

## Transcription - Brandon Wilson Part 1

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and today we are joined by Brandon Wilson and Brandon is going to talk to us, among other things, about leadership sabotage, which I think we have all in some fashion experienced during our careers. So welcome Brandon, thank you for joining us. He's currently based in the US and I will say for our listeners benefit, is recovering from Covid. So we're very happy to have him here with us today. Absolutely, I would not let Covid sabotage. Very good.

The first question we asked you, which I'm interested in terms of the change in the workplace over the last two years, is do you see that leadership sabotage is more prevalent, particularly in the last two years than you might have seen prior to the change in the working environment that we've had.

You know, that's a tough question. And it's one I want to give a more nuanced answer to than your listeners might expect in terms of talking about whether or not it's more or less and if the shift to a virtual work environment is adequate call for that difference.

I think it's a tough analysis to make. What's a more easy analysis to make is that there has been a change in our performance culture that is perhaps giving more reward to people who achieve success by bare knuckle brawls. You know, I remember a time early in my career more than 20 years ago where slow and steady won the race. But now it's quick and dirty to get to the next place. And I think it's that kind of attitude that's becoming more and more pervasive, that's leading to some bad habits, that's starting to dominate the conversation with regard to how we define high achievement and to be a high achiever.

Now you have to be ambitious. It's a word that we hadn't heard quite as often quite as much as we do now tied to high achievement is ambitious. Ambition is a character flaw, ambition is an insatiable drive to get to the next thing. And then once you get there you get goal drunk and you go look for the next thing and then you go and look for the next thing. The more you feed it, the more insatiable it becomes, the more thirsty it becomes. Which leads a lot of high achievers if they prescribed too high achievement as ambitious to start working with blind ambition or doing things, making decisions, taking actions without a lot of regard for people around them. And it's just one example of how the way we talk about leadership has shifted and is making it more and more commonplace and there are, say more and more acceptable to have bad leadership behavior in the workplace.

So do you see a trend to what we would call ruthless, decision making? Ruthless. It's a great word for it and I think it's about results, the results matter but I long to see a day and I hope that my book *Sabotage*, leadership that overcomes betrayal, theft and deceit, makes it more fashionable to talk about people, not just results but about people. You know think about when we talk about who we are, there are two ways to talk about ourselves.

So the first way is to talk about ourselves in terms of what we do that is becoming more fashionable. You know, I am a chief executive, I am a board member, I am an advisor, I am a professional mentor, I am a senior vice president. I dare say you're none of those things, you know. You are Barbara, you are Jane, who is that? Who is that person, right? And I think we need to get back to that world in order to bring more focus and clarity on how we help people become better leaders who then drive purer results more consistently. And we're jumping over a lot of the human aspects of leadership, the human aspects of execution and right to the results and if we do that we miss the opportunity, consistently miss the opportunity to attribute where those results came from.

And so if we only talk about success in terms of the result and being ruthless about that 1% gain, that 13% return in the S&P, that modest growth and what you save in your budget over the last quarter, then what we do is, every achievement shrinks us. I want you to think about it that it shrinks us. It makes us smaller and more insular and by focusing on people and the ceiling for capacity and for ability and for development of the people who will be actually executing those things are making them your focus. You actually become broader because with every success every win you're finding more unlocked potential. You're finding more capacity. You're finding more personality and characteristics to fit within your organization.

And so the reason we don't want to get to that place is because when we talk about people, when we focus on people, we have to talk about the elephant in the room and that is difference.

We have disagreements with each other and that is one of the most challenging. Addressing those disagreements is perhaps one of the most challenging, most longing to avoid things about leading. It's that the people who are leading will disagree and it's easier just to talk about that percentage and to talk about that growth and to talk about that, you know, that next goal as it is to talk about how to get people to play well with each other. And I would dare say in my last statement here is that the alchemy of leadership is being able to achieve mastering and unlocking the power of collective impact, getting people to work

collectively to do that which is bolder, more audacious and more enterprising than that which we can do on our own.

It's very interesting because in my early days of my career, so we're talking 40 plus years ago in a training and development sense, we introduced the idea of synergy to teams and so synergy was going to be, that the total was going to be more than the sum of the parts and that was very, very prevalent in training, working teams for probably 10 years. And I haven't heard it talked about since that time.

I've read a great piece, some quotes by Peter Drucker a revolutionary professional coach. And he tells this great story about synergy and how it died on the bayou, on the battlefield and when it died it was replaced with what he refers to as the most natural law of them all. And that is self preservation. And I just thought it was an incredible stroke of wisdom and clarity.

The question that drives self preservation is does this advance my position. So every time I have a chance to do something to make a decision to interact with someone to build a broader network, the question that that determines whether I do it or not in that natural law is does this advance my position?

I mean think about that. I mean that is such a very small place to begin the conversation and think about how far that person is from leadership, which is collective impact because you're even so small within yourself that you're asking, you're thinking about a position for yourself, not even your environment, just where I am today. And that is such a small way to start the conversation. It's very insular and I think very prevalent because we are not encouraged to think beyond the me generation. You know, look after me first and everything else will fall into place and you don't live in isolation. You don't exist in isolation.

So you always have to interact with people unless you're a hermit or a hobo it's going to be a time where you have to interact with someone. And if you expect to move in organizations then you need to network. You need to understand what's happening in the organization.

And I think it's been lost. I really do think it's been lost. Always talk about we and us. That's right. The leaders that aren't so good are the self preserved ones. It's about me, my image, my performance and what can I get out of it myself and anybody that gets in my way is the disruptor. That's right. That's right. Which gives way to these activities that we talked about in terms of leadership sabotage.

Well, let me back up and say what we know about but that nobody wants. And the reason we don't want to talk about is because we believe that talking about being sabotaged does not advance our position. So in fact it makes it worse because it looks like I was weak enough to let this happen to me. Absolutely. But who wins when we do that, when we suffocate the dialogue about this omni present force that seeks to limit us and rob the world of our leadership gifts? Who wins? The saboteurs win every single time because we lack the scientific data needed, the evidence needed to look to patterns of behavior that will show us when those limiting forces have made it close to our personal or professional networks because we don't talk about it.

And what I learned in my study of leadership sabotage is not only how pervasive it is, but also how unwilling leaders are, high achieving leaders are, to talk about their inevitable bouts with it. And the reason I say inevitable because if you are an achiever, you've dealt with sabotage. And when you go and speak to give the commencement address at your alma mater at Harvard or give a lecture at Yale, you're gonna talk about all of the great things you achieved, the goals you set and you did, the expectations you made and surpassed.

Let me just put it another way, how boring is a movie where the main character has one note, has no color? There's no there's no antagonist. There's nobody there.

And so I think talking about that time when you were betrayed by a partner who you trusted and how you achieved despite those things. How not only precious that story is and relevant it is, but also how helpful it is. And helping us to navigate corporate career mazes that are made of so much more than just bricks, mortars, desks and computers, but populated with people with their own self interest, populated with people with their own ambitions, their own character flaws, their own home life situations that may cloud the judgment they bring to work, that's clouded by the pressures from the board, that may be put upon that ceo that leads her to act erratically or irrationally when asking you for expectations. Imagine being able to have the skills, the armor, and the artillery, the equipment needed to navigate that world.

You become so much more of a samurai in the art of war when we prepare each other to navigate that landmine and be successful as opposed to just jumping from desk to desk and from office to office because that's not the reality that we live in. And so I wrote the book to provide people with that equipment needed to understand the lenses and the intentions of people who surround us all along our career runway.

This seems like a good place to take a pause in our discussion with Brandon Wilson. Join us for part two, for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is Inside Exec..