Transcription - Taylor Proctor Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside
Exec. Today we are joined by one of our international guests and that's Taylor Proctor. Taylor is here to talk to us about being positive among other things. So welcome, Taylor.

Hi, thanks for having me.

First of all, we might let you tell us and our listening audience a little bit
about the journey that you've had so far.

Absolutely. So it's kind of a two-fer. I have my personal journey in discovering leadership and embracing vulnerability for myself as I led myself through
life. But then I also had this amazing opportunity to lead a team recently at work that I was just thrown into and to be able to embrace imperfection and vulnerability in that department as well.

So on the personal side, I was very much afraid of vulnerability and being seen as less than perfect and that made me a very angry and unhappy person. And I really struggled for a long time and it wasn't until, and of course I'm giving you guys the short version, but it wasn't until I realized that I really had to put in the work and I wasn't inherently just naturally going to be this bubbly happy upbeat person and I had to work on my mindset and really get vulnerable with myself
and take leadership of my life, that it wasn't until I was able to do that the things started to shift and change.

And I'm so grateful for that because in my corporate job and corporate world,
I had several years of practicing this on myself before I was given a situation that was really interesting and exciting. I got a job at a corporation that I was hired on to spearhead this new capability. So it was really exciting and I was going to be leading a small team and it's kind of the startup mentality, up to me to figure out what I would do with this capability and how I would set the culture and set the tone and have KPIs and make it measurable and meet client needs.
And so it was really, really excited for it. And I think we've all been there, right? We've all taken a job that has been like that challenging, that exciting, and kind of that full ownership and responsibility. Yeah. I stepped fully into it only for it to not happen. I took the, I had been at my previous place of employment for five years and I was like, this is my dream job, I'm totally going to take it. And so I stepped into the new role at the new company and nothing happened. They had hired me thinking that they would have two clients right away within like two weeks of hiring me and so they really quickly brought me on and those accounts that new business fell through. And I was there for about seven months, twiddling my thumbs, trying to provide that value.

Anyone who is in, ever been in a leadership position, like you don't really twiddle your thumbs, right? Yeah. So that's just impossible. And so I built out this whole entire department and new capability based on like strategy and assumption going like, please, like I have all the pieces in a row, like let's put them into action and then pivot and adjust as we need to. But

I feel like I have a solid foundation. And of course, I'm not in control of the new business piece, not on the business dev team. And so just to kind of went nowhere. So after seven months of helping here, helping there, trying to provide value in so many ways, they came to me and they said, hey,we have this new capability that we are really excited about. And the client is not very happy witha lot of the like team leads that we have presented them with. We know you can lead a team aside,

no, you're not really doing anything. And we know that you really wanted to get into this like getting a new capability. This is that area. It's an area of focus which I have a strength in, content and social media. And they said, so we want you to kick this off and lead this team for like just the next three months. And then we'll get it figured out and go from there. But they start on Monday and they came to me on a Thursday. Wow. They came to me on Thursday and said, oh, yeah, and the team will be in for their first round of training tomorrow on Friday. And then you'll all start on Monday.

So we walk into this room on Friday morning. And it's a team that I haven't hired. It's a new capability that I have been downloaded on the afternoon before
And I'm like, hey, we're going to do this. So we have the initial training and then Monday, the client is in town and does this week long training with us. And after they left, we had our team on approvals, so the client would approve and the client said, hey, you've got this. I'm going to have you approve too. So I'm approving my team to go live with these social media posts on behalf of the client. And I've had the exact same amount of training and time and prep that they have. The exact same. And I have them coming up to me and being like, hey, so what should we do about this? Or how should I respond to this? And my first instinct is like, heck if I know, like, I've had this same exact training you have. But as a leader and leading a teamand new capability, my first instinct was like this clenching of my body and being like, oh my gosh, I shouldn't. I'm supposed to somehow automatically know the answer to this. And I don't. And so my brain was in this like high gear of trying to find the answer because I felt like as a leader I had to.

