

Transcription: Case Study - Feeling Overwhelmed

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're going to talk about feeling out of your depth. We'll look at a case study where you have put your hand up, volunteered for a position of responsibility, perhaps on a board or a community committee or some area where you're not being paid for your involvement. So it's a voluntary contribution, not necessarily in the community, it might be in the workplace, it might be a joint committee with another organisation or a consultative committee or some other sort of joint activity where you are the representative for this activity and you went in with some idea that this was going to be an area where you could contribute, where you had some skills and knowledge, some information that would help the process along.

But as time passes in the initial phases, say you're meeting once a month, then as time passes in the initial phases, you increasingly feel like you are out of your depth, that you're a lightweight in terms of the rest of the committee, that you really don't know what it is you can contribute and you dread the meeting days because it's going to be another opportunity for you to be inadequate in some sense.

That's not good when you feel like that. However, if it does happen of course, the first thing you've got to do is go back to basics. The first one is, why did I put my hand up and how did I not know at the time and what I was thinking of? Because that would give you the positive thing that you're just missing right now. Secondly, you've got to trust that you were selected. If you're feeling you're not as good as the rest of the board members and all of that, remember they picked you for this particular role, volunteer role, because they thought you are the right person and try to reflect on that, on the why. The other thing is, if we know everything about everything all the time, that's not realistic. So there'll be things, if you're being realistic and not just feeling overwhelmed at the moment, you will find that actually there's some things that you're very, very happy with and there's some things that you know you're very strong at and you bring in to the table already. You've got a lot of other skills that you have proved yourself over time, in whatever you've done in roles other than this one.

So back to the, why did you feel inadequate? Because sometimes it's that negative self talk. You put your the idea in your head that they're better and you feel it, it becomes self-fulfilling. So go back to facts, go back to logic, go back to answers. There's something that you will be given as a responsibility that you don't know anything about. So what? There's going to be some of them for sure. Research it. Talk to people that know. We talked, in other podcasts, about how good research engines are these days and about experiences here and overseas. If it is something about the topic that somebody else has done somewhere else, talk about success trends, where in an organization have they done this? In another industry? They put in a new process or in new machinery or new system?

Yes, it might be in manufacturing, but you can absolutely use it in human resources or whatever it is.

So, in that sense, do that objectively, get into why I'm feeling the way I feel and accept I don't think I know what I'm talking about on that. That's part of your growth and contribution, but also don't sell yourself short. Just remember, you're there because they knew you could contribute and that's still valid. And they picked you because you can contribute and they

need you. And I think that in the short term, it's probably handy for you to have something that is the top of your folder, or whatever you take to these meetings, that has the reminder for you about the fact that you put your hand up for this board because you thought you were going to be able to contribute and list what it is that you thought you were going to be able to contribute, so that you remind yourself before you go into every meeting or before you read the board papers, whatever it is, that the reasons that you're there, that because you thought you were going to contribute these things.

And if that's not happening, maybe it's because you're not offering that service, that idea, that thought, and take control. Don't be going into this situation, you know, I'm just here for the numbers, so I should sit here and listen, because that's not what it's about. And it's not what a team is about. You know, you're the new team member. If someone asked you to be part of a team, that's not why you're there. You know, you're there for a reason, otherwise you just waste time.

You know, that's the other thing, is a reality check is probably a good idea. I'm going to be out of my depth about this technical issue. I'm adding to my depth about this particular thing. And that's where you go and find out. So how do I find out and become familiar? But don't talk yourself into being out of depth about the whole job because it's not real.

Just the phrase itself out of my depth, you know, refers back to a swimming pool or swimming area. And so you're out of the depth where you can put your feet on the ground. But if you're out of your depth, it doesn't mean that you're drowning. Yeah, it does mean that you can't put your feet on the ground, but you can still do things. You can still swim away, you can still tread water, you can still float. All of those things. So it's not a disaster situation.

You will know from previous podcast that I'm very fond of speaker calls Simon Sinek. And he says that the great leaders are people who are comfortable saying, I don't know, I don't understand, I will find out. And all of those things, things that are important for you to remember, is that there are things you can say, no one's going to think less of you. You don't have to know everything. You shouldn't know everything yet because if you come into a situation, a committee or a board, thinking you know all the answers then you're not going to listen to what's happening in the meeting at the time. You need to be able to react with what you know, go with your gut, go with your feelings, listen to what's been talked about, contribute without second guessing, contribute without analyzing, otherwise you're just getting to paralysis by analysis and you are not contributing. You are not there for the reason that you should be there.

