're going, "Huh, this was more important than I thought." What did you learn through the loss in this transition that informs a little bit about how you go forward?

[00:15:31] NT: I think the biggest thing is that I have been earning my own money since I've been eight or nine years old. I mean, at that point, not a full-time job. But I've always been very independent or tried to be financially. And so, with the loss of my job came kind of a loss of a part of my identity. I don't want to say myself worth because I don't know if I thought that was connected. But it was a big part of my identity and one that I was proud of that I almost always had a job in college. I had several jobs. I was an RA. I babysat. I interned all at the same time throughout multiple years.

And so, this was a big part of my identity. I was reliable or I am reliable. A hard worker. Wanting to contribute. Wanting to make an impact. And so, suddenly, when I didn't have the employer to

kind of give me that stamp of approval for my identity, that was one aspect where I needed to consider what that would look like in the future and how much of an importance I placed on that aspect of my self-identity.

And so, after I graduated or after my job was eliminated, I did have some consulting clients lined up. And so, I wasn't not making any money. But it was just a little different than having the security of saying I work for X organization. I think that was probably the biggest lesson. Not tying where I work, who I work for the type of job I do as a part of my identity that I lean so heavily on in the past.

[00:17:05] RT: It's a tough challenge. Because we spend half our waking life oftentimes in the thing we call work. And if we're working in an organization, that's a lot of time for the organization and the culture to influence who we are, and reward us and recognize us. And it's a regular experience. And then have it suddenly be gone is not easy. I appreciate the candor on it.

If I got my timing right here, somewhat running parallel to all this is your own initiative around developing a wellness practice. Give people a sense of what you were up to when you weren't in Columbia doing all the stuff you had to do. You got interested in developing a wellness practice for yourself. Help people, A, understand what that is and why you were doing it. What was going on there?

[00:17:49] NT: Yes. Happy to dive in. Because you're right, it was kind of happening in tandem. I would say there are certain wellness practices that I've always done my entire life. I was a very active child. I always loved moving my body, working out, doing sports to whatever extent that looked like throughout my life. And so, I will say that was a very standard baseline I've had since probably the age of 12.

Physical exercise has always been a part of my wellness practice. However, right around the time when I was 23, 24, I was working at a different company. Not Columbia yet. And so, at this point I was a few years into my career and had always operated from a high threshold of anxiety. And a lot of people I know have anxiety. I hadn't really considered this to be. I just

thought this was part of my personality. I thought is what made me successful. I was very diligent. Very hardworking.

But I reached a point where it wasn't necessarily serving me in the right way or in the way that it had in the past. And so, I just decided to start working with a mental health professional to kind of understand the root of this and how to work with this part of myself to set me up for success and not let this be an area where I continue to struggle when I didn't need to.

And so, shortly after working with her, I decided that I needed to start looking for a different company and a different place to work just because it wasn't a good fit for me anymore. And that is one of the key things that I talk about whenever I share this aspect of my life, is that working with – I was going to talk therapy at this time. That therapy is great. But if you're not actually willing to take action or learn from what you're doing in therapy. therapy is less than one hour a week I was doing it. No matter what I was doing outside of that one hour, my life wasn't really going to change. And so, I knew I needed to make a different step.

And so, when I eventually moved to Columbia, a lot of that anxiety reduced, honestly. And so, I continued this part of my wellness practice for a few years. And during this time, I was really getting interested in meditation and breath work. I listened to a lot of interviews with successful entrepreneurs, and founders and different people along different stages of their careers.

And one of the through lines was some sort of meditative practice. What that looked like varied. But for me, I just started like doing two minutes in the morning. And this maybe back in 2019, 2020, and grew it. And now I meditate regularly. I can't say every day. But regularly for somewhere between 20 to 30 minutes just by myself sitting. And that has really helped me connect with myself versus looking for external validation.

And other wellness practices like eating, well, choosing the relationships that I surround myself with. Wellness is so holistic that it can range from anything from the physical to the mental, to the environmental. I try to encompass all of this in my life because it helps me be better at work. It helps me be better with my friends, and with my loved ones and with my family. And so, it's not something I see as an independent pillar of my life. It's so holistic. It impacts everything.

