027 When Your Proposal Gets a "No": How Strong Leaders Navigate Rejection

Peridot Circle Consulting

Leadership Transformations

Full Episode Transcript

Leadership Transformations with Linda Linfield & Janet Taggart

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[00:00:00] **Janet Taggart:** Your job isn't to defend your idea, it's to evolve it. It's to ask yourself, "What's the mutual win here?" Leaders who can bridge the gap between their vision and their stakeholders' priorities are the ones who move the needle over time.

[00:00:19] **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 the help of our two founders and principal consultants, Janet Taggart and Linda Linfield. Today we are joined by Janet Taggart.

[00:00:39] Janet specializes in empowering leadership transformations from the inside out coaching aspiring to executive leaders to become known for their highest value. Thank you again for joining us today, Janet.

[00:00:52] **Janet Taggart:** Great to be here, Stephanie.

[00:00:52] **Stephanie Willmore:** Thank you. And we are going to dive into a topic today that resonates with many leaders and it's a little bit of a pivot.

[00:01:01] Usually, we're, you know, lately we've been talking about organizations and their structure and developing talent, and today we're gonna be talking about something that's a little more personal to leaders, and that is when we create ideas and proposals and they get rejected. And this is something that happens to even the most thoughtful and experienced professionals, and what should leaders do when their great ideas are met with hesitation or even worse and outright no?

[00:01:30] **Janet Taggart:** Great question. And it is inevitable and it really actually does relate to some of the organizational issues we've been talking about with leadership pipeline and developing a leadership strategy and developing your talent, because sometimes we develop this proposal and then it goes south, we don't get the answer we want. And I'm so glad we're digging into this because rejection really is a part of the leadership experience.

[00:02:00] It's how we respond to it that can either stall our growth or become a catalyst for our leadership maturity. One thing that will really help leaders when they are told no is to

reframe that no to a "No, not now," rather than a "No, not ever." No decision has to be final. As long as you preserve the relationship, you can continue to navigate toward the desired outcome.

[00:02:27] May take a different path. It may take something you hadn't considered before, but as long as that relationship is maintained, you have the ability to continue to navigate toward the desired outcome. Through adopting a "No, not now" approach, we can maintain our curiosity about where the resistance is and how we might alter our proposal or approach to meet the needs and objectives of the decision maker.

[00:02:53] This mindset shift is so crucial. When leaders treat a no as final, they inadvertently close the door on future possibilities, but if instead we reframe that no as provisional, we keep that door open, sometimes even inviting new opportunities through it.

[00:03:12] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah. That is such a powerful reframe. I feel like that's such a key idea that we have curiosity about where the resistance is coming from, because you can work from there, right?

[00:03:23] I mean, it takes it from somewhere where it feels like it's personal or that it's a complete rejection to, "Where can I take this and how can I think about this differently?" And sometimes we see this with our clients. You know, they work really hard on these proposals. They present it to key stakeholders.

[00:03:43] For example, somebody may have a proposal for a new org structure only to have their VP shut it down. But then, when they really think about it and have that curiosity, they return to the table a few weeks later and say, "Okay, how can we refine this?" And then they do refine it, and I think there's a really important key with thinking about alignment, aligning with their leaders in the business's vision and goals and the priorities. And often the response can be really different. And so thinking about it from a curiosity perspective is really important. I love that.

[00:04:16] **Janet Taggart:** Exactly. You're right on. That's a perfect example of what I mean when I say refine your proposal.

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[00:04:22] Find the intersection between what you want and what your leaders want. This is where resilience meets emotional intelligence. Your job isn't to defend your idea, it's to evolve it. It's to ask yourself, "What's the mutual win here?" Leaders who can bridge the gap between their vision and their stakeholders' priorities are the ones who move the needle over time, especially as that curiosity invites them to open up their thinking to another perspective and maybe another pathway toward a solution.

[00:04:57] So remember, demonstrate resourcefulness and resilience as you work to achieve your goals.

[00:05:03] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah. That's a really good point, that you are demonstrating resilience and remembering that when you're making these proposals, you're making it to people who may have different ideas or different priorities, and that in the process you have to make the connection with relationship building that this process can evolve because of relationships and that you can kind of marry both relationship building with the tactical side of leadership. You know, we're making these proposals, but how do relationships play into that? And so let's talk a little bit more about that. What role does relationship play in navigating these type of professional disappointments?

[00:05:41] **Janet Taggart:** I would say that relationships are absolute foundational in navigating professional disappointments because we're drawn to wanting to defend that idea rather than holding ourselves back and looking at the larger picture and saying, "No, relationships are going help me be successful over time," and being able to navigate through those disappointments, through building stronger and stronger relationships. It's useful to maintain focus on the outcomes you want to produce and your opportunity to take steps toward the outcomes you care about in terms of both accomplishing the task and strengthening the relationship.

