

Raymond A. Mason School of Business

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 93: MARGARET LIPTAY & TERRY SHANNON – WORKING WITH A LEADERSHIP COACH

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. It's difficult to reach your goals by yourself. We all need help along the way. The best guarterbacks in football work with guarterback coaches. The best actors have acting coaches. And in business, the best leaders have leadership coaches. At some point in your career, you may decide to work with a leadership coach. It might be your idea, or your employer may make the suggestion. Either way finding the right leadership coach and creating a collaborative one-on-one relationship with the coach can have a dramatically positive effect on your career. Today we're joined by two certified leadership coaches. Margaret Liptay is CEO of MLC consulting. Terry Shannon is Executive Director of the Executive Partners here at William & Mary's Mason School of Business. The executive partners provide leadership coaching to the students in the business school. They join us on the podcast to discuss how they work with their clients and what you should expect from your leadership coach. Here's our conversation with Margaret Liptay and Terry Shannon.

Ken White

Well, Margaret and Terry, thank you very much for joining us today. This is an exciting time we're actually recording just as all the students are coming back to William & Mary. You've both been very involved with students and leadership and coaching. We're all so welcome thanks for taking the time to join us.

Margaret Liptay

Thank you, Ken.

Ken White

Margaret, we'll start with you. Your background, your story. How did you become a leadership coach?

Well, Ken, that's a great question. I always encourage the clients that I coach to become very good storytellers. So I'll hope I hope you'll let me share a story

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

with you this morning. First of all, let me start a little bit with my background in my career. I had an absolutely fabulous career with a Fortune 100 professional services firm. I was a managing director and enjoyed every single day of my career. Lots of pressure, lots of clients, internal-external, you know, as the senior executive, you have lots of decisionmaking authority. You have a lot of people that you need to tell what to do day in and day out. You're sort of the ultimate decision-maker with both your internal and external clients. And I loved it. I loved every minute of it. The challenge and the regret that I have was that I really didn't have enough energy and time in my day to spend a whole lot of time on leadership development. Particularly in service of our emerging leaders or our transitional leaders. And I always regretted that. So after 25 years and just enjoying every moment of my career, I had an opportunity to work for Fordham University Graduate School of Business, where I was an adjunct professor, and I taught team dynamics, and Leadership, and Change. And I loved it, and I worked with the executive MBA students, and I was so jazzed. I loved working with them hearing their stories. We'd it'd 10 o'clock at night, and we'd still be talking, and it was great. But to me, there was still something missing. There was still something I wanted to do with my career to better pay it forward.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

So coincidentally, again, I happened to have an opportunity with some leadership coaches, and it was an aha moment. The clarity of what I wanted to do after those conversations, which were very powerful, and I asked a lot of. You know, inquisitive questions was just amazing to me. So I applied to Georgetown University and became eventually certified as a leadership coach. But I want to talk about that journey. So I go to Georgetown. I really didn't know as much as I thought I knew about leadership coaching. And one thing is clear about leadership coaching it's about listening, not telling. So let's reflect back on my background. That was my 25-year career, telling. I have an MBA in organizational behavior that was all about telling and organizing around organizations. So when I went to Georgetown and they said you really can no longer tell. You're only going to listen. I said what.

Yeah, no kidding.

Margaret Liptay

How can that possibly be? So they it took a while. They actually had to break me of a lot of habits where I wanted to be in control. I wanted to be the managing director in chief. I wanted to be the strategist in chief. I wanted to be the professor in chief, and they were like no, no, and more, no. You will become the listener in chief. And about halfway through the program, it was again a moment of true clarity where I realized it is so much better to be a listener than a talker and a teller. And I just stepped right into it. It became transformational for me. And it changed my life. It changed my behavior. It changed the way I listen. It changed the way I view people, their problems, how I listen to them, how I feel about them. And so I would have to say that my journey from the chief telling officer to, in my world, you know, the chief listening officer has been just incredibly powerful. And what I love about it is that my clients own it. I don't own it. And so, in paying it forward, I help them see with new eyes, feel with new spirit, do things they couldn't do before. And at the end of the day, they move forward, and they own it. So that's my story.

