

## The Joy Factory Podcast – Cultivating Healthy Workplaces – Transcript

### Season 3 Episode 1

SDF - Welcome to the Joy factory, where we explore the art of happiness and art. I'm Susan DeFazio, your host and founder of Future Ready. Today, where we develop toolkits, simplify our world of art, and empower 'the how' for happier and healthier outcomes so that people and businesses can truly thrive. Our podcast guests come from all walks of life, and today we're delighted to welcome Dr Arlene Eagan. Welcome, Arlene.

DAE - Thank you very much, Susan.

SDF - Thank you. It's I'm really excited about having you on the on the episode today. But let me for the listeners, let me just do a little bit of, -, background to Arlene. Arlene is the CEO of Roffey Park Institute, which is a global leader in organisational development. She has 25 years of experience working with board members, leaders and managers. Arlene's mission is a straightforward but a bold one. And it's to empower leaders to be their best selves so they, in turn, can transform workplaces into thriving ecosystems.

Armed with a psychology background specializing in sports and cognitive behavior, Arlene's honed their expertise in critical thinking, strategy, and leadership behaviors. She works with leaders from all kinds of industries, both at home and abroad. And if that's not enough, alongside her role as CEO, Arlene is also a trusted business partner, mentor, captivating keynote speaker, published writer, exceptional executive coach, and a dedicated researcher.

Arlene, I really am so impressed with everything you do, and I feel that we are extremely fortunate to have you with us today, talking about cultivating healthy workplaces, because I know it's a subject that's close to both of our hearts. Yes. -, so in this episode, let me just give the viewers a sort of an outline of what they might expect to hear. -, so today we're going to explore with to Arlene her thoughts and experiences on how and how leaders create environments that allow individuals and business results to coexist and thrive happily together.

Our conversation will cover the characteristics that make up a healthy organisation and how these are being redefined. How the role of leadership has evolved over the past ten years, and the type of success behaviors today's and future leaders should think about. Developing and role model, together with the type of learning styles that help organisations stay relevant to both an intergenerational workforce and their accelerated pace of change. So we've got a lot of deep, -, subjects that we want to kind of touch on.

So, -, we'll have our work cut out for us, Arlene. Absolutely. But, -, but first, before we get into this sort of the heavier stuff, -, I'd like to start off our conversation by asking you, what is Joy mean to you personally, Arlene?

DAE - So personally, uh, joy for me is related to. Creativity. It's related to nature or natural states. Mhm. -, and it's related to a sense of fulfillment as well. And that sense of fulfillment

can differ from day to day. On Monday my, my fulfillment could be qualitatively different to that I might feel on a Friday or Saturday. Yes. It's the energy really that laughs. - joy brings. That's that's what I, that's what I really, really value about being in a joyful state.

SDF - Yeah. I think sometimes people think it can be, uh, material things. You know, if I have X, Y, or Z, I'll be happy if I have this house be happy. You know, for me, what you're saying about this creativity and sort of the fulfillment in the moment, and it just depends on where you are and you're working week or the month, you know, -, it's it's like, I love spring. I mean, I, I'm so hopeful around spring. That brings me an enormous amount of joy. So I love your connection to, uh, nature, but also natural states as well. -, I think in this world, I don't know why. It feels like everything's sort of hyped up. Everything. You know, your emotions need to be hyped. And actually, uh, for me, contentment is something that is extremely. And you have to find what unlocks contentment for you. Don't you know? I suppose that's the that's the key there.

DAE Absolutely, absolutely. And, you know, for me, a lot of.

Now thinking about that joyful state again. It's a lot of it is to do with energy. And so to your point, you know, I love spring, too. I love getting out and being able to walk early in the mornings and listen to the sounds of nature, you know, and, and actually give my head to that little bit of space. -, and, you know, fresh air, uh, challenged by the elements usually, of course, being based in Dublin. So, yeah, a lot of rain and a lot of cold, but, you know, it is in it is in those truly natural surroundings for me that, you know, I certainly get a lot of energy and a lot of joy that I'm able to take into maybe the trickier situations that might come across the days.

SDF - Yeah. Because you have a big role. I mean, there's a lot of people, you know, with a bold, bold sort of mission and a lot of people depending on you at the Institute to, to, to lead in a certain way. So I think, you know, you're in that prime position, I guess, where you're you are I mean, you're surrounded by leaders.

Obviously, you can't do it on your own. But what do you think from your experience? What do you think are the characteristics that make up a healthy organisation?

DAE - So at the foundation, at the core of a healthy organisation is trust. Ultimately, it's it's trust. -, and, you know, I am truly blessed in the position that that I hold and in the organisation that I work in, because I am surrounded by amazing talent, amazing people, and people with other leadership skills that complement mine. -, and, you know, so again, thinking about this idea of a healthy organisation, it's one that really values balance, uh, as well as a high performance. So, you know, you can have both. You can absolutely have high performance in terms of productivity and other types of KPIs like low absence, low attrition, low turnover, high customer satisfaction. You can have this, -, and you can have this concept of a healthy organisation. And when I think about the definition of that for me, it's around, uh, the people and the behaviors that get promoted and rewarded in the organisation.

