



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

The power of mentoring

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Hello, everybody. This is the Superstar Communicator podcast and livestream with Nicholas Simon, Susan Heaton Wright, and our very, very special guest today, Michelle Connolly, who is dialling in from Canada. We are talking today about mentoring, and Michelle is an absolute expert in this. She walks the talk on this topic. So we're gonna learn an awful lot about this topic. So thank you very much, Michelle. Michelle is a senior manager at Pfizer, a program director for the Pfizer Global Supply, women's mentoring program, and country chair for Canada for the G100 Business Networking Wing. She lives in, Manitoba with her husband and 2 children.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

She's an advocate for women's mentoring and networking and understands the value of making meaning full connections like we've made over the last couple of years, Michelle. So welcome.

Michelle Connolly:

Thank you.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Why is mentoring so important to you?

Michelle Connolly:

Thank you, Susan, first of all, for having me here, and I love how you emphasize Canada. Like, it's, middle of nowhere. I am actually in the middle of so very happy to be connected with all of and, yeah, I'm excited, honestly, just to, talk about mentoring and hopefully get some people on the call excited about it and just a different lens on it than, the typical conversation that you hear about, why mentoring is important. So, I mean, if we strip it back to basics, right? Like the definition alone of a mentor is someone who's, you know, an experienced and trusted advisor. And, you know, we have them throughout our lives. You have them from a very young age. Usually, it's your parents to start with as your informal mentors. They are a mirror for yourself to help you see yourself in a way that you don't.

Michelle Connolly:

They can help, you know, show a path for you that maybe you didn't see, a different direction, a different way to try something new. And it goes on into your adulthood and into your professional career as well. Mentors can really offer you that that sort of that, that mirror view of yourself or a different perspective on yourself and, and help you see something that you didn't see. So, I mean, I I can give you a really real example from my own experience. And that was that, as I said, I I live in rural Manitoba, Canada. And for, reasons with my personal life and my family, I choose not to move. This is my home. And I was always a dreamer, always had, you know, a vision of being, somewhere big.

Michelle Connolly:

I never, you know, aspirations were never new to me, but I I didn't always know what that looked like. So I remember, this would have been about 7 years ago now. I was working at an organization, and, I had been working my way towards this particular position. My manager at the time had been mentoring me. I had gotten my MBA. I had my science degree. I had the experience. I had the people leadership.

Michelle Connolly:

I I had nailed it, and I was so confident that I was gonna get the role. And I remember, as we all can relate to the devastating blow when you don't get the job that you really, really wanted. And so I I'd gone to my my mentors, my OGs who will know who they are. And, with, you know, devastation saying, what am I gonna do? Like, that was my place to go, and I'm in rural Manitoba, and I'm not moving. And and and that's it. I'm done. Right? And they said, well, wait. You know, that that was where you wanted to be, but there's some other paths and let us show you.

Michelle Connolly:

Let us show you some other ways that maybe you didn't see. Right? And so they did. They they helped me see something that I hadn't, and I I took a different path. And I applied on other jobs and failed some of those as well, did not get the jobs right away. But after, perseverance, you know, I ended up getting into a new role that was, outside of the place that I had been working. And it was a growth opportunity, and it it really sent me to the trajectory I am on now. And I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the mentors showing me the way and showing me my own life.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

That's an amazing story. I am aware that there's at least one person watching. Do please introduce yourselves. And if you've got any comments or questions for Michelle, please put them in because this is interactive. We want you to be actively involved in this conversation. So, Nick, have do who have you had as mentors throughout your life?

Nick Simon:

Yeah. I suppose, the first mentors you have are, well, your parents and then your your teachers. So I've had a few very good mentors. One was my music teacher who inspired me to do music. And then at my most current mentor is my my careers adviser who is essentially pushing me in the right direction towards, film composing and that kind of thing. So I find, mentoring is is very much a focal point of, showing someone what you're doing and getting their point of view and how you can focus more.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

What does a good mentor look like? Because I can think of 1 or 2 people when I was younger who didn't necessarily give me the best advice, and it was based on their own limiting beliefs.

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. I can I can take that one? So, to me, a good, good mentor. 1st, you have to have a match right with the mentee. So there has to be a certain level of expertise that you can offer them. That's going to be relatable to the mentee. If you're too far removed in your area of interest or in maybe within your level of the organization, it might be a little more difficult for the mentor to put themselves in the mentee shoes and really be able to understand what it is that they need. And good mentors, they really need to just accept the responsibility of knowing that, they're gonna learn and grow just as much as the mentee is. So I think, mentors need to be humble and be willing to, just, adapt it as they're developing that relationship with the mentee and and showing them their ways.

