

Transcription - Trish Nicklin Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're talking with Trish Nicklin and Fulyana is going to introduce her.

For the last 25 years, Trish has been working in corporate organizations, contributing to business advice to each organization, business advice through transformation and change and general leadership, which we'll hear a lot more about shortly. This was mainly in the finance industry and Trish worked in Australian Stock Exchange, BMP, Baraba Security Services, ABC, DEXIA, Investor Services, JP Morgan, Chase, and others. At the moment, Trish has just got her new company and it's called Critical Q. She is the owner and founder of that company and I'm very excited about it, so we're going to hear more about that. Trish is also a board member with Australian Transformation and Change Association and a president and a chair of the Dragon Boat NSW. On top of all the things that Trish is doing, as well as studying, which we'll hear about, she is also involved in a very exciting sport as well. So, welcome.

Thank you. It's such a long list when you listen to that.

It's impressive, isn't it?

I found it bold.

So, you should say I'm accomplished.

Yes, I should say it's a bit too serious. (It's very interesting.) It's embedded inside the economy. We won't go on the chronological measure. It's interesting actually that you bring it up so early because really it's not a measure. I think that there are ends of the scale where, when you're first coming into the workforce you feel that it's a measure and you don't want it to be because you're out to change the world and you've got to fix everything. And I think towards, we do as a society have a tendency, towards the end of the chronological scale, to discount information that might be coming that way. We'll say yes, we should learn from people's experiences and they're full of knowledge and all the rest of it, but really life is different today. We have to do it differently and it's not the same as when it was for them. And so, we don't hear the messages as clearly as we should. So, interesting topics to discuss.

I think for me too, as I'm looking at younger people coming through, we say coming through the ranks, which is such a bias in ways, it's a paradigm I'm trying to fight. This concept of, you have to have this sequence of experience, is now being really challenged. And for those of us that are in those generation X and baby boomers, we're struggling with that because that was what we were raised in the, you know, corporate mindset, to work up the ladder.

We were public sector trained and you knew, in the 70s or 80s, that you looked around the room and said, oh well that person will go up next because they've been here longer than me. Sometimes it was only a week's difference, but you knew that the pecking order was such that, it didn't matter what the promotion was or how well you knew the job, it was their turn.

Now that's all being turned around and people are saying, I'd rather someone with a better idea or a new idea. Although I'll caveat that by saying, there's still plenty out there that are struggling with that. I was thinking about this, this morning, about how many innovators are out there in these organisations that are struggling to be heard because the right to innovate is still under time.

We talked with one of our previous guests about being an entrepreneur in the organisation and how you go about that and how you can accomplish that. It's interesting that you're seeing that as well.

Very much so and it's easier but it's also harder because it's still a class effect and some people, if you're pinpointed and your permission to go there then you can, but it's all the other people that aren't permissioned. (Yes.) And so it's how do organisations change their entire thinking to permissioning people? And one of the things that I'm looking at doing or that my business does, one of the programmes I run, is about how to run a freelance economy within an organisation. And I think that's a really exciting prospect, to take that model out that is outside, actually put it within a boundary so it's relatively safe, you know, from a shareholder point of view, if that's where we're acting. But yeah I guess for me, I should add that I'm no longer president of DragonBoats NSW, I came off that board last year and then went on to the Australian Transformation one. So they're not quite as doubling up, but it was, that was a really exciting phase of my life. That's where I did most of my transformation work, comparative to what I had done in my professional career. And the sole difference, I was putting a bit of thought in this last night as well, the sole difference was that I had that permission. In other words, nobody said no and there was a lot of support from a board behind me and that brings me to that next topic which is a support sponsorship, which is really important for people because you can't progress in an organisation unless there's somebody leveraging you forward, upward, forward, around or going in to bat for you. That is really important and that needs to change because there are some wonderful people out there with magnificent ideas that just may not be sponsored. Do you see that as a responsibility of the individual or the organisation?