So this is the the openness. It's the idea of seeking balance between being able to cope with high pressure situations, but also understanding that we don't need to be in a state of high pressure constantly because it's not sustainable. So these behaviors that really seek to help us through those much more pressure to times, but also allow recovery within the organisation as well. So, you know, people to be able to step out, step away, maybe do different kinds of projects, work with different kinds of people so that the energy in the organisation is maintained, that the focus in the organisation is maintained, but it's done so in a way that actually brings a little bit of, you know, this word joy, happiness. It's a happy place to work, -, that that people feel fulfilled.

And ultimately, uh, Susan, I really, really believe that people go to work. So they go to work to do a good day's work, you know? Yes, everyone is adults in this situation. Some days, like everything else in life, we might have a high energy day. You know, we might be on top of our game. We like accurate results. On other days we're just feeling it. But again, you know, when when we are in adult relationships in the workplace and we provide the conditions for people to do their best work, we will see good results. -, you know, and so, so this concept of the leadership of the organisation really role modeling, uh, healthy, sustainable behaviors, you know, it's going to, to cascade across your organisation.

SDF - Yeah. You know that this sort of the essence of trust and surrounding yourself with people with the right skills, but also complementary skills, but then giving them the what I'm hearing you saying is, you know, you're giving them the right conditions to thrive in that. So it's not about working like you're a battery hen, who you're sort of in this high, high state of production every time you need to be. It's like you said earlier, you know, about going out for your walk. -, that I'm quite sure when you're walking, you're connecting with nature. There's things that bubble up about, you know, personal things, but also work things that help you think things through. And you're not necessarily sitting at your desk hunched over your laptop, are you?

DAE - Absolutely. And you know, when you step back and you think about, uh, the purpose of, of work, you know, in, in, in kind of, -, a little bit more of an objective stance work provides a great structure for many people. Yeah. It's where we do spend a lot of time, uh, a lot of our lives, you know, we do spend in, in our workplaces and or working. And so when you think about what work can offer us and again, some days we just might not be in the mood for it or or, you know, we could be finding ourselves in a challenging work environment. So when you think about work from a different perspective, you know, what does it offer, what it can offer structure. It can offer the chance for collaboration. It can offer the chance for fulfillment in another aspect of life. And so, you know, it's a myth to think we go to work and we don't bring any of our personal life with us. And it's amidst to think when we go home, we leave work at the door. You know, there's there's things that can that can come with us, either the highs of the day or the lows day. -, but, you know, ultimately when you think about life, it's so integrated. And I think that was a really big lesson from Covid, from the pandemic, how integrated all facets of our life really are. And so, you know, if we can take a healthy approach and a sustainable approach to our, you know, to our existence as beings, then going into these different situations, it just might offer us up a different kind of a toolkit that we might not have considered before.

SDF - Yeah. And, how do you, you know, in what you're doing and, and you know, you're really at the sharp end helping organisations develop this, -, environment where people can thrive. How do you think, -, you know, the notion of a healthy organisation, if you like, because it's quite it's a relatively new term is certainly from my perspective, I think it's the right thing. But, you know, we're talking more about it now to when we were ten years ago. So how do you think perhaps the the mindset perhaps coming from maybe leadership is thinking about. The organisation and the organisational state to perhaps, maybe, you know, five, ten years ago.

DAE - So I suppose if you think about it, it's a cold, hard term, Susan. And you think about cash and you think about you think about performance, okay? So leaders in your organisation know their job looking at strategy, looking at, you know, growth and, and -, the ultimate performance of the business, you know, things like attrition, burnout, -, mental health issues, uh, wellness issues. They all cost organisations money. So imagine thinking ahead and going, well, you know, if I had an organisation that, you know, where the leaders genuinely cared about health and well-being themselves, right? So we we can see them living this, -, and leaders care about health and well-being of their stakeholders, whether that's their staff, their clients, their suppliers, whoever is in their supply chain. Imagine that a mindset. Because what you will see is that in cultures, in organisational cultures that do take this seriously, there is a focus on reducing attrition. There's a focus on different kind of work practices that are going to allow for better balance.

There is a focus on creating communities and outlets ultimately for people to engage with the business and in the business in different ways, which again, can, you know, we can see the benefits to innovation. We can see the benefits to, you know, enhanced motivation in terms of work, practice, -, across the organisation. So, you know, there is a link to performance in this. And as leaders that certainly all of the leaders that are working with performance and high performance, whether it's, you know, your own metrics of comparing competing cultures or you're looking at your competitor list, you know, how do we outperform?

You know, this is where leaders think. And so, you know, if if we start to think differently about how our organisations are structured, how the future looks for us in terms of leaders and leadership, there's a there's a real chance for leaders to do some amazing pioneering work in this space and, and start to move it to those organisations of the future in terms of just moving health and well-being onto the strategic table. As opposed to having it as an initiative. Sitting with a person somewhere. Because as we know, you know, that's not how how big strategic ideas get transcended across organisations. It's got to become a strategic intent, you know, so, you know, we're blessed. We work with a very entrepreneurial organisation called Healthy Place to Work. And, you know, we've been certified as a healthy organisation.