Michelle Connolly:

They need to be open to learning new ways as well.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

We've got a couple of comments. 1 from LinkedIn user. There's always one with your LinkedIn user. It doesn't the name doesn't come up. So many apologies. Hello. What advice would you give to someone who wants to become a mentor or gain a mentor? And Tracey I'll come to you in a moment. Thank you for your comment as well.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

So tips on how to become a mentor.

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. So there's different ways. So first, there's the the straightforward path. So if you're, you know, organization that you work for has a mentoring program, then, you know, signing up that way so they can match you with mentees and there's already a structure there. But I would say if the question is more for an individual who maybe doesn't work in a company that has that, then it's really looking for opportunities in your life where where you're needing a mentor. So where is it that you're needing support? Where is it that you're getting stuck? And who do you see that that is is has got it? He's doing what you wanna do? And and reach out to them. And and please do not just ask them to be your mentor if you're looking for a mentor. Oh.

Michelle Connolly:

Oh, Susan, I hear that you are fantastic with communication it, and so they're do so. And and then I think the other way around, it can be the same thing. Right? If you wanna be a mentor to somebody, if you see somebody struggling, and you know it's something that you can help with, then then you offer to help them, and you don't have to say, let me be your mentor. It kinda happens organically if you're if you're helping that person to see something that they couldn't see and and you wanna be able to show them away.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Well, thank you for that. That it's Rachel. It's one of my my good business mates. Thank you, Rachel. One other question that I wanted to carry on from that, and I will come to you, Tracy and Gabriella, as well. I've noticed your messages, and that is if there is a mentoring scheme in an organisation and there are and there are benefits to the mentor as for their professional development, but they don't show up. They don't really do a good job for the mentee. Any tips on how to manage that situation?

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. So, I would say that that's something that it it would be up to whoever manages that program. So there's there should be somebody I would think that, helps oversee the entire program. Usually it's like people experience or human resources or whatever you would want to, call that. And and I think that going back and and having a voice about that and sharing your feedback about what's working with the program and what's not working with the program so that they can continuously improve. And for the mentor themselves, I mean, before you go to, you know, say HR, if it's someone that you've developed a good relationship with, then, I would say it's worth having a candid conversation with them. Say, look. You know you know, I'm showing up and, you know, and you're not showing up for me.

Michelle Connolly:

It's hard because I'm here to learn from you. You have something to offer me. I value your time and your input, and it's important to me that you're here. Right? So, I think the candid conversation with the mentor first, if you're comfortable, would be the way to go. But feedback for the the program directors who are who are leading that program and setting it all up, they should know as well because, I mentors, as much as they learn from it, it's not about them. Right? It's about the mentees. So

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Brilliant. So now we've got a message from Tracy. Thank you all. Tracy Barr, who's an independent strategic consultant specialising in health care. I really enjoy mentoring people, so here to listen and hear how I can be the best possible mentor. Thank you, Tracey. And if you've got any comments please feel free to share. Now here's Gabriela Pedrosso McCun from greetings from Montreal.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Hello? Montreal. Michelle is an OG, and she might not know it. She invited me into a network with little real working experience with me and together we tried to make a positive change. Through that experience we learned how to fail together. Glad she found this space to make that change. Can you share how to adjust your mindset when you don't achieve what you're working towards? Oh, that's a good question.

Michelle Connolly:

Thank you, Gabriela. Yes. So I think that, we're hearing this message more and more of these days. You hear about people having grit, which is really that, that desire and perseverance to achieve long term goals. And the only way to get there is to accept the fact that you're gonna fail. You're not going to get every opportunity that you wanted. You're not gonna win, everything that you try to achieve, but you can't stop. Right? If you stop, then then you're definitely not going to go anywhere.

Michelle Connolly:

So, honestly, I I sometimes relate it back to parenting. I I think I said I have, I have a son with disabilities and and he can be very challenging. And often when I talk about him, people will say, well, I just I don't know how you do it. Like, how do you do it? I'm like, well, you you don't have much of a choice once you're in the situation. Right? Some days you win, some days you lose, but you have to keep going. So I think, you can be disappointed when you don't win at something. You can you can feel sorry for yourself, you know, for a day or 2 or whatever you need, but then you can't live in that space. You can't live there.

Michelle Connolly:

You need to, realize that you're not going to let your circumstances shape who you are and that it's up to you to focus on on what you're gonna do next to get to where you wanna be or to to make a positive change in your life.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

That's a brilliant answer. Do you have any comment to add to that, Nick?

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. I'd say, I have a few questions about, introducing mentoring. And how can mentoring help help you or someone?

