

Roz Usheroff-Podcast-27- The FROG of Greatness-with-Sarah McVanel

Roz

Okay. Welcome to my podcast. I think I'm going to sound like a broken record, but one thing that I believe we're all going through, we're all living in interesting times of unrelenting change and uncertainty. And in the midst of all this wonderful pressure, the last thing leaders should take for granted are their people. Makes sense? When everything feels uncertain, employees don't just need direction, they need connection. In fact, Gallup's research with over 10,000 employees found that when people crave most from their leaders, it's trust, compassion, stability, and hope. Now, these aren't soft skills, they're survival skills. They're the foundation of a healthy culture that actually works. Yet too many employees feel overworked, overlooked, undervalued, and unseen. Hopefully it's not all of the above for you. This growing sense of insignificance is quietly fueling stress. People are feeling lonely, we're feeling burnt out, and disengagement is leading to low performance. That's why recognition is no longer optional. It's powerful, it's personal, and it keeps what? Oh, and it's what keeps people anchored when everything else is changing.



Today, we're diving into the magic of recognition, and you're all in for an amazing treat. My guest is none other than the extraordinary Sarah McVanel. A true champion of helping people feel seen, valued, and celebrated at work. Sarah doesn't just talk about recognition; she actually lives it. She is a recognition expert, professional speaker, coach, author, and the movement maker behind FROG, which stands for Ever Recognize Others' Greatness. As the founder of Greatness Magnified, Sarah has trained thousands of leaders over 25 plus years to see their people as exceptional. She builds thriving, inclusive cultures. With CSP, PCC credentials, and so many more, she proves that recognition isn't just a feel-good gesture. Her message is simple. It's bold and it's powerful. Recognition isn't fluff. It's fuel for retention, energy, and innovation. When it's done right, it doesn't just transform teams, it transforms cultures.

So Sarah, come on board.

Sarah McVanel

Oh, I feel honored that you truly see and hear and feel the movement. That was one of the most beautiful introductions I've ever had. Thank you for that. It's fed my soul.

Roz

Sarah, it's from my heart. Seriously, I've known you for years and I just think what you do is so magical.

Roz

I've got a lot of questions that I've prepared in advance because your time is so valuable. So let us begin this journey. First of all, you've said that recognition isn't the icing on the cake. It is the cake. What do you mean by that? And why do some smart leaders still miss the recipe?

Sarah McVanel

Well, you know what? I have experienced over the last 25 years, whether it was working in organizational development, leading corporate teams through mergers, acquisitions, no matter what the situation was. And of course, most recently as Canada's recognition expert, The easiest, most delicious, most scrumptious ingredient we can add into a meeting, ah team a team, whole culture is recognition. And so what I would invite people to think about is how can they add just a little bit more flavor two conversations, one-on-one or collectively, where people feel seen, heard, and valued. And really, my

friend, that is what recognition is. It's seeing, hearing, valuing people. And who doesn't want a piece of that culture cake?

Roz

Oh, for sure, for sure, including me, of course. So I've noticed that and more employees today, especially younger professionals, they aren't just hoping to feel appreciated, they really expect it. Do you see a generational or cultural shift around recognition?

Sarah McVanel

What we're seeing right now when it comes to this generation is they're very vocal about what they want, what they need, what they expect. And we've just come out of a time when they had so many options. We're in a frozen job market right now and unemployment is on the rise. However, this is very new. And so a lot of people have that mindset of when they first started in the workplace that they get a chance to call the shots. They have had more of a say. They can all be vocal anywhere. All you need is a smartphone. And so that context of how they grew up is going to inform how they are employees and middle managers. So I don't think it's so much a generational thing as it is a function of the environment where they had their formative years. What I would invite our listeners to consider is that what did you expect when you were newer in your career? I bet you wanted a great boss who listened to you, colleagues who valued your opinion, a workplace where ideas mattered from everybody, except many of us didn't get that. So many of us have forgotten that we deserved to have our great ideas listened to and heard, no matter what our role, no matter how long we had been there. But so many of us were used to them being shut down. And I'm so glad that we are in an era where our younger generation is reminding us that everybody's voice matters. So I think that it's a rally cry to remind us that everybody's opinion is needed in order to innovate and manage the kind of complexity that we're all working in right now.

Roz

And really think in a way it is generational. I know when I was growing up when I had my first, second, third job, I didn't really get the feedback to develop. I wasn't really developed.

Roz

As long as I was doing you know a good job, that was what I was hearing. But I feel there's a shift right now and I believe the recognition; it just inspires people. But they're blind spots. I still feel that leaders are not paying attention to. What do you see as blind spots for leaders today?

