

EPISODE 80**[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.

[0:00:19] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. We are the podcast where we have conversations with individuals who've made a choice to use themselves to lead on difficult challenges that the world faces and to help people navigate those challenges and build some capacity to lead themselves. Today, my guest is Eula Rohan. She is coming at us from Brisbane, Australia, and she has been doing some very interesting work with groups. And I found her through the odd networks that I have, and I instantly knew that she had something to bring to us. And so I asked her. And she is here. So, I'm going to give you the first shot. What do you want people to know about you to set the context for the conversations we're going to have here?

[0:01:04] ER: Thanks, Rick. And thanks so much for having me on your podcast today. Yes, I am in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. And I'd just like to acknowledge that I'm on the traditional lands of the Yuggera and Turrbal people, Meanjin, and just pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and their future emerging leaders. And just to note that this land was never seated.

So, I am super excited to share a little bit about my story. It's a bit of a winding journey to get to where I am today as a place-based change practitioner, practicing systems change and supporting leaders that are in communities navigating really complex sort of wicked problems, remote, urban, and regional settings.

But my story, I guess, begins way back in my beautiful supportive family. I'm very privileged to have been one of four kids raised here in Australia, the land of opportunity. And my parents come from different backgrounds. My father is English-born with connections in Czechoslovakia. So his family were Jewish and survivors of the Holocaust, although quite a lot of them were taken out because of the result of that war. And his parents immigrated to England. And so he

was born and raised in England. And he met my mother, who is, I think, fourth or fifth generation Australian with Irish heritage. We're a bit of a mixture from where we've come.

But I was born in Sydney, raised on the beaches. And so I feel very connected to saltwater. And my parents used to take us on holidays to a farm inland. And so that's where I started to build a connection very early on with horses. And so I have this background where, since I can remember, it was always about wanting to be around horses. And it wasn't until I came into high school that I finally begged and begged and begged that my dad finally caved in, and I was able to lease a horse and have the experience of owning my own horse. Quickly learned that I knew nothing about horses after years of riding stock ponies on holiday. That introduced me to the world of natural horsemanship and the Pat Parelli method.

And I think as a young girl growing up having a horse, it taught me a lot about how to communicate and how to be in the presence of an animal like that. You have to learn how to communicate with them, set boundaries, and become a partner with that animal to create that trust. And I had no idea where that journey would take me, but it did take me out after schooling overseas. And I was really fortunate to train with some of the best horse people in the world. I even spent some time over in America working for an Olympic rider, Leslie Morse, and having that experience there.

I think the pinnacle of my career, though, is training with Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling in Denmark. He's a bit of a master around connecting with horses and finding not just that spiritual connection, but also the authenticity that one has to have when standing in front of the horse. And that horse is a mirror to that inner world that you are holding. Essentially, if that horse doesn't trust you and doesn't see you being in your true self, then they're not going to follow you.

And I was really curious about that. I was a dressage equitation trainer, but I didn't want to continue riding. I wanted to understand more around what does this mean for people with their horses. And then I found out about this world of horse assistant education, where we could bring together leaders and teams of leaders to do work with horses. And I was just like, "Oh my gosh, I think this is amazing. I'm fascinated by this."

And so that was really my entree, I think I was 26 or 27 at the time, into leadership development and bringing all the knowledge that I had from the horse world. And I studied with Paul Hunting of Horsejoy UK first. And then I started to do studies with the European Association for Horse Assisted Education in Germany. And it was just fascinating to see how when you bring leaders out of their normal boardroom or office environment and you put them into this different environment with horses that are there to mirror and reflect back to them who they're truly being, what their real leadership style is, how fast the learning is or gaining insights about who they are authentically, how we show up, how we communicating. Because you can't miss what that horse is telling you, because it's half a ton of beast right there at the end of the line, and they're reacting to you.

And so after doing all my training, I set up my business, Red Horse Assisted Training in Australia. And that would have been over 20 years ago now. But I was really at the front end of that industry in Australia. And so as an independent small business, it was very hard to educate a market about the opportunity. And so I ended up having a bit of a gear shift, and I moved out of the equine industry and I went to live in the Northern Territory. And I worked for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, leading the Northern Australia marketing campaign for the 2011 census.