Michelle Connolly:

How can it help?

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah.

Michelle Connolly:

So if you're if you're looking to again, if it's a specific skill set that you're looking to develop, then looking for somebody who's a match for you in that regard, they can help you to maybe you're looking at improving communication skills. You want to be able to speak to, senior leadership in the organization, but you could be a little bit rusty, speaking from experience. Right? So, mentors can provide you the opportunity to maybe get more face to face time with senior leaders to work on that that communication. They can give you time or I guess candid feedback is an important thing. So, not sugarcoating the feedback that they're giving the mentees, but telling them an honest, reflection of where they could improve, really shining, and and confidence. Honestly, mentors can help like, being in a mentoring relationship can help boost someone's confidence so much. And, again, it's really just that other point of view that's outside of your own head, your own voice that tells you that maybe you're not good enough or that imposter syndrome that everybody is so familiar with. Just having a sounding board to tell you that that, they see you differently than how you see yourself, and these are the great things that they see.

Michelle Connolly:

So I think it's really about about that reflection.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

We have an old friend. You you're not old old, but we've known you for a number of years. Simon Drake, great to have you on the call, and thank you for your comment. What a powerful subject. So thank you, Michelle, and thank you, Simon. And he said, agreed to what you've said. Any more questions, Nick?

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. Yeah. So how do you start building your network?

Michelle Connolly:

Okay. So, it start it depends where you're starting from, but your network can come from different places. If you're talking about within an organization, then you are having, you know, connections with people who, again, if you see someone in a meeting and, they're really shining. Right? You're like, wow. Like, you know, that person was really articulate. They they had it all under control or they seem to I don't know. Maybe they know a lot about pivot tables in Excel and you really struggle with that. Whatever it is that you're needing support with, it it starts with reaching out and being brave enough to know that I'd say 99% of the time, if you ask someone for help, they're gonna say yes.

Michelle Connolly:

People intrinsically want to help one another. So I think it starts with finding what it is that you're that you're seeking to connect with somebody on, and just finding that common ground and then building that relationship from there. But, it can be done in in your personal life as well. Right? So, for myself again, my son having disabilities, I've done a lot of work to build a support structure for him. And I go out to different activities where I see other mothers, and I can see their kids with similar struggles. And and I make a point of reaching out to that mother and saying to her, hey. You know, how are things going with you? Are are, you know, he seems busy or however you need to, get the conversation going. And then I help them find the resources that I found so that they can get the support they need for their families.

Michelle Connolly:

And then they become part of my network. Right? I've now helped helped them with the situation and, you know, maybe in the future they help me. So, you really do have to be brave and and make the first move to make the connections with people.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

What a wonderful person you are, Michelle. How fantastic. I've had a couple of LinkedIn users and what their name you rock, Michelle. So proud of you. And hi, Michelle. But I don't know who they are, so please let us know who you are. Nicholas, do you have any more questions for Michelle?

Michelle Connolly:

Yes. So continuing from that, kind of idea of making connections, asking people for help, how can you make more meaningful connections via the Internet?

Michelle Connolly:

So that one is interesting. I, I remember I was at an event and one of the, I think she was from Catalyst speaking, and she had said, and this might be more for it was this at the time was directed more for women. Women tend to not add people, say, on LinkedIn as much as maybe a man would because we're told that it's not you need to be safe. Right? You need to be careful about sharing your information, who you're connecting with. And so and so we are intrinsically have this, need to protect ourselves and not want to expand our network because you want to be private and you don't wanna put yourself out there. But forms like LinkedIn are meant for those professional, networks and for building that. And the information that's on there is only what you choose to put on there. And, it is it is a safe way to connect with professionals.

Michelle Connolly:

Don't get me wrong. I've had people add me, who then try to just chat in. I'm not up for just chatting whoever that person was, but then you just just disconnect with them and you and you move on to the next connection. So, again, it's looking you'll see some it'll recommend people for you to connect with that are maybe in the same industry that you're in, that are interested in something. Maybe they like to send our article to you, and and you can connect with them.

And, if they're if they're if you can't connect directly with them, you can send them a message as well to say why you wanna connect. So sometimes that helps eliminate, the creep factor, I would call it. So bar trying to connect and and someone might think it's coming out of, out of nowhere, you can kinda put in the message what it is that you're wanting connect on or why you're interested in connecting with them.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

So we've got some more love for you, Michelle. Raheem, is it Rajimi, A former Pfizer employee and great friend of you, Michelle. The love's coming across

Michelle Connolly:

Yes.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

On this livestream. So how could we be better mentors whether formally or informally?

