



Co-Hosts: Dr. Daphne Scott and Dr. Katie Hendricks
Episode 65: The Sidebar Meeting
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Daphne Scott: Welcome to the Super Fantastic Leadership Show podcast with Daphne Scott and...

Katie Hendricks: Katie Hendricks!

Daphne: This is *the* podcast devoted to supporting you in leading at the highest levels of effectiveness with the greatest levels of fun.

Katie: As you were saying that, I was just thinking about how often we kind of skip over leading. This is a show about leading. I want to acknowledge that if you're listening to this, you're interested in leading. That often means that you're sort of out there. You're the point person. You're out there ahead of other people. It's a unique position to take on, and we really want to support you in leading while being really effective and having a good time.

Daphne: I'm really glad you pointed that out, Katie. We have *leadership* in the title of our show, and I don't think we've really addressed what that means to us, you know, our definition. A leader is just a person willing to step into the unknown.

Katie: I love that.

Daphne: I think when people think about leadership... Again, we come back to this kind of hierarchical structure. I just want to say I couldn't see that more differently if I tried.

Katie: I so appreciate you saying that, because that's my definition of leading also: being really friends with stepping into the unknown over and over again.

Daphne: Thanks for pointing that out, Katie. Next time I say it, I'm going to emphasize the word *leading*. Does that sound good?

Katie: Okay, all right. That will really get people's attention.

Daphne: That will definitely get people's attention. Okay, what are we talking about with this week's show, though? We're talking about the good old sidebar conversation, Katie.

Katie: Oh yeah. That's so close to that thing called *gossip*.

Daphne: It's so edgy, right? I feel like it's right on the edge of it. I just called in the title of the show this week, "Also known as the meeting after the meeting."

Katie: Yes, the meeting after the meeting, where all the important things go on.

Daphne: We are bucketing this topic today sort of within this idea of withholding. Well, not sort of. It *is* withholding, but like you said, Katie, it kind of creeps along the edge of gossip. It might not quite be gossip, obviously, as we define it. We'll talk about how we define that later in the show. But boy, there's something about this kind of sidebar conversation that happens after the meeting that I think really undermines trust.

Katie: I am so glad you brought that up, because it's one of those kinds of sometimes invisible things. People know something happened there, but they can't quite put their finger on what it was, but they don't feel good or connected with people.

Daphne: Yeah, it's like subversive almost. I'm going to talk about the men's bathroom as well.

Katie: Oh, okay, good. I'm sure you have more experience with that than I do. I have no idea.

Daphne: Why would I have more experience with that?

Katie: I don't know. You brought it up.

Daphne: But it's true. Obviously I did bring it up. The men's bathroom and the ladies' lounge. We're going to talk about both of those.

Katie: Oh yes, and the ladies' lounge. Now *that* I can definitely relate to.

Daphne: Okay, great. So that's what we're talking about today. Let's take a little moment to do some appreciation.

Katie: Yes, let's. I want to start today.

Daphne: Do it.

Katie: I want to appreciate our friend Sophie Chiche, who is an extraordinary entrepreneur. She lives down in LA. She has created this wonderful opportunity for people to refresh themselves called an urban sweat lodge. It's called Shape House. One of the things I so appreciate about her is not only her great ingenuity, but the quality of her presence with people. She is just such a connector. She's like a fountain of connection and presence. I appreciate that so much about her. So that's who I wanted to appreciate today.

Daphne: That's wonderful. Shape House. That sounds great. I can't wait to come out and try one of those.

Katie: Oh yeah, you have to when you come out.

Daphne: That sounds great. The day spa for sweating.

Katie: Yeah, it's an urban sweat lodge. It gives you all of the benefits of sweating with none of the inconvenience.

Daphne: That's so great. I love it. Well, I'm going to appreciate my yo-yo. I have a yo-yo. Here's what I want to appreciate. I love that someone invented a yo-yo. It's just this thing, and it has a string around it, and you make it go up and down. But here's how I use my yo-yo. This is really funny. I've had a yo-yo for years, and I've gone through different yo-yos. I lost one. I broke one of them. But I use them at these moments when I'm stuck a little bit or I feel like I want to take a break, like walk around or whatever. I find it the most relaxing, easy thing to do that allows me to rejuvenate myself in a very short period of time, like within one or two minutes.

Katie: I love that. You're doing a movement that takes some skill, so it involves you, and it gets you out of the state, whatever the state was that you were in, and it refreshes you.