And that was the first time that I really connected and had the opportunity to go into remote Aboriginal communities and start to meet some of our First Nations people. And I felt such a connection and warmth and a sense of almost like belonging, like, "Oh, gosh. This is a part of me that I have in Australia." I was really fortunate to have the opportunity to go around to a lot of communities.

And I ended up out in northeast Arnhem Land for a very famous festival called the Garma Festival run by the Yothu Yindi Foundation. And it happened to fall on the census night. We were out there with a group of people. And I just I had to go back to that land. There was something that really captured my heart and my soul.

And I ended up getting a role out there with the different organizations. And so I left the Bureau of Statistics and I went to work with Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships. And in that role, I had to build the partnerships across Aboriginal-controlled organizations to then bring in some corporate support to help build capacity really. And it's a two-way learning exchange, where

corporate secondees would come in and support those organizations in projects that were meaningful to build their capability and their businesses essentially.

And so it was in that role that I started to get more exposure, I suppose, to how executives were coming in, the types of learning that they wanted to have, and how do we learn together from our First Nations colleagues and then crossing into the non-indigenous as well.

And I was so fortunate to have such incredible leaders from community. I was fortunate to live on the Gumatj lands with the Yunupingu family. And so I learned a lot from them as to their generosity of spirit, their resilience, and their willingness to share and want to share their knowledge as well.

And then when that project sort of came towards the end and to hand over to someone else, I went into the Empowered Communities national project, which was an Aboriginal design and led reform agenda with government to really shift the way that government works with First Nations communities. And it was across 10 regions of Australia. And I was lucky enough to get into the Redfern and La Perouse community as the regional director and help build up from the ground what a partnership governance model might look like for these two iconic communities to come together, and then also establish what their shared priorities and a shared joint long-term agenda might be for change in partnership with government.

I really learned a lot of what I know now and draw on now from actually doing that work and making lots of mistakes, and being a really strong listener, and coming behind the leadership from both those communities to try to ensure that their vision was brought to life with the supports from government. And so that was an incredible opportunity. We designed the what's called joint decision-making framework, which was the first framework of its time that gave First Nations community members a seat at the table to make some comment, and feedback, and decision-making on funding that was ceasing within their communities that government was providing. And then from that, we had the minister at the time endorse 75% waiting to those leaders to have a say in where that money went. It was a pretty big opportunity, and is continuing today across 10 regions.

It was probably my first exposure to, from nothing, how do we really build from the grassroots up? How do we include everybody in this conversation from the community? But also, then, how do we create that condition for government to partner and design something that's actually going to create that structural change as well to then see the changes happening as a result of that. That was a super interesting and rich learning field for me, which I was then able to take on into the other place-based work that I support now.

Really, now, I coach quite a lot of backbone team leads or secretariat leads that are supporting cross-sector government and traditional owner groups coming together to design governance models that can sit down, share decision-making on some really complex issues that they might be facing in their communities. Yeah, that's a very short snapshot of how we've moved across the last kind of 15 years.

Yeah, just learning in the university of life, being privileged to learn from the incredible visionary and resilient First Nations leaders that I've had the opportunity to work with. And yes, just continuing on that journey. And I think a big part of that is obviously the adaptive leadership element.

Liz Skelton was a pretty big mentor of mine and introduced me to the Adaptive Leadership Institute, where I've been learning, essentially doing some of the learning labs to strengthen my skills. And how do we support this work and translate that theory into practice, really?

I think the other major framework that I draw on is deep collaboration, which is it incorporates adaptive leadership, process-orientated psychology, and the intercultural framework of Mark Yettica-Paulson. This deep collaboration is really supporting First Nations and other multicultural groups to come together, sit down at the table, and work out how do we lead together? What do we need from each other to be able to stay at the table when things get difficult so that we can actually start to drive some change? Yeah, probably draw on a few of those different frameworks to support leaders at this time.

[0:12:01] RT: Very good. You've given us a wonderful landscaping of what you're pulling from to do work in the world. One of the questions I have is – and I want to come back to the horses. For people who don't know this, we'll post some links in the show notes when the podcast is

released. But you posted just the other day a very cool video of you and a big giant horse on LinkedIn. We're going to come back to that in a minute. But I'm curious about the facilitation in groups. That's how I kind of came to get connected to you.