[00:21:18] RT: I want to jump ahead a little bit. But before we do, I want to take this moment if you would. Because you sort of ran it down. But let's just sort of make space for this. If I'm a listener and you got my attention around this wellness practice. Make some recommendations just on structures and processes that you think are possible considerations for designing a wellness practice. You got meditation. You got some breathing. Talk a little bit more about breathing. Why that matters? But what else would you say, "Okay, these are things you might choose from the menu of options you've got to craft a wellness practice." What have you learned and what elements would you throw out there for people to consider?

[00:21:58] NT: Sure. For me, and I preface, I'm not a mental health professional in any capacity. This is just what I've done. And so, hopefully, this can be helpful to you. I look at this in three concentric circles. Physical, mental and environmental. I try to hit something in either of those circles. And whether they intersect, great. If they don't, okay. Every day.

Let's start with physical. This could be anything from doing a Pilates workout in my apartment. This could be walking around the block for a certain amount of time. This could be doing a quick stretch in the morning or before I go to bed. This varies based on how I'm feeling that day. But I try to hit the physical. Because that's really helpful for me to – there's so much research done around endorphins and lowering cortisol. And physical health for me is very important to longevity as well. That's the physical circle.

Mental is the meditation, the breath work. Something I was listening to in a different podcast is, for example, if you're frequently given the advice to take deep breaths when you're feeling stressed. However, if you are not taking deep breaths in any other point of your life and you've never practiced taking breaths, it's probably not going to be the first thing you think of when things are going not well in work, in your mind, anything.

I am frequently just deep breathing. I'm sitting here with you. I'm taking deep breaths to regulate my voice, my thoughts and everything. And so, again, it doesn't have to be the 20 minutes of meditation. It could be anything. It could just be sitting here before you take a call. Hand on heart. Hand on stomach. Just to bring yourself ground back. Again, if you have an animal, petting an animal, holding an animal. Wiping down your plants. Dusting them. There's that aspect. The mental aspect.

And then the environmental aspect. When I say environmental, I'm talking about the places you inhabit throughout your day. Whether that is your home, your apartment, your office, your desk within your office. The bag you're bringing with you on the subway. Your car. Take what resonates.

There's a ton of research that shows a tidy, clean environment is very, very impactful. And so, I do not necessarily live in a place where Architectural Digest would show up and start filming how I've designed my space. However, it's very tidy. It's clean. I sometimes bring in fresh flowers every week to look at. Because it brings me joy.

And so, understanding that the home or where you spend most of your time is such an important aspect of your wellness is something I here talked about a little less. But how I take care of this is making sure I keep promises to myself. I leave the kitchen clean every single evening. That means I clean up the dishes. I wipe down all the surfaces. And if that's the only thing I've done that day to make my home a place that I want to live, then check. I've kept that promise to myself.

Other days, it does look doing a deeper clean. Vacuuming, washing the floor, scrubbing the shower. But my thing is being able to focus on all three aspects in tandem. Even if it's only for five minutes a day in each helps you build a wellness practice. Because by committing to that, you're keeping these promises to yourself. And that also feels really good and helps you build confidence in yourself and how you show up in work, personal life, in your relationships, in the world.

[00:25:45] RT: Good job, coach. Not but. And you have now decided that you want to play in a bigger game around wellness than just taking care of Natalie. Share with people a starting point for where you are now and what you're thinking about in this context of wellness. Because it's much bigger than you at this point. That your goal is much bigger than just taking care of you.

[00:26:10] NT: It is. It is. And what I think about is how different I feel now than I did five, six years ago. And it's really night and day. And not necessarily in what I look like or what my career

or successes I've been. But how I feel internally. And, again, that took me a little bit of time to figure out how to do that. And a lot of it was trial and error.

And so, I wanted to explore what it would look like to help other people on this journey. And so, a lot of my friends have come to me for advice on any one of those aspects, the environmental, mental or physical. And so, when I was thinking about you know what is my purpose in this world, I could continue down this path of being a thought partner to executives. I could find another job like that. But I kept feeling like there was something bigger I could do. And that's when I started thinking about what would be my goal for my life and what I would like my life to look like outside of work. And that's kind of when I started thinking about the farm and where I wanted to take that.

[00:27:20] RT: Okay. Nobody knows about the farm. Let's get into the farm.

[00:27:22] NT: No one knows about the farm. And so, this is an exclusive. I mentioned one of my early jobs in childhood was taking care of animals. And so, this was a big part of the environmental aspect when I was a kid. And I horseback rode. I was around animals. I loved it. And that was another part of my wellness journey. I have a cat and he's been with me since I graduated college.

