



## Episode 25

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### Interview with Pamela Weiss

Welcome to *The Amiel Show*, a podcast about leadership. Why it matters and how to develop to your full potential in complex times. This is your host Amiel Handelsman.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Hey everybody, we're at Episode 25 today. That's quite a milestone, and it suggests to me that this thing, this podcast, is actually happening. We're getting great guests over and over again. All of you, all over the world are listening. I'm deeply grateful for that.

So to mark the occasion I am adding a new feature to the podcast. It starts today, and it is called *Jedi Leadership Tricks*. Yes, it is named after Jedi Mind Tricks from Star Wars. It's a simple act that produces powerful results if you practice it over and over again with sincerity.

With one big difference. The purpose of the Jedi Mind Trick is to persuade others to do something that you want, which is good as far as it goes. The purpose of the *Jedi Leadership Trick* is a bit broader: to produce positive results through an act of leadership. It's not specifically about getting your own way, although it might include that. It's about leading with others toward a common purpose.

Today, we're going to start with one called Two Feet, Five Breaths. I use this myself at least a dozen times a day and have introduced it to many people I coach. The reason is it's amazing anytime you're feeling distracted or reactive. Speaking for myself, I feel distracted or reactive throughout the day. Two Feet, Five Breaths helps you literally feel more grounded, centered, and relaxed so you can be present right there with others. It takes two steps. Let me walk you through them.

The first step is to ask yourself, where are my feet right now? Where are my feet? Are they floating up in the air? Are they crossed over my ankle? Are they sitting there right on top of the

knee? Wherever they are, put them flat on the ground. Yes, feel them right there on the ground. If you have to adjust your chair or how you're standing to make this happen, go ahead and do that.

Now that you have your feet firmly planted, I want you to do something a bit strange. Wiggle your toes for a second. Make sure they're there. Got it? Getting your feet grounded shifts your attention downward. Instead of being caught up in your thoughts, you're focused on your toes. What it basically does is it reduces the odds that you're going to react instantaneously to whatever is happening. It buys you some time for step two.

Step two, take a deep breath. Do this from your abdomen. Now, for a large proportion of the population, breathing in from the abdomen is an abnormal act. We have learned to breathe from our chest, which is very shallow breathing. Breathing in from the abdomen is much different. Now, the easiest way to do this, which I recommend particularly if you're alone, let's say on the phone or doing email, is to actually touch a finger or two right below your belly button.

Right down there on the abdomen, feel the breath going in and out. Now, if you're in the room with others, you may not want to do this. Just pay attention to that part of your body as you breathe. Breathe in for a count of six, breathe out for a count of eight. That's where the slow breath comes in. You don't just breathe slowly, but you actually count. If this is a little bit hard, you might start with breathing in for a count of three or four and breathing out for a count of five or six, okay?

Do this four more times for a total of five breaths. The great thing about breathing deeply is it stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system. To make a complex story simple, it helps to calm you down. It's just like the old expression, "Take a chill pill." People who meditate regularly or, say, do yoga; you may know how to do this pretty easily. It's just a matter of doing it in the middle of life.

For everybody else, if you try this and find it difficult then it's a great reason to take up a meditation or yoga practice, because by getting better at breathing when you're not in the middle of life, you'll be ready for when you are.

That is the *Jedi Leadership Trick* known as Two Feet, Five Breaths. Go ahead, try it out and let me know how it goes. You can send me your stories on email to [amiel@handelsman.com](mailto:amiel@handelsman.com). Leave me a comment on the blog or send it through [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [LinkedIn](#). I'd love to hear from you.

Now on to this week's feature interview. I'm very pleased to be joined by Pamela Weiss. Pam is a seasoned executive coach based in the San Francisco Bay Area who works with senior leaders in companies. Pam is also long-time meditator and meditation teacher in both the Zen and Vipassana traditions.

To speak from a personal note, Pam is one of my very first coaches. When I met her back in 2000, I had just moved across the country and was struggling a bit both in rebuilding my business in a new place and in creating new friendships. Pam helped me stand on more solid ground by pointing out that I was caught up in a strange and painful cycle. One moment, I would feel this amazing sense of grandiosity, feeling as if I was the best in the world at what I did—and wondering why the world wasn't seeing this.

Then the next moment I'd feel down and discouraged like I was nothing. Pam helped me pull myself out of this dynamic by encouraging me to focus not on am I great or am I a loser but how well am I connecting with other people. This practice helped a ton with my business and with my friendships. This continues to be a practice that I use today. Pam, big thanks for that.

There are two reasons I invited Pam onto the podcast.

Reason number one, you'll quickly see she's just an awesome, awesome person. The funny thing is, the closer you work with her, the greater respect you feel for her. In fact, I put a note on Facebook a few weeks ago and a number of people who work very closely with her had such positive things to say. They were really pleased we're doing this interview. In fact, I had the honor of partnering with Pam on a project about 10 years ago. We worked with the big startup manufacturing plant in Arizona. I got to see up close the kind of qualities she brings. How she actually puts into place what she talks about. That's reason number one.

The second reason: Pam stands on a pretty important soap box in the