But for us, the certification that's the start. Now, you know, so what else can we do? You know, what's working for us, you know, in terms of our leadership, in terms of our initiatives. And if you like, the ethos of the organisation and how can we keep building on that going forward? Yeah, it's it's I mean, it's inspirational to to hear you speak because, you

know, this is not about all leaders have to model, -, the right kind of behaviors if you like. But also it's not just about one functions responsibility. Often I see, you know, people, the leaders sort of lead the business. They're in charge of the results. They've got their pal, if you like, and they've got their, their KPIs. -, but then it's sort of HR figure out the really difficult stuff. And, and for me, this is a shared responsibility that, -, organisations need to come together on. And really, it's, it's there's I mean, there's no doubt it's hugely complex. So it's not just one function's responsibility or one individual's responsibility. It's a collective, -, opportunity, if you like, -, to be able to think about, okay, so how do we redefine the way we operate? What does health mean to us and how does that transcend through the, through the organisation? So do you think,

SDF - I wanted to pick up on something because you talked about reward and it's something I'm, -, sort of really, uh, I like you say you're an average researcher. I mean, I, I research all the time. I just, I have a thirst for it because that's a way that I learn as well, other perspectives. And. But do you think that reward mechanisms or structures, if you like, -, are keeping up with the notion of healthy systems? Are they are they broad enough and holistic enough, do you think, -, to be able to, to sort of drive the right behaviors? I'm wondering what you're seeing. Mm.

DAE -, yeah, that's a great question. And I think it's early days on it. Yes. But we we can't forget the, uh. Age old statement of what gets valued gets measured. Yes. And until again. This is again that idea of thinking more strategically about the concept of health and well-being. Because it's not just I feel it's not just the organisation's responsibility, uh, to ensure that to ensure the health and well-being of of staff and key stakeholders. You know, I think all of us have responsibility to ourselves to make sure that, you know, we're clear in terms of what this means for us. You know, it's it's not like the organisation is going to, you know, every Friday we're all going for A5K run. You know, it's not going to work. Neither should it. But ultimately it's around. What are the conditions? Uh, the organisations can really, uh, promote to make sure that, you know, it's it's not a toxic organisation. Sometimes it's easier to know what we don't want when it comes. To this, you know, and and again, thinking about experience, as some of us may have had working in toxic organisations, which would be defined as organisations that are very they have a very strong blame culture. If something goes wrong, somebody is sought out to be punished. There's a lot of deceit and lying at work practices.

You know, if you're not at your desk at 5 a.m. and you're, you know, the last to go, it's, you know, you're not working right, you know, and these are the organisations that just aren't these practices are not sustainable. So, you know, you're going to see you're going to see your metrics around attrition and burnout and all that. So you're going to see that stuff high. And ultimately, you know, performance long term sustainable financial performance will be a challenge. So how do we create balance within our organisations. And really so you know again what does that mean. So one of the things that I was very taken by towards your question, Susan, around the metrics piece, -, is that, you know, during the pandemic and obviously we're still talking about workplace practices in terms of whether that's blended working or omni working or back to the office or completely remote or, you know, one of the one of the key pieces of research that came up in that state and was around loneliness,

increases in levels of loneliness, -, for for vulnerable people and for people who who weren't set up properly. And so, again, we could start to see, uh, during the pandemic, how particular conditions were going to impact work, because we weren't dealing with those people that were mental health issues became, you know, kind of rampant for some because of the isolation. So, again, what's the workplace? Uh, what is the responsibility of the workplace to make sure that people feel connected and supported? This isn't going to go away. It shouldn't go away. And so can we just take that one step further and think more about, you know, what I'm thinking about the mental well-being of people? Well, what might that mean for the physical well-being of people? And sometimes is this about putting it really, really simple practices like, I've had to do it, you know, where you might have a day, you're working and you have scheduled calls. From nine until 5 or 6:00. And, you know, at the end of the day, you look at your watch, you know, you look at your you look at your whatever. You're, you get your health data from and it goes, well done. You've you've walked 200 steps today. You know, you're going really. You know really.

That's. Why you know, I, I haven't I, you know, I've eaten uh, uh, sad sandwich at my desk. You know, I haven't seen the sunlight. I couldn't even tell you what kind of of a day it is out there, you know? So there's little practices that we can bring in, but there's also workplace practices that organisations can model. And it can start to normalize, if you like, in terms of just creating a better balance for people so that their energy stays high, their fatigue is managed. You know, they've got different kinds of interactions with different people. Again, it all to do with energy thoughts, do it satisfaction. -, and it's all to do with with that sense of engagement.

So sometimes you know when we think about gosh like how might I evolve my organisation to become more healthy? Well, leadership practices, that is key, you know. So how are leaders lead? That is absolutely a key facet of this. But there's also other things like connectedness, like physical energy, like mental energy resilience, -, the kind of work we do and how we do it. So there's initiatives that organisations can take across these that can ultimately bring in that extra, -, element into their organisations.

SDF - Yeah, it's it's interesting. You know, there's a it seems that there's a lot there, but it, it should be really simple. And I love for how you talk about, think about the conditions because people talk about values and and and behaviors. And I think that's, that's absolutely right. But the values I guess lead to what do we want somebody to say about the conditions when we're not in the room, when we when when they're being truly honest. -, and they feel that the, they're, they're safe enough to be able to to voice that. And I think it does take a lot of deep work, -, and introspection and collaboration for leaders to kind of come together and think, very well, simply I would say, but just think conditions.