And huge part of this as I was going through pandemic was this connection to wanting to be in nature that I couldn't really shake. I really wanted to have this in my life. And I still live in New York. I love it here. But I kept wondering if there was something outside the city where I could meld this desire to be in nature. To be in a beautiful space that was designed well. Whether that's inside or outside. And the ability to connect with like-minded people or people that felt the same way and had the same goals in one space that, although not necessarily directly in my immediate environment, but close enough that I could experience this regularly.

And I figured that this might be something that a lot of people would be interested in given the amount of stress that people endured over the past few years and the general trends of what I'm seeing across social media and across life of people wanting to reconnect with themselves through nature.

And so, I started thinking about this in a few different ways. And at first, it was purely selfish. I wanted to have my own farm where my family could come. Have little cabins around. And we could connect with one another, and be in nature, and be around animals, and spend time together and build these wellness practices in community.

And then I started telling more people about this idea. And everyone was really excited almost to a point that I hadn't predicted. And they all asked me, "Well, I love to come to this place. Is this open the public? Can other people stay there? What kind of animals would you have? Oh, you should get Scottish highland cows." Really giving me a lot of ideas. And that's when I was thinking, "Okay, it would be so great for me and my family. But what if this could have a broader impact?"

And so, that's when I started thinking, "What if this was more of an elevated hospitality model in nature on a farm?" And so, a way for people to come and experience what they need through a wellness lens. Whether they really want to focus on the physical aspect of those three concentric circles. And they want to play tennis all weekend or go hiking all weekend. Or if someone wants to experience the environmental aspect of it specifically, okay, we're going to be in a beautifully designed cabin, room in very stunning piece of nature. Or the mental aspect through the meditation classes, through equine therapy, things like that. But my secret thing is knowing that even if you come for one of those things, you're actually getting all of them just by design of the farm. I call it the farm. I think I need a better name for it because I don't think it encompasses everything I'm going for here. My thing is that you might come for one aspect. But at the end, you might sneakily get all three.

[00:30:46] RT: All right, so cool. This is a very interesting idea. When you were telling me about this, I thought that this is an aspect conversation we kick around a little bit here. So help people understand that now you got them in this conversation about the farm. For those who are listening, Natalie's also making a request. You have an upgrade on the name. So maybe they can pay you with some upgrades on the name. Well, your LinkedIn profile, we'll have some links in the show notes where they can get a hold of you. So they can pass on name suggestions that they like.

Let's take this endeavor seriously. Right now, where you are with it is as a concept, it's an idea. It's a piece of – you've sort of given us what you've got right now in terms of how you're thinking about it in some form. Let's throw it out to the universe here. As you sit here now and you think about where you are with the idea, what are a couple two or three things you think, "If I could get these things in place now." Now, let's say a month to two months from today. That would be progress, but it would also give me feedback on how I'm thinking about this and maybe refine it a little bit. So what do you think you need that you don't have that moves this thing down the road a little bit?

[00:31:52] NT: That's a good question. I think in my mind, there are three aspects of this. The first is understanding how to fund something like this. So whether that looks like self-funding it and growing this in a different pace, whether it's taking on partners through an equity sort of relationship, or whether it's working with a current hospitality company on something like this. I think, for me, it's to understand the first thing is to kind of understand the funding structure of how I'd like to do this. There's benefits and trade-offs to any choice.

The second aspect is understanding a little bit more about the most impactful location. I mentioned I live in New York. The most important thing for the farm to me is to be within two hours of at least one major city, two to three hours. That way, people can justify coming for the weekend, a long weekend, and not having the journey be so much of a consideration. So understanding that perhaps the farm will expand, and someone would like to fly in for an experience here. Right now, the location being within two to three hours of at least one major city is important. So, exploring what areas at least close to me look like. I went up to Hudson a few weeks ago to see what that was like, and so nailing down the location. Right now, we have funding and location.

Then the last aspect is identifying partners that would be able to help maybe not necessarily in an equity perspective but, for example, building out the animal program. I love animals, and I am fairly knowledgeable about some of them. But taking that aspect which is such a huge part of the farm, bringing on a partner that would be able to oversee that aspect would be great, similar to bringing in folks who are experts in meditation, Reiki, equine therapy, things like that. Or identifying some potential partners with maybe not even reaching out to them yet but just

identifying some people who would be on my wish list to host a workshop at the farm is the third one on my list as we move forward here.

