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Announcer:

Welcome to Surfacing. In this episode, the hosts, Lisa Welchman and Andy Vitale are joined by leadership coach, Margaret Lee. Margaret spoke about her experience as director of UX Community & Culture at Google and offered good advice for starting a community of practice. Finally, Margaret discussed the personal impact of her article and talk, *Insights from a Reluctant Leader*.

Lisa Welchman:

Andy, are you going to kick off this time?

Andy Vitale:

I am. And Margaret, I feel like we met at Fluxible like 2019-ish. So it's been a while, but I've been really. Well, we'll talk about all the things that you have going on, for sure.

Margaret Lee:

We met when the world was different.

Andy Vitale:

I know. It's such a different place now, but hopefully we'll be back to normal. Anyway, so Margaret, thanks for joining us today. You've been a leader at some really interesting places. Yahoo, TiVo, Google. I'd love to just have you tell us a little bit about who you are, and your journey to get there?

Margaret Lee:

Sure. Well, I'm Margaret Lee and I most recently was at Google. I left a month ago to basically pursue leadership coaching. And I'm doing that through a training and certification process at the Hudson Institute in Santa Barbara. So kind of working backwards. I've been at Google for about 14 and a half years, or I was at Google for 14 and a half years. I have to get used to the past tense now. I spent the majority of my time like the first nine years, really mostly working in Google Maps and helping to build that team and the product and really seeing the evolution of not just Google Maps, but the industry and the UX function and technology over that period of is really fascinating.

Margaret Lee:

Then the last five years I spent leading a program that I actually founded called UX Community & Culture and that was a program that was really focused on basically empowering the UX function at Google, which got so big over time. I think when I left it was about 5,000 globally which is insane.

Andy Vitale:

Wow.

Margaret Lee:

Yeah. So that was a really fantastic role. So before that, I was briefly at TiVo and I didn't spend too much time there because I think what I realized was I was looking for a place that maybe was a little bit more forward moving in terms of the technology. I think TiVo at the time was pretty much settled on the product that they had. So great product. I loved the product, but it wasn't necessarily what I was looking

for. So I didn't stay there very long. And before that I was at Yahoo. I had done Yahoo Personals, which was really fascinating. Days before Tinder.

Lisa Welchman:

I remember that. I remember that. I remember that.

Margaret Lee:

So super interesting thing there and also what was called... I think it was called the media group. So it was basically all the content stuff like finance and sports and news and entertainment, all those products before they moved that whole division down to Santa Monica. So I was there for a while. Then before that lots of other internet concerns that no longer exist before the dot bomb era, but been around the tech industry for quite a long time.

Andy Vitale:

Just going right to your time as the director for Google Maps, one of the things that you've mentioned is the constant change in rapid scale. I'd really like to know some of the things you learned about change management from that experience, but also looking back on that was the constant change in rapid scale actually necessary? Did it lead to better outcomes? And what trade-offs went along with that?

Margaret Lee:

Well, there's so many different dimensions to constant change in scale, and some of it is absolutely necessary because it's the industry and it's the world that's changing around us. So you either adapt or you don't. Right? I think that's what was so exciting for me to come to Google and to be in a place where the industry is just changing. I mean, at that point we weren't even doing mobile yet.

Margaret Lee:

The first smartphone, the iPhone hadn't even come out when I joined Google Maps. Right? Everything was desktop. It was third. It was behind MapQuest and Yahoo. So there was just so much runway you can imagine. So to get from there to where Google Maps is today with navigation, which we used to use those things that you'd buy a Costco and stick in your car for navigation, right?

Margaret Lee:

It wasn't just with you all the time. You could imagine the amount of change that was happening to get from where it was to where it is today. So a lot of it is necessary because you just have to keep pace. And then a lot of it is also opportunity. I used the example of Street View. We were just starting to do Street View in 2007. The first miles had been driven around Palo Alto, around Stanford where Larry Page originated the Street View concept in his graduate school days or whatever. And nobody really knew what it was going to be for, right?

Margaret Lee:

So it was a technology without much of a use case when it started, but over time, because, again, the world is changing around us and technology is making all these things possible. You can see Street View just integrated into things like travel planning, or buying a house, or a number of use cases that we didn't imagine when the technology first existed.