Ken White

Great, Terry, what about you?

Terry Shannon

Well, my story. I spent 35 years in the food distribution industry. The first 26 of it on the corporate side, food service distribution. Started in sales and marketing and, as Margaret said, moved up through those telling kind of steps where you were managing people and working with folks. After 26 years in that industry. I crossed over to the nonprofit sector and became CEO of one of the largest food banks in the country in Phoenix, Arizona. At that time at, that transition moving from the corporate world to the nonprofit sector was quite an adjustment. And one of my board members at that time suggested that I connect with an executive coach to work with me leadership coach. To help make those changes and make those adjustments along the way. It was a terrific experience, and I spent nine years at the food bank and found it to be my the most rewarding part of my working career. After retiring moved here to Williamsburg and got involved knew it wasn't going to be all about golf and drinking coffee because I'm not that kind of guy. Got involved with the College of William & Mary and the Executive Partner Program, and I soon realized that would be helpful for me to have a little bit of framework. Very quickly realized the framework around working with today's students and then in helping them. Went back to my leadership coach and started talking about programs for coaching. She pointed me towards the Georgetown program and applied to it, and like Margaret, it was an incredibly transformational situation. The first three day in session seminars, a set of seminars, I remember calling my wife at the end of the first day and saying you're not going to

believe this. It was much more emotional and touchy-feely than I thought that I was going to be walking into, and you know, half the class was in tears during the first-afternoon session, and it just opened eyes and was just the incredible transformational experience, and it gave me framework to be able to work with students and with outside clients that I work with now that I have just found the whole coaching profession to be incredibly effective for the client but also very rewarding for me as their coach.

Ken White

And you mentioned the executive partners. That's a group of one hundred and twenty or so semi-retired, retired executives who work with the business school here at William & Mary and serve as coaches to our students.

Terry Shannon

Yup, we work with the students at all levels. Grad and undergrad and grad level students actually have a specific executive partner assigned to them for the full first year that they're here to work through their personal and professional development process.

Ken White

You got a coach fairly late in your career. I mean, you weren't in your 20s, and this was later, after what, 25 years in the private industry. What was that experience like?

Terry Shannon

It was difficult at first and challenging because I know you come from that corporate world, and you think you know it all and you have all the answers, but in crossing over from the nonprofit or from the profit sector to the nonprofit sector, I didn't have all the answers. So really helped me work through how to deal with that and how to open myself up and soften some of the edges because the nonprofit sector needed that as you're working with the donor community and the client community at the food bank environment.

Ken White

Margaret, how does a client find you?

Margaret Liptay

A bunch of different ways. Lots of referrals through website or LinkedIn, where we are found. We also get recommendations or what I call testimonials from our clients.

Ken White Sure.

So one client begets another. A lot of my work are through corporate sponsors. So one corporate sponsor will generate another corporate sponsor, and we do a great job, it becomes evangelistic. I mean, the word gets out.

Ken White

So from a client standpoint, an individual could approach either of you individually or through their company. Is there a percentage of work you've done corporate versus individual?

Margaret Liptay

I've done a lot of work with individuals approaching me. I've done the vast majority of my work collaborate through corporations, and they seem to have very rigorous programs in some cases around coaching. I like the idea of coaching at all levels within an organization. The trend is getting more to that, but right now, there's a lot of senior leadership coaching that goes on. I would say the vice president director level and above. In my world, I would like to see a more holistic approach to coaching, and I would like to see leaders learn some aspects of coaching. But to answer your question, it comes at you from all different directions. Cause you could coach someone within an organization and they have such a good experience, hopefully, that then they might refer their brother-in-law or their sister-in-law or a colleague, and that might be an independent assignment. So you know engagement, so you can work it either way, really.

Ken White

And from the client standpoint, they may pay or their organization?

Margaret Liptay

Well, if it's an individual that you're coaching, they would pay you on an individual basis. If it's a client, we call it the sponsoring firm, the client sponsor firm they would pay. However, you know, you sort of take that off the table early on. It's not about who's paying.