That's a really good question. I see it as both, but I think if you're an individual with great ideas and you just don't have the resources or sponsorship to point them forward, then you can become disheartened and demotivated so easily. Likewise, the other example that I've seen a lot, is your ideas get lifted and adopted and taken on by somebody else. And that's again very demotivating. It's a tap on those shoulders. Charlie came up with this amazing idea and we're going to take it full on, but when the promotion and the bonus is handed out or when the person that gets up there and presents it across the organisation, is not Charlie, that's to me, where an organisation really has some issues to fill in.

That's where my favourite topic of leadership comes in because we've got a lot of leadership training happening out there that we're not solving these very real problems and we're not acknowledging them as much as we should be. There's a lot of ticking around the edges and grasping of little bits and pieces and we're doing employee engagement surveys, we're asking but there's still this measure of control.

So if we look at leadership in and of itself, when should training for leadership start?

That's a great question. I genuinely think that we leave it too late. Yes, we absolutely do and we train, again we do it in schools, in primary school, is when you start to think about leadership and we have a structure and there are still prefects and monitors and there's set principle roles, sometimes there's a democratic vote, sometimes there's not. You're appointed or your given the option by a higher authority and I think that that's such that precedent for you have to be in a certain model and so then we start this process and the culture, other people who don't get selected in that process. Exclusion is the cancer to innovation, I believe. I think that we do exclusion very well. We teach it very very well. In a sense we focus on exclusion, whatever else comes through is just lucky. Absolutely.

See we're not encouraging the idea of saying you lead from any chair, from any position, at any age, in any circumstance and that's up to you. We're saying almost like in your description of say, the school, you say you're not in that position so that's nothing to do with you and that's the exclusion. Yeah, you're not allowed to do things and some schools are working around it, that's not to say that they're not, they might cycle so that you might do it for a term and then it's somebody else's role. But there's also labour and resource in this teaching, which is where I find this new way of working around these.

With the example of a bureaucracy which is about this, everything is a project and you bid for your place on the project and in one project you're leading it and in another project you're making the coffee. (Yes.) And you're working on a number of them at any time and so it's one of those methods but it's this idea of these circles going around and I think that that is answering that question because it's playing to strengths. Something that I read the other day and I was talking about with people earlier this week, I thought it was really profound and we should be teaching this actually, to everybody, not only in schools but in corporate life as well and in any working sector, but we excel in life by maximising our strengths not by fixing our weaknesses.

This term, fix your weakness, really struck a chord with me because if I look at the entire time I've spent in different work and including volunteer work and not for profits, somebody gives you an assessment at some point, performance reporting, performance measurement and there's always this pointing out of weakness. You can call it, you can wrap it up in pleasant terms like this is what we can improve, challenges, we have these challenges. That's lovely word. Definitely. You're off, you know, your opportunities and what they fail, this whole process completely fails to do, is it becomes a judgement as opposed to an acknowledgement. So first of all, the conversation should be, what is a weakness and we don't like it and we want you to change, we think you're not presenting well enough in your roles and sales and you need to present well enough. So there needs to be a conversation around, well who's setting that standard, what does it look like, where am I not meeting it, what is the measure?

Is there also opportunity then, because my feeling is that weaknesses are identified by someone else, you certainly identify weaknesses, when you identify weaknesses yourself you discard them unless you really think that it's something that you need to do? But you're driven to change it for a reason. So there's some other motive apart from an external judge.

So my feeling is that you discard the weaknesses and then you play to your strengths

because your strengths are what you could, often it's what you enjoy and so in that situation where someone says to me, or we think, you know, you're weak in this area, I'll say, I'm strong in all these areas. You find me things to do that are strong in all these areas or we don't have an arrangement because I want to work to my strengths because that's what I'm good at and that's where I think I can give the contribution. The weaknesses are your assessment and if that's what you need then you need someone else, you don't need me. And that's why we're not, so this is what I find is exactly what you just discussed is where we're seeing and the people are doing that and they're saying, well if that's what you want, I can't meet that. Whereas I know for me, I would sit there and take it or be horrified and feel shame and then try and adjust it. I remember being told, a few jobs ago, but for a long time I was told I rattled on too long, talked too much and I can't tell you how much I feel like trying to change that and I probably learned a lot and I developed, slow down my speech, I sped up my speech, I changed my speech, I tried it in different languages, I'm writing it down, I tossed it out, I dictated it, I did everything I could and in the end I tied myself up in knots and at some point I just thought, this is how I am and I don't have to change. I'm getting good success, I'm in a great relationship with all these people I'm dealing with.

