

This is a rough transcription of The Career Contessa podcast. This transcription is for **Season 11 Episode 11**. It originally aired on March 17, 2026. There may be errors in this transcription, but we hope that it provides helpful insight into the conversation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email editorial@careercontessa.com

Hi, Contessas.

Welcome to the Career Contessa podcast, your shortcut to be more fulfilled, healthy, and successful at work.

I'm your host, Lauren McGoodwin, and today we're diving into a topic that sits at the heart of your career growth, learning to manage yourself before you manage anyone else.

So many women write to us saying things like, I want to lead, but I'm overwhelmed, or I'm trying to manage a difficult boss or colleague.

I feel like I'm working so hard, but something just isn't clicking still.

And so often the missing piece isn't another strategy, script, or productivity system.

It's understanding ourselves.

Our triggers, our emotions, our behaviors, the stories we tell ourselves about who we are at work and what we're capable of.

Today's guest has built her entire career around this truth.

I'm joined by Margaret C.

Andrews, author of *Manage Yourself to Lead Others*, and the creator of Harvard's wildly popular course by the same name, *Manage Yourself to Lead Others*, and it's a course that's had to wait list every time it's been taught for more than a decade.

Margaret teaches leaders that great leadership doesn't start with a title or technical skills.

It begins with deep self-awareness and the ability to manage our own emotions, reactions, and behaviors.

In our conversation, we dig into why self-awareness is often the number one reason careers derail, the 6 roadblocks that can block your growth, the difference between judging ourselves by our intentions versus our behaviors, and why emotional intelligence is

becoming more valuable than ever, especially as AI automates so much of our quote, hard skill work.

If you've ever wanted to feel more grounded, more composed or just more effective in the way you show up at work, this episode is your roadmap.

And now this is the Career Contessa podcast.

Hi, Margaret, welcome to the show.

Oh, thank you so much.

It's great to be here.

So your work centers on this idea that great leadership begins with self-understanding.

So before we get into the frameworks and more about your book, I'd love to start with your story.

So what 1st led you to explore this connection between managing yourself and effectively leading others.

I'm sure this came from watching a bunch of people get it wrong, but I'm very curious what your story is.

Yeah, well, you're very close.

It was watching myself get it wrong.

Uh, so, um, I, really what started the whole thing was that uh, many years ago I had a job where I thought I was just knocking it out of the park.

And, you know, I'd had multiple promotions, was doing, you know, bringing in results, all these kinds of things.

And then my boss told me in no uncertain terms that I lacked self-awareness and did not understand how my behaviors impacted others.

And that was so rough.

Oh, yeah, it was, and it was not said in a way that was, hey, let me help you with this.

It was said as an indictment.

And so I was shocked, of course, by this and, you know, took it very personally, et cetera.

But when, you know, when the dust settled, I realized, to my horror that he was right.

And, you know, I could be impatient and demanding and set really high standards and these kinds of things, all of which I thought were good.

Yeah.

And, uh, but then when I looked at folks on my team, you know, there were some that were anxious.

They felt unappreciated and that was pretty hard for me to admit because that was absolutely never my intention.

But it was the result.

And so what really started it was that conversation and what I did afterwards, was to say, you know, yeah, this is the result, but I do not want this to be the result.

So how do I fix this?

And, uh, so I just went on, I'll say, a quest where I looked at everything I could possibly think of that might give me some insight, including famous leaders and people I knew.

I looked at management books and academic studies and history and philosophy and psychology.

You know, I kind of nerd it out.

And, um, through all of this, there was sort of a, I'm going to say, if I boiled it down, or, you know, there's kind of these connecting threads or Venn diagrams, whatever you want to say, and it kind of pointed at what is the thesis of the book.

And that is, is that we have to understand and manage ourselves before we can effectively lead others.

And it's it's really an inside out proposition, uh, that, uh, so anyway, that's that's where it came from.

I like this story a lot because I feel like there's probably someone out there who feels this and maybe their boss hasn't said that to them yet, but they're, you know, the people who are reporting from them, uh, reporting to them maybe are giving them the clues, right?

Like in a way, it was a little harsh, but it was probably like such a gift of feedback for you too, as you said.