What what is it we stand for? What should a day, a month, a quarter a year look like beyond, you know, the PNL or the, you know, the impact on society that we're we're striving. So that sort of takes me on to the role of leadership, because anybody, I suppose, listening to us could think, wow, -, you know, when I think back to when I started many years ago. You know what? You're. I'm hearing you say, Arlene, is a lot of emotional intelligence required, a lot of empathy, a lot of, -, being able to spot things that are not

necessarily said or visible. But years ago, my experience was that leaders. That was just a you were just lucky if you had a leader like that, that it was much more you came to work. You didn't. It wasn't a good thing to show too much emotion if you like, if too much of yourself. So how did how do you think leadership has evolved over the past ten years or so? -, in terms of the the behaviors that you would see perhaps going forward as being, you know, that the what we need to do compared to where we've come from in the past.

DAE - Yeah. Again, I think that's a really interesting question, because of course, like anything else you're going to have, you know, your experience of leaders on the spectr- from and I don't want to to isolate any of your younger listeners, but anybody who used to watch Dallas back in the day, you know, you know, you've got your Jay or Ewings there, you know, you've got your leaders that rule by steer. You know, you always have those leaders, you know, and across the spectr- and really the call for leadership. So one of the again, coming out of the pandemic and you know, I know we're getting tired of saying that. But businesses, organisations, you know, they're always going to have challenges. In fact, for many leaders that's what keeps the role interesting. It's you know, how do I cope with this next piece, you know, what's the market doing? What what fire am I am I fighting at the moment. -, but really for for leadership, what we're seeing is, -, the real emphasis on the value of people. Help people do the work. You know, we've got these pending arg-ents coming at about the future. And, you know, the robots come in to do the workforce and stuff like that. But right now, you know, people do the work. And again, the more engaged people are and the more aligned they are to the organisation. And this again, is back to that healthy organisation where they really understand the purpose of the organisation. They can get behind the purpose because it aligns with them. You know, leaders need to really be mindful of, you know. The ethos of the organisations that they're leading and the value of the organisations that they're leading. And, you know, in some cases, the legacy, you know, we've come through a time of particular challenge around, -, attraction and retention of staff because staffs are and employees in the marketplace, you know, they started to see choice where they did not see it before. -, so being able to work remotely for an organisation in another country, options of which may never have been on the table before. So, you know, the culture of the organisation, it's important. We have two generations coming up. -, you know, behind me for sure, uh, that care about this because, you know, as we started at the beginning, if a lot of my time is going to be spent working well, you know, I want to work in a place that I believe in, you know, that that really speaks to my values, that that aligns to my purpose. And leaders need to understand that, you know, who they're bringing into the organisation, the purpose of the organisation and the legacy, the organisation that people are paying more attention to this than they were. You know, ten, 15 years ago, you know, even the work that we would do in the public sector in different countries, the demographic is changing from people that will go into the organisation and be there for life. Yes, it's changing. And this is significant because people are spending shorter times in more organisations and moving when they feel either that they've outgrown the organisation or that they don't align to it.

So the culture, the ethos and how it feels to be part of this organisation in terms of health, in terms of that agenda, you know, these are really significant. So for leaders, emotional intelligence is key. You know, it is a very, very, -, key. And honestly, the team that leaders

have around them is key because, you know, I've worked in so many amazing organisations, but I have never seen the perfect one yet. Susan. So leaders need to understand not only the the skill stack. They the the kind of the mental orientation that they have, the disposition they have, but also that of their whole team, you know, because regardless of what organisation you're in, people will always look up if they believe in leadership and if they can role model healthy. -, if January, if they can see leaders role modeling healthy, sustainable behaviors. This is one of the most powerful ways for behavior to actually be taken up across organisation. So visibility is also very important.

SDF - Yeah. Because I think in the past, Arlene, you know, -, I mean, you touched on toxic cultures and experiences and I've certainly, you know, had the misfortune, like, I think we all have. I don't think any of us are not touched by a toxic culture at some point in time. But oftentimes you get this sort of a them and us and, and you, you know, leaders, it's a privilege to be a leader, but it's also a responsibility because you have got other people's hopes and dreams in your hands. You are you're nurturing them to that. Well, this is my view, but I often I don't see that. I see it being more egocentric as opposed to, -, what's the difference I can make to that individual's life, to my team's life? How can I how can I put some of myself in to leave a bit of a legacy? And I think, you know, it is hard, I think, for leaders, -, if they're not naturally wired that way. But it's not about, you know, leaders do one thing and the rest of the workforce do another. In my opinion, you know, it is that it is a natural, authentic. It's not do what I say is it's you know, do what I do and I do it in the right way to, you know, -, which brings me on to something which I think, -, it when you see, you, you talked about the, the multigenerational workforce and so on. -, and you've talked a bit about you've talked about emotional intelligence, but in terms of decision making, because I know you're, you know, highly in tuned with critical, uh, critical thinking, but in terms of this sort of collaboration and solving problems together, do you think the, -, leaders, uh, because in the past, I think I've seen and certainly I'll include myself in this, the leader is the one that's paid to make the decisions and to figure the hard stuff out. But actually, there are these are really complex problems sometimes that we're having to solve. So the role in -, as a leader is, is more about how do you generate this collaboration so that people feel that they're contributing to something that's really meaningful. I mean, I'm curious about your your thoughts on that as a leader, you know, is that something they should really be thinking about and cultivating?