[00:34:09] RT: You talk about funding, how you actually get the money in order to make this thing go, location in near city. You say New York. Just so we're specific with people right now, you live in New York City. So that kind of checks the box, but it could be somewhere between New York and Boston, for example, as a possibility.

[00:34:27] NT: That would be ideal like the Berkshires, even though there's quite a competitive market there. So, I'm not sure that's where we'd go first.

[00:34:35] RT: But say a little bit more about identifying partners. Are you talking thought partners around wellness? Or what's that look like? Granted you may not know everything you want to know about this now, but as you sit here now, what kind of partners help you think this thing through or help you advance it?

[00:34:50] NT: When I originally mentioned that, I was thinking more execution partners. For example, a friend of mine has a small family farm. So, when I brought this idea to her, she said, "Oh, if you need any help on the animal side, let me know. My family's been doing this for decades. We're more than happy to help advise on what that looks like." Again, animals are one small area of that.

Thought partners, however, is another aspect I've been thinking about when it comes to learning from other hospitality companies or small hospitality organizations that have done something similar. I don't know if they've done the exact same thing to the extent. We're not talking the super high-ends like Miraval. They've definitely got that under control. But maybe a group that owns one or two bed and breakfasts on some sort of land. So looking to them as a thought partner or just to learn from as I continue on in this eventual hospitality career I envision in my future. I think there's a dual path here that, hopefully, run in parallel.

[00:36:02] RT: I believe it is a truism that we learn more from our leadership failures than we do our successes. But then the question becomes what's my process for learning about my failures, which is to say that another angle into that is what's my contribution to the mess I'm

trying to solve if I'm a leader because invariably I've got a hand in the thing that I'm trying to solve it. That leads us down the road to what are my blind spots. What are the things that I get seduced by on a regular basis because I have a weakness for that kind of seduction, whether it be being significant, being confident, being recognized and rewarded, et cetera?

From your own perspective, if you know Natalie best in this endeavor, where might you get yourself caught out based on your weaknesses, the ways in which you can be seduced through these kinds of blind spots based on your experience? Because we all have them, so I'm thinking where could you get caught out on this process?

[00:37:02] NT: I know exactly what I'm going to say, and it's something I've been working on since I've been a teenager. I think it's asking for help. This has been present across my career as well in many instances. But I think this became very apparent in this context of building the farm, this hospitality concept, when initially over a year ago, I was just thinking, yes, I'll just save money, and I'll finance this myself. If the growth is slow and we need to build in stages, that's fine. I'll get there eventually.

Then when I was having more conversations with different people and some of my friends would say, "Well, if you're going to be exploring funding opportunities, please come ask me. I'm really interested and would like to be a part of this if you consider fundraising," and that's when I stopped. I never considered asking, exploring funding outside of bootstrapping this myself. The more and more I spoke with my boyfriend who is very interested in doing this as well with me, we talk about this all the time, he said, "Yes. If you take on external funding, you can just do so many of the things like build tennis courts at the start. You don't necessarily have to wait five or six years to do that if that's one of the value ads that you want to have immediately."

While I had never thought about that people would even want to be involved in something, which is silly, that was something in my mind that I had to do this all by myself. That's how it would work. That's not necessarily the case, and it has never been the case in my career. I've never just been able to do something 1,000% by myself. I've always leaned on the expertise and the experience of other people and their help to get where I've needed to go. So this would be no different.

[00:38:51] RT: You and me are in the same camp around doing things by our self and allowing for the reality that it doesn't scale very well. Size and proportion are going to be correlated directly to how much help I ask for. I would put a plugin for some of the value of doing it by yourself is possibility that you can manage detail a little tighter. You got hired to the job to be a thought partner. Having a sort of loose board of people who are not necessarily stakeholders in any one of these three initiatives but have your best interest and the project's best interest in mind. That can provide guidance and ask hard questions and tell truth when it needs to be told is also something.

You know my daughter. She's one of those people in my life. I think that's a useful strategy as well. Not to pin you down, but let's pin you down a little bit. Five years from now, where do you want to be with this thing?