It put you on this quest.

Yeah, and I always tell people, you know, we always say feedback is a gift, but I said, just remember, sometimes gifts come in ugly packaging. Doesn't mean the gift isn't valuable. Totally.

And I also hear what you're saying about, it wasn't your intention.

Your behavior caused this result, but that wasn't your intention.

I know we're going to get into that because I think that's something I see a lot in today's modern workplace where it's like, well, that wasn't my intention to cause this thing.

It's like, but you still, but that was still the result.

And so, um, to your point about managing yourself.

I also think there's like an accountability and an ownership piece to this that is probably a tough pill to swallow.

So I want to talk about, like, you mentioned managing yourself.

So you teach that most management problems are actually self-management problems.

What are the most common signals that maybe someone's leadership struggles are really coming from within or maybe you're not even a leader yet, but maybe you personally are having self-management, you know, challenges as someone who's part of a team.

Yeah, so I'll answer that in sort of 2 different ways that overlap.

You know, if you are a leader, a lot of times it's that you're not quite getting the word I want to use is traction, you know, that you've got this fabulous idea, right?

Or a vision or something like that and people aren't on board or things aren't going quite the way, or very oftentimes you feel misunderstood.

And this is very common because there's the old adage that, you know, we judge ourselves by our intentions, but other people judge us by our behaviors.

And so that is what they're responding to.

So, uh, but the other I'll say is, you know, some of the clues are, you know, a lot of times people that don't understand or manage themselves well, uh, can be, have, or I'll say, a tendency to, uh, be impatient, easily angered, uh, judgmental, opinionated, uh, have to prove that they're right, uh, you know, these kinds of things.

And, you know, those are, you know, some of the tells.

And, and whenever I mention those like in a speech or something like that, I always have people come up to me afterwards, I go, O my gosh you know, I checked a few of those boxes.

And, you know, they're coming to me to say to hear me say, well, here's what you do.

And I say, well, congratulations.

And they look at me like, what?

Why would you say congratulations?

Because now you know, you know, that's, that's what self understanding is, is, is picking up on those signals and that, you know, that, that self understanding, the understanding, the awareness of this is the 1st step.

Because that is where the transition begins.

You can't fix a problem that you don't know you have.

Totally.

I also think of self-awareness is like, you go from, you know, thinking this is an outside problem to one of your earlier points of like, this is, you know, the company, this is the team, this is the lack of resources, this is your response to something to realizing like you do play a part in how those outside areas respond, right?

Yeah, and I actually like the way you said that because that's what I think is that we play a part, right?

And we oftentimes think about blame.

It's your fault.

It's my fault.

It's their fault, right?

But one of the things that I mentioned when I teach or in the book a lot is, you know, look in the mirror, when you have a problem with your boss or a peer or, you know, somebody that works for you is look in the mirror because in a way, there's probably a dance going on here, right?

That we are doing something that contributes to this.

So, you know, if you and I are dancing and you step forward, I step back, right?

So I am contributing to this dance.

So, you know, what would happen if instead of stepping back, I step sideways or, you know, these kinds of things.

So, yes, I think that we oftentimes contribute to it in some small way.

Another thing you wrote about that I really liked, is you said, that, um, people who lack self-understanding are actually 6 times more likely to derail in their careers, which makes sense because it's, I think those are the people who also are always switching careers because it's always like, well, this is not a me problem. Going to go and fix it by, you know, finding a new job or something like that.

So what does derailing actually look like in practice?

And then what are maybe some early warning signs that the listeners could be looking for in themselves?

I mean, I think they could maybe look for this in their boss.

But I think more specifically is something that people need to have some self-awareness about.

Yeah, yeah.

So I'll say that wasn't my research.

Uh, but it was done by the Hogan organization that has, you know, information on a gazillion different leaders and and what happens with them.

And so the idea is, is that, you know, if we, um, well, let me say derailing, uh, happens at some point in our career, perhaps, right?

And it happens to a bigger number of people, than perhaps we might think.

And the idea is, is that the symptoms, if you will, were there all along.

And that very oftentimes are results, that organizations know these things about us and that they let, because we're getting great results, they kind of look the other way at these, uh, at these issues.