What concerns me about society generally at the moment and it links into leadership, it's about responsibility. So where do we, in terms of leadership and the leadership models that we have at the moment, where do we start sharing the idea of responsibility, individual and organisational responsibility?

I think a lot of that comes down to making leadership simple because like many things, leadership, it's just, it's just a term that gets a buzz word and at the moment there's so many theories on it that we've made it quite complicated so that people have twisted it inside and turned it upside down so that they can make careers out of teaching it. That's not to say that it's not valued to look at it and I've got a great deal of value myself. When I started to study leadership and I looked at the history of leadership theory and I could go from great man theory right through to current post structural post heroic theory and see what had evolved, but what I found in that process was the horror that where I was in my career we were still teaching stuff that was 30 years old. You're teaching it as dogma? Yes, as dogma. We take all these standard models and we just pull them out of the textbook and like a jumper over a screaming child that it no longer fits because grandmas coming and we need to show that we're wearing it, we shove these models over the employees and we say this or do that. So there's all these people just caught in that, in the cross hairs. It is an individual thing and I know I'm rambling. I think we will get somewhere when we stop trying to put bandaid solutions onto it. Yeah, give us a flavour of what you think we should be doing in that space instead of just going old models because I tend to agree with you as far as, for example, we don't know people's strengths and weaknesses and we do have some methodology for like performance reviews. You can talk about your weaknesses and strengths, your manager can as well and then you work the solution.

The opposite side of what you were saying earlier is some people make their weaknesses much bigger than what they really are because they're humble and to me, I've seen that where examples of, you are really good at this and that, so it's a responsibility of both parties. Tell us about leadership, the right model for now compared to what we've been using as historic or outdated models.

Yeah, so I think what we tend to do is, we tend to go back into what we call adaptive or adapt to some new term for situational leadership on one side. So the manager will say I'm a situational leader so therefore if you are a quiet person I will work with you, if you are an introvert I will understand that, if you are an extravert and you want to go and do lots of presentations, I'll work with you to make that happen. I will duck and weave and then together we will work, we'll do the same with the organisation and the challenges facing the organisation and we'll do all that which is really a hard thing to do, I think can almost be impossible. So we have that happening on one side and then what we ask is that the employee does the same thing. So if I'm going higher I need you to come higher, if I'm going lower than you, come low with me but the problem is that's impossible to do across so many individuals and it's impossible then to meet the requirement as it flows. What happens is it gets lost, so we walk out of the conversation and then what happens is the manager then goes and has a cup of coffee and then goes into the next one and so where are you? You're sort of in the back of the brain and it takes a certain type of person to be able to love their employees at that very individual level as well as loving the organisation.

That's what we've been doing and how we can change that is by, I think, breaking down a lot of these structures within organisations that then require or that because of that management and that leadership, in recognition. Yeah it's just sort of, it's like running through hurdles of jelly that just gets thicker and thicker and thicker as you go until you're not running anymore you're just sort of trying to punch a hole through or concrete wall. If we look at this startup community and they're just throwing all of that stuff out the window, everything out the window and that they're still thriving. They just move on to the next thing and it's such a wonderful thing and I think, well, that's where that future peace comes in. I think you've got to almost put a match to it and then come back and start again. There's this concept around elitist leadership and the best example of that is the hashtag. It is one person with an idea or two people with an idea, they start a hashtag leadership and something goes into the thing, everyone's on board, it's trending and it fizzles and dies or it regrows to something else but it becomes a living breathing learning forward, there's contribution from everywhere. There's no path that you have to find to contribute, you don't have to get approval all the way along, you can just throw in your idea or your opinion or your spin on whatever it is and then move on to the next thing and so there's that much more engagement, that much more opportunity to move an organisation forward or together without the need to find a solution that there would be in the traditional or large organisation. That's exactly what Twitter and Facebook are doing, is you don't have to have a title to be published and you can have a say and that's what word processing is doing. In the past you would write but you'd have to submit it to a newspaper and you'd be ahead of time and it may or may not make it and someone would make a judgment. There's good and bad in it but the the beauty of it is that it's really evened up the field.