Margaret Lee:

So to me change can be a really wonderful way to make possibilities happen. Right? But I guess the downside is when you're... Are we sometimes churning rather than changing for a positive? I don't think that that was usually the case, but it can feel like that when you're in the thick of it.

Andy Vitale:

Right. It's interesting because some people... Like I gravitate towards change all the time and it sounds like you do too, but there are people on the team that are kind of like, "Oh, another change. They get change fatigue." So what experiences have you had or some of the things that you've learned about managing others to get excited about the next change that's coming?

Margaret Lee:

I think change is inevitable. It just really is. And I think that the change that is hard on organizations is actually organizational change. Reorgs are harder than when you think about product changes, I think. But often reorgs happen in order to make some kind of product shift possible. That is theoretically the reasons why we do reorgs is to better align to product outcomes that we want to see happen.

Margaret Lee:

You also mentioned scale. It gets really hard as the company gets bigger to figure out how to organized yourself to product outcomes that basically yield a coherent user experience that isn't... You're not showing your organization in your navigation menu, for example, which is it happens, right? You can tell sometimes when different features are built separate teams because they don't actually interact well together.

Margaret Lee:

I think that reorgs are a result of trying to figure that out of how do we get the right teams to collaborate across business units or feature teams or whatever the scale of teams is. I think for my observation, that's where change has been difficult is having to learn how to work across these boundaries.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. I mean, that really resonates with me. The work I do in digital governance is all about designing team structures and collaboration models and getting people to work more effectively around digital spaces. One of the things that I consistently recommend and why I'm so excited to be talking to you when someone comes to me and says, "Yeah, we understand that we need to take warm, mature approach towards digital governance, but we really can't get management to pay attention to it either because we're already making a lot of money and nobody wants to rock the boat or whatever. Or power and politics, whatever the case may be. One of the things that I consistently say people can do is build an internal community of practice.

Margaret Lee:

Yes.

Lisa Welchman:

Right? So that you can start communicating with each other and sharing information back and forth outside of more formalized policies and standards and work design libraries, pattern libraries, those sorts of things. So I was super excited when Andy said, "Let's get Margaret to come on." I was like, "Yes, communities of practice." So just stepping in that direction for a minute, I can put you on this spot because I know you know this stuff so well. What's the value of a community of practice for folks? How about this? Why don't you define it for us, your definition of a community of practice and what value do you think it can bring in an organization that's struggling with those silos, that's struggling to work across multiple geographies, multiple product lines or some combination of that sort of thing?

Margaret Lee:

Yeah. You actually encapsulated it really well how you described the problem statement because it isn't just about the formalized practices. I mean, yes, you can have design systems and yes, you can have kind of like, here's the blessed way that we do things or whatever. Right?

Lisa Welchman:

Right.

Margaret Lee:

But human beings are highly variable components in the system and it really isn't just a big company problem. I think this happens as soon as you have more than one team, you have this issue of potential siloing and turf and all that. So the community of practice, or what we call the UX Community & Culture program was really geared towards that part that nobody owns. It's all the stuff that tends to fall between the cracks of organizational accountability because there's so many issues and problems that are actually shared, but aren't owned necessarily by any one group or they're owned by one group, but really the stakeholders live in another group.

Margaret Lee:

That was the opportunity that I saw with the whole UXCC program was just like, "Somebody needs to be looking after this as like a job." It should be somebody's accountability and not always like a 20% thing because that's basically what was my premise for proposing this was like, "Look, I've been doing this for nine years on the side as I was trying to..."

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah, on the side of your desk. Yeah, exactly.

Margaret Lee:

Yeah. As I was trying to build the Google Maps UX team, right? In order to do that, I knew that there were... And it wasn't just me, by the way. It was many other leaders doing this on their 20% time too. But doing things like, "Oh, well, we actually need different kinds of roles that don't exist yet because they're still hired in the early odds of Google's early days."

Margaret Lee:

So needing to define new job ladders. So things like change management at the company level, I think was really important for UX to have a stake in because that's part of the system that enables us to

function as a healthy organization. Right? So there's a lot of things like that. The processes of what our job ladders are. What's the hiring process, the promo process, et cetera, et cetera.

Margaret Lee:

And then there's all the unofficial stuff that's just about human beings coming together. As you observed, if you can't communicate well, then how are you expected to collaborate well, right? So if you don't even know who the other person is, you're less likely to reach out when the time comes because at least at Google, there's so many business units that have to work together. Right?