And so speak a little bit, if you would, about the work of facilitating groups, the challenges, what you've learned about how to do that well, maybe even some mistakes you made, knowing that there are listeners out there who are maybe further behind you on the trail to learning how to facilitate. What do you know about the craft of facilitation and what's essential in order to have good outcomes with a group?

[0:12:56] ER: A really great question. And I have certainly learned a lot through trial and error. I've also had the opportunity to watch really great facilitators and learn from them. And I think, I suppose, for me, because most of the groups that I'm working with, at times, the frame that we might have three levels of government. The local level, state level, and federal level. We may have traditional owner groups, and then we might have service system cross-sector representatives all around one table.

And so to facilitate in a space like this where there is a lot of different agendas, and everybody's agenda is equally as important as the other, it's quite important to set the conditions that everybody has a voice in the room and that nobody's voice is lesser than the other. And often in these types of groups, getting the representation right can also be a bit tricky. And so making sure that we acknowledge that there's people's voices that aren't in the room that still need to be heard.

And so one way that we can address that is by actually having an empty chair there to say who's not here. Let's make sure we account for them as well. Creating the conditions is super important. And I think one of the ways that I start off generally is to sit in circle as much as possible. If we can have a room that doesn't have tables in the way or computers and laptops creating any sort of barriers between folks sitting in circle, and then inviting everybody to check in. A simple check-in question that links to purpose. I think always grounding everybody in the purpose of why you're here personally. And going deeper and deeper onto that connection.

And one of the great questions that a colleague of mine and also an adaptive leadership institute faculty member, Diana Rena, she said – this is a great question. Why are you here? And then you say, "Why are you really here?" And then the next one is why are you really, really here? It just starts to strip the layers back for people. And also, it gets people really reconnected and grounded in their purpose. And I think for the work that we do, because it is really tricky and it's hard, finding your unique purpose to being in the room is pretty critical.

And then just creating group agreements as well. What do you need from each other? What do you need from me as the facilitator to be able to participate and make sure that we're looking out for each other, but we're also balancing out the voices as well? There's a couple of little things that do that actually have a pretty big impact. And it doesn't have to take a long time. But also, sitting in circle just gives everybody that chance to connect and come into the room. Yeah, I would say that those are a couple of things in facilitation that I do to set up the room.

As we sort of get into the work, I think having a really strong process around what we're aiming to achieve for the day that I will have in the background to follow. Sometimes things can go sideways. I think what I tend to do is overprepare so that I can be prepared, but also I'm ready to sort of move sideways with the group if they need to go that way. And then ensuring that people are on board and everybody's staying together as we move along.

I think one thing that I'm constantly coming up against is balancing the right amount of time. Taking time to slow down to actually do deep listening in our busy lives. That can be quite challenging. But the response generally that I get is that, "Oh, it was actually really nice to slow down. We needed to have that conversation." And just creating a bit of space within the group to be able to pause and go into some of those deeper conversations can actually be quite transformational by the end of the session. But it is a bit of a balancing act because we're all got to deliver. Everyone wants to get their piece over the line. As a facilitator, that can be one of the challenges, for sure.

[0:16:42] RT: Yeah. In the world of adaptive leadership – and you're very familiar with the distinction between getting on the balcony and being on the dance floor. I'm curious, in those moments or those situations where you probably been the only facilitator in the room and maybe sometimes you're partnering or you have a team, but when you're the only one, how do

you take advantage of and satisfy the need to have a view from the balcony that can be interjected to the dance floor of where the conversations take place? And when you're the only person there, how do you attend to that?

[0:17:13] ER: Yeah, I really prefer to facilitate complex groups with a co-facilitator if I can. And in most cases, with a First Nations colleague that we do it together, particularly to monitor cultural protocol as well. Because as a non-indigenous person, I will miss things completely that they will pick up, and then we need to be able to address those things. But in the scenario that you've set there, I find that when I'm in that facilitation mode, I can be on quite high alert. Everything is super sensory. And I think also from my time working with horses and facilitating in that space, I've become quite intuitive. And so I will really come into the present moment to be able to step back and scan the environment to see what are the patterns that are occurring here.