Sarah McVanel

Well, you know, if we pick up on the thread that what we didn't get when we needed it earlier on in our career, that can be a blind spot because we forget how much that was necessary. So one of the ways in which we can be aware of our biases and our perceptions at work is to put ourselves in the shoes of what we needed five years ago, 10 years ago, go back to the very beginning of your career And then reverse engineer, imagine if you had received what you needed. And therefore, it's no longer an invisible need that everyone has. And to say, what would be different? Maybe I would have asked for a mentor earlier. Maybe I would have been able to perform without limits. Maybe I would have not put up with that disrespectful behavior that we experience. So part of, I think, the managing blind spots is looking at what you needed and how you could be that difference for somebody else. You know, be the mentor, hold, pull somebody up with you, and that will reveal what you've always needed. You know, I think the other blind spot is that we get really short-term thinking. Humans are naturally wired that way. We're going to deal with whatever's right in front of us, whatever's urgent, whatever's most pressing. And if anybody disputes

this, let me ask you, what was the dominant conversation at your executive team? Was it about hybrid workplace? Was it about how you manage the pandemic? Is it about AI? Depending on what says seems to be right in front of us, is going to be the thing that dictates the conversation. And the problem is, and this is where Roz, I'm so glad we're having this conversation, is the one most important thing that we can never forget is that every single person in the organization, no matter how long they've worked there, no matter their role, no matter their tenure, is they need to know their work matters. And that it matters to somebody else. So if we keep recognition always front and center, and it never is a blind spot, so to speak. It's not like something that we forget or that we have to manufacture on employee appreciation day. And it's something that everyone needs. That means that it's the fuel that you talked about earlier. That's what fuels performance is knowing that our work matters and that we we're motivated to do more of it.

Roz

Yeah, I really love that. I think that adding to, you know, people knowing that their work matters is that they're, they also know they're essential to the business and that they have the autonomy to do it. But I want to go back to a certain kind of individual that I see as a leader where they themselves don't really need the recognition. They are self-motivated and if they don't feel they themselves are doing a good enough job um and I tell them how wonderful they are they're not going to believe it so those are the type that are most difficult or they have the most difficulty in giving recognition because they themselves can't accept it. How would you help someone see through their blind spot if that's where they come from?

Sarah McVanel

I love, so you said two really interesting things. Don't need it and that they're not getting it. There's a few people who genuinely don't need words of acknowledgement or extra time with somebody that they that they might be rewarded. Their form of recognition might be something external, such as a bonus check or a trip or being put on a big contract. In fact, there's whole industries where that tends to be the case, right? Such as if you're a lawyer, if you're an investment banker, those are that's you can people tend to be drawn to those professions where it's these external markers of success. What I would invite people to think about is, are you the type of leader who doesn't need or you don't get it? Because, you know, part of the thing is sometimes we think we don't need it, but actually it's a miss. It's something we don't have. It's we've stopped expecting it. We've stopped asking for it because we're always disappointed. So maybe the thing to consider is, What would be different? Here's a way to test that, Roz. If let's say that your boss or your colleagues or your VC capital funders gave you more acknowledgement about what is working and why, would you do more of it? Would you feel more fulfilled? Would you feel even more confident? Would you take bolder moves? And if the answer is yes, probably you've needed it. You've just gotten used to not having it. If the answer is no, let's say there's some people thinking about this and they say, no, actually that wouldn't matter to me. Okay. So what are the signs that it does matter to somebody else?

Roz

I think that's key. Actually, that's really where I'm coming from because there are some, um I don't want to be specific, but there's some occupations where they're self-motivated. They know if they've done a good enough job, they don't really need the recognition. So the challenge you may not need it, but your people will. How does one measure if their direct reports are feeling fulfilled and valued? One these questions.

Sarah McVanel

What we know is that most people, yeah, what more what we know is most people aren't. um Only 30% of people are truly engaged at work. And satisfaction results um also show that same thing. So I think we can safely say we don't have too much of this. I would say to leaders to lean on the assumption that everyone that reports to you needs the acknowledgement. I actually think that we have a deficit more so than giving too much and it being misplaced. The research shows that there are more people who feel lonely And burnt out and disconnected and not feeling that their culture is aligned to their values and that it's not even aligned to its own values. Recognition is a way to, if anything, use it as a way of connecting people back to the values of the organization. So rather than try to convince people if they're listening and they're thinking, you know, it just doesn't matter to me. It's going to feel like it's going to be fake and forced and performative. And it's just not who I am. People are going to see through it. I get it. Nobody wants to force you to be something that you're not. What could you acknowledge in people about how they're aligning to the values, the targets, the performance, If you say you value respect as an organization, it is respectful to say you matter to me and ah this this work made a difference. Align it to corporate values. I think that we can all agree is essential.