Michelle Connolly:

K. So, I think it starts with, first of all, if if it's for the mentors themselves or the mentoring program, if you want to look at the mentors themselves, you need to remember as a mentor, it's not about you. So to the comment earlier about if you're working for a company where the mentors get some sort of, high five or potential in for being mentors, you're in it for the wrong reason. You know, the mentors have to be in it because you're invested in wanting to grow other people. You want to see them grow and develop and, that has to that has to innately be the reason that you're in it. So the the reasons have to be right. Again, being humble and open to learning from your mentees. And and really just seeing a problem even if they can't.

Michelle Connolly:

So when you recognize that someone's having a problem, my again, my example earlier with the the parents struggling, with their children. Right? Maybe they didn't realize that there was a solution out there. So recognizing that there was a problem that you could help solve, really looking for that instead of just putting your head down and saying, I'm I'm too busy. I'm too busy. My calendar's full. I don't have time to, bring that person along with me. Right? So, seeing the problem and not ignoring it, taking taking a voice and and recognizing it, I think, is all critical to being a good mentor. And, really, I think the the the final thing I wanna say on that, and, Nick, if there's anything you wanna add, but mentors, need to act as a mirror again to enable, individuals to see themselves more clearly, but not try and make them little versions of yourself.

Michelle Connolly:

Right? Just like as we are parents, help the mentee grow into their best versions of themselves, not a version of you.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

That's a real

Michelle Connolly:

good question. Is there any difficulty in that? What kind of, thing as a mentor can you do to not have that, pushing or encouraging someone to become a kind of carbon copy of yourself? How can you kind of encourage someone to be there be themselves in their own right?

Michelle Connolly:

A lot of active listening, which, is something I struggle and work with during every conversation. You can't be thinking about the next thing you wanna say. You can't be trying to solve the problem for them. You just want to listen to where they're getting stuck and offer them options and tools. But they'll let them find their own way. And they might come up with something that you don't agree with. But it doesn't mean that it's as a mentor, it's your job to tell them that that's not the right way. Right? You don't want them to fail, but, if they're doing something different than how you would do it, but the means gets to the end, then I there's no need to force them down a path that would be your path.

Michelle Connolly:

I don't know if that was a straightforward answer. But

Susan Heaton-Wright:

I'm looking down the list of people that are here that have commented. I know I'm gonna shout out for Simon Drake because I know what a good leader you are, and I'm absolutely certain that you do mentor your talent. Michelle, you're also a leader. What are the benefits as a leader mentoring your team?

Michelle Connolly:

So do you want me to answer that or Simon?

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Yes. No. No. Simon can't answer. Other than typing something, it's your call, Michelle.

Michelle Connolly:

So as a leader rephrase the question. Sorry.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

That as a leader, what benefits of you mentoring your team?

Michelle Connolly:

So by mentoring your team again, you help bring that diversity and inclusion onto your team. You're embracing diverse perspectives. You're seeing each person for who they are and helping them to grow to be the best versions of themselves and that's going to make your team stronger. When somebody can show up at work every day and be their authentic self and have that psychological safety to be able to speak up if they have a different opinion, to see things differently, then you're gonna have a stronger team. So so mentoring your team to be the best versions of themselves is just gonna make your team stronger and ultimately, more productive for you.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Thank you for that. Now you are very much part of, mentoring women in your organisation. Why is it particularly important to have mentoring programs for female talent?

Michelle Connolly:

Yes. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for that. So, first of all, you know, you can spit out all the numbers. Right? You can look at the, before we close the gap. Right? So you can go and look and see the numbers. But for the people that are living at day to day, someone might have a similar experience to what I had, and that was, I would say back in, you know, 2016 when I first got involved with women's mentoring.

Michelle Connolly:

I didn't think it was needed. I didn't see it as a problem. I would be one of those people who said, why do you need women's mentoring? Right? Like, why isn't I just mentoring? Why can't we include everybody? But, I I got invited into the program, and, and when I came for my very first face to face event where there's a group of, you know, women and then female and then, male mentors and their sponsors and everyone was in one room and they were talking and they were sharing ideas and they were energized. And, after listening to other women's stories, I realized that just because it wasn't a problem for me, where I was in my life, it didn't mean it wasn't a problem. And so I took that upon myself as a call to action that I I could do this and I can help lift other women up and I can help show them a way and help them find their voice, and just help, you know, close that gap, hopefully, quicker than a 132 years from now.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Brilliant answer. And we got some answers from Simon as well. The benefits of mentoring without the shadow of doubt, it increases engagement and ownership, thus ensuring your customers receive a really personalized experience from team members who are bought into what you do as a business. In addition, a solid team increases retention and therefore reduces cost and time for recruitment. He's nailed it.