I feel like I'm getting better each time I facilitate at capturing what the roles are that are playing out. What are some of the dynamics that are actually holding the group back to be able to then, "Oh, can I just pause you there? Can I play this back?" I'm just observing, or I'm just noticing there's a bit of a shift here, or whatever that might be. And so there is always a lot of data to capture.

And for sure, Rick, I don't capture it all. And I'm always trying to get better of that. But having that tool in your back pocket to be able to go, "What am I observing?" And also I think another thing at the beginning in framing the session is seeking permission from the group to go, "I'm going to pause you from time to time and just play back what I'm observing as the external." Because then they know that that's coming. Rather than, "Oh, what's she doing?" There's a bit of permission-seeking around that at the beginning as well.

[0:17:13] RT: I want to ask you this question. It just popped. It's not on my list. Because the description you just gave about what can be going on in the room, and you're the one there, and stuff's coming and going. And what's your superpower that enables you to actually absorb a lot more than most people could absorb sort in real time, and identify the thing you should respond to versus four things that aren't top of the list? And how do you digest, and interpret, and then replay back so people keep moving?

[0:19:27] ER: That is such a great question. And I think what comes to mind is I'm actually quite good at sequencing what needs to come next, particularly in process. If I know that a group is aiming to achieve a certain end goal, and I know where they need to get to as a group, maybe it's deepening a level of trust or surfacing attention that hasn't come out yet. If I know that that's what has to happen, it's like a sequencing of energy, I guess.

Like I said, it's a little bit of that intuitive nature of when you're really present in the present moment, I think, and naturally will go to what is going to help the group move to that next step to be able to play that back. I'm not sure if that answers the question, but I think it's trusting my intuition when I'm in the space. Because you just never know. Every group is so different. And I don't always get it right, for sure.

But I think in terms of being present, knowing where the group wants to get to and just helping to support them to get there, I will probably naturally pick up on those key things that I'm seeing that, "Oh, okay, I think that might be the bit there that we need to – maybe there's a little elephant in the room that nobody's spoken about yet. Let's just poke that elephant and see what happens."

[0:20:43] RT: Okay. So, I want to bring in the horse conversation. When you and I were exchanging, as we were getting ready for this, you included a link to Klaus Ferdinand. I can't pronounce his last name. Hempfling?

[0:20:54] ER: Hempfling, yeah.

[0:20:55] RT: Who I'd never heard of before. I didn't know who he was. And so, I chase a little bit what you had sent, and I began to get a sense that there was – I could understand why this person might be influential to you. Would you bring him into this conversation in terms of what you're learning from him? Because it looks on the surface to people, it's got nothing to do with facilitation of people in groups. But I know that's not the case. What about him and his ideas have informed you and made a difference for you?

[0:21:24] ER: Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling lives on a very small island in Denmark called Lyř. And I went to train with him for a 10-day seminar back in, gosh, 2009 maybe. A long time ago. But when you're in the horse world, for me, he was the pinnacle because he had the spiritual connection with the horses that he could read them and connect between the horse and their owner and understand immediately what the dynamics were. It's very much around diagnosis, which can relate very much to the leadership context as well.

And for him, it was all about being very present, extremely authentic within yourself about how are you showing up for that animal? Perhaps that animal has got trauma, they're a bit scared. What do you do within yourself to be able to meet that animal where they're at to be able to connect with them on an emotional level? But also, what was incredible for me was to see the spiritual component of that woven in as well. I never saw that as distinct from when I'm working with people because people also have trauma, and they also have emotional blockages that get in the way of being able to stand within your authentic self to be able to lead others and taking up that action of leading. Well, it's harder to do that when we have deep-seated fears or self-doubt, whatever that might be, that sort of root cause within yourself that perhaps hasn't been healed yet.