Roz

Right. Yeah, I've seen leaders where they actually use recognition. It's almost that they're ticking off the box. Okay, let's tell someone good job or whatever, but they don't really go into the specifics of it. And you know, it's funny, as you're talking, I'm thinking that this applies to our homes. you know, recognizing our partners, our spouses, our children.

Roz

and it almost makes me think that it's not only recognition, but I think what you say and stand for, it's appreciation. Does that resonate with you?

Sarah McVanel

Yes. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And when I have the privilege of speaking for, it doesn't matter what the group is. It could be frontline nurses. It could be like last week were speaking with the chief administrative officers of cities. Every group, with few exceptions, I end with a story about how recognition saved our family. um One of my kids had a very serious mental health um crisis as a result of terrible, tragic bullying. And the only thing, Roz, that we could do, we couldn't stop the bullying immediately. It had been happening. It had been building. And he was at an age where he didn't want to tell us about it. He didn't want mom and dad, you know, taking, charging into the school. But what we could do is build real ah um connective tissue through acts of acknowledgement and appreciation all throughout the time that we were together. That was enough of a an emotional compassion insulator to get us through the biggest crisis of our family. And what I learned about that experience, my friend, is that What I had been teaching as a work psychologist, essentially, all along was what my family needed most. And the more I did it at home, the more I realized why it was so healing at work. So leaders, as you're listening to this this beautiful podcast that Roz puts together for you, I mean, this is a form of appreciation of your clients and your listeners, Roz, that you're taking the time to do this for people. I would say whatever you do at work that works, bring it home. Whatever you do at home that works, bring it to work because people are everywhere. People are people.

Roz

Right. I think it this resonates so much with me. I want to move on a little bit because, you know, we often hear leaders say that they're their people are the greatest asset and yet many still treat recognition like

it's an afterthought. In your experience, how is strategic recognition showing up as measurable gains? You know, what's the ROI? What's the business case for making gratitude a leadership muscle, not just soft skill?

Sarah McVanel

Yeah, absolutely. And it is, we talked about the low disengagement. We Our team and takes this so seriously. We have a return on investment calculator, both for disengagement and turnover. So we will actually calculate with people how many millions it's costing them by having a culture that is devoid or lacking in recognition. So it is linked to productivity, to retention, to engagement, aka discretionary effort. It's linked to intention to stay, which means that you're going to less turnover, recruitment costs. It is linked to innovation, continuous improvement. This is our own data as well as what we see through statistics from Gallup, through McKinsey and Company, all of the work global leaders, the people who create dashboards every year, that that both executive teams as well as entire industries such as human resources, what they look to as the evidence for why we need to do things from a strategy standpoint when it comes to building and recognition-rich cultures, the data is there. When people say, but what is where is the data for why recognition matters? It's literally in every single white paper about work culture and retention engagement. We are not devoid of data and evidence that this is essential.

Roz

You know, I've seen a lot of well-meaning leaders assume that their team knows they're appreciated. But of course, they don't know how to say it. And silence can, you know, feel like indifference, especially when people are working so hard and going through so much change. I just delivered a ah training in Toronto and, you know, the theme in the afternoon was resilience in these changing times. So What's the gratitude gap? I want you to talk a little bit about it. Why do people who mean well still drop the ball when it comes to showing appreciation?

Sarah McVanel

So this is actually really yummy because I too have had a lot of clients talking about this and this year. And you I think you know one of my books is called *The Flip Side of Failing*. And as a recovering perfectionist, I have to say it was extremely inconvenient to have done so much research. And the number one theme out of all of the interviews with these high performers was that they show up and they fail with grace and with intention. I personally do not like a good failure. However, what I've learned through that experience is it's actually about unconditional recognition. So here's the thing. Here's how we build resiliency through recognition. We **unconditionally recognize**, for example, that we were willing to try, even though we weren't sure if it was going to work, that people put up their hand to join that agile team or that project, even if it didn't it didn't move forward, that we're willing to take on and mentor somebody or ask for a mentor. And we don't know how that's going to go. Any time where people have to step outside of their comfort zone, those are the things that deserve acknowledgement through the intention and the effort and not necessarily just the outcome. We know from the lean continuous improvement cycles and circles that that's a key tenet of a lean organization is one where we recognize and we measure and we ah we acknowledge and we study and we iterate based on progress. not just outcomes. It's too late. It's a lagging measure if we're only looking at outcomes. And so when we look at it from a recognition standpoint, oftentimes what we think about from a strategy standpoint is our rewards program, our years of service, our what we do on employee appreciation day. ah If you're a hospital, let's say it's hospital week, which those are important by all means. How do you recognize and acknowledge people when things aren't going well? If you're in a hospital, how do you go and acknowledge the, even though the wait times are high, but the volume is doubled, and it in but the wait times didn't double. So acknowledging that people