Then I realized I had a choice. I could either pretend or I could gain the trust of this team. (Yes). And be vulnerable. And so I looked at the individual and I said, you know, honestly, I don't know either. I've had the same exact training you have. I think we should ask the client and see what they think and ask them for a little bit more information. And the individual was like,okay, great. Yeah. And I said, do you want me to send that or would you like practice being client facing?
You can send it this time. Okay, great. So I shot over a message tagged everybody in it so that everyone could learn from it. And we moved forward. It was in that moment that I really had to go, okay, I don't know what I'm doing. They don't know what they're doing. We've had one week of training. It's a global international, very big deal client. And we are going to figure this out. And
from then on, it has been one of the most rewarding and amazing experiences of my of my life. And to really be able to work hand in hand with this team and
watch them grow and know that my job is not to be perfect and to not have all the answers. My job is to support them so that they can do the best that they can in their job, in their careers. And the best way I can do that is by raising my hand and sometimes saying, I don't know, but we'll figure it out.

In that sense, we've talked to a few people who've talked about that being the ideal situation

and having a safe environment for people to work in. Have you found that that has encouraged more innovation in the team?

100% because they're not scared to put forth ideas. There's not a power struggle of, and I've been on teams like this where it's like, I have an idea and
I want to raise my hand, but then my boss like shoots it down because it wasn't his idea. Because he was afraid to be vulnerable and say he didn't have all the answers. And so by setting that standard, that precedent, yes, the team is so much more innovative. And if a process isn't working, instead of kind of toughing it out and gritting through it, they raise their hand and say, hey, this isn't working. What if we adjusted this, this, and this? It's like, absolutely, let's give it a try. And it's in the marketing space. And I think that marketing, in its essence, is testing. What works? What doesn't work? And so what works for us as a team or process or procedures? What works for us as a team in cultural trainings? What works for us as a team in innovative responses?

There's a side benefit. It hasn't put a ton of extra pressure on me. Like the team can be innovative and we all grow together. And there's pressure on me, but it's not the same kind of pressure. I don't have to know all the answers. And that allows me to learn and grow and be free to help and support them as much as possible. Because it's not about me anymore. It's about supporting that.

Looking back, do you feel that you also were able to draw on experience you already have? Through your other jobs, you would have had a lot to do with people interaction, getting people on board, getting them to have ownership and good communication. These skills would have been with you and were you able to use them in this situation, even though on the technical side, there was a lot of learning and growing?

Absolutely. We've all had that terrible boss, right? Hopefully we have them pretty early on in our careers. But I look back and I am so grateful for that time with that boss. Because it taught me so much about communication. It taught me so much about how to be on a team and how to communicate in a way that makes sense for everyone and how to set boundaries and not have it be that power trip. And so that was, I learned a ton about that stuff from a terrible boss, funny enough.

Absolutely. Everyone is in the mentor in some way.

Absolutely. Absolutely. And then there's things like growing up, my whole life, I always played sports. I did team sports as well as individual. And so there's a lot of communication, leadership that happens there. But then I think the biggest thing, if I can go back to the personal side of leading my own life. Shortly before, about two, three months before, I was asked to lead this team, I actually became certified as a life coach. And that helped immensely as well. Because I had undergone training of how to communicate with people to help them work together to achieve their goals. And ultimately, that's what any team, especially a work team is all about. You're all together, working together to achieve goals and you happen to get paid for it. So how can we make that the best experience possible? To fully focus on your question there, absolutely. Tons and tons and tons and entire lifetime of communication, vulnerability, practice leading up to this point.

It interests me that you're in an environment that we would consider fairly high pressure in terms of a corporate or a career world and you chose to train outside of that as a life coach. What led to that?

So on the personal side of things, it's something I wanted to do for a long time. And the opportunity came up. I had the money and decided I wanted to do it.
And so I became certified. And on the backside of things, as well as being a certified mentor and coach, I also have a daily podcast where I share tips on how to be happier. And so a lot of that leaked into the corporate world because who doesn't want to be happier in the workplace as well?