DAE \_ And did I see it, you know, being being open to being called out and saying, no, I disagree with that. I think that assessment of a situation is flawed. And here's why. You know, what do you what do you think? I know I've sort of downloaded on you, but what do you think about that? Sure. Yeah. So I suppose there's, you know. There's different kinds of decisions we're thinking about, and some of the leaders need to be able to make quickly. And it's interesting just to go back to, you know, when you were talking about there the ego piece, because it's one of the things that particularly bothers me, -, with leaders, I guess, you know, and it's important to understand that leaders have to be able to have the confidence to say, I'm backing myself now, but it's when their own perception of themselves gets in the way and actually can cloud their judgments of themselves. You know, this is where ego



becomes really, really, -, uh, back to that word toxic or unhelpful, you know? So again, we'll always see a balance in terms of our well, we should see a balance in terms of ego more with leaders. But this this leads directly to your to your question, Susan, which is -.

One of the great things that Covid taught many leaders, and is certainly something that I saw, and I would hate to see leaders lose sight of this now, is that, you know, in crisis, so many organisations saw really good leadership qualities all over their organisation, not just those at the top or with the title. You know, in terms of, you know, being a leader of this organisation, leadership skills, whether that was, you know, analysis, evaluation, strategic thinking, ideation, communication across the organisation, people stepped forward in crisis, you know, and the great thing about the pandemic as well, if we can if we can say that, is that it also meant that, you know, let's look honestly at the role of a leader, and it's not to have the answers to all the questions, because, let's be honest, who knew what to do in the pandemic?

Leaders, early leaders were experimenting all the time. So the thing with decision making is that, you know, the higher up you go and the more you know, you have to be confident to back the decisions. But you don't always have to make them because let's be honest, you might not be the best qualified to make these decisions. So collaboration is key. Now sometimes, you know, we don't have time for for deep collaboration because decisions need to be made. -, but again, the critical thinking ability of your leader or leaders in that context is really important. How quickly are they able to scan? You know what? The challenge is down to particular options for outcomes and make and take, uh, one of those steps, because ultimately, a leader's job is to make the decision and keep the organisation moving forward. So you gotta do something. Now, critical thinking comes in here, really. You know, uh, kind of. As as a key function of leadership in terms of quick decision making. What kind of mental models do do the leaders and organisations have to take them from? This is my challenge. What are my options? What's my choice? What will I do? And now, obviously the better leaders are critical thinking, or the more aware they are of their flaws in critical thinking, then they can bring other people in just a sense check with them. So you've got you know what? Critical thinking really plays a role in that, in that side of it. But when you think about collaboration and again, the more progressive organisations that we're getting to work with now, Trophy Park Institute, you're seeing people in terms of decision making from different sides of the business, not just the leadership team, you know, and it reminds me of that line. There is none of us as dumb as all of us, you know.

So when you've got the same team that think the same way, that know how they think and they're making all the decisions, you're not going to get a lot of innovation. You're not going to get a lot of, you know, novel problem solving or creativity or, you know, fresh ideas come out when it's the same people making those decisions. Imagine the power. And I know this isn't a new concept. I know this has been spoken about quite a lot, but imagine the power of people with different perspectives and different motives or agendas coming in to to solve real organisational problems. Now, there are a n-ber of organisations that we're working with and that are taking on this approach for particular problems that businesses are facing. So specifically around things like product diversification, growth, communication with stakeholders. And, and, and there are pieces of work around customer and client

satisfaction. So there's always space for these kinds of organisational. -. Pieces of work. And again, when collaboration has done well, you know. People get such energy. And, you know, often these are projects on top of people's workday and they can still manage to find the time to do this because it's done well. So it won't be done well, though, if we go back to our very first point, if there isn't trust, collaboration will work well. So, you know, again, thinking about that healthy organisation driving this forward, trust is really, really important for us to have vibrant, effective collaboration within our organisations.

SDF- Well, you know, you're so right, because I think and for I just wanted to ask you a question about critical thinking for the listeners, because I talk a lot about critical thinking and for the for those people who are maybe not as familiar with the term, would you define critical thinking as asking really good questions? So if I look at Socratic questions, for instance, you know, like asking about, you know, getting clarity, -, drilling down on significance and what the relevance is, how would you share with the listeners, you know, what critical thinking is and isn't?

DAE -Sure. So the way that I always think about critical thinking is it's the right kind of thinking for the right kind of task. Right? Okay. Yeah. So. And this is the challenge, is that because many of us will use the same types of thinking, regardless of a complex problem, a simple problem, you know, a high pressure problem, you know, we go through the same motions, right? Whereas and, you know, as you raise the the kind of ideas around questioning, you know, questioning is key. And if we keep the same level of questions, regardless of the complexity or kind of gravity of the decisions that we have to make, we are not engaging in critical thinking. So people often think about, you know, because the word critical is in there.