are doing the best they can in ridiculously hard circumstances. if you I had the privilege of speaking for a group in a really large oil and gas company. These are the folks who are working on some really amazing green innovations. Most of what they are coming up with will never make it to market because the level the threshold of environmental stewardship is so high for anything to go to market. It's hard for these high performers to fail, quote, fail every day. What they have to do is recognize each other's efforts every day and not just the outcomes. And that is a very different thing than what they've experienced in their career. So resiliency, I think, is about what happens along the way towards that that expected outcome or goal.

Roz

You know, to your point, which really resonates with me, I'm working with a group of engineers and they're so steadfast and they're so disciplined. and perfectionistic and to be admired. And it's difficult work, it's really challenging. And I was saying to one of the leaders, you know, what do you do to recognize your people? Whatever the traditional answer I recognize when they do great work, et cetera. And I said, but right now, you know they're in the building stages. Have you ever considered, and I call it Friday night so celebration, is getting your team together on a Friday and go over what worked that week. What do you feel really good about and what was really difficult that you lived through? So even though they may not have something to be recognized for, it's the effort they put in that kind of recognition. Anyhow, he started doing it. And it was so good that I'm talking to you today because he said, you know what? they seem more uplifted. And so we've now made this a tradition. And every Friday we get together, which you know, maybe for 15 minutes, but we all have a voice.

Sarah McVanel

Yes. Yes. And the power, what I love about that, and I'm so grateful that you were able to help group of folks who weren't used to doing that. It's very outside of the norm. in their sector, in their industry. I love how you have the kind of trusted relationship with your clients that they're willing to do something that is very different and very outside their comfort zone. And, and because that's really where it starts, right? It starts with having somebody who believes in this, who is a diehard. And then, you know, you try it and you are let yourself be surprised it works. You know, like for those who are listening and they think, but you know what I don't even think that would work here. What is the harm if you try ah Friday, you know, where you're looking at what worked? What's the worst that happens?

Roz

And were really, Sarah, it's just not just what worked well, but what didn't work well and what was the learning and looking at it as a gift, right?

Sarah McVanel

I agree with you. And one of my favorite quotes of all time is by Nelson Mandela. You never lose, you either win or learn. And what you just shared there is you invited people. What were the wins and what were the learnings?

Roz

That's great. Yeah, he has another one. You're playing small doesn't serve the world. The two together work really well. I have another question. I got so much to ask you. I want you forever. So you're on a mission to help people feel seen and celebrated. But the reality is in some workplaces, that sounds as likely as a unicorn sighting. How do you actually get through the skeptics? And I have a long list of skeptics

I've had the privilege of meeting, as I know you have. What do you when you enter a culture that they're not receptive to you? Like, who are you? You know, is this with leadership buy-in? What do you do?

Sarah McVanel

Yes. um Well, you can try it and see if it works. You could say, well, what's the worst that happens? it's It sounds like you're, and then you prevent back the data. Sounds like the reason why you need me here is because engagements in the floor and you can't retain people and you can't meet your targets and quality's declining. So really, it sounds like it couldn't get much worse. So why don't we try it? So that that that's one way is we just, and honestly, Roz, for so much of my career, before I went out and started working on my own, what I would do in corporations was I or then my team, once I was a leader, um would go in and work with those teams that were falling apart at the seams. And were they thrilled to see us coming? No way. No, they were really, they were just waiting it out They're like, we're going to, we're just going to be, they're going to cross our arms and just wait for them to leave. They couldn't help but come along for the journey with us because they felt good when they started to move the needle. If they didn't hate going to their own meetings, oh my, well, how do you argue with that? When people share great ideas, how do you argue with that? When people are not running a mile from your team or your organization and they start to say, you know what, actually, know somebody who would do really well here and they start becoming the recruiters for your team, for your organization, it's pretty hard to argue that you are proud to be a part of that. So that's one thing. It's just, you know, and just try it. I will say I thought I was going to dedicate my career of helping people find their way to recognition because they didn't believe in it. But actually, and you may have found this too with executive presence, it's not the people who are the resistors that find their way to my door. It's the people who get it, who want to get it even more, who want to be even more successful. And I'm happy. I'll work with them all day long because all the skeptics who are watching them and they have credibility with those skeptics, the skeptics will follow because they're not going to follow me. They're going to follow their colleague that they or they're somebody who's working in a in a partner company. They will take a look and say, wow, OK, I didn't think it was going to work. I thought I thought my friend, my colleague, who was just all a bunch of like unicorns, right? Unicorn sightings. I'll just wait. though I'll be here to talk with them about that's too bad. You waste all that time and money on it. And then they see the transformation, the impact that it has, and they say, okay, well, maybe we should try that.