[00:06:29] This dual focus is what separates strong leaders from competent ones. When a proposal gets rejected, you have a chance to either erode or deepen trust with your stakeholders. Leaders who focus only on outcomes often miss that second opportunity to invest in the relationship.

[00:06:49] This is particularly important in fast-growing, high change environments, just like those many of our clients operate in, especially in tech or tech-dependent organizations. It

makes me think of the phrase we often use at Peridot Circle that we help leaders lead and we help the best leaders become even better.

[00:07:08] And it really applies here because becoming even better isn't about always getting a yes. It's about how you move forward after you hear no. And this next point is critical, especially for those managing up. Show flexibility and logically and sincerely tie your design to the key stakeholders' desired outcomes.

[00:07:31] And even then, you may still get a no, but that's part of the vision or a way forward when it comes to trying to make proposals that leadership wants to adopt and wants to move forward on. We coach leaders to take a stakeholder-centered approach. This means being curious, not defensive. If your idea didn't land, why not?

[00:07:59] What matters most to the people you're trying to influence? When you align your design with their vision, you increase your influence exponentially.

[00:08:08] **Stephanie Willmore:** You explained that so beautifully and I think that everybody aspires to have that curiosity and to have a resilient mindset. But what about those leaders who, over time, become disheartened, that maybe they've had several nos and they're starting to question their own instincts?

[00:08:25] **Janet Taggart:** Great question. And that's when we coach leaders to lean into the idea of leading with composure and resilience. If you telegraph in flexibility or despair, you can cause others to lose faith in you. And so this is a lot about presence. Your stakeholders aren't just evaluating your ideas; they're watching how you handle resistance.

[00:08:51] Are you adaptable? Do you stay solution-oriented? Do you still lead with integrity even when things don't go your way? One of our clients, a rising technical leader in a hybrid team, faced pushback on a tool rollout proposal. Instead of arguing, he invited feedback, then reworked the proposal in a way that created a stronger alignment to operational KPIs, things that he had overlooked in his original proposal, and that's what leadership at every level looks like.

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[00:09:25] We often say to new managers, "Giant leaps are thrilling, but baby steps also count and they really add up."

[00:09:34] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah, that's a really good point. And that's encouraging. You need to know, remind ourselves that progress is made a step at a time, and I really liked the point that you made about resilience and presence, that really, leaders can choose to get out of their own way.

[00:09:49] Or they can kinda stay stuck. And so I think that it's really helpful to say, "Make that decision. Make that decision to be open. And remember that your leaders are watching the way that you react to situations like these."

[00:10:01] **Janet Taggart:** Yes. And you know, we work with so many good-hearted leaders that want to cause the right thing to happen.

[00:10:07] And when they put all this work into an idea and a proposal that they think will have such a great impact, it can be very discouraging for them. And so we would just remind them leadership is cumulative. Every email you send, every meeting you facilitate, every difficult conversation you approach with grace, that's leadership.

[00:10:31] At times, you'll have the opportunity to sail smoothly straight to your desired destination. And other times, a better strategy is to navigate the rough waters, staying the course towards your destination. In other words, don't mistake detours for dead ends. Stay the course and keep the long view in mind.

[00:10:50] Use the detours as opportunities to develop deeper, more trusting professional relationships and as invitations to understand the needs and the objectives of the organization more fully. It's true that we learn more about ourselves during times of challenge, frustration, and uncertainty than when things go smoothly.

[00:11:14] **Stephanie Willmore:** Well, that is really wonderful wisdom that you've shared, Janet. And before we close, what would you say to HR leaders or business executives who

wanna encourage this kind of resilience and in terms of relational leadership in their organizations?

[00:11:31] **Janet Taggart:** A great way to start is to start by modeling it and building that capability within yourself.

[00:11:37] Do a gut check and say, "Am I modeling this or am I expecting others to do it well when they don't see a good model for that?" And then create environments where it's safe to experiment and fail. Allow people to make proposals and just tell them no, and to encourage them to do the things that we've outlined here in this podcast.

[00:11:58] And recognize resilience and coach your leaders on how to take no as information, not as a verdict. It's really important. Here at Peridot Circle, we partner with organizations to build these exact capabilities from aspiring leaders to senior executives. And when you invest in this kind of leadership development, you get more than just great ideas. You get leaders who can carry those ideas through rough waters.

[00:12:26] **Stephanie Willmore:** Yeah. We see that power in the idea of authentic leadership and in being genuine, and allowing people to have a growth mindset and to use all of these experiences to build that leadership maturity. So thank you for this wonderful discussion, Janet, and thank you to those who have joined us today on the Leadership Transformations Podcast.

[00:12:46] If you are an HR leader committed to building a strong leadership pipeline or a business leader who knows that your company's growth depends on the growth of its people, we would love to connect with you. And at Peridot Circle Consulting, we partner with forward-thinking organizations and we help leaders at every level rise to their potential. We do this with programs, coaching and tools that create a real impact. We want to remind you that you were meant for greater things. Thank you for joining us. 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

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