Ken White Right

Right.

Margaret Liptay

It's about who the actual client is.

Ken White Right.

So the client becomes the person that you're coaching. And that is a very sacrosanct, very confidential, very one-on-one relationship-building process. And you do. There are ways to report back to the actual person or corporation that pays, and you work that out on the on the go inside when you negotiate your engagement, and the way I do it, Ken, is that if a corporation hires me, then we have to have clarity. There has to be an agreement between the corporation and what their roles and responsibilities are. What my roles and responsibility are. And what the client's roles and responsibility are. And that responsibility and has to be, you know, very well expressed, very well put in writing, and then everyone knows where they're at, and there's no lack of confidentiality or no requests for information that you know you're not in a position to give. However, I can ask my client if they mind if I have a conversation with their leadership and if the person says yes, that's fine. Your ideal is we have a three-way conversation.

Ken White

Got it.

Margaret Liptay

Because it's not once again about me telling, it's about me sitting with them and saying how do you two feel we're going in progressing in this relationship.

Ken White

Terry, your relationships with a client. How long does it last?

Terry Shannon

Vary from six months to a year, typically, and it depends on the frequency of that you're connecting as well. You know, early on with some clients, it may be every other week kind of thing, and then it may spread to a monthly kind of scenario because, you know, what we're talking about with the client is behavior change and ultimately to orchestrate behavior change you need time in between sessions for them to experiment and try new things and be able to come back and talk through. How that went? How it impacted? Is it making the progress they were looking for? So you need that those gaps to be able to give them an opportunity to do it.

Margaret Liptay

To Terry's point, the whole aspect of coaching it's not talk therapy. You know we're not their friend, we're not their minister, we're not their psychologist. We are their coach, and in the front end, you establish what it is you are coaching to and around. What you want to accomplish, and there's actionable items along the way. There's a lot of rigor, and then

there's expected outcomes. Let's face it a firm is not going to hire either Terry or I if, in fact, there is no outcome.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

They need results. And that's certainly understood by everybody. And I think that one of the key issues is that you have to concentrate on making sure that there is progression along the way. That's why this is a rigorous process. It's not just talk therapy.

Ken White

Right, no. Before we started recording, we were talking about the core components of coaching. Listening, powerful questions, and then the process. Margaret, would you talk us through the listening piece? What takes place in that component of the relationship?

Margaret Liptay

Well, this is where you really have to learn not to tell because, at the end of the day, you want the individual that you're coaching to own their outcome. You want them to own their behaviors. You want them to own how they show up. So having said that, what I go through with my clients is in terms of the listening skills. I try to reflect for myself and them on what I call global listening. And we talked a little bit about this. If you recall, Ken, in our leadership presence presentation, there's three levels. There's a level where you're listening, but you're not really listening. You're thinking of your next question. You're kind of listening, and there's a level to where you are listening, you're intently listening, you're really engaged. And then that global listening, that beautiful place that you both can get to and that we strive to have our clients learn, is where you're not only listening, you're listening profoundly, you're also watching, you're watching body language. And then lastly, through listening for what's not said. How many conversations have we been in where you know, when someone left the room, they were not telling you something?

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

So we as coaches have to work on those listening skills and really be intentional about listening and about presenting the powerful questions that will get us to sort of peeling the onion, as I call it, and get to the core of what we're trying to not only establish but how we're going to get to the results and the actionable items.

I assume if I'm the client, I would like you to tell me a few things once in a while, Terry. But that's not where the aha moments happen.

Terry Shannon

No, because the ability to reframe that the impulse for us to tell into a question so that the discovery process comes about for the client. That's the remarkable kind of part of the conversation and the true aha part of it along the way. The ability to interpret body language and say oh, I notice you're holding back. You're sitting there with your arms crossed. You're not making eye contact with me when you just said that. What's behind that? What's causing that? How are you feeling about that kind of situation? And going through that discovery process is really really what gets the client to move from A to B to C and get down the path.

Ken White

And how do you learn to ask those powerful questions?