It's like, you know, conflict or nasty or ripping things apart. No, that's not actually what it means. It's much more to do with an appropriate level of depth and asking the right questions, challenging assumptions, challenging different thought processes so that your confidence as confident as you can be. -, in terms of being a leader, that the decision that you're making is the right one, that you just you've got that confidence in terms of your thinking. -, and it's interesting because, again, a healthy organisations will allow for more questions to be asked. It will allow for a curious, uh, kind of disposition to be an educated. And whereas, again, and go back to our toxic cultures, questions don't get asked in those cultures. They just don't. Because, God forbid, tweezer for something that we shouldn't touch. Yeah, exactly. You know, don't tell me. I don't want to think about that because we've already made the decision or this is my view, and it's going to be, you know, this way or the, the, the highway type of thing. But I think, you know, this notion of, -, asking questions. I always think you can ask uncomfortable questions as long as you do it with an open heart, a kind heart and an open mind, because it's not. I sometimes find that, and this is where the conditions and trust is really important.

But as you say, because you're not being adversarial in this, you're being you're really trying to seek and break down complex problems and, and find a pathway forward as opposed to proving somebody is right or wrong or flawed. And to me, that's really key. If you don't have if it's not done with the right intent and it's not nurtured in the right way. This is where well,

it just well, it just doesn't work. So, you know, that's my view of it. I'm not sure what you think about that.

SDF - Yeah. No, that's a really good way to to I think to break it down because again you know this goes back to healthy cultures. Right. If, if I can ask questions, you know, in a way, to your point, you know, the organisations always have a way, okay. They have a way of communicating. They have a way of dressing. They have a way of asking questions or not, you know, so if the organisation if within the culture, a questioning approach and effective questioning approaches, cultured, -, and nurtured, then when people come into the organisation, they'll pick this up quite quickly and it becomes the way. So, you know, really the value of questioning is, is, you know. It's significant. And, you know, I remember doing a piece of work a number of years ago. I think it was just doing some research for the book I was writing at the time. And it's amazing. Four year old girls ask those questions in the Western world.

SDF - Really?

DAE - Yes. Okay. Four year old girls, they do this. And as we grow, we ask less and less and less questions. And then we come into our our organisations. And some of us are blessed with leadership roles and, you know. Where is this skill, you know, with asking questions? We're not moving forward. And if we're not asking tough questions now, you know, nicely. Obviously there's a lot of but if we're not asking those, 1s business isn't being thought about from, you know, effectively from a leadership perspective, we've got to it's in the state of. Discomfort. That's where growth is.

SDF - You know, whether it's in our personal lives or a professional lives. It's the sticky states we find ourselves in. That's where growth and change happens. And it's the same for organisations, you know, so important you are.

I'd love that as an example, you know, because I think about even myself, you know, and this has come with experience and probably maturity, you know, before, -, if somebody had asked me a tough question, I used to perhaps feel, uh, oh, my gosh, they're trying to they're trying to expose me in a way that, you know, I'm uncomfortable here. I'm not quite sure what they are of what the answer is.

And now I think it is become much easier to say, do you know what I'm going to have to think about that? I'm not sure of what I think about that. And I know, you know, I do a lot of, -, facilitating and teaching, -, around the world of work and, and, and every day for me is a school day, and, uh, and I will go in and I, you know, I'm standing up there forever. It is, -, I'm teaching up for a particular workshop, and, you know, the the group of people are looking at me as the, as the expert. And I often see, you know, what, you're going I'm going to learn from you.

Yeah. And I'm going to learn from your questions. So I need you to, to help me because I need to and, and now actually I love difficult questions because it just makes me think differently. And I welcome that more perhaps to, -, where I was in my earlier, earlier my

career. Maybe that's just confidence experience. Or maybe there's something around, you know, you've got Brené Brown now talking about vulnerability and and so on and. You know, ten, 12 years ago, it wasn't really something you brought into the workplace. You know, showing vulnerability was a little bit harder to do. I don't know what your thoughts are about that.

DAE - Yeah. So, you know, a really interesting perspective you're sharing there because, you know, imagine it's part of the joy that we got from work was seeing ourselves grow and develop.

Yes. Yeah. Right. But, you know, often we'll take on courses. We, you know, we might take up a new hobby because we want to develop a hobby. And interestingly, we often don't apply that mindset to our workplace. You know, where we might have had a really tricky week. And if we think back over that week ago, you know what? Actually, when I think of myself, I one day and I think to myself now on Friday, I've learned so much stuff this week. Yes. Yeah. It's you know, yeah, sure. It might have felt uncomfortable, but like, I'm going to be smarter next week, you know? -, yeah. And often, you know, this can be a source of joy for us. It's a source of, you know, a change can be tricky. You know, none of us like us. Well, there's always 1 or 2 of us that like it, let's be honest.