And yet at some point, very often, the problems outweigh the results, and therefore people, I think of it like the way Hemingway talked about, you know, how does somebody go bankrupt?

And he says, well, slowly, and then all at once.

And to me, it's very similar.

Like that it was there all along and people are just starting to turn and then all of a sudden, boom, you're gone.

Or you know, you're not promoted or you're fired or, you know, all of those kinds of things.

So, you know, some of the things about derailment, very oftentimes it comes from things like, you know, immature behavior, which can be, you know, having an angry outburst in a meeting or, you know, punishing somebody, you know, very, um, uh, persecuting kind of thing, you know, just retaliation type of thing.

It can come from not being able to build a good team, build and maintain a good team.

You know, we talk about the common thing is, is that, you know, people tend to hire people that look like them and sound like them and were educated like them.

And why?

Because it's fun, right?

You know, we can have a wonderful conversation.

But if you and I, you know, think alike and all that sort of stuff.

When we when we hit a difficult problem, we might both approach it very diff- similarly.

And that's actually not helpful.

We want somebody who says, hey, there's a different way or I see it differently, et cetera.

So, um, uh, or, you know, that we just have lots of turnover uh, on our team.

In fact, that is one of the biggest signs is that when somebody has a lot of turnover on their team, um, in fact, I say if you're looking for where, uh, not so great management lies in any organization, look for where there is higher than average turnover because people just don't want to work with people like that.

So, you know, a lot of this goes to that, not understanding ourselves or how our behaviors impact other people.

Yeah, I think that's a really good question to ask in an interview too, is like, what's the turnover rate on your team specifically?

I think people think about like, oh, what's the turnover rate at a company?

It's like, just worry about the team.

Okay.

Don't worry about the whole company. Like focus on the team.

Think back to the moment right before you started something new.

Your business, your brand, your podcast.

There's always that mix of excitement and self-doubt.

Is this really the right decision?

What if I fail?

What if I don't?

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I really want to get back to this intention versus behavior thing because I think it's so powerful.

And you said in, you know, one of the ideas in your book was that we judge ourselves by our intentions, but we judge others by their behaviors.

What does that gap create in the workplace and how can we shift that so that we are also judging ourselves by our behaviors, which I would imagine is a more helpful way to get to this like self-awareness, like not not lacking self-awareness.

Like, okay, now you have some self-awareness and you are able to manage yourself and I would imagine that you need to be able to judge your behaviors, not your intentions.

Yeah, and your question is actually a big question.

So how long have you got?

So I would say a couple of things there is that yes, we judge ourselves by our intentions.

I mean to be a great boss.

I mean to be a great team member, you know, or parent or you know, whatever it is.

Um, and, uh, and we may actually have very good intentions, very good ideas, et cetera.

But the way we we, um, We behave is the way that people will actually judge us.

And so a big part of that is looking for how do people react, you know, to the way you do things, because you've probably heard the saying of you can be right and wrong at the same time. You can have the right idea and implement it poorly.

And, you know, a lot of times in those situations, whoever's, you know, big idea it is that we're trying to implement things, what's wrong with you guys?

And, you know, again, hold up the mirror, you know, what might you be doing?

And the reason why I say this is a big question is because this is, I think, one of the hard parts about leadership, is that you are constantly balancing all kinds of things, you know, the rights of this group versus the rights of this group or revenue in the short term, revenue in the long term.

Uh, you know, development growth, all of these kinds of things.

And the other is, is that, uh, it related to what you were kind of asking is that, uh, you know, as a leader, you have to get comfortable with the fact that not everyone is going to agree with you and not everyone is going to like your decision.

But, you know, it is hard because, uh, uh, you have to realize, you know, sometimes you are doing something for the betterment of the organization or the person involved, right?

Maybe giving them some feedback that will actually help them grow, they may not like that feedback.

But you know what?

That's your job.

And, you know, I tend to think of leadership as being the, uh, the way that we uh, move individuals or groups of individuals toward a better future.

And I say better future.

Now, we can argue about what the word better means.

Your idea better might be different from mine, and that's where leadership comes in.

And uh, but not everyone is going to think that's better.