And so, for me to have that opportunity and to spend 10 days with him was quite remarkable and life-changing because it really brought all the knowledge and all the learning that I had from all my other trainers together. And what I'm learning more and more, Rick, as I'm doing more sort of meditative practices, and I'm tapping into the work of Dr. Joe Dispenza now, which is around the neural science behind how we create clearings within ourselves to become more authentic, to become more of the true, achieve more of the true potential that we have within ourselves. I'm sort of feeling more and more, it's up to us. It's up to me as an individual to sit down and do my own inner work. And I think adaptive leadership is really calling us to do that too, because it is very reflective, particularly that piece around self within the system. Because I do a lot of systems leadership work, it's about how do I support individuals to see their own role to see what's their own individual block to be able to participate in the bigger system piece and then see them self within that system.

Because a lot of partners within the groups that I work, they don't always know, "Well, my organization is bigger than me. I've got to convert all of those mindsets to be able to influence

this collaboration." And that's a big load, right? What I love about the adaptive leadership is it helps you to center around yourself. What can you do individually? What little small steps and choices can I make as a leader in my own right, in the role that I have, with the influence that I have to be able to then have that ripple effect more broadly within that bigger system?

I think that that's really the richness of that prior learning that I've had is that it's kind of reinforcing everything that I'm standing for today in terms of I think it's up to us. If we don't do our own inner work, well, we're not going to see the changes that we want in the systems that we're trying to change. And that's hard, isn't it? Because we have to look at ourselves.

[0:25:02] RT: It is. It's such a fantastic question that Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky came up with, "What's my contribution to the mess I'm trying to solve?" It's pretty direct and it's pretty unambiguous, but it's also pretty square. I'm curious, since you're speaking of this, could you speak a little bit about what is your reflective practice? Say you've done a workshop with a group of people, and you're on your way home, or you get home, how do you reflect on the work? Yourself in the work? Because I think that's a piece that we miss, and maybe there's some ideas that you have that support the structure for other people's design.

[0:25:36] ER: And I'm going to be super honest here and say that that my practice has changed from being extremely critical of myself, number one. What did I do wrong? What went wrong? And I've been practicing shifting that to being more around what worked really well. What were some good interventions that I tried on? And even if they didn't go well, good on me for trying that. Because I think part of my inner work is becoming less critical of myself and becoming more of a champion to say that, "Actually, I have got the skills to support these groups."

And so the self-reflective practice, I think it comes in a few different pathways. One is my own inner work to overcome my own limiting self-beliefs in my role as a facilitator supporting a group. But the second is, I think, there's no better way than to debrief with somebody else. Maybe it's one of the project leads that was in the room. Maybe it's the co-facilitator. And just going through and saying, "Okay. Well, how did that go? What was some of the successes? Where could we have tried something a little different?" There's always huge value in getting that feedback.

[0:26:45] RT: Let's go to the video, the LinkedIn video.

[0:26:47] ER: Oh, yes.

[0:26:47] RT: You have this 800-kilogram horse in a corral of some kind. Not very big. And you have a wonderful post. And I'm going to let you to the degree you want to share the post in the conversation here. But it's a very compelling video. Set people up. What are you doing in there? And what's the learning that you're having? And what's maybe the learning the horse is having? There's something magical going on in that space.

[0:27:11] ER: I haven't been working with horses for over 11 years. An old colleague or client got back in touch with me, literally lives around the corner, and said, "I've got this horse. Will you come and start doing some work with it? Because she's doing nothing. She's in the paddock." I was like, "Sure, why not?"

I'm coming back – and it's quite interesting to observe myself in the space again, because I'm in the round yard and we're doing what's called liberty work. There's no halter, there's no lead rope. And so it's purely body language. Communicating with body language. Building a connection through trust and being really clear with communicating. Okay, I want you to caner around the round yard and then I'm going to invite you to come in and be with me. And you need to stop. You can't run me over.

And so being able to step into that space with her, it reflects exactly what I do when I'm working with groups. I have to create that safe space for both of us. A space that she can express herself and her free will. She doesn't have to do anything I ask her. But I also have to be safe in the space with her. I start off by giving her a lot of attention and cuddles, and making sure she feels comfortable that I'm there to be her friend, and that we're going to do this piece of work together.

[0:28:25] RT: Are you talking to the horse when you're doing this, verbally or just – okay.