[00:39:45] NT: I don't mind being pinned down because I make these commitments to myself maybe just in my mind. But for example, when I was in my early 20s, I said I want my MBA by the time I turned 30. I got my MBA by the time I turned 29. I don't think of these as arbitrary numbers. Some people might, and I understand plans change. But I want the farm to be fully operational in seven years.

In five years from now, I anticipate being a little bit more clear or not anticipate. I will be more clear on the location, exactly what funding structure I have, and what the first iteration will look like, as well as a business plan in development. Then after the five-year to seven-year, that's when I think really looking for a property or something to actually nail that aspect down is like the five to seven-year range. Then opening by seven years would be the goal.

[00:40:51] RT: 2030, 2031, somewhere in that range, right? Do you have a name? If you'd have a name, you don't want to share it, don't do it.

[00:41:00] NT: I have a few thoughts in my mind. I think right now, it's the brainstorming stage, right? Nothing's off the table. I think if anything, I need to be a little bit more focused on understanding the core business. Are we a hospitality company that has a farm? Are we a farm that has a hospitality concept? Do we also have a tennis club, which is part of the farm as a

standalone business and open to people that live locally? Do we have the same for on the equestrian side?

I think it's becoming a little bit clearer on differentiating if there are different business lines and communicating accordingly. Whether it has the name farm in the title, I'm not quite sure. I think that's the shorthand I use for now. Hopefully, more thorough name will be developed soon.

[00:41:52] RT: Something coming down the road. Okay. We're coming down the road to the end of our conversation here. I haven't asked you that you want people to know based on where you're at now. What are we leaving out of this conversation?

[00:42:07] NT: I mentioned this perhaps in different aspects of our conversation. But I think the biggest thing that helped me become very clear on this was taking time to really connect with myself and what I wanted. I had habit of opinion-collecting and trying to learn what other people wanted from me to achieve that and then be successful in their eyes. I'm sure they had no idea I was doing this. I was just trying to do this to be liked.

I think the most important thing, if I could share anything, is to take time, either through meditation, walking, playing a sport, getting in flow, traveling, whatever you can do to connect with yourself. When you do that, that's when you'll be able to show up the best way. This word is very used right now but authentically. Being able to understand yourself will make you successful in most areas of your life, as well as you're doing that respectfully and bringing your best self to the world.

[00:43:13] RT: Cool. All right, one last question then. You have a very cool site on Substack. I may get this name wrong here but Andiamo. Is that correct? Do I have that right?

[00:43:23] NT: Yes, Andiamo. It means let's go in Italian.

[00:43:27] RT: Okay. I find it a very interesting and useful place. I was surprised. I was attracted to the details.

[00:43:32] NT: Thank you.

[00:43:33] RT: We'll put a link in there for the site in the show notes.

[00:43:36] NT: Thank you.

[00:43:36] RT: But tell people a little bit about what they'd find there because that's a little different than everything we've talked about. You got another thing going on there that's, I think, quite interesting. What is the site about? What are you trying to get done there?

[00:43:47] NT: Yes. Andiamo is a newsletter I launched about a month ago, about a month ago. I felt like I needed a place to share an edited version of my thoughts. This really focuses more on the areas of my life that I'm passionate about. That looks like traveling, the books I'm reading, the podcasts I'm listening to, places I want to go, and lessons learned. This is kind of like a recommendation thoughts on travel and reading that is just an area where I find it easier to collect versus sharing it on Instagram. It's not necessarily as professionally focused as LinkedIn typically is.

I think Andiamo will actually be a place where I share more about the farm idea moving forward. So that will probably be the best place to keep up with this journey if you're interested in reading along. For right now, it's a collection of kind of my recommendations and thoughts around travel design media and life.

[00:44:58] RT: I'm going to put a plugin. You can say this is incredibly, beautifully, aesthetically designed, too. You have great imagery and all. It's a pleasure.

[00:45:05] NT: Oh, thank you.

[00:45:05] RT: It's a pleasure to take it in visually, as well as the content. I'm a follower of it.

[00:45:11] NT: Thank you.

[00:45:11] RT: Natalie Trotta, thank you for coming to the swamp and sharing your stories about the farm and your practice of wellness. It's been a pleasure to have you here.

[00:45:21] NT: Thank you so much for having me, Rick. This was such a fun conversation. I appreciate your time.

[00:45:25] RT: You're welcome. Bye-bye.

[OUTRO]

[00:45:29] 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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