Margaret Lee:

So ads is obviously a really big business unit at Google, but most of the products are also monetized. So they have to work with the ads. That's just one obvious example, but there were many other ones like when I was working on Google Maps, local search was a big crossover with the search team. So just year over year I would see the same issues tend to crop up in terms of whatever the cadence of things that would mark your activity like roadmap planning.

Margaret Lee:

Okay. Well, we're going to have to make sure that our objectives align to the search and the ads' objectives, et cetera, et cetera. And that's just not on the UX side, that's across all functions. Right? So it becomes this really complex matrix of interactions that have to happen that there's no real defined process for, because, again, it's so relationship driven a lot of times. And you can have a certain amount of top down mandate of like, "Okay, you have to go work with that team." But really, it's like on the ground. How to make that happen when you don't have defined ways of doing things is very depend than on relationships.

Lisa Welchman:

It's funny what you're saying, because one of the things that I hear a lot when I kick off projects with folks is a lot. A little less now than it used to be is that, we'll get everybody in a room together, and I want to do a terminology check. I want to introduce myself and tell people here's the language we're using, et cetera, et cetera. And they'll say, "This is the first time we've all been in a room together." And you're like, "What? You've got a 97-year-old website and you've never actually ever gotten in the same room speaking to each other."

Lisa Welchman:

So it's really interesting to hear you talk about that. One of my theories and I just want to bounce it off of you because I feel like we have a lot of things in common. It's really interesting to talk to you and hear you talk. I believe that the team model, the model of people, I don't want to say factory, because I want to get away from that linear manufacturing model that we often use to describe the way people work, which I think is not helpful or healthy. But I believe that the collaboration model that is required to produce a product or a service or a thing at all in a lot of ways deeply reflects the nature of that thing.

Lisa Welchman:

And because the web is so complex and interrelated, intertwined as Peter Morville would say, interactive and has all of these sort of cross silo relationships, not only within a product that you may be

creating yourself, but also with general website standards, W3C standard or industry standards, if you're working in finance or all of these other sorts of things that that means that the collaboration model is going to be sort of convoluted and weird.

Lisa Welchman:

So I think because it's going to reflect that product and I think that communities of practice where people are at least looking at each other and saying, "Yeah, we're working on this thing together." And yes, I deeply believe in governing frameworks because it's required, and I think a lack of firm and solid governing frameworks is contributing to some of the challenges that we see online right now. I also think that's just a maturity issue and that will shift over time.

Lisa Welchman:

But I also just feel like there'll always be a role for people just getting together in a room and talking to each other. And a lot of these problems can either be kept from happening in the first place, and that there can be a good feeling amongst the people who are creating something together and that good feeling is only going to make things better, which might sound a little soft.

Lisa Welchman:

So I'm wondering what you think about that human factor of feeling good at work and how that contributes to the quality of what people are making and how that might contribute to the user experience, improved user experience? Do you think that's a factor and do you think communities of practice play a part in that or is that just something I've made up in my head and hope is true?

Margaret Lee:

I think it's a huge factor. And in fact, I mean that it's kind of at the premise of the whole program of UX Community & Culture at Google was having some shared sense of purpose or shared sense of something rather than all being siloed senses of whatever each team was doing was very... It underlaid everything that I felt was important for UXCC as a program because especially as Google scaled and like I said, it's not just a scale issue, but it is multiplied a thousand fold when you're the size of Google and you have such sprawl in terms of where everybody's geographically located.

Margaret Lee:

And even like in Mountain View where the headquarters are, you would find people video conferencing from one floor to the other because there was just no time to travel, to meet in person, which was just crazy. Right? So you would just see this tendency for us to stay in our own lanes which is just not healthy when you're trying to create coherent user experiences where our customers aren't feeling the division within the product. Right? It should just be natural.

Margaret Lee:

But the other thing is there's so there's so much knowledge at Google. So there's so much expertise. You're talking 5,000 people, right? There's a lot of knowledge and a lot of expertise. And you know that there are some people that have knowledge that more people should know about. So there was a big effort to how do we unlock the knowledge that people hold and make it available for people who need it because there's a lot of expertise that is really valuable. Right?