Michelle Connolly:

Nailed it. He had time to type it out. He's not on camera.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

We'll have to get him on a new one. I think that would be brilliant. You up for it, Simon? Yeah. Carry on, Michelle.

Michelle Connolly:

About the women's mentoring? Yes. So, yeah, so like I was saying and so, once I became part of the program and started to see where other women were struggling and the difference that can make, it really again came to my realization that it's our responsibility, for, you know, our daughters and for the future to come to continue to have those types of programs so that women have a seat at the table, that they have a voice so that either they're not holding themselves back or they're not allowing others to hold them back, that they can grow a network and have their own version of the proverbial golf course, if you will. Right. A network of people who will show up for you. Like I was talking about earlier, my OGs, right? That the people that are gonna have your back so that, you know, you're surrounded with people who are going to, what was the phrase that I read earlier this week? They're going to talk about you in a room full of people and full of opportunities. So people who are going to pull you up and raise you up, to really get to where it needs to be because we are stuck. As I said, we there aren't enough female, leaders, across the globe. We're not there yet.

Michelle Connolly:

And the only way they're gonna get there is by having the support, having the network, having the same opportunities as men do.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Very, very interesting point. So before we finish, Nick, have you got any more questions?

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. I was interested in, I I've been doing, editing for a podcast, and someone mentioned that people were actually put off by mentoring. How might people be put off by mentoring, and how can you convince them to undertake it?

Michelle Connolly:

So I think I started this conversation, highlighting that I didn't want this to be the typical, you know, here's the key benefits you can get for mentoring, and you take it off a list. Like, I think that out of context, so if you had a bad mentoring experience, if it's been overused, mentoring erosion, if you will, where it's not really reflective of what it truly is. I think people just need to, think of it in a different way. And so, again, it's not the, the lost person walking around saying, will you be my mentor? It's it's having more than one mentor. It's having people who will have your back and who want to see the best in you and who are going to give you great advice and pull you along with them. And if you look at it that way, there really is no downside. I don't know how anyone could be put off from surrounding themselves with people who only wanna see the best in them and the best for them.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Really, really important. And and Simon's added something. If they are put off by mentoring, it it's essentially as

Michelle Connolly:

I don't think so.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

I wanted to ask one question regarding mentors and sponsors because often people think that they get a mentor that the doors will open.

Michelle Connolly:

Yeah. Yeah. So so the difference really is, to me, and I talked to you a little bit about this earlier, is that a mentor, is really someone who's gonna help show you the way they're going to help you see your own light and see where you need to be and help you to get there. But they're not going to take you there. They're not pulling you along. They're just helping you find your own light in your own way. Whereas a sponsor, helps everybody else see your light. So they're the ones that are going to talk about you when you're not in the room.

Michelle Connolly:

And often what comes from good mentoring relationships is once you've built that trust and the mentor knows you, they know your skills, they, know you as a person, they know where you want to be, then they often become your sponsors. They're they talk about you when they walk into a room and, there's other people talking. They they like, hey. I know someone really great. She's fantastic. You need to see her shine. So

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Oh, brilliant. So before we finish, what are your 3 top tips about mentoring to share with the audience?

Michelle Connolly:

Number 1 is it's a two way street. So if you, once you find yourself fortunate enough to be in a mentoring relationship, remember to show up for one another. So mentors show up for your mentees. They're counting on you. Mentees show up your mentors. They've carved time out and they've shown that they value you, so you need to make time for each other. So, showing up for one another. If you don't have mentors in your life right now, and you don't have a network, then just take those first steps.

Michelle Connolly:

So really important that if you don't have it that that you start with that now, whether that's reaching out to somebody online, like you said, LinkedIn, somebody at work, somebody in your personal life. Start building those connections, to get your network going. And and lastly, it would just be really to be have a growth mindset and be willing to grow with each other. So both mentees and mentors are going to grow together from that relationship, and only good things can come of it.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

Wow. What brilliant topics. And what a great discussion. And thank you very much, Michelle, but thank you very much also people that have contributed, particularly Simon who's taken over the at the chat line, about this important topic. The fact that we can grow as people both by being a mentor and being menteed. So if you want to contact Michelle, Michelle is available on LinkedIn. I'm I speak on your behalf, Michelle, but I'm sure that you wouldn't mind people connecting with you directly. And think about how you could be a mentor for somebody else and who would you like to mentor you.

Susan Heaton-Wright:

So that's what I'm going to leave you with. So until next time, thank you very much for being here for the Superstar Communicator podcast and livestream from Nicholas Simon and Susan Wright. Thanks for listening. Bye bye.

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