Roz

What do you do? And I've heard this from a client where the CEO does not believe in emotional intelligence, does not believe and spoiling your people, push them hard, move them to the right direction. It's all about bottom line. How do you work with, if that's the leader and people still enjoy the company and their colleagues, what do you say to them? When it's not supported by the top?

Sarah McVanel

Well, one of the things that I say to myself, I don't say this out loud, is I wonder how long this person's going to be able to stay in that environment. If anyone's listening to this and they do not believe that this is working and the people who do, they may be looking for their exit strategy. I'm not saying that to scare anyone, but that literally is what people will tell me very quietly. And in certain industries or where people have this belief that I'm not going to thank people for doing their job. Well, the reality is, and we know this from psychology, is that what gets appreciated gets repeated. So if you want people to keep doing their job and doing it well, tell them exactly what they're doing that's working well. Not to try to this... be you know this this toxic positivity sort of person, not to try to be something you're not, you're literally acknowledging the performance that you expect of people. um But to, you know, come back to your

question specifically about when people in the organization just don't believe it, when the CEO just doesn't believe it, I say start small. If you're a team of five people, make your ecosystem the most delicious, scrumptious place that the five of you have ever been. And who cares if people don't think that it's as serious as theirs? That's fine. They don't have to work there. If they think you're all unicorns, no problem. Guess who's cooler than somebody who's grouchy? A unicorn. So just let yourself be a unicorn because unicorns are cool.

Roz

You know, when I hear people and companies say, well, you know, I'm here for a year. then I'm going to a be moving on. It tells me that there's something drastically missing from their culture. If they're not committed in their work, they say they will say this is a stepping stone. And yet when I work in cultures and I'll actually mention Johnson & Johnson because their culture is so strong and their credo and it's all about people. You can see where you'll have people working there for years and years. I was just working with someone and she's celebrating her thirtieth year working at the company. Now it depends, you know, certain industries, it's natural to have them transition over several years, but I feel you're what you stand for in the whole idea of recognition, it does impact on retention and attracting the right talent. Let me move on to another. There's, um, This is an interesting question to ask you, because I know that you've gone through a lot of experiences. Is there like a weird or funny or unexpected reaction you've ever gotten when you help the company start recognizing their people better? And I have one for you.

Roz

Well, it's more of an individual. However, he never recognized his people and he was very, and very perfectionistic, very methodical, very analytical. And I was sharing with him that people, he did not need recognition, which is wonderful. I wish I fall into that category. I love when people give me compliments. I'll take anything. But anyhow, um I said, to you know, you've got to show that you care about people And it's a small things that make a difference. It's the everyday recognition. It's not like you don't send, give flowers on Valentine's day. And I said, this relates to your wife as well. You know, do you give her recognition? Do you, do you tell her you appreciate her? So one of the things that we're going to do as part of the coaching is you're going to take this new mindset of recognizing. You're also going to bring it home. So anyhow, about month goes by, and he calls me. he says, you need to talk to my wife. I said, why? He says, well, I've been recognizing how she takes care of our children. I've been appreciating her food, you know her meals, and she thinks I'm on drugs. Could you please tell her? that and I'm just following your advice. I thought that was hilarious.

Sarah McVanel

Well, he certainly got noticed by his spouse.

Roz

Oh, my goodness. Yes. Major, major change. Shift, growth mindset. What else do you want? But anyhow, that's an individual story.

Sarah McVanel

I'm so curious. did he start bringing that to work in a big way?

Roz

He did. And, you know, and it wasn't that he didn't want to be that way. He just felt awkward. And he said, truthfully, he was brought up in a family that they didn't tell each other how they felt about each other. They never said, I love you. And yeah I don't know if you go to ah an employee say, I just love you. But I say that to my employees. I can't live without you. So tell me your story.