It's interesting too, that we hear a lot of talk about social media particularly, being the death of interaction and yet I think that it's not. I think that it engages more people and I don't think it disengages them from face-to-face communication either because there's that many more things to talk about - did you see, had you seen, have you heard, let me show you this.

I mean I'm in a fandom and I found you know like friends in there. (What's a fandom?) A fandom is, if you are a big fan say of a certain actor or actress or Game of Thrones or a TV show, you can start looking at hashtags around that and find people who have the same

interests and being engaged with them and I've ended up with some wonderful friends all around the world. Many times I've flown across Australia or had people flying to Sydney and we've caught up and gone to the odd festivals together, we've gone shopping together, go and meet at the big comic cons, so you've got an interesting comment and that could be entertainment but it could be business ideas. It could be anything and you know, Facebook groups are great for that for people who are starting up new businesses. At the moment I know someone who said I'm going to set this up so you all can start talking, this is a forum for anyone who's starting their business and it's an interaction of experience and all of that. It's anything that you want. 15 years ago you would have forums on websites where people could put it and now we just have threads and Facebook pages and groups and it's so much easier to get access to a broader range. It's very humbling I think when you realize that you have a lot of things in common with people who are completely different, have completely different lives to you, and that you can enrich each other's lives. There's also the very dark side of all of that, where there are a lot of people who take advantage of that situation but that's no different to society outside of electronics and there are many people that just make it bigger and faster and sometimes it's not stupid, it's more obvious, it's just more obvious and is that not a good thing that we are starting to be more careful about our safety personally, our standards across society generally? I can't see that, in any sense, there's any detriment to anything, we're teaching the same lessons but it's just that the playground has moved, it's a different venue and I think that there's opportunities now in terms of these shifts.

What I'm looking at is, if we then take this back to work, all of this is going on in life and life has moved, it's shifted onto this entire new dynamic, but we're still running businesses and organisations with these old style mindsets, we sort of bog down and regulation has a hard play in that but it's not just businesses. If you look at families and they're still that old patriarchal/matriarchal style, I'm in my mid 40s, my parents still try and tell me what I can and can't do but likewise I still go to them. That's the first. But I can also call a mate when I need help or advice or guidance and that was instilled from that.

My next question is, is your management style something that you develop, and you talked about the school years and how you might get selected to be a leader in that time, but your management style or what you think your management style is going to be if you're coming into workforce now, is that something that is a reflection of mentors, for want of a better word, you copy?

Yeah, copy it until you know otherwise. You copy what you've seen. The first real example we have of that is that family around the dining room table, the parents at each end that we've grown up with and that was always the way it was done and then you go to school and you're sitting there, there is somebody standing in front, instructor here and that's how we're raised, so we can then go into organisations where the teacher's desk is replaced by a common office or a better seat and what we're seeing now is less of that. We're seeing more rounder tables, people don't sit at a dining table like home, but it's becoming, it's really starting to change the dynamic and yet in schools we're still instructing. Classrooms have changed, my daughters in the environment where there's only two desks in the room but they have bean bags and there's high tables and lower tables and the kids just choose where they sit and this is starting to teach this different style, no longer a desk, teachers either, at the back of the room, if they've got one at all. That is going to create a

more inclusive future and while we're seeing this changing, it also creates an issue in the workplace of change because you've got a generation coming through who want to manage in this more organic way, working for, at this point in time, a generation who were schooled in different way. Well, they're not working for them, as far as I can see, so I'm looking at a lot of organisations that are struggling to get people coming. They're coming for a while but they're not sticking around. There's no loyalty. It's not about loyalty, it's about the environment where you can thrive and be innovative and I think it's that they support it and have everyone doing their best within their natural abilities as well as learn.

We've actually gone a little bit longer than we normally would so we might stop and take a break here. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we're talking with Trish Nicklin and this is Inside Exec.