025 Is Your Leadership Bench Limiting Growth?

Peridot Circle Consulting

Leadership Transformations

Full Episode Transcript

Leadership Transformations with Linda Linfield & Janet Taggart

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[00:00:00] **Janet Taggart:** Who on your team is actually making your real job easier? Who is helping others regain their equilibrium in the midst of change or uncertainty? And who is supporting your strategic vision, not just your immediate tactical needs?

[00:00:22] **Stephanie Willmore:** Welcome to the Leadership Transformations podcast. I'm your host, Stephanie Willmore, accountability coach with Peridot Circle Consulting. In this podcast, we explore real-life situations with our two founders and principal consultants, Janet Taggart and Linda Linfield. Today, we are joined by Janet Taggart.

[00:00:43] Janet specializes in empowering leadership transformations from the inside out, coaching aspiring to executive leaders to become known for their highest value. Thank you for joining us again, Janet.

[00:00:56] **Janet Taggart:** I'm excited to be here.

[00:00:57] **Stephanie Willmore:** Today, we are diving into a topic that is essential for growing organizations, and it's to answer the question, "Is your weak leadership bench limiting your growth?"

[00:01:08] And if you've ever felt like you're constantly solving problems instead of building the future, this episode is for you. Janet, I want to start with something that many of our clients share, and that is leaders dealing with burnout, or they either feel stuck in the weeds or they're unable to focus on strategies because they're so focused on what's right in front of them, because they're feeling overburdened, they're feeling overtaxed. And why is this such a common experience?

[00:01:37] **Janet Taggart:** You know, you're right, Stephanie. It really is a common experience, and it signals something much deeper. We often ask leaders who express feelings of stress and overwhelm. Do you feel like you're on the edge of burnout? That there aren't enough hours in the day to accomplish everything that needs to be done?

[00:01:53] And what they tell us is not just stress talking, it's typically a systems issue. Leaders are carrying more than their fair share doing, fixing, solving because their teams aren't yet equipped to share the load. And when the load isn't shared, strategic thinking gets sacrificed, relationship building gets postponed. The long game never gets played because we're too busy playing defense.

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[00:02:18] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah, I mean, you really painted a picture there of what it looks like when an organization is overburdened, but you made a really good point that it's not necessarily about the amount of work that has to be done. It's also about making sure that you have the capability to handle it and having enough capable hands to carry it. Am I hearing you right?

[00:02:40] **Janet Taggart:** Yes. Yes, exactly. And as I'm thinking about it, it's not just we have good technical folks in place, as we know, leadership is much more than that, and so it really does point to a central issue is that your leadership bench may be too shallow, meaning you don't have enough ready, willing, and capable players behind you.

[00:03:03] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's such a great point. And so, can you help us understand what a strong leadership bench actually looks like? Like, how does an organization know if they have one?

[00:03:12] **Janet Taggart:** Well, to answer that, there are some questions you can ask yourself about your bench strength, and there are questions like, who on your team is actually making your real job easier?

[00:03:26] Who is helping others regain their equilibrium in the midst of change or uncertainty? And who is supporting your strategic vision, not just your immediate tactical needs? As we say, a lot of times with our clients, every leader needs an A team. They need a first string of emerging leaders who are actively supporting both their team members and you as their leader.

[00:03:53] These are the people who are present, prepared, and proactive. They absorb disruption. They resolve conflicts. They hold the energy of the team when you're not in the room. These players are resourceful, and they are resilient. They, like you, are disruption shock absorbers. And when these leaders exist, you really feel it. You can finally breathe, and you can delegate with confidence, and the team keeps moving forward.

[00:04:22] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's a great explanation for what you should be looking for and how a strong organization with a deep bench really looks like. And so what happens on the other end? What happens when your leadership bench is weak?

[00:04:35] **Janet Taggart:** Well, you feel that old, familiar feeling like you are doing everyone's job. You're spending your energy on quality control, on conflict resolution, and handholding.

Instead of innovating, you're troubleshooting. You might even feel hesitant to pursue promotions or stretch roles because, frankly, you don't trust that the team can manage without you.

[00:04:58] If your leadership bench is weak, then strengthening the bench is of highest importance to your success and to theirs. That means developing your current team or hiring strategically to build the leadership muscle you need.

[00:05:12] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's a great insight. Thank you for sharing that. And so, you know, you showed, kind of painted a picture for what a strong leadership bench looks like in week one, and then kind of gave some recommendations.

[00:05:22] So let's talk about solutions. Once a leader realizes that their bench is weak, what should they do next? Should they develop internally or should they look externally?

[00:05:32] **Janet Taggart:** Well, you know, that's a great question, and the answer is often both. Growing current talent really has an advantage of upleveling people who are already known to you in the organization.

[00:05:43] If they have the desire to elevate their performance, if they have the emotional intelligence to navigate difficult interpersonal situations, if they have a sense of team play and are not myopically self-focused, and if they have a commitment to quality, then they may have the potential to grow into what you need them to be.

[00:06:05] But admittedly, it does take time and patience, and coaching, and of course, that's where we can come in and help out with that.

[00:06:14] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's right. And that's why we create these podcasts is to help people in these situations. But say you are a leader and you recognize that your leadership bench is weak, what if you still feel like you just don't have the time? You wanna do that type of development, but you just feel hesitant, I mean, you're already drowning. How do you have the time to develop that bench? What would your response be to somebody in that situation?

[00:06:37] **Janet Taggart:** Yeah, I would say that then this is when you consider hiring, but to do it wisely. Hiring individuals from outside the organization also has its benefits. You can look

for someone who has already learned how to operate at the level and with the personal acumen you need.