Daphne: Yeah. It's not so much about appreciating the yo-yo. It's about appreciating... I don't know who invented the yo-yo. I don't know anything about them really, but just appreciating that someone had the instinctive sort of like, "Maybe this would be fun. I'll just make this thing go up and down."

Katie: Yeah, human inventiveness.

Daphne: Human inventiveness. So Duncan. If you're interested in getting your own yo-yo, please get a Duncan. I do not know how to do any tricks on them. The Duncan Butterfly yo-yo is what I'm into now.

Katie: That is very cool. Well, Gay loves yo-yos and is very skilled at them.

Daphne: Really?

Katie: Yeah.

Daphne: Tell Gay I want to get together with him and just yo-yo sometime.

Katie: Absolutely. I'll tell him. We can make a video of it.

Daphne: I think that would be fantastic. Maybe you have something you appreciate like that, but I just wanted to take the time. I actually carry it in my backpack, and I enjoy using my yo-yo. So I wanted to appreciate that. I was using it earlier today, and I thought, "This is such a great little thing, such a great tiny little gift."

So on with the topic of our show, the sidebar conversation. Now this all comes from an article I briefed over that Deb Katz actually told me about. We mentioned Deb last week on the show. They were talking to Twitter's CEO, and they were like, "How do you keep yourself together?" He said one thing in particular that stood out. For him, he doesn't allow sidebar conversations after a meeting. If people come up to him and say, "Hey, I didn't say this in the meeting, but I think you should know," or "Here's my idea," or "Here's what I thought..." He has basically made it clear that that's a nonnegotiable.

Katie: That's a nonnegotiable. He will not have those conversations. I love that.

Daphne: Isn't it fascinating? I got into this conversation, and I started thinking about this, and I'm like, "Yeah, these sidebar conversations are really not helpful." I thought it would be a great thing for us to explore about what's really happening in those instances.

Katie: Yeah, what is really happening? I love that, because it's one of those energy drains. I'm so glad he brought attention to that phenomenon, that interaction pattern. What my attention went to first is, "What happened in the meeting that the person didn't bring up the thing then?"

Daphne: Oh, that's such a great question.

Katie: Then what happens to your attention and focus when the first impulse comes up and you override that? I would say that probably you're not present anymore.

Daphne: Oh, Katie, so true. You're just going to keep hanging on to that thing you didn't mention, so you're not going to hear the rest...

Katie: And going to either write it down, or your attention is going to go to that and off whatever is continuing to emerge in the meeting.

Daphne: Right. Somebody could be saying things that you're not even noticing now.

Katie: Exactly. Not even noticing or responding to or building on.

Daphne: Oh, that's so great. I had a thought. I don't know that this is always true, but it's a little passive-aggressive almost, you know, that you'll kind of take it outside of the meeting. It can be used as a way to manipulate an outcome.

Katie: Yeah, I can certainly see that. It could be somebody in the group who you don't want to encounter, who maybe opposes you or you don't like, so you don't bring up the thing. You're going to do a sidebar so you can work around that person or their reaction.

Daphne: Yeah, exactly. I thought we could kind of approach it from, "What causes us to do it?" I think your question was so great. "What happened in the meeting?" We're talking about this in more of an organizational context, so I think there's a lot about culture and how things are structured that plays into this. I think this is what got my attention about this CEO. He's basically saying, "Look, that's not going to be part of our culture. We're not going to do that."

Katie: I love that. Declaring the parameters of the culture in a way that's so clear and that gives people a whole different possibility, and also really declares, "Look, we're going to have a certain container here, and that's how it is."

Daphne: Yeah, exactly. So what causes us to do it? What happens to us when we see someone else do it? This is one thing I really thought about. What tone does that start to set? How does it impact us if we know that's occurring, if we've been in the meeting, obviously? Then how to handle it when we're the leader or decision maker, the person who might be leading the charge in that particular instance or called the meeting or has decisions to make or that sort of thing.

How do we handle it? How do we want to be in that? Do we want to be so bold, if you will, as the CEO of Twitter to say, "Look, we're not going to do that"? How do we want to handle it? So what causes us to do it, Katie? I think this is the place I wanted to start. I was trying to think back. I'm like, "Have I done stuff like that?" Yeah, absolutely.

Katie: Well, fear. It comes right down to I'm afraid, and then I don't realize that I'm afraid, and I make it about the conversation or the other person rather than, "I am afraid to share this."

Daphne: Because of [fill in the blank].