Yeah, lots and that's where it gets hard.

I also feel like one of the things that I've noticed in the leaders I've really respected or, I guess, really enjoyed working for, is that they're somehow able to influence me or get me on board with that better future.

You know, like, this is why it's a better future.

Maybe I don't agree on day one, but ultimately I'm like, uh, so, like, I also, I, I feel for, I always feel for managers and leaders because I do think it's such a hard job and you're balancing so much.

And I think, you know, we could talk about the fact that, like, well, AI is making the hard skills less, you know, less relevant, which only makes the quote, people skills or soft skills even more important.

I mean, emotional intelligence, I feel like, has, it's something we've always talked about and said, you know, it's really important or emotional maturity.

But I would almost say like it's it's becoming even more of a thing that makes people stand out.

And I would imagine, especially with your book and your work, that's something you're seeing too, which is like, people need to manage them, learn how to manage themselves more now than any other time.

Um, and other like the risk is getting higher for you not to have this emotional maturity, which changes throughout your leadership journey, right?

Right.

I mean, I think, you know, it's always hard to say.

Is it more important now or not?

Yeah.

I think it's always been important.

But, you know, you're right about AI changing what is possible to be done by a machine versus a person.

And but I do think that in the world of work, there is a sense people want more understanding, more meaning into the work that they do.

They want somebody who thinks of them as a human and not a widget.

Uh, and uh, and I think that's, that is where uh, self-understanding uh, self-management goes a long way.

Because if I understand myself, I understand, you know, kind of how I became myself, you know, what influences and values and all of these kinds of things.

But when I do that work, I realize, aha, but Lauren is different from me, right?

She grew up a little differently than I did or had different experiences, et cetera.

And that's probably why she sees things differently.

And so I think that when we, you know, 1st time, as I say, shine a light on the inside, which is not always what you want to see, it makes us realize that, aha.

Yeah, I'm different from other people, which, by the way, means they are different from each other and from me.

Yeah, there's, um, it's interesting because we, uh, a job a couple years ago I had, we took a, I had someone on my team where, I would say that was 100% us.

We had a little bit of like, we didn't work super smoothly together.

We got it done, but then we took these personality tests, and we learned like, oh, this is, again, like your intention versus your behavior.

I have someone on my team right now where every once in a while, she responds in a way where I'm like, oh, why do you have to do it that way?

And I'm sure the intention is positive, but the behavior, the way it comes out is icky.

After I did the personality test with this person a couple jobs ago, it changed everything for us.

And I just think it brought maybe like maybe an understanding for myself, but also an understanding for that person too.

Like, I would imagine that part of managing yourself is being able to also, I don't know, take that and then put it on somebody else as well.

Like I have a little bit more understanding where I'm coming from.

Maybe I can accept that you're coming from a place also that is not, I don't know, different from me or something like that, right?

Yeah.

No, and I love your example because I think we've all had that.

And I bet we've all had it on the other side where it's like, whoa.

Yeah, I'm sure I've done it to be back.

Right?

Like, how dare you kind of thing.

But then, you know, when you think about it, you think, because I had a very similar thing, one time where somebody I'd worked with for a long time, sent me an email and, uh, and I felt like I'd been slapped through cyberspace and, uh, and I, but I thought, I know this person.

This is not the way they interact.

So I, you know, I called them.

And I said, you know, I don't think you meant it the way I took it.

But I said, I just want to let you know because if you're sending something like that to other people, you may get a different response.

And, uh, so, yes, I think it makes, uh, I think that there's oftentimes something going on, you know, uh, and, and we show up differently every day because, you know, we had a bad night's sleep or we're worried about something or, you know, all of these things.

Guess what?

The same thing happens with them.

And so sometimes we are not at our best, sometimes they are not at their best.

And gosh, I hope nobody judges us by our worst days.

Yeah, totally, totally.

Okay, as we start to wrap up, I want to talk about a few practical items.

So you talk about there's 6 roadblocks that can block your growth.

Um, you don't need have to name all six, but I am very curious which roadblock do you see the most often, um, and why, why do you think that is?

Yeah, so I'll mention a few.