But the majority of us don't like. But, you know, often we don't see. Our workplaces as providing these opportunities day to day because we, you know, again, we're not thinking critically when we're in these situations. We're going through motion is quite often we're in a routine. And we talked about structure structures. Great. We like it. We like to feel confident in terms of what we're doing. And we don't like to show vulnerability. But you know, and definitely, Susan, to your point, -, I feel that with, you know, with mistakes and actually, I was with a group of women, uh, on a network event this week, and I was reminded of advice that was given to me by one of my favorite leaders. So I worked for this gentleman like I was way down the chain. He wouldn't have even known who I was. You know, when we work together, and I always remember saying, if I was going to be a leader, I'd love to be like him. <sup>15</sup> And what he had was immense skill, immense and and expertise. A real strength of character, but really authentic. Uh, compassion. Right? He was really compassionate, a very good listener. And I remember when I was going into my leadership role in Roffey Park and I, you know, got a chance to have a couple coffee with him, which I was completely overwhelmed by, that he was willing to give me this time, you know. Yeah. And I said to him, you know, a pen poised Susan, you know, edge of my seat. Tell me, how did you get to be the leader that I knew you to be? And he said six words to me. Susan.

SDF - What was that?

DAE - Many, many, many, many, many mistakes.

SDF - Oh, wow. You know. Oh, wow.

DAE - I just thought, well, I was a bit underwhelmed at the time, as you can imagine. But, you know, in my leadership role now, you know, we make mistakes all the time. We make mistakes all the time. [1s Healthy organisation cultures.](#)

Allow people to learn from those mistakes. You know, uh, you know, you're honestly, I got a I know the many, many, many. But I've sent a bit of a tingle for me because I think, you know, I've been in that position where I've been so in awe of people, and they make it look so easy. And they, they simplify in a way that it almost makes you relax and you think, wow, well, you initially you're a bit underwhelmed because you're you're looking for that magic key, aren't you, that you can that magic potion that you can take and use. -, but it is it's a mindset.

SDF - Which brings me on to you're talking about this making mistakes. And, you know, earlier I talked about the learning styles that help organisations. -, but, you know, you've also talked about experimentation. Do you think a part, you know, is experimentation one of the learning styles that organisations are, you know, tell us more about your thoughts on that.

SDF - Yeah, I think organisations, -, again, uh, the barriers that were broken down by the pandemic for our customers and clients, you know, have been massive. You know, I've, -, and only through experimentation. Right. So you take some of the, uh, retail, -.

Platforms that you might interact with now that you didn't, uh, do before the pandemic came because these didn't exist. You know, it took potentially it took a group of craftspeople to come together to go, what if we all clubbed together and sold our handmade craft products, you know, across the world, right.

This is an experiment, you know, will this work will only know by trial and error. Now, the thing about experimentation for many organisations is, is that they can see it as being cost prohibitive. -, and it's something that we're going to be doing in Rocky Park this year for bringing in our our innovation for-. And ultimately, it goes back to that, what we were talking about around collaboration. Great ideas can come from anywhere in the business. We know this. You know, uh, a particular client pain or a particular staff pain could be communicated to anybody in the business.

Again, sometimes we see, -, wonderful organisations with specific innovation teams and their it's their job to get the innovation. Innovation no more than health and well-being should be on the mindset of everybody in the organisation. It should sit everywhere. We do of course, need some controls in place. Yes, and I do everything that people think should be done. But again, the trust to be able to put your hand up a goal, you know, what's either this process, it's too c-bersome. We should take out two of these steps. Let's let let's have a look and see. Let's put a little team on that. And and let's see what that might lead us to.

Or you know our competitors are doing this. What if we tried this. You know, it's questions. It's the what if questions. Again, if we don't have the what if in our culture, if we don't have that question in culture, we're not going to get innovation as easily as other organisations are. But for organisations to stay competitive. [1s We have to be asking the what ifs. We](#)

have to be thinking about innovation in, you know, it's for what that means for different organisations because, you know, what's the shelf life of a service or a product these days? You know, the competitor landscape has changed so vastly and client customer expectations have changed as well. So how are organisations going to compete? They're not going to compete, be in the same organisations they were last year.

SDF - So, you know, and things are changing so quickly. And the other thing that comes to mind as well, I think, Arlene, is if you look at the, the generations, the, the sort of the I mean, there's five generations in the workplace. -, but if you're looking at sort of the ones that are entering or beginning to sort of get to the the midpoint of their career now, -, they, we talked earlier about growth and the the joy and growing are many individuals now are seeing that as their reward. Yes. Money is important to them, of course.

And yes, good working conditions. But being able to grow and taking the joy from saying, you know, last month I couldn't do that, but we I now can. These are the things that if you're if you're creating a culture of experimentation, if you're asking the what if if you're if you're using as a way to refine your business model or delight your customers, you're also involving your workforce in something that is so valuable to them, you know, engagement. And and I'm wondering that connection. I wonder sometimes if it gets a little bit lost. -, because it's important. There's almost like a, it's a network effort. It's a knock on effect, doesn't it? It just it's not just the personnel, it's the workforce that really get a real kick out of it, I suppose.