Terry Shannon

Through the Georgetown training and just lots of experience in it. As Margaret said, it's that comfort level in not worrying about what my next question is gonna be. I'd need to be paying attention to the client and immersed in the situation. I need to be focused and centered 100 percent.

Margaret Liptay

To be totally in the moment. Totally in the moment with that person.

Terry Shannon

You know, an hour-long conversation with a client. It takes me an hour to recover after.

Ken White

I bet. I was going to say that.

Terry Shannon

It's a cool-down period because the adrenaline is high, I'm pumping, I'm focused, you know, zeroed in on everything. Every word they're saying, every inflection in their voice, the body language that they're demonstrating, and trying to feed that back because I'm a mirror. Picture I'm a mirror. I'm trying to hold that mirror up for them to see how they're showing up in that particular moment.

One thing about coaching: it's totally selfless. You have to take yourself out of it and make it 100 percent about the person that you're coaching, and that is quite hard.

Ken White

I'll bet.

Margaret Liptay

Particularly when you have a very rich and vast background, both educationally and careerwise. You want to help, but those would be our solutions. They wouldn't be their solutions, and therefore there wouldn't be a continuous sustainable behavior that would follow. So it takes to Terry's point. It's exhausting.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with leadership coaches Margaret Liptay and Terry Shannon in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education is once again offering its popular certificate in business management program in late October. It's a five-day program designed for working professionals who want a cross-functional understanding of business. Each day is devoted to one business-related topic, including communication, operational effectiveness, strategy, managerial accounting, and leadership. The five core topics taught in our highly ranked MBA program. To learn more about the certificate in business management, visit wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with leadership coaches Margaret Liptay and Terry Shannon.

Ken White

It sounds like teaching you go in for an hour and a half and give it everything you have, and you're ready to take a nap right after that. I'm spent. It takes time.

Margaret Liptay

And sometimes, in all fairness, you get to a roadblock.

Ken White

I'm sure, yeah.

Margaret Liptay

It's not moving, and you have to reframe and rethink and come up with another route to go down because something's not happening, and you have to again keep at it, keep

digging so that you can get to the root of what it is that we're trying to accomplish and then come up with those actionable items.

Ken White

And is that the process? As you're talking about going through that.

Terry Shannon

There's a lot of tell me more kind of framed questions in one form or another to try and dive deeper to help them understand what caused them to get to this point, this issue, this opportunity, and then because you've got to kind of maybe sometimes dismantle it to be able to rebuild it.

Margaret Liptay

And there are assignments, and I'm sure Terry does the same thing I do in his practice where between our sessions, there are assignments. Will you try this and you co-create these assignments so that they again own what they need to do? But you encourage them. Would you be willing to try x, y, z that you just talked about? We just came up with a potential solution to the problem. Now how are you going to implement that when you get back to your office and get back to your staff? What are you going to do? Because if you don't do anything, there is no point to the coaching. There has to be action and results.

Terry Shannon

In some of those practices, sometimes maybe an article, a video, watch a movie kind of thing from an activity standpoint and use that as a means to have a further conversation on a topic or subject and deep dive the next time. There's tremendous amount of tools that we pull on from our virtual toolbox to put in the client's hands that can support some of those kinds of practices going forward.

Ken White

Is there a particular time in someone's career that forming a relationship with a coach is right, or is it individual?

Margaret Liptay

Well, my opinion is even though it's a challenge and I understand it totally. Starting when you have emerging leaders coming along. Starting at their earliest stages is the best time to start because I'm sort of in the school of really old dogs, and new tricks don't always work. So start the foundation really early. However, what's practical in many firms, as I mentioned earlier, is starting at least at that vice president, director level, that middle manager level so that you can start to influence and you know the more responsibility you get no matter how many people you're around and how many clients you're with and how busy your day is you're actually very lonely. Leaders are lonely, and you become a source of getting rid of some of that loneliness for them. And then there are other tools. They have a coach. They have a journal which I'm a big advocate of journaling. They have, you know, the articles that Terry mentioned. They have the homework assignments. If you don't like conflict, approach someone between now and next time we speak that you're having a conflict with and see how you can manage through that. See how it works, then tell me. Report back. How did it work? What did you do well? What didn't do so well? And what would you do differently next time? Those are three powerful questions that can serve for a whole session.