[0:28:29] ER: No. Oh, no. Not necessarily. Sometimes I'll say, "How are you going?" And I would give her cuddles and patting her. And then I'll be looking for signs from her that she's relaxed. And so typically, her ears will be a bit out to the side, looking around. Her head will drop

lower than her shoulder line. And then I know she's ready to work. And so then I'll lift my energy and I'll take a deep breath in, and I'll start to stand in front of her and then direct her out onto the circle.

And so, definitely, it's an energetic shift in my body language that she will pick up on. This is a great exercise for experiential and emotional learning for people. Because when you stand with the horse, if you don't shift your energy to take up that role of leadership now to say, "Right, I'm going to ask you to go," she's not going to do anything. She'll stay there. And so it's definitely very clear direction that you have to give.

And then once she starts to go out on the circle, then I build again. I give her another signal. And I'm watching her to see her reactions. And then we push up into the trot and then into the canter. And you'll see that she does a little kick at the back. And I can see she's feeling good. She's enjoying. She's like, "Okay, we're going to go for a canter now." And off she goes. And then I give the signal for her to come in. I have to drop my energy, catch her eye, and say, "Come on." And then I'll draw her in. And you'll see that she circles in and she canter in and stops, fall short. And then you'll see me give her more hugs. And she'll drop her head, and she starts to lick and chew her lips. And that's a sign to me that she's understood. She's really comfortable. She's had fun. And it's just a totally beautiful interaction.

And you'll see in my face, I'm smiling, I'm laughing. And I'm like, "Oh, that was really cool." She's here. She wants to have some fun today. 85% of communication is through body language. Same with people. If I come into a room and I create the environment to have some nice music in the background, I invite everyone into the circle, and let's start with a good check-in. We welcome everybody, acknowledge country. And then we just start to check-in. That sets the scene for how I'm going to facilitate for the day.

If I come in and my energy is really low and I don't want to be there, well, people are going to sense that. It's exactly the same. But the purpose of that post was around power. Because, obviously, when we are working with different levels of sectors and government, we have the imbalance of power in those discussions. And I think one of the really big emerging themes in the field of place-based work right now in Australia is around how do we genuinely share power with communities? Because the way that government policy has been rolling out is that it's been

very much top-down. It's been shifting to working alongside. But now it needs to be another shift down to deeper collaboration around how do we partner. How do we actually share power and change the system to affect that change?

And I think the horse metaphor is so powerful because it's visible. You can see the power differential is huge. She could roll me over in a second. I've got no hope stopping her. But what's invisible is the body language, is those signals, is the underlying prey-predator coding that we both have, which already sets that power dynamic. And often in communities, the power imbalance is really felt deeply, but it's not voiced. It's not named.

And so, I guess the purpose of that post was just to sort of hopefully give people another way of looking at it and going, "Oh, okay. Here's another way. And here's some tips. How do we name it? How do we make sure that we have that safety first?" People trust each other. We have a shared language around why we're actually here. What's our purpose? Is your purpose and understanding of the purpose the same as mine? Or do we have different language around that so that we can actually make sure we both understand each other? Because it's often a cross-cultural setting that we're working in.

Slowing it down to make sure that those foundations are solid before we start to say, "Okay. Well, look. You guys have got the weight of government behind you. And we are a small leadership group here in community. How do we work with this? And then that opens up a whole new conversation. And so yes, that's why I thought, "Oh well, you know what? I'm going to create a post about this, put it out there, and just see what it seeds for people if there's interest and appetite to have a different conversation around it."

[0:33:03] RT: And I think the metaphor that you're putting there is the actual impact that physical presence has. The horse is obviously much bigger than you. But at the same time – and at least for me, watching the video. By the time it gets to the end, it feels like and visually looks like you're on equal terms with each other. There's trust. Horse is still much bigger than you physically. But relationally, it looks equal. And I think that's such a wonderful metaphor for the work of being in groups to get some equality, experiences of equality even if it's offline in the room. You can't take that back. You got to live with that. You carry that forward. There's

something magical about the video that really conveys that is what I'm saying. I'm going to encourage people to watch it.

You've mentioned this a couple times, but I'd like to go a little further on the work you do with First Nations. Not everybody listening is familiar with that world in Australia. Could you establish a little, I don't know, history or context? And then also what that work with those people have done to you in terms of how you show up, and how you do the work, and how you engage.