DAE - Absolutely. And for organisations that don't yet trust that process, you know, in terms of I would let every I would I wouldn't open innovation up to everybody in the organisation. You know, if that's the mindset of some organisations that might be listening today. You know, we're certainly also seeing and it's one of the projects, again, we're doing internally at Park Institute is that for some of our strategic projects internally. So for ESG, as an example, you know, again, we have. <sup>1s</sup> Anybody in the organisation can can volunteer to be part of our E or S or our G group and be involved in innovations with us as an organisation to enable us to, you know, -, realize just the strategic remit we have around ESG as an example.

So, you know, collaboration at innovation and inclusion can be on internal or external projects. But really, you know, and you're reminding me again and again, another feature of the healthy organisation is feedback that it comes back to trust. Right. So you're not going to develop people without being able to give them feedback because they don't know where they're coming. Their starting point is, -, you know, and then in terms of any worker or any focused behavioral change, you know, well, where am I evolving into? So feedback is key for organisation. And you're right, the Oregon, you know, people coming into work now, they're they're bold and brave in different ways. You know.

And they'll say develop me. And in developing me I will expect feedback and I'll expect it regularly. This is refreshing because so many organisations are trying to create a more, uh, a stronger feedback culture. If this is being driven by your employees, you've got to seize that and go, yeah, what a great opportunity. But again, it's going to work a lot better in those healthy organisations where the energy is high, the collaboration is high, where feedback

can come from multiple places. And, you know, it's not overshadowed by the threat of deceit or mistrust in terms of the feedback that you're getting.

SDF - Yeah, it's it's -. It's so true. I think sometimes leaders can build walls, if you like, in their own mind based on their their viewpoint or their experience. And actually, you know, I remember this is years ago and I don't know why it popped into my head when you were talking about it, that it did.

Many years ago, I was on an Easyjet flight up to, to Edinburgh, and, -, I don't think he's Easyjet. Been going awhile, but not, you know, it wasn't, you know, hadn't been going for for years and years and years. And sitting in front of me was Stelios, you know, the guy that started, -, Easyjet on the flight. Right. And it was a yes, he was going to Edinburgh, but his sole purpose was going round the passengers, asking them, how are you? What brings you today? What are you doing? And listening to their stories and just asking really simple questions.

And it's that it's that level of interest and that level and that level of listening. I don't I often feel that. Me included. You know, we're so busy, sometimes we don't listen properly. -, and we need to create the space and the behaviors within an organisation to really listen. Yeah. -, because sometimes what we manufacture in our heads as the reality is just not the reality. It's just our reality, as it were, you know?

So, -, but. Wow. I mean, I have thoroughly enjoyed our time we've covered so much. One of the things I wanted to say was, -, a while ago, I came across, you know, you know, Patrick Lenconi, you know, the Five dysfunctions of a team. He, he brought a book out some time ago. I don't know if you've read it. I've dipped in and out, but it's about it's called the advantage and it's called why organisational trumps everything else and business. And I started to read this and I was I was so excited by it because he was talking about the shift and the focus. -, and the organisation's organisational health will actually tr-p everything else, -, in, you know, whether or not you're is about strategy or technology or marketing. He's saying or he asserts that becoming healthier will allow organisations to. Really reach new and dizzying heights.

And so that's why it's one of the reasons I, I asked you to come on to the, to to the Joy factory, Arlene, because I knew what you do. It's not just what you do. It's who you are and your passion around inspiring leaders and helping to create those healthy workplaces that, that that really, I suppose, made me gravitate towards you.

So thank you so much for, -, for joining us. I mean, is there anything you would like to leave the, the listeners with any sort of, -, like, like you're many, many, many, many mistakes. Any anything else that pops into into your mind to leave our listeners with?

DAE - Yeah. Well, I suppose it goes back to that idea that, you know, we all have responsibility to ourselves and to those that depend on us, whether we're in a formal leadership role or not, to really think about what we can do in our own health and well-being space. Do you start with yourself? Uh, and then others will start to trust your

judgment, -, in terms of, of health and well-being. -, and in a few month's time, we're going to be launching a healthy manager program as well. So we will be able to provide different kinds of insight and resources, -, around that program, too.

SDF - Oh, that is brilliant. I will certainly check that out. So if anybody wants to, you know, if they've been listening, uh, want to connect, they can connect with you through Roffey Park. But I'm sure LinkedIn, is there any other way they can connect with you that you, you want to make available or LinkedIn and directly into to Roffey Park?

DAE Yes. You can go ask me through LinkedIn at any time. I'm always honest. So yeah, I, I keep a very close eye. But it's been amazing to talk with you and today, Susan, and thank you for having me.

SDF - Oh, you're absolutely welcome. Thank you for coming on board. It really seriously has been a joy. Thank you once again.

Thank you to Doctor Arlene Eagan for sharing her wisdom with us on cultivating healthy workplaces. Arlene gave so many valuable insights that it's tough to summarise, but for me, I suppose the main takeaways are:

- the importance of trust, balance, collaboration, experimentation, and
- stepping into asking questions that stimulate critical thinking.

I'd also like to share something that really struck a chord with me that that Arlene shared with me previously, which is when work can be an antidote to many things, then working in a healthy workplace surely must be of paramount importance to us all. That really struck a chord with me, and I hope it does with you too.

Please join us on the next episode, where I'll be chatting to our next guest and discovering their thoughts about how we connect and create happiness for ourselves and others.