Ken White

I would think from the client's standpoint, don't even think about this unless you're willing to make a major investment in time and effort as well.

Margaret Liptay

Absolutely.

Terry Shannon

Yup, that's initial conversation.

Margaret Liptay

Exactly.

Terry Shannon

You have to have with folks along the way. One of the other misunderstandings about coaching and what time of the career is appropriate. Coaching isn't about dealing with people with performance issues in an organization. And Margaret, I think, agrees with this that I will not take on a situation where a client has come to me and said I need you to deal with Joe. You know he's on his way out the door if he doesn't change. That's not where coaching can be. Can coaching work there? Sure. But that's not where I like to work my end of the client.

Margaret Liptay

No, that's why on the early discovery meetings that you have with either your client or your sponsoring firm, you want to find out are they really invested in growing where they are, not as an exit strategy. I will not take an engagement that's about an exit strategy. That's for someone else to do. There are people who do that. Career counseling. Career coaching. And that's perfectly fine. But that's not as a leadership coach what I would be engaged in.

Terry Shannon

The other major opportunity is very similar to my story that I described right up front. Is if somebody is changing job. Has just change jobs, just changed careers, industries, and you know, they're taken on a fresh new look at things. Coaching can be a very effective way for them to be able to organize that and think about it and be successful at it on a moveforward basis.

Ken White

How much do you use technology to interact? How much is face-to-face? How much is phone and so forth?

Margaret Liptay

Well, practically speaking, the way that most executives work today, they're never in one place at one time.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

So you have to accommodate their schedules, and we travel too as coaches. So the beauty is there is, you know, go-to-meeting, there is Skype, there's telephone, and then there's those in-person meetings when you can grab them. And all three seem to work, at least in my practice, very effectively. And what I kind of like about the phone is that you become a coach, very tuned in to a sigh, an inflection, a pause. You do get very tuned in. So I think, in a way, sometimes a phone conversation is really great because you might pick up something that you wouldn't necessarily pick up if you were sitting right next to them when you get one of these sighs.

Ken White Right.

Margaret Liptay Tell me about that.

Ken White Yeah, absolutely.

Margaret Liptay What's going on?

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

Where sometimes, people don't do that when you have the energy of each other together because they're going to not have your energy all the time. They're going to be on their own energy.

Ken White

Years ago, when I had the opportunity to work with a coach, the first thing was they asked me to give them names of people with whom I interacted with on a regular basis. They went out and interviewed those people. Is it does it still? Do you still do that?

Terry Shannon

I use that as a very common practice. I'm interviewing a set of stakeholders that they interface with, hopefully, a blend of both from a business and a personal side. And I've got a series of 10 questions that I picked up from some of the Georgetown networking and so forth that is just a tremendous set of stuff to be able to begin the process with, and those conversations are confidential as well, and I don't share the specific information from one one of those stakeholders back with the client. But I am able to compile that into a framing to be able to use as part of the conversation with the client.

Margaret Liptay

To Terry's point, what's fabulous about coaching and maybe people misunderstand sometimes even though you're coaching to certain outcomes that might be applicable within a firm. You're coaching the whole person, and the person doesn't stop showing up when they leave the office. So the idea is that we want these skills and the behavior changes and the listening skills that we inculcate in our clients to generate not just within the workplace but at home and in their other relationships as well. It's about relationship building holistically, not just about within the firm.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

So I think if you kind of look at coaching in that context, it's important to kind of know what's going on in the person's world and have discussions with people that impact that person and vice versa.

Yeah, makes sense.

Margaret Liptay

We'd like them to see that the person that they become after coaching.

Ken White

Right. Now you've both coached students. MBAs is in their 20s all the way up. What's the difference? Or are there differences between someone that early in their career versus someone who's leading hundreds and thousands of people? Is there anything that comes to mind?