Katie: Because of whatever the story is, but it's almost always, "I'm afraid somebody is not going to like it."

Daphne: Right. If you read different articles on this topic of "sidebarring" and that sort of thing, it's like, "Well, in certain cultures, this is the way it's done, and you want to go around and get everybody's opinion," but I think we make up a lot of excuses.

Katie: That just reminds me of a dysfunctional family where nobody talks to each other.

Daphne: It totally is.

Katie: Where someone says, "Listen, I want to tell you about Grandma, but don't say anything to Grandma, because it'll upset her." That stuff just drives me crazy, because I think that is the source of so much misery in life.

Daphne: Well, it doesn't work.

Katie: To have somebody declaring that that's not going to happen at work, I just applaud that. I think it's just wonderful. I think what needs to come along with this as the leader is really demonstrating that differences of opinion, different perceptions, opposition, people not liking things, feelings... All of those things then need to get included, because I think that's one of the main reasons that people sidebar. They have either fear or other feelings connected to the conversation, and they're not willing to be authentic about it.

Daphne: Right. So taking it just from the individual perspective is that you have fear. "Am I going to be accepted? Am I going to be the weirdo?"

Katie: And also there may be things that are unconscious in the culture that drive that, so it may not just be the individual taking something personally. There are certain cultures where disagreement is not really allowed. I was just thinking about working with Motorola. Many years ago, I worked with a lot of their vice presidents, and one of their mottos was doing it right the first time. Just think about how impossible that is.

Daphne: Well, I don't have to look back too many hours in my day-to-day to see that.

Katie: I think it would be all about concealing. What drives sidebar is either in the structure of the organization or the person or both there is permission for and support of concealing rather than really valuing authenticity and meeting people and appreciating differences.

Daphne: I think this is where we start getting at this cross path, looking at the individual taking their responsibility for revealing, as well as the culture and the people in the culture being responsible for the container they're creating. I think that's where these start to meet, if you will, as I thought about this.

Katie: Yes, and I'm thinking about all of the different subtle and not-so-subtle ways people will keep what then becomes a sidebar, where people support concealing. For example, interrupting somebody.

Daphne: That's a good one.

Katie: A culture of interruption, where that is allowed, where people don't get to finish their point, or where there's a lot of innuendo and kind of disguised contempt or ridicule, everywhere from sarcasm on into nonverbal communications of disinterest, like texting while the other person is speaking.

Daphne: I encountered one on a team I was working with, where the senior leader, the president actually, would voice his opinion, and the room... It was one or two people on the team who said, "Well, whenever he says his opinion, that's what we're going to do. He speaks first. That's really what he wants to happen." I said, "I think that's interesting."

Katie: "It's interesting you should say that."

Daphne: It's an interesting story. I think even the stories we can make up... I said, "Have you ever really asked him if that's true? Is there evidence here to support that that's actually true? What is driving it?" It was fascinating to work with this team of people, because then, of course, we made it very salient. "Here's the story everyone has. Is there actually any evidence of this?"

Katie: It's certainly a large part of what I did when I was doing corporate consulting. I made the story visible. I think when you ban the sidebar the story is going to get a lot more visible.

Daphne: Well, I imagine that's what's happening in this situation. Again, what are the perils of revealing in a group? Well, I think the perils are really driven by the culture. There's really nothing more valuable than revealing, but psychological safety matters, context of meetings matter. I want to say one thing about this in terms of... Well, actually we'll say that at the end, because I think there's another thing about context in meetings that really matters that I want to bring up, but we'll get to that.

Katie: Okay, don't forget.

Daphne: I will not forget. Now I want to talk about what happens when we see someone else doing it.

Katie: Sidebarring?

Daphne: Yes.

Katie: I first would think, "Oh, they don't value me. I'm being excluded here. I'm not as important." I would feel mad. I feel mad just thinking about it.

Daphne: "I'm making myself angry right now." Well, this is the men's bathroom. I wanted to bring in the men's bathroom and the ladies' lounge. I've watched this happen on teams. There's a break in the meeting, and if the person who's the decision maker goes to the bathroom... You know, people are going to the bathroom. That's fine. Boy, there's a trail. This is what happened in particular with this one organization, where the men's bathroom was where decisions were made.

Katie: Whoa.

Daphne: The men's bathroom was where the decisions were made. Now this is really fascinating. I thought, "Oh, this is interesting." I said, "I wonder if this is happening..." Sure enough, there was this lady's... This is kind of an interesting phenomenon. The men's bathroom was just a regular bathroom, but in the lady's bathroom there was a lounge area.