So the 1st 2 are really a lack of self-understanding, right?

And self-management, those two.

And the reason is, is it goes back to, you know, we judge ourselves by our intentions and other people judge us by our behaviors.

And I oftentimes think if you feel misunderstood, there's something is out of alignment, right?

That, you know, and pushing harder doesn't help.

So it comes, sometimes it being, you know, stopping or slowing down, you know, the, the, I like to think of it.

I tell people they say, oh, I don't have time to do that.

And I say, you know, sometimes you have to slow down to speed up.

Yeah.

Uh, and I think that's uh, very helpful here.

The other that I will say, um, and these, these 2 are a little bit related, but one is vulnerability, where, uh, you know, that, as we move throughout our career, we go from individual contributor to member of a team, to leader of the team, to leader of multiple teams, and, you know, on up, that it requires different skills for us, you know, that, that, uh, Marshall Goldsmith has a great saying, he says, uh, you know, what got you here won't get you there.

And I think that is so important to, you know, doesn't mean that what got you here is unimportant.

It just means what's going to get you there are some new skills and behaviors.

And I think that, you know, fear of vulnerability is a big one because especially as you go up in your career, more people see you mess up as you're trying to learn a new behavior.

And that's embarrassing.

If you're a high performer, a high potential, right?

You've gotten through a lot of things by muscling through and, you know, uh, these kinds of things are, you know, being able to uh, do great research or being right.

And, you know, that's not what it's all about as you as you move throughout your career.

And then the last thing I'll say on that is, it's also related.

It's what I call the knowing doing gap, that we know we should do something like, oh, EI.

Yeah, I've heard about that.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tell me something new.

And I'm like, well, but are you doing it?

You know, just we all know, and I always ask this in classes.

I say, well, how many of you know that you should listen to people when they talk?

And everyone raises our hand.

And then I say, how many of you do that all the time?

How many of you do it really consistently?

And, you know, 3 quarters or more of the hands go down.

I go, there you go, right?

We all know it and we're not doing it.

So when we get these weird reactions.

Maybe it's because we know we should be doing something and we're not.

Yeah, and I and it's, it can feel so hard to do that in today's world because you have so many competing priorities, especially, I think, as you go higher up in the job levels, right?

I can imagine someone probably in your class where they're like, I know I need to do this, but where do I carve out the time to do this thing?

You know, I've been meetings all day or I'm managing, you know, 100 people on this team or whatever it is, and it just doesn't feel like there's time to do it.

Um, what advice do you have for people who feel that a little bit, where they're like, they're listening to this and they're like, I buy in.

I'm on board with this.

I don't know where I'm going to find the time to take on this, you know, like redoing my behaviors and assessing and, I mean, obviously maybe they could hire an executive coach and make it a point there, but like, I don't know, I'm thinking about the person who's like, I love this, but I'm worried about how realistic this is that I can change my behaviors this much.

Yeah.

So I would say, you know, before managing yourself, there comes understanding yourself, right?

And there's, um, you know, these 6 questions that I have and 3 other questions and a whole bunch more, um, is to take it and bite-size chunks.

You know, you don't have to do everything all at once.

You know, you can think about one.

There's the 6 questions that I have.

The 1st one is the big one, the huge one that takes a long time to answer.

So, you know, just jot down the question and, you know, if you're on the bus or, you know, you're uh, waiting in line uh, or something like that, pull out that question and think about it, you know, and jot a couple things down, come back, you know, the next time you're on the bus. Or waiting in line or something like that is to do, and in fact, in many respects, I think

rather than trying to knock it all out and at once, that doing it over time is actually more helpful.

And, and it just gets your mind thinking about it, that, you know, once you, I always say you're planting the seed into your brain and your brain is working on it when you're working on other things.

And so the next time you visit it, you will see things, different things, more things, et cetera.

So I definitely understand that.

And we've all been there.

But I always think, you know, just chip away at it, you know, 11 little piece at a time.

What is the one big question?

Just for everyone should buy your book to get the other questions, but anybody who's on a bus right now or the big one.

Yeah, let's give them something to think about.

The big one is the 1st question.

And that is, you know, who and who's thinking have influenced you throughout your life.