Yes, we talked to Maura Sweeney about that very topic, about being happy and being happy in the workplace. And we asked her a question that we put in your list of questions as well. So we might ask it now, what is being happy at work?

I think that can differ for several individuals. So I would love to share what I think it means for me personally. And then what I think it means for more of a general workplace audience. For me personally, happiness in the workplace is in one word, interdependence. Because I don't do well with someone trying to tell me everything to do and thinking they can do my job also. I do do well knowing that I am trusted, I am respected to own my piece as it works in a puzzle for the greater good of the organization. And knowing that I can rely and trust on the people around me to do their piece. And I don't have to make up the in between or the gap on that. So to use it in one word, interdependence, I really thrive and love kind of that startup challenge mentality. I like putting processes and procedures in place. And I'm happiest when I can have that interdependence, I can lead and I can change the lives of my employees but also the lives of my clients in what may seem like small ways. But if you really look at it, we're all individual as part of this collective, right? And as an individual, you want to go to work and enjoy what you do. And there's some astronomical percentage here in the US of, I want to say it's 75% of employees, leave because of their boss or their leader, not the actual job.

That's because it's that's a one to one individual concept. So I really thrive and think that happiness for myself comes from a place where I can work on the individual level but make a large impact and a significant impact in the organization and in the individual's life by meeting my goal. I don't meet it all the time, I'm sure, but my goal is to be the best resource for my team as possible to
support and lift them up. Now, I think that that crosses over greatly into an individual, what that looks like for a happy workplace. And you brought it up earlier. Number one, first and foremost, is psychological safety. Yes. And if you can have that, you can have a job that allows you to be creative, a job that allows you to be your unique and authentic self, while stepping into a role that can be challenging and teaches you new skills and helps you learn and helps you grow and sets you up for success. Like who wouldn't want to come to work eight hours a day in that kind of atmosphere? And so I think that a lot of what makes me personally happy in the workplace can cross over to what is a collective of individuals that can be happy in the workplace too.

Do you see your team obviously is happy and productive? Do you see that team ethos reflected in other teams in your work environment?

In some ways, yes and in some ways, no. One thing that's interesting about my team is like I'd mentioned, their new capability. So I should kind of wrap up the story. So after three months, we did a huge global product launch where we ran, we were manning the social media on behalf of this client. And after the three months, my job was done. I was supposed to get them through. I was

supposed to hone and find someone within the team to internally promote team lead and I would go back to my original role. And at the end of it, I said, you know, I definitely want to have a team lead in place, but I want to go the next level higher, which is where I'm actually supposed to be. I want to take this capability to the next level. I want to get other clients. I want to really grow this out and have it be something beyond just a one off ask. It's kind of my baby now and I really think I could take it to those next levels if I still was able to have some part of it. And so the company was great and said, yes, absolutely. You've done a fantastic job. We want you to keep on owning this in a capacity and move forward. That being said, I see that there is that availability and that happiness in other departments around the company. But I don't see it in the same way I see it in my teams,purely because we are so different. We are different in the services and solutions we provide than the rest of the company. And we are also so different in we're still fairly new. We're like, it's been, it'll be a year here in about a week. And so we're still fairly new. Great retention on the team, which is awesome. I'm really excited about that. We're so different. And we've had a different cultural upbringing. I credit that to me having that in that very quick moment of my whole body tensing up being like, you got to be perfect right now, and then letting that go and being vulnerable. It's changed the whole dynamic of everything. And so that's kind of been the North Star for me as a leader and what I try to teach my team leads. And I think it's the North Star for the entire department. So I think it's possible to be happy in other areas in the company, 100%, but I don't see anything similar to what we have. And I'm very proud of that. Yes, absolutely.

Yes. That's where we're going to take a break in this discussion with Taylor Proctor. It is really very fascinating. Please join us again for part two of

discussion. But for now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we are talking with Taylor Proctor about team leadership and this is Inside Exec.