You want to go to find out information, it could be by talking to someone, it could be by looking it up, it could be anything. Just say what you just said, I don't know, I will find out. When you find out, you come back with it and then not just find out the research and for the circumstance, I think we should consider A,B,C and D. Once you do your research, you already know you can come up with some suggested solutions or answers for the situation that you researched and that's when you have a discussion about it and you agree on what you're going to go with.

If it's a situation where you feel that you're being inundated with information at the last minute before the meeting, rather than rail against the fact that you've been inundated with

information that you're expected to digest with less than 24 hours, perhaps you take what I term the politicians approach and you don't address that issue of reading the information, but you address a different issue, which is the organisation of how the information gets distributed or how people know there's information or deadlines for getting reports in, all those sorts of things, so that it comes back to horses for courses.

Don't look at the immediate, look at the broader picture. Start to think about, have I got something that I could contribute to this organisation or this meeting that would make it more efficient for me? Start thinking about yourself, not about the board, think about what would make it easier for me in that sense, might ease you into feeling like you're contributing, like you've got something that they're looking for, because for the most part they will not put up their hand and say we need help to organise ourselves.

And that's the bottom line, all of the ones I've been involved with, that's what they've needed. Someone to organise the community itself, the board itself, to have a process for what happens before, between meetings, to have an agreed communication platform. For the most part these days that is not a email. But that's a whole other session because that'll just be on communication in these situations. But look at the process, don't look at the immediacy of the meeting, in what you have to be doing at the meeting, but look a bit broader and bring to bear some of the things that work for you in your own work environment. And start to contribute in that way from your experience, from your expertise and that will make you feel that you do have something to contribute, that it's not contribute at the level that you think you're lacking, because you think you're lacking in knowledge of a particular topic. But you do have other things to contribute and you are, as we've said all along, you are there for a reason.

When you give them an example, as you're walking into the meeting you've been asked to address, how it works and issues, you're absolutely right, this is a process issue. And if it's happening to you, it's happening to other members and sometimes it becomes the norm because nobody steps back saying this is not very efficient. So by saying, look, I'm not going to ask him to answer those because we just got them, but let's still put that how, which is the process, as you said, and agree on that process. What will happen then is that you'll be frustrated by it, expecting to answer them, I can't answer it, to putting a process in place that will help everyone, but particularly you, because you're coming in with fresh eyes as a new person. So it is good. People might not respond immediately to that, they appreciate it when they realise that it helps them, as well.

Can I put out a word of warning to all of you who are in large organisations or government organisations or areas that use acronyms? This is a bug bear of mine, has been for many many years. If that is you, you're used to it, you know what they mean. You use them all the time and you find that it's easier than writing out the whole word, or the phrase that it refers to. But just bear in mind that not everyone understands your acronyms. Your acronyms might mean something different to someone in another organisation. Now I had an experience in the last two weeks of someone using acronyms and the person read them and thought they meant something entirely different. And whilst it was amusing at the time because the acronym, what the person thought of the initial reaction was that it was the world of wrestling federation (WWF) when it was something entirely different to do with a wetland. It was amusing at the time, but it highlighted for me that there still is a whole lot of it happening, internal speak, but particularly about acronyms. I urge you to think about the people who are getting your communication and to think about whether they might understand the acronyms

or not. If there is any doubt, if there is any question in your mind, have a glossary of terms, have something that goes with every email, with every communication that outlines it. Now you know that I was a consultant to the National Parks and Wildlife Service here in New South Wales for 15 years on their advisory committee. And always the manager sent us a glossary at the end of his report that had all acronyms listed because in the first two meetings we had someone who was from another committee who took great delight in saying, "Oh this must mean...." And it would be something entirely inappropriate. But what it did was remind the manager that he really needed to tell us what he was talking about. And so he did the list once and if there were new ones he would add them to it, but it meant that we were always, between meetings was like the two months, so we were always able to refer back and know what he was talking about without having to try and work it out as we were going along reading to report.

I think we probably covered enough of that for you to be going on with. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.