Sarah McVanel

Well, Frog actually came out of doing some work with a labor and delivery unit. So this is a group of very high achieving professionals, mostly nurses, but also, of course, it's a multidisciplinary team. And they were a center of excellence, but nobody wanted to work there anymore. It seemed like there was bullying, incivility, there was gossiping. Um, it, it, safety and quality were declining and they were at risk of losing their status. And so they brought my colleague actually in through our, our team and, They, you know, our team and she specifically worked for years, like two years with this group of talented folks. But the very first day she said, let's bring the team together and let's go around the room and you share with me, since I'm you're new to me, um your name and what one aspect of your greatness. Yeah. Nobody would say a thing. And she just initially assumed that that was because nobody wanted to speak up. So she pointed to the matriarch of the room and she said, well, why don't you go first? Because you've mentored everybody in this room. So why not kick us off? And she said, I have nothing to say. I have no greatness. The person that had been through more crises, more turbulence, more so brought more nurses to a level of such competence that they were nationally recognized, didn't feel she had a single thing to say about herself that was good. And at first, everyone looked at her with great surprise, and then and then they all started to nod their head. So the aha there was they didn't even see their own greatness anymore. No wonder they couldn't see it in each other. No wonder gossiping and incivility and bullying was so rampant because they probably were incivility central in their own minds, in their own heads, in their own hearts. And so recognition actually became the most important first skill. So your to your point around people thinks it's soft skill, we made this concrete. How huddle meetings happen, how the handoff meeting between shifts, the communication board, the summary of the of all of the events and all of the um projects that were happening, they always had to be celebrating wins. We always had to be capturing the small successes, the surprises, the things that weren't going well and why they weren't worse. It's actually the solution-focused approach is what this is. And what ended up happening at the end of this two-year journey where they turned their performance round. They were the center of excellence again. They were the place everybody was wanting to come and work in their area and their unit again. This was this was the place that that was the spotlight of all of the nursing departments that it once was. And so before my colleague, Brenda, who I wrote my books, my first couple of books with, um she said, okay, so since healthcare loves acronyms, what's an acronym we could use to, you know, remember this work? And that's where FROG came from. Somebody said, well, what about FROG? Forever recognize others greatness. And they turned their unit into a frog bog, but much cleaner, of course. They had frog motivational posters. When somebody would celebrate something, they bring in a frog cake or frog cake pops. It became the language of all meetings of every shift. and because it was so, people would come to their units, such as the pharmacist or the pharmacy techs to deliver medication. They'd see all this frog stuff everywhere and they'd say, what's with all the frogs? And they'd say, well, frog stands for forever recognize others greatness. And the greatness I want to recognize in you is. And so they started frogging the people in the other departments and other units. And they would frog the, you know, way to go, dad, you haven't fainted in five minutes. You know, so they'd frog the frog. the labor support people who were there with moms. And it became, it started to, transform it transformed not only themselves, it transformed their team. And then it started to transform the other departments. So that was, that's probably the most special yeah experience that I've ever had, because that's what it convinced us of all

the things that we know how to do as organizational development practitioners. Yeah. That was ah hardest team. And every time we used it since, I've worked with over 100 teams in my lifetime, and now I speak for thousands and thousands every year. I've yet, yet to experience a single team, no matter how small, no matter how large, that does not benefit from recognition.

Roz

Amazing. It's amazing. Yeah, fascinating story. Thank you for sharing.

Sarah McVanel

You're welcome.

Roz

You know we know, not all appreciation lands the same way, however. What's a recognition fail that you've seen that's totally backfired? And how do you coach leaders to recover from that kind of misstep? Not with intention, of course, when it happens, but...

Sarah McVanel

Yeah. Well, my own fail. Shall I share with you my big fail? When I was a senior leader in my last corporate role, we were having to do massive budget cuts. And one of the things I was responsible for was employee, the years of service. And my team, we came up with challenge. big cost cutting strategy in our department. And somebody had said, Oh, I have a great, I have found a, this was, this was not the core team that I was just referring to. This was an individual who normally ran. She was the event professional for this, this event. She said, I found a great solution. I'm going, if I just need your permission to use this alternate solution. Fantastic. Thank you for coordinating. Great event. I didn't ask too many questions. I just said, fortunately, we have a great solution. It's going to be half of the money, but it's going to be the same impact. What we ended up doing was switching from ah giving people gift certificate to the local jeweler to them being able to select something from a catalog. People felt so insulted. It wasn't supporting local, for one thing. People could not find the thing that they wanted in this catalog. And nothing says, thanks so much for being here 30 years and working around the clock 24-7, including many Christmases, as finding your own gift in a catalog. mean, how many of us say, sure, if you give me a gift certificate, I feel like that is such huge heart. Thank you. So that was, we got so much negative feedback, as we should. I learned I need to ask better questions. I made the assumption that the philosophy of recognition that all of us had in the team was the same level of philosophy that all of us had in the team. And no, ah to that person, being able to pick something out was exactly what she would want to do. But that was, we didn't test it. We didn't go and we asked, we didn't ask people. And I've heard examples of this was from other people where they've made assumptions, especially for corporate recognition. But I'll tell you what doesn't get them, get the doesn't, isn't experienced as a fail when there's hard to it. when um a an indigenous organization um up in northern Alberta had um drums made by local elders and then asked one of the members of the communications team who went to school for art to hand paint each of the drums with her version of what the seven sacred teachings looks like. And then when they had people nominate, who do you feel deserves the seven sacred teaching of honesty and trust and love? And they identified who those people were and they presented the drum of this hand painted depiction made by an local elder and made by and somebody in their organization. So special. Nobody asked permission to do that award differently, but it was so meaningful and so well thought through and so aligned with the company's values and the spirit of the awards that nobody will ever forget it.