[00:06:55] Just remember, it's not instant magic. Cultural fit is real. Adaptability and relational credibility all take time to establish. Either approach does say take some time. It's just a matter of the other elements as to what decision you can make in that situation. Whether to develop internally or to hire outside. And like I said earlier, it's often a combination of both.

[00:07:22] **Stephanie Willmore:** Those are really great points about what they should consider when it comes to bringing in outside talent. And so, say a leader is ready to develop their team further or bring in outside talent, what does that leader need to assess about who has true leadership potential on their team? So somebody who's already internal.

[00:07:42] **Janet Taggart:** Yeah, so whether you're thinking you need to hire outside or inside, you still need to assess your current team. And a couple of useful strategies to build capability at the next level is for you to get really clear on what you need from your team in order for you to stop worrying so much about them.

[00:08:01] And the answer may lead you to either developing internally. Hiring externally, or both. But here's a couple of questions that can help you: ask yourself what behaviors build trust and who exhibits those ties to behavior already? Who communicates transparently and who lifts the energy in the room instead of draining it?

[00:08:23] If you can identify people who fit those criteria, then you can tell yourself that that is your potential bench, and now it's about investing in that bench.

[00:08:35] **Stephanie Willmore:** You've given so many great examples of things that organizations can think about in order to know which next steps they need to take and strategies that they can employ to strengthen that bench.

[00:08:46] So, can you give us a real-world example of an organization you've worked with who was able to go through this process and strengthen their organization overall?

[00:08:56] **Janet Taggart:** Absolutely. The one that comes to mind is when we worked with a large FinTech company. Their managers were bogged down, stretched thin, and struggling to scale.

[00:09:04] We help them identify their informal leaders. As I described earlier, those already stepping up. We then equip those folks with coaching tools, feedback frameworks, and mindset training. The outcome was that turnover dropped, collaboration rose, and senior leadership was finally able to focus on strategic growth. It's such a great illustration of our mission.

[00:09:27] At Peridot Circle Consulting, we help leaders lead and to help the best leaders become even better. And when we help leaders build the right bench, the transformation ripples outward across teams, functions and results.

[00:09:41] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's a really powerful example about all of the different outcomes you can have by simply looking at your bench and finding ways to strengthen it.

[00:09:49] And so if you're somebody that's listening to this and you're ready to take the next steps to strengthen your bench, develop your organization, what would you say the first step is for those who wanna take action?

[00:10:01] **Janet Taggart:** I'd say the first step is to reflect and ask yourself. What do I need my team to do so I can stop worrying?

[00:10:07] It's essential that you know what success looks like before you can fix that and try to get the right people developed and in place. You want to know what success looks like by asking yourself, "What do I need my team to do so I can stop worrying?" The next question is, "Who do I trust to manage relationships and outcomes without my constant oversight?"

[00:10:32] So, in other words, who's already doing these types of things? Who's already stepping forward in their own way? And then, where are the gaps and what support is needed to close them? So you've identified maybe a few individuals, or ideally, some individuals that you maybe even wanna hire externally. You wanna know where the gaps are and what you need to do to help support closing those gaps.

[00:10:56] From there, you can decide whether to optimize existing talent or acquire new talent. Usually, the answer lies in some combination of the two. And it also depends on what the organization's appetite for external hiring, or whether the development internally needs to take place.

[00:11:16] So there's a lot of factors, but that is where you start. And if you're not sure where to start, we can help.

[00:11:24] **Stephanie Willmore:** That's really reassuring because sometimes organizations have an idea of what they need, but need somebody to kind of guide them through that process. And you've offered us in this episode so many questions, inventory questions, almost like a litmus test for how organizations can know where they truly are.

[00:11:41] And do you have any final thoughts that you wanna add to? All of this has been a really great discussion.

[00:11:46] **Janet Taggart:** Well, I would say that if you're in crisis right now, if you're feeling some of those feelings we talked about earlier in the podcast, then get started right away. Don't wait till things get better to do this long-term planning, but really just set your mind to, that we need to make, even if they're baby steps, to start climbing out of this crisis. And of course, we're here to help. Also, if you are not in crisis, please don't wait until you are to build your bench. Strong leadership benches don't happen by accident, and when your company or organization is poised for growth, then we don't want you to lean into that unprepared.

[00:12:33] Developing that leadership bench, they really are a result of intentional development, clear expectations, and the right investment. And the payoff? Greater ease, higher impact, and a more sustainable leadership experience for you and your team.

[00:12:51] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah. And I feel like that's really why we do what we do is to help organizations realize those outcomes, to have that security, to have that sustainable leadership experience, to not worry or to panic when a crisis comes, to be prepared.

[00:13:08] And I feel like this is just such a valuable conversation to help steer leaders in the right direction of how they can get there and how they can build their bench. So thank you for joining us again, Janet, and thank you for joining us for this episode of the Leadership Transformations podcast. If you are an HR leader and you're committed to building a strong leadership pipeline or a business leader who knows that your company's growth really depends on the growth of your people, then we would love to connect with you. And here at Peridot Circle Consulting, we partner with forward-thinking organizations to help leaders at every level rise to their potential. And we do this with programs, coaching, and tools that create real impact.

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[00:13:52] We are so grateful that you joined us today and remind you that you were meant for greater things. Until next time.

At Peridot Circle, we facilitate the growth and transformation of individuals, leaders, and emerging leaders of fast-growing tech-savvy organizations. If any of our listeners are interested in learning more about our approach to leadership coaching at Peridot Circle Consulting and how to help transform how you show up at work, book a consult with us online at peridotcircleconsulting.com. We would love to help you and your organization achieve more than ever before.