[0:34:10] ER: Yeah. Well, I feel super privileged to been able to live and work with the Yolngu people up in northeast Arnhem Land. It was really the first putting into community life that I had experienced. And in Australia, there's hundreds and hundreds of different tribes of First Nations peoples, but all of those tribes have their own law and languages. And right now, we have a languages policy partnership which is dedicated to revitalizing and restoring the languages that have been lost under the previous government policies and the white Australia and our history there, which is pretty devastating.

But the work that I'm doing now aims to really support and bring forth the voices of those that have lost their voices over those years. And it's quite remarkable for me to have been able to work with so many visionary and strong leaders that I've basically just listened to and take guidance to be able to elevate their voices in a way that reflects who they are and where they would like to go. I feel like I've always sort of been behind the scenes to be able to do that work and felt very privileged to be able to support in the small ways that I can.

And we have, I suppose, the work that I did with the Empowered Communities group, which is covering 10 regions across the country now, was my first real learning around the power when we can support our first nations leaders to come together to design the models that reflect who they are and what their communities need. Because every community has – as I said, it's got their own law around how they want to design the changes that they want to see to affect that change. And so that agenda certainly amplified that possibility. And that's still going on. I think we've had 10 years of that agenda rolling out in Australia now, and will continue as well.

[0:36:15] RT: The question that comes to me that I want to ask you is a lot of what you've been talking about, a lot of what you've done has to do with adapting. For you, what's the role courage plays in this?

[0:36:28] ER: I suppose to stand up for what you believe in takes a lot of courage. And I've always had a strong sense of justice and social justice for those that have been disadvantaged. And so yeah, being able to stand up in the face of those that don't advocate and go, "You know what? No. We're standing together with our First Nations colleagues." Particularly as the – yeah, we had the referendum for the yes or the no vote to recognize First Nations peoples in the constitution. That was quite divisive in this country and it really brought out, unfortunately, more of the systemic racism that exists in Australia, which probably a lot overseas aren't aware of.

But we have the oldest surviving culture in the world, the oldest surviving, 60,000 years. And it just perplexes me that it's not something that's celebrated and like put front and center. Yes, I mean, it's confounding, really. But we have to deal with that in this country in this context. And I think just every day doing what I can to help to amplify and continue to support the spirit of those ancestors to be heard. Well, I'll just keep doing that because I'm driven to do that.

[0:37:47] ER: I have this question I always ask. It's an adaptive leadership question. I'm tempted to amend it based on a comment you made a little while ago, but I'm going to go with it. And then we can ask it both ways. How is this? You can answer both ways. Here's the question. Generally speaking, for most of us, we tend to learn more from our leadership failures than we do our successes. They sting, they stick with us. They leave scars, etc.

Allowing for the fact that you're shifting your reflective practice to what worked and how well you did, are there some things that you've learned the hard way in this work that have stuck with you that have made a difference in how you function today going forward?

[0:38:24] ER: Yes, definitely. And I think one of those was when I did my training in deep collaboration and learned more about the roles that exist within the system, and that can play out. And there is one role there called the savior or the fantasy leader, I should say. It's called the fantasy leader. And what that role means is somebody that people will look to to say, "Oh,

they're going to look after it. They'll take care of it. They're going to come in and they're going to save the day."

And I think I realized when I got the language to identify some of the roles that I had played that I had actually sort of stepped into that role a few times in my work with my First Nations colleagues. And I felt so ashamed that I had done that. And I was just like, "Oh my gosh. Oh, you really overstepped there when you could have taken another choice." I had to deal with that myself.

But the beauty of learning is that you adapt then and you go, "Okay, well, I recognize that now. And that's not a supportive role at all. And I won't do that again." And so I learned to partner in a different way and not be like, "Oh, I'm going to sort this out for you. Don't worry, I'll take care of it," type thing. That was a really big one for me.