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Margaret Lee:

So a lot of the programs that we did were geared towards that. So a lot of the community events, for example, UXU, UX University was probably what our team was best known for. And it was basically like an annual conference where all the UX community was invited to. So the last time the team was able to get together was in 2019 pre-pandemic. And over half the organization showed up in Mountain View for this event. It was so big that the fire marshal came twice to tell us that we had to lighten the load on the building.

Lisa Welchman:

That's fantastic. That was back in the day. I can't imagine that ever happening again.

Margaret Lee:

Back in the day, yeah. I mean, I think that at the time over half the population was over 1,700 people showed up. So it was a lot. That's a lot of people.

Lisa Welchman:

Fantastic. That is a lot of people.

Margaret Lee:

Yeah, and it's all peer to peer education. We put out a call for proposals. People would propose, "Here's what I'd like to teach or talk about, or have an expo on because there were many different components to it, but it was all geared towards unlocking the knowledge that was resident in individuals or within teams or whatever for the greater good of the community."

Margaret Lee:

So the knowledge was one aspect that was really important, but the other aspect that I think that was the unspoken piece was the get to know you aspect and the social capital that would be built during that event that would carry over a long after the event was over. So people would know who to go to because they've had exposure to them through their classes or their talks.

Lisa Welchman:

They have a relationship with them.

Margaret Lee:

They the many social engagements that they could have throughout the time of conference because we really designed it so that there would be many opportunities for people to meet each other outside of just in one of the classes. I think that that's a really big component is bringing people together. And these days it would be virtually. So I know that the team... I've left since, but the team is planning the next UXU this November and it's all virtual. Meanwhile, I'm admiring that image of you behind you. That's kind of amazing.

Andy Vitale:

Nice.

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Lisa Welchman:

Oh, the stuffed Andy?

Andy Vitale:

Yes.

Margaret Lee:

Is that stuffed? I didn't know. That's amazing.

Andy Vitale:

It is. In the late '80s or early '90s, they had these wrestling buddies. So I used to wrestle professionally, but I wasn't good at it.

Margaret Lee:

Wow.

Andy Vitale:

So I didn't do it very long. And someone recreated the wrestling buddy as me.

Margaret Lee:

Fun fact.

Andy Vitale:

Yeah, exactly. The thing that's so interesting is we're trying to build a community of practice right now in my organization. And when we think about design in our company, we've got a family of companies. So there are so many different companies that have small design teams and our design team is well over a hundred. We're on the path to go over 200. So we're the largest design team outside of probably marketing. And what we're trying to do is bring everybody together and not worry so much about organizational silos or where people report.

Andy Vitale:

We're start starting with, you just described that ability to learn together and contribute back and solve problems together. So it's been going well. I think we do need somebody to actually formalize it because it is a lot of everybody's role or a portion of everybody's role. Just curious, kind of like what's some of the things to look out for when building a community?

Andy Vitale:

We've talked about some of the good things that it solves, but what are some of the things that someone should be aware of as a potential like what if or expect this to happen and how we navigate that?

Margaret Lee:

There were certain areas that we stayed away from. And that was just something that I just felt I knew from having done a more traditional UX leadership role in a product area. And that would be try not to step on toes because that can just be really distracting when people feel like, "Wait, why are you trying to enter this realm of things that I have ownership over?" So that was actually pretty easy because there's so much that you can do. You don't need to be entering areas that are already covered by another team.

Margaret Lee:

Just look for the areas that basically have no owner, like I said, that actually have pain points and you'll find that people welcome you with open arms because people want the stuff to happen. They just need somebody to make it easy. So I think for you, because you don't have a dedicated team like UXCC was or whatever, I think that the thing to watch out for is people volunteering to do something and then they get too busy to do it, and then it ends up falling flat.

Margaret Lee:

So it's figuring out what the accountability model is. We ended up actually, because we've recognized that all the stuff is done through the dent of volunteers really, like we had a small team and yes, we were dedicated to it. But the majority of the work was really volunteer field. Because of that and because... These aren't just like frivolous types of activities, these are really, really productive, right? Like the learning experiences and like I said the social capital that gets built and carries over to ongoing product collaboration is really key.

Margaret Lee:

We actually built in a citizenship component into our job ladders, and that was something that my team was empowered to do. But basically it said, "Look, we've recognized that this stuff that you devote your time to is really important and it should get acknowledged during your performance review time.