And so, I mean, it's a humongous question.

It's, you know, it's, of course, your parents and early caregivers and siblings and childhood friends.

It's teachers, it's boyfriends and girlfriends.

I would say it's people that helped you, people that hurt you.

It's books you've read, lectures you've attended, right?

It's all of these things.

And when you start really thinking about it.

It's, a lot, right?

And as I say, these might be ideas that were implanted when you were younger that, you know, that's who I am.

And then you think, 0 my gosh, no, maybe that's not true.

And the one I hear all the time is when people say, you know, when I was in 3rd grade, my teacher told me I wasn't good in X and it took me 40 years to figure out that wasn't true or that, you know, maybe it was true at that time, but it's not true now.

And so that's why, you know, when you go back and you think about, well, what did I learn from that teacher or what, what, what messages did my parents give me?

Uh, and do those things are they helping me now or are they standing in my way?

Yeah, I get why.

This is a big question.

It's a big one.

And why it takes time, but obviously this is part of the journey of learning how to manage yourself.

And I think it's important to note that this is not something that has a start and a stop to it.

It's an continuous ongoing thing and I find like most hard things are, but those are the things that also give you the biggest ROI and bang for your buck. Especially if somebody is sitting in a seat right now and they are feeling misunderstood or like any of the kind of, um, things that we mentioned at the top of the show where, you know, why are people just not getting traction on the project and going, like these are your signals to start this exploration.

Um, and anybody can do it.

And I'm sure I benefit from it.

But I'm curious, as we wrap up for listeners who want to better manage their emotions and specifically their reactions at work.

But, you know, maybe, again, their, they're just like, oh, that was like a knee jerk reaction or I've been doing this for so long.

What are some habits that you have seen work that can really improve self-awareness over time?

Oh gosh.

How long have you got?

So, uh, a few things that I will say in terms of, because there is, there's self-understanding, right?

Like, why do I do things this way?

How did I become the person I am today, right?

These are those questions.

And then there's what do I want to become, right?

Which is a different question than how do we close that gap?

And, um, so it's both self-understanding as well as self-management.

And so what I will say is the bridge between those two is mindfulness, which everyone goes, oh man, don't you have something else for me?

And uh, and the thing is, well, you know, if you have an intention for something, you know, if I am uh, in a meeting with somebody that always, you know, uh, says something that makes upsets me or something like that, okay, good to know.

So then I might get curious about, well, what what is it that they're doing?

You know, and is there a different way that I could respond or also think about what is it about them?

That's making, you know, them want to do this?

So it's kind of getting curious about it.

And then you might think, okay, so they do this all the time.

What are the 17 things that I could do differently next time instead of, you know, sitting back and crossing my arms or something like that?

Maybe I could say, could you repeat that?

You know, I could say, well, can you tell me more what you mean by that?

Or I could get up and walk out or I could take a sip from my water. Right?

A bunch of different things that you could do.

And then you think, okay, what might be the result if I do that?

Uh, and so the thing is, is that uh, I have an intention for responding differently in that meeting.

And so, but I need to be mindful that, oh, here they go again, right?

And I might feel that, you know, anger or hurt or whatever it is rising.

And then because I've thought of it, I now have different things I can think about, right?

But you have to be mindful of it.

Yeah, to be aware.

I really like that.

I think it's taking the pause, taking a beat, giving yourself, you know, to your point.

Like take a sip of water before you have a response if somebody is giving their same response over and over again and it's not working for you. Change the way you're doing it too, you know?

Exactly.

Um, I love this conversation.

Margaret, tell people where they can learn more about you.

We'll obviously put a link to your book in the show notes, but tell us all about the book as well.

Yeah, yeah.

So, um, uh, if you want to find me, probably the best place to do that, really the only social media I really do is on LinkedIn.

And so I don't do a lot there, but it's a good way to connect.

And also you can find me through my website, which is Margaretanders.com.

So pretty easy to understand.

Amazing.

And the book is called Manage Yourself to lead others, and we'll make sure that that is also in the show notes so people can get on this work sooner rather than later.

So thank you, Martin, so much.

Thank you so much.

It's been great to be here.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Career Contestant podcast.

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