Terry Shannon

I found the student to be much more approachable and a sponge and willing to try and experiment with new stuff along the way. The executive is a little more sensitive and a little more tenuous in making change big change along the way, but the students are having both the student and the season client. It's a refreshing change from a coaching standpoint.

Ken White Yeah, I bet.

Terry Shannon

You come at it from two different directions.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

I agree. I think the students are very eager. Most of them to learn just like you know more senior people. Some of them get stuck and don't want to do the work and aren't interested and think they're great and perfect, and everyone is looking at them with, you know, pennies in their eyes. But you know there are the students that I've dealt with. I usually continue on for many years with them because they when they go on to their full-time jobs, they're still touching base back, and we're still talking. Now, in that case, we're mentoring, and I would like to make a distinction around that, Ken.

Ken White

Yeah.

There is a big distinction between coaching, mentoring, advising, counseling, consulting. Coaching when it's really rigorous regardless of who the person is a student or a CEO. It's very intentional. There's rigor. There is breakthroughs, and then there's hopefully successful outcomes and a change in either behavior or a way of looking at something. A way of presenting themselves. A way of using their body language, their voice, etc. That's coaching. Mentoring is sharing experiences and a bit of talk therapy. Counseling is again. It's counseling. It's telling, most times. There's a big component of telling in counseling.

Ken White

Interesting.

Margaret Liptay

Maybe you should try this. Maybe you should do this. This might be better for you. Is that you should do that. There's a lot of there's a lot of that. There's a lot of powerful questions as well, but there's some of the telling that goes on. So as you go up the spectrum, there's more and more telling and less than less it's all about you. You're going to own it. This is what we expect. This is the rigor. This is the outcome.

Ken White

If you meet someone or if you meet someone who says I think I want to do this, you know I've had a nice career. I think I'd like I'd like to pay it forward. As you say, what kind of advice do you give them? What do you tell them about this profession and what it means?

Margaret Liptay

Well, I think it's fabulous. But I also spend more time talking about the heart of the coach. You know what it's what it means to be selfless. This is one time it will never be about you. We have to go through the whole conversation about are you capable of listening and not telling because maybe they really want to be a mentor and not a coach. Will you have the rigor? Are you willing to get certified? I think no cooperation or individual out there would hire a coach who has not gone through some formal training and gotten some level of certification. Some level of experience because you're dealing with human beings here. So it's a huge responsibility. Terry may have some other.

Terry Shannon

Yeah, you know the challenge that we experience with the executive partners. Every one of those one hundred and twenty-plus came from senior-level positions.

Ken White

Sure.

Terry Shannon

And they were in that tell-world kind of scenario. And now we're trying to get them to be coaches for first-year MBA students and put them through training. Imagine putting volunteers through eight hours of training on coaching skills, on listening, and powerful questions. To try and get them out of the, you know, the key theme that we use is the ask, don't tell. You know, whenever you find yourself about to tell somebody something. Bring out your war stories and your experiences and cross them into that mentor role. Stop yourself reframe it into a question. Now how effective they are without a significant amount of training. Like the Georgetown program, which was six months worth of time and effort. I think they're good, but they're not as good as they could be if they went through that kind of formal training. Absolutely.

Ken White

What about a professional executive who's seeking a coach? What should they do? Which steps should they take to make sure they land with the right person?

Margaret Liptay

Well, that's part of the discovery meeting, so they should certainly see three or four or have a conversation with three or four different individuals who are certified coaches, and then then there's a two-way discovery going on. The coach should be discovering how coachable are you and the person who thinks they've want a coach should be interviewing the person to say you know can I build a rapport with that person? Do I trust that person? Are they certainly qualified and certified? You know it's like you wouldn't go. You wouldn't go to a doctor without you know some level of interviewing them or getting recommendations and referrals and testimonials. So that's what I would do if I were looking for a coach.

Ken White

And then, if all works out, both parties experience success and have a great time.

Margaret Liptay Exactly.

Terry Shannon Exactly.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Margaret Liptay and Terry Shannon. And that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals. With business and leadership development programs that fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guests this week, Margaret Liptay and Terry Shannon. And thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Till next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.