Margaret Lee:

So that helped. Codifying something that says, "Thank you for contributing. That was worthwhile and you're going to get credit for it." Other ways of doing that, you might... We had a system where we could give pure bonuses. It was a nominal amount, but it was really more the acknowledgement. We also had kudos, which was non-monetary just acknowledgement that was public.

Margaret Lee:

So figure out how you can actually acknowledge the work, because if you don't, people might just feel like, "I just put in so much time and it was fun, but I'm not going to do that again, because I'm not getting credit. It'd be like, what do I get out of it?" So maybe think about that. Think about how do you give back?

Andy Vitale:

Right. No, that makes a ton of sense. We have a similar system internally where we give points that have a monetary value that people can then trade in for gift certificates or cash in for like... I have enough points now to get a toaster or an air fryer slash toaster oven thing.

Margaret Lee:

You must be excited.

Andy Vitale:

Well, I'll be able to condense two different kitchen devices down to one. So it'll be space saving. My wife will be happy. We have a lot of kitchen gadgets that never get used.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. It's funny you say kitchen gadgets. I had to get rid of all of mine because I changed plugs. You know what, you don't need all of them. That's my summary. Because this podcast is not about kitchen gadgets. And I love to cook, but honestly, some really good knives and a couple of essential kitchen gadgets and you're kind of set.

Andy Vitale:

And fire. That's all you need.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. Talk to me a couple years from now because I may have a kitchen full of gadgets again. It's very hard to walk by some of those beautiful things that they have. So I wanted to shift gears a little bit on this and talk about a topic that, to be honest with you, Andy and I have shied away from addressing directly, which is equity and inclusion.

Lisa Welchman:

Right. So I watched just this morning, your video insights from a reluctant leader. I think that's the name of it if I'm remembering correctly. And it really, really resonated with me on a number of different fronts. When Andy and I started the podcast one of the strengths we thought was, "Okay, I'm a black woman in tech. He's a white guy in tech. We've got some bases covered and we have a diversity of experience."

Lisa Welchman:

So on the equity and inclusion front, where do you think we are? And how do you think we're going to get better? And when I say better, I even want to know what you think better is on that front. I have opinions about it, and it's just such a touchy topic to discuss because you feel like you have to take a side which already you're losing.

Lisa Welchman:

You're already losing, but you feel like I'm a black woman. I feel like I ought to take the black woman's side. But once you're on a side, then you're not listening and you're not doing a lot of different things. It's just really, really challenging. So just it's a very broad question, but where's your head on that right now? You're talking about being a leadership coach. How are you going to factor all of that into that experience as well?

Margaret Lee:

That's a lot of questions in that question.

Lisa Welchman:

That's a lot of questions. I always ask a lot of questions in a question so bad. It's a bad habit of mine. I guess a short way to put it would be equity and inclusion. What do you think?

Margaret Lee:

Yeah. Wow. Well, I will say going back to, you mentioned, the talk and it's also an article. I feel like I came into my own late because that was like three years ago when the first time I gave that talk came up. It was really just me saying it out loud. All these things that I think I was feeling inside, but really didn't have a really formed formulated point of view that I could articulate. It was just a lived experience.

Margaret Lee:

When I decided to say this stuff out loud, it was really incredibly personally empowering, but I could see that it also had effects on other people who would come and talk to me about it, which was then even more empowering for me. It suddenly made me realize that I have a responsibility because if I can do this for anybody else, then I should do this, whatever that means. Just talking about it, shedding light on it, getting other people to talk about it.

Margaret Lee:

So I found that that was just something. It was a very personal thing for me being able to basically articulate something that I think I had assumed was just, this was the way life is. And it shouldn't be like this. Right? I have kids that are becoming adults. Now, my first just went to college and my second will be following next year. That definitely-

Lisa Welchman:

Congratulations.

Margaret Lee:

Thank you. And that definitely made me think about like, "They're about to enter, God knows what." Whatever they're about to enter, because I think they probably haven't faced a lot of the inequity that they'll undoubtedly face at some point. Why not talk about it to help the next generation or even the current generation? Because we talk about it, but we don't really talk about it.