Roz

That's so heartwarming. It really is. It reminds me years ago, a little bit different. But the CEO of Texaco, was working with him in Canada when I was living there. And he had this high, was really a high, I don't know, he had about... a hundred cards on his desk every day with his name on it. And I said, you know, why do you have, I I'm going to start again, because obviously you can't see the picture of me. I Years ago, when I was living in Canada, I worked for the CEO, I was consulting with the CEO of Texaco. On his desk, I noticed a huge bundle of cards with his initials on it. And I said, well, what are those for? He says, well, when I run across someone in the hall or someone sends something, I just want to let them know that I appreciate them. And I just send them a little card. And it seems that they really love these cards because they put them all over if the offices. And it's a little thing, but I want to encourage my people to do the same. It's not about the big recognition. It's the little things that people do every day. That over time expand into really big, important work. It was amazing how people, when they received his card, the whole sch joy came out and they felt valued. Everything that you talk about is really important.

Sarah McVanel

88% of people actually say one of their preferred forms of recognition is a handwritten thank you. So he was following what most people want, you know, and.

Roz

But we don't do that. Like I really, when was the last time I tried to think about it, people send thank yous through email. Like seriously, I mean, at least go Jackie. Lawson. I don't know. I've got to check it out. But you know, you can get something that's got music to it or it could be very creative. At least that you thought about it. An email as a thank you. If you can avoid, I mean, if you have no choice, sometimes you don't have a choice, but I think that would add something.

Sarah McVanel

Absolutely. And your email will ah be catch the timeliness. And then maybe there can be a note to the whole team, the whole project, um to that individual. If you've sent a number of emails, also share send the card. I actually have my mother who is an artist make frog cards. And so when I have a very special client, such as the event professional who, um, I had the privilege of working with last week, I took one of those cards and I hand wrote her a note and then gave it to her because I wanted her to have a token, a memento, not to remember me, but to remember her greatness that when she looks at that, she remembers, she was so exceptional that somebody took the time to not only write a note, but that the note was something that was unique and special to her. And when I ask audiences, my friend, ah has anyone here ah you know does Has anyone here kept a note? every Everyone puts up their hand and I'll say, what do you do with them? People will say, I put them on the fridge. I show my family. I put them on my desk. I have a file folder. Ah I would say there's about one in every audience, maybe a couple if it's a really, really large audience who says, oh, but I don't keep them. I recycle them. Okay, well, so if you write thank you cards and all but one out of 100 people keep them, I'd say that's a really good return on your time, return on your effort. How many other things does a leader do where you have 99% uptake and have feel good and you are more likely to do something for that person? That's I was I was in a yoga class um on the weekend and I was asking somebody who had just switched jobs, how is he liking his new job? He said, my boss is so extraordinary. Every week since I started, she checks in to make sure how I'm doing. If I'm, you know, if I have everything I need, she's always quick to acknowledge. And he said, you know and I said, so it sounds like you're working for the best boss ever. He said, let's put it this way. She comes to me and she says, I have a favor. And he says, the answer is yes. Now, what's your question? Isn't that how we want our people to be with us? All we need to is be so aware of their greatness that they say,

know I'm already going to be successful. No matter what this person asks, they're going to appreciate it and I'm going to be a star. So why don't I go ahead and be a star for them? It's not manipulation. It's meaningful connection.

Roz

It is. I'd like your thought on something. I am doing some work now with dialysis clinics, and these are people that they're so committed. They come in at four in the morning. They're helping people to stay alive, basically. And they're putting out so much energy, and it's not as if they're getting recognition always from patients because patients are going through enough of their own stress. I was sitting in the kitchen there these little areas for kitchens and they all come and go. And I said, you know, why do you do what you do? You work so hard. You give unconditionally. and it was wonderful to hear how they felt recognized through each other that worked together. and so how do you, is it something that you ask people, what does recognition look like to you? Is that an idea? Because I could make the assumption, ah that the recognition that I want to give them is what feels good for them. How do you identify what's the right level and what's the right type of recognition?