And dealing with conflict as well. I know that for me, one of my areas for development still is when we get into a hot spot within a room, particularly if there's racial charge around it, I get really scared. My body will freeze, and I will be like, "Oh, God. Oh, God." Because I get triggered, and then I think, "How do I deal with this when I'm in the facilitator role?" And I've had a couple of situations like that where I don't feel like I handled it as well as I could. Lent into the disequilibrium more, lent into that and gone, "Let's hear more about this because it exists so deeply in our systems."

That was a really big learning as well. And that's just something, I think, each time I facilitate, I just have to practice. When there's a hot spot, just lean into it and be present. And don't make it about me. It's for the group to navigate and to see. And I think I'm trying to practice more about giving the work back to the group and not diving in. And time pressure can cause that issue for me if I've got a short amount of time, and I can sometimes cut things off. I think that's another piece of the work that I'm constantly working on is how do I manage that to give people space to be able to have the dialogue and surface the learnings themselves when we don't have so much time. That's probably the two big ones.

[0:41:00] RT: Okay. Okay. We're coming to the end here. And since you and I just exchanged on the loose structure of our conversation, I want to give you space to address anything we

didn't talk about that you think is relevant for people to know about what you do or why you do it, so that they have a complete picture of you as we can.

[0:41:22] ER: I think the other part for me is, I suppose, the spiritual side of the work and working with the collective consciousness of groups. I feel like that's a pretty big part of where I've come from in terms of my practice with the horses, with the healing work that I used to do with horses as well, is very much around being present and connecting with intuition, your own intuition.

My feeling is that each time we have a breakthrough as a group that's shifting the collective consciousness frequency to change. And it might be a tiny millimeter of whatever, but it's still having an impact on the broader system. And whilst I don't sort of preface that, or talk about that, or practice that outwardly, it's a big part of how I show up in a room, is that I've done that. I'm holding that as well. Because so much happens in the field of energy. Fields of energy are impacted by how we all walk around and interact with each other.

And so as much as I can, I try to support the spaces to be able to lift the vibrations, lift the energy so that people have good experiences. Especially when we're doing innovation and we're right on the learning edge of something new, it can be really uncomfortable for people to be there because they don't know what's going to happen. They don't know where we're going to go, where we're going to land. But for me, that's so important that we can bring people to that edge and go, "Let's just be here for a minute. It's uncomfortable, sure, and it's not normal. And you don't stay here for a long time, but just be here." Because that's when some intuitive ideas will start to fall in. And that's where some of the breakthrough ideas can occur. And so that's probably another part, another dimension from what I look at and consider when I'm stepping into my facilitation roles.

[0:43:16] RT: Because you can feel it in the room. You can feel it in yourself.

[0:43:20] ER: Yeah. Everybody can.

[0:43:23] RT: Yeah.

[0:43:24] ER: It doesn't always shift either. It depends on what's coming into the room with people on the day, you know? Can be quite heavy work sometimes, particularly if there's a lot of trauma or unsaid things. And so it's having process to help bring it out in a supported way that people feel like they can say what they need to say to clear the space for newness to occur, new ideas to surface, new relationships to form.

[0:43:48] RT: Last question. What's ahead for you? What do you want to do that you haven't cracked yet that you want to do into the future?

[0:43:55] ER: Yeah. Oh, it's so exciting. And part of what's coming up for me is more group work. Yes, definitely more facilitation. But there's an emerging field within the state that I live in, Queensland, around networked governance models, where we really ground power and, decision-making, and accountability into the communities in partnership with government.

This is a pretty dynamic space right now. And I'm super interested and keen to participate in building that field of knowledge to understand how do we really translate this into practice? What does it look like? How can we learn quickly about it? It would totally shift the paradigm of normal hierarchical governing to a networked lateral type approach. And so I think, yeah, I'm super interested to do more in that space.

Yeah. And let's just see if there's interest from folks who would like to go deeper with their own – experimenting with their own authenticity within their leadership. And maybe we might see a resurgence of horse-assisted leadership coaching. Watch this space. Yeah.

[0:45:05] RT: Okay. Yeah. Stay tuned.

[0:45:06] ER: Stay tuned. Yeah. Thanks for having me on your show.

[0:45:09] RT: Eula, thank you so much for doing this. It's been a treat. Thank you very much.

[0:45:13] ER: You're welcome. Thanks so much.

[OUTRO]

[0:45:17] 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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