Margaret Lee:

That's what I feel. In companies, I feel like we make pledges, we have these objectives, we have these volunteer employee resource groups that try to do things, but where is it getting us? I'm not saying that as an individual, I'm going to get further at a company level, but I felt like I had to do something that just felt like it had some meaning for myself. So that's what I chose to do is just to talk about my own experience.

Margaret Lee:

As it has resonated with other people, at least within my conversations, I feel like at least that's helping a little bit. But for me also, it's like, "Can I encourage other people to talk about their experiences?" Because that's what it's going to take. Otherwise, it just stays in this abstract level of company commitments and whatnot or news coverage.

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Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. And then it goes away the next day.

Margaret Lee:

And then it goes away. , I think that the other thing I feel about it is that sometimes it's treated like a zero sum game which I really resent. Right? Is this population suffering more inequity than that population? It should be a yes and because we're UX people and we know how to say yes and, right? Why are we-

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. Is it Kimberlé Crenshaw who talks about intersectionality?

Margaret Lee:

Yeah.

Lisa Welchman:

I can't remember who. Have I got that right? Okay. To me, that's where the solution lies in understanding that every human being is a system and together we're all systems. I am a black woman and there is an incredible round of bias around me, but I'm solidly upper middle class and always have been. I picked up and moved to the Netherlands. What an incredibly privileged thing to do? Right? Yet at the same time, I'm walking around in this body, looking this way, and that causes people to treat me in a certain way. They have certain expectations around things.

Lisa Welchman:

So I think it's interesting that you bring that UX factor to it because it sounds like if people... And I think you mentioned this in the article on the talk, if people can get over their fear of looking bad.

Margaret Lee:

Yeah.

Lisa Welchman:

Right? I mean, like when Andy and I talk-

Margaret Lee:

Saying the wrong thing.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. When Andy and I talk about this, the number one thing I'm always bringing up is, "Oh my God, if we talk about equity and inclusion and then one of us says the wrong thing, we're really in trouble." I think the last time we talked about it, I was like, "We can protect each other. I'm the black woman, you're the white guy. We can protect each other." There's this defense of like, "Oh my God, I'm really scared that I'm going to say the wrong thing. I'm going to say the wrong thing as a black woman." Right?

Lisa Welchman:

I'm going to say the wrong thing about somebody who's not like me, or whatever. So I think if the UX community in particular, because at least on paper, they're supposed to be researchers and people who are considering different viewpoints, if they can as human beings get over their own particular insecurities, around looking not great, I was going to say stupid or not, we're looking biased. I think that's what it is.

Lisa Welchman:

People are afraid to think and say things. Right? So that's why I really appreciate your coming out and telling your story. It's so simple. I know just from my own reluctance sometimes to talk about things that have happened to me that it looks simple, but it's not. It Takes an incredible amount of emotional courage. So I really appreciate-

Margaret Lee:

Thank you.

Lisa Welchman:

... you taking the steps to do that because it's from... At a practical level, you're worried vocationally. How am I going to say something that's somehow going to make me seem like a less strong, viable professional or whatever. So that's really, really helpful. So when you think about leadership coaching, are you thinking about including aspects of that in it? What direction is that going to be? Maybe it has actually nothing to do with that? Or is it going to be more individual leadership coaching? Why are you moving in that direction?

Margaret Lee:

Well, you-

Lisa Welchman:

I may have swiped your question, Andy.

Andy Vitale:

That's fine.

Lisa Welchman:

I'm sorry.

Margaret Lee:

I'll just answer Andy then.

Lisa Welchman:

Answer Andy, yeah.

Margaret Lee:

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You mentioned something that really resonates. You said we're a system and it's so true. That's actually how I'm thinking about this transition into leadership coaching is actually quite natural going from working on community culture at scale at Google which definitely was a system, right?

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah.

Margaret Lee:

To actually one on one leadership coaching, which is basically looking at the individual leader within the system because that's a really important role that leaders play is how do they navigate the system as themselves, as their authentic selves, whatever that means. I think that's where the DEI element could come in, but it's not something that I'm necessarily leading with. But I do think that whoever it is that's coming to me, I think that's going to be a consideration.

Margaret Lee:

If there's somebody that feels like they're underrepresented in their group or that they feel like they're the only one, I think that's a really important factor for existing in a system that we would want to address.

Lisa Welchman:

That's cool. That's cool. So you're just going to keep being you.