Sarah McVanel

What I love so much about your question is you're saying, to what extent is it okay just to follow the golden rule, treat others the way you want to be treated? And to what extent do we actually need to aspire to the platinum rule, treat others the way they want to be treated? But the strategy And I love that you asked that question because now I actually have a resource. We have a tool on our website called the Recognition Checklist. And it's actually started as one page and now it's two. The whole first page are things like on a scale of one to five, to what extent do you like? words of acknowledgement, a simple thank you, a card, a gift card, ah all kinds of ways that there could be acknowledgement. And then on the back, it has continuums. To what extent do you want it to be individual to team oriented? I'm willing to bet that that dialysis team, probably because no one person can function without the rest of the team. So I'm willing to bet what they would fill out is they would be on the far end of the continuum on the team oriented. We ask questions such as expected to surprised. Maybe they prefer to be more expected and therefore they like it when it's included at huddle meetings in the morning. Or maybe they want it to be surprised. They want their manager to come by when they least expect it, not on Nurses Week but and not on Dialysis Appreciation Day, but on a random you know, June the 2nd. So, you know, they, June the 2nd, every, all of a sudden it is, turns out it's National Donut Day in Hong Kong. And even though here we are in Patika, Iowa, we're going to take their tradition. Here's some donuts. like it just Or it's National Donut Day. I don't know. The point is, it can if you want surprise because you've asked people how they want to be appreciated and you give them it in that way, then it's not about the donuts. It's about you paid attention. So you're speaking their language of appreciation.

Roz

And I feel too, when you're coaching someone, you might, at the beginning of the relationship, ask them, what's the best way to recognize and honor you? I feel that's really important. We're coming to the end, and I'm so sad. I have one last question. If you could wave a magic wand and get every workplace doing one thing differently tomorrow, what would it be? And why would it change everything? Because you make your magic happen every day. us advice.

Sarah McVanel

I love that you're asking this question. We're actually just about to embark on the global thankful capital F U L movement. And it is actually getting at this exact question. We are going to be asking people from

around the world. What is the most important compliment you've ever received? Or what's the most important compliment that matters to you? So we are going to be in August. We'll be in Netherlands and Belgium and Germany And in the and early 2026, I'm going to be going to Sweden and Finland. And every time we I when I'm in North America, I'm asking people this question. Because if we speak in the language of compliments, it goes back to what you were just asking in terms of how do people want to be acknowledged? The compliment that most values that they have most valued um has most value being received by them in their career it taps into their values, their intrinsic motivation. The more we acknowledge that, the more the compliment, the more the recognition lands. And that's what can be very different person to person. So if I could wave and wave a magic wand, I would say compliment and also receive compliments. They are a gift. They do not have ah gift certificate or a return receipt. You know accept the compliment and give the acknowledgement back. So if somebody has said to you, you know, I really value having you on my team. I can always depend on you. And you could say, well, I value that you're really creative because I'm good at the organization, but I'm not the creative person. So thank you for bringing that to the table. Let's not be hung up on, will I not seem creative? you know, what am I going to seem egotistical or, or is this going to seem like it's artificial? No, just share the compliments back and forth because the happiest countries in the world and the most productive and resourceful teams and organizations in the world speak and trade on ah on a currency of compliments. So compliment my friends and receive them as the gift that they are.

Roz

I love that. Thank you. I could add a little bit of humor. My girlfriend has this saying when she used to get complimented at work, she says enough of the praises, what about the raises? But that's not where we're going. um but That was so heartfelt.

Roz

That was amazing. I don't know what I can't even like summarize. I wrote little notes, but maybe I'll just go through a couple of them. But they pale by comparison to your wisdom and listening, I think, several times to this podcast. Everyone should listen to it.vAnd I just don't think in the business world. I think in the personal world, because we take people for granted who we live with. I had to add that little comment here. So celebrate the progress, not only the successes, recognize great ideas, small ideas, make your people, your recruiters. I love that. I loved everything you said. Who gets appreciated? Could you end that? You said who gets appreciated gets...

Sarah McVanel

Yeah. What gets appreciated gets repeated.

Roz

I love that. I need to say it again because you're worried.

Sarah McVanel

Yeah. That's learning psychology, friends. That's not just a Sarahism. That is an entire science of learning psychology. Yes.

Roz

I love it. I love it.

Roz

Recognition is the most important skill. It's not soft. It's concrete skill set. Make time for recognizing small successes. ah Recognize how others like to be recognized. Link it to their personal values.

Roz

Don't wait for the recognition. It's like waiting for Valentine's Day. It's like To show someone you love them. That makes me laugh. receive Although I do like roses.

Roz

But let's put it this way. I would rather have the scent of a rose. Every day. Than just wait for that one day year. Receive compliments with grace. And give it back with acknowledgement. And then I just added this. if which you I believe you said this at some point. If your praise could apply to anyone. It meets it means something to no one. Be specific to the real impact.