Katie: Oh, there's a lounge. You can hang out.

Daphne: Why am I hanging out in the bathroom? I never really understood this phenomenon. Nevertheless, also in the ladies' lounge... So these sidebars would happen. Most of the decisions in this particular organization were made in the bathroom, long story short.

Katie: Wow.

Daphne: It was an interesting culture to work with. As I was putting this together, I had this recollection of, "Oh man, I remember hearing this with these teams." It was kind of an interesting phenomenon to watch. It wasn't until somebody brought it to my attention and I started watching that I was like, "This is really neat."

What I started to do, just to play with this when I was working with this one team... As soon as the break would come up, I'd ask the president, "I want to have a conversation with you for a second," just to see what would happen with the trail of people going to the bathroom. They would wait. It was really, really fascinating. So that was obviously something we cleared up and started to reset in that culture. Like you said, making those stories known.

Katie: I bet that was very powerful for them.

Daphne: Oh, totally. The point of that being what happens to us when we see other people doing this or we start to get a sense that this is what's happening? One of the things besides our anger... I think this is where trust starts to get really violated.

Katie: I do too, because I was immediately having the thought, "Well, I don't feel safe."

Daphne: Right, exactly.

Katie: I don't know if what I say is going to be contradicted by somebody else, and I don't even get to hear about it, because it's happening in some sidebar conversation. I think that somehow the decisions are being made here by the team, and then suddenly I find out that the guys come back from the men's bathroom and we're going off on a whole other track.

Daphne: That's exactly it. A couple of people had reported that they had watched that phenomenon occurring, and I thought, "This is really interesting." So again, I think culture. I think how the leader handles meetings and decisions. This is what I wanted to say earlier, too, Katie. Who has decision rights is so important. We're going to talk about that more when we get into invitations to mastery. I think that's one of the ways we can stop this sidebarring, people feeling like they can't express during the meeting.

We've talked about this before on the show, Katie. Do we make space for the skeptic? Or devil's advocate I think we called it. Do we make space for that? That's one of the ways I know the comfort level of a team. If someone is presenting or I'm sitting in on a meeting and I'm watching it, and everybody has their head down or no one is expressing an opinion or everyone is agreeing the entire time...

Katie: Yeah, you think, "Oh boy."

Daphne: That's what I think.

Katie: "Yikes! Lots of work to do here."

Daphne: Yeah, exactly. I think it's something for us to pay attention to when we're in meetings, that we're allowing space. You know, if somebody hasn't spoken and it has been 50 minutes (hopefully your meetings aren't going longer than an hour, but let's just say it's 50 minutes) and there are one or two people who really haven't expressed anything, I think it's worthy to say, "Hey, what are *you* thinking?"

Katie: Or "How does this seem to you?" The other thing that's occurring to me, along with literally asking for people's opinions, is looking at people's body language. That's one of the keys for me. I'll look and say, "Joe, I noticed your forehead is scrunched. I'm wondering what's happening for you. Do you see this in a different way, or do you have another opinion? I'd love to hear that." So I'm acknowledging both the nonverbal communication and also making space for something that is not completely in alignment with me.

Daphne: Yeah, I really like that you're bringing in the part about the body and watching how people are interacting more from the body's perspective versus just the words.

Katie: You know, their body language, whether breath has stopped. So often in a group I'll say, "Okay, I noticed there's no breath in the room right now, so I'm wondering what's not being expressed."

Daphne: Yeah, that's so good and so true.

Katie: So it's not like I'm making up anything. I'm simply noticing what's happening. If I then give voice to that, I describe, or any leader does... We're really acknowledging the whole person. They may not have their thoughts all formulated. They might just be having a hesitation. So I think also we can make room for nuances and for things that aren't completely formed.

Daphne: Oh, that's so great. Yeah, ideas that haven't completely been vetted. You don't have to have it all together to express yourself.

Katie: Or packaged.

Daphne: Yeah, or packaged all nice and neat. I like to say, "I don't know. As I think about that, I just...eck." I do say that. That is a true story. "I don't know what it is. I just have this *eck*."

Katie: Or "Neh."

Daphne: "I just have this sense. I don't even know what it is." It does not have to be packaged nice and neat. Not at all.

Katie: Often the "neh" or the "eck" are real windows to a whole different shift, a different way of looking at it, or a whole different direction for the project or the strategy, and if those things get overridden, which they often do, then the person's emerging intuition gets turned down. It's like the whole faucet gets narrowed and trickles rather than flows.

Daphne: I think that's where we miss opportunities. This is one of the advantages of having the expression happen in a group. We miss the opportunities, then, to do one of two things, to either have that sense of, "Whoa, yeah, maybe we're on the wrong path," but also to do what I call "yes and-ing." "Yeah, I hear you. Oh my gosh."

Katie: That's a great skill, "yes and-ing."

Daphne: Yeah, I learned that from my improv days. So really building on what the person has to say.

Katie: In your case, what you were just saying when you had the "neh..." When you say, "Yeah, I can feel that, and I'm wondering what next step you see, or what's the next thing that comes up for you when you are giving yourself permission to really go into the something feels off? What's the quality of how it feels?" You add something to it so the person can keep uncovering what it is they want to contribute.

Daphne: Exactly. Well, let's touch on this. We said at the top of the show that this was really going to be about withholding, because that's obviously what's happening here. The part I wanted to touch on, Katie, was what happens to us... We've talked about here's what's happening in the culture, and what happens when we see somebody else do it, but I also wanted to talk about what happens when *we* are the one doing it.

Katie: Oh, we're in trouble.

Daphne: And I think this was the piece... Not only how these sidebars affect our teams and our cultures and decisions, but most importantly, coming back to, "Well, what happens to me as the individual when I've had something and I withheld it, basically?" I try to go express it, but I... Even when we express it in a sidebar (this is the point I really wanted to make, Katie), it never feels as thorough.

Katie: No, because it's not direct and you don't have free flow. It's like talking out of one side of your mouth.

Daphne: "Hey, I've got this thing I want to tell you that I didn't want to bring up in the meeting." Why do I sound like I just got out of a 1940s gangster movie? "I'll tell you, you see? We're going to do it like this, you see?" Right. So what happens to us when we withhold? I think this is like what you just said. Our energetic hose is not completely... We're not available. We've left ourselves. We have withdrawn from our own energetic expression, and we are in trouble now.

You kind of touched that at the beginning and said that we go away. This is what I think contributes to this sort of... I don't know why the word *shutdown* just came to me, but sort of this shutdown experience we can feel at work. We're blocked. We haven't really expressed in the group. I think this is the key point about the sidebar conversations. Yes, it's about culture. Yes, it's about making sure we're creating space for it, but really I come back to, "Wow, this is actually about people's vitality, our individual aliveness."

Katie: Yeah, the aliveness and the juice, and then, of course, the co-creativity, the collaboration that becomes possible. Each of us has the power to open the faucet, the flow of aliveness, and that's where I would look in the invitations to mastery. I would look at a recent meeting or a recent interaction and ask, "Did I have the impulse to sidebar at the end, and what did I do with that? Am I aware of anything that I did withhold?" If you did, go and clean it up.

Daphne: That's perfect. I think that's a great invitation to mastery right there. I'm going to add one more, which is really about decision rights. I think this is one of the things that can keep these sidebar conversations from occurring. Make it really clear who has the decision rights ultimately and how you're going to go about it.

So if it's, "Hey, the leader is going to ultimately decide, but I want everybody's input," make that clear. Or "Hey look, today we're going to be making a decision. We're going to be getting input, but it's going to be a majority vote, so I want everybody's voice." I think that really helps manage any need for a sidebar conversation.

Katie: I love that. Then of course the third one would be my choice to not participate in sidebars.

Daphne: There you go. Nailed it.

Katie: If someone comes up and says, "Hey, I want to go over this thing," I go, "Nope."

Daphne: Exactly. "We just talked about this in the meeting."

Katie: "We just talked about it. Put it on the agenda for the next meeting."

Daphne: "Please bring it to the group."

Katie: "Send a memo to everybody."

Daphne: Yes, love it. Nailed it. Those are your invitations to mastery. Give them a try. In the post this week, I will be putting up sort of an algorithm, for lack of a better word, for decision rights. You can get on the post where we put the podcast up on my website, and I'm actually going to have a document there that people can access.

Katie: Oh, lovely. I love it. That's great.

Daphne: You can go there and access it. All right, well, we hit the invitations to mastery. I think we're going to wrap it up. We hope you enjoyed this podcast and that you remain more inspired than ever. Keep posting your questions and comments. You can post them on www.daphne-scott.com and also on Facebook. We really put out the message on Facebook, where you can get in touch with Katie and me. You can get in touch with us on social media too. We really enjoy that. And keep living a super fantastic leadership life.