Andy Vitale:

Which is the most authentic thing to do. But I'm curious when did you first realize that leadership coaching is what you wanted to do? Was there a specific moment that basically led you to like, "All right, I'm at Google for 14 and a half years, and now is the time I'm going to go do this?"

Margaret Lee:

Yeah, that's a complicated question. I think I'd always... Not always, but for the past couple years, I've been thinking about leadership coaching as a potential next step, because I think I tended to give a lot of advice, which is not the same as coaching, but adjacent to it maybe. I just realized that that was something I enjoyed doing. And like I said, I do like working at systems levels and thinking about a leader as part of the system was intriguing to me because leaders are such an important part of the system. They influenced so much of the system that if you can get that right, it can have such a multiplier effect.

Margaret Lee:

So that was intriguing to me. But also I think that the real turning point was I had a really great coach the last year or so that I was at Google. That really made me think about what do I really want to do, and just help me clarify this as a next step. And of course the pandemic, right? The pandemic got everybody-

Lisa Welchman:

Thinking.

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Margaret Lee:

... a little bit more introspective.

Lisa Welchman:

How are you holding up with that? How have you been during the pandemic? Alright?

Margaret Lee:

Yeah, I think I've been okay. I think that one of the advantages was actually that ability to get introspective and to make a decision.

Lisa Welchman:

That's definitely a privilege that some of us had during this time.

Margaret Lee:

Yeah. I wouldn't wish it on like any other teenager. I've watched my teenage kids navigate high school through this pandemic. It's horrible.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah. I can imagine. I have a grown son and I was really glad that he's an adult already, because I mean, it was challenging for him in a number of different ways. He works in the entertainment industry and that was just basically shut down. But it is definitely hard. It's hard. Still is hard for some people.

Andy Vitale:

And now we're seeing, especially like they're... Typically, people tend to move on in their careers and the pandemic I think has done a decent job of keeping people where they are because of the safety net of like, "I don't need to leave my company." But as we're starting to get out of it and hearing things like the great resignation, we are starting to see people just explore what's out there. It's a candidate market for sure which is really interesting. Curious, kind of as you talk about coaching, and not looking for any free coaching sessions in the moment, just curious-

Lisa Welchman:

It's your opportunity to practice.

Andy Vitale:

No. Curious what you're seeing as you go into this new role in terms of some of the key areas that people are struggling with, that leaders are struggling with right now?

Margaret Lee:

Well, I think a lot of people tend to come to coaching when they're at a transition point of some sort, generally. Maybe they're trying to make a change in their leadership style, or they got a new role and they need to level up or they just recognize something. They're self-aware of some habit that they want to change. But I think that one of the... I think that the common theme there is what behaviors aren't suiting you well anymore that you want to acknowledge and maybe change.

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Margaret Lee:

So that to me is probably at the crux of a lot of the coaching that so far that I've been doing is just what's holding you back from the thing that you want to do? And can we address that? Because sometimes it's not obvious. Sometimes it's like somebody might know what they want to do, but they just don't know why they're not able to get there. And that's kind of the nugget for coaching.

Andy Vitale:

Yeah. That makes a ton of sense. And it's funny because like you talked about earlier kind of giving advice and coaching are so different. I think there's an aspect of coaching when you're actually leaning in and helping someone that you're also learning a lot from that process. Some of the greatest things I've learned are in my efforts to kind of coach or mentor others.

Andy Vitale:

So it's very admirable. It's one of those things that we're starting to play with some leadership coaching in our organization. At least it's become available to me and some of these sessions and I see the benefits. So it's really important. But anyway, Margaret, I want to be respectful of our time. How can people get in touch with you, stay up to date on your leadership coaching, what you have going on? What's the best way for them to do so?

Margaret Lee:

I'm not a super active tweeter, but I do peruse Twitter on a daily. So you can always reach me on Twitter @frauhauslee. That's F-R-A-U-H-A-U-S-E-L-E-E. I'm also on LinkedIn. So those are probably the easiest ways to get in touch with me.

Andy Vitale:

Awesome. Well, it's been a pleasure to talk about all of the things. Thanks so much for coming on.

Margaret Lee:

Thanks. I enjoyed it.

Lisa Welchman:

Yeah, it was really great to meet you. I wish you well on all you're doing.

Margaret Lee:

Thank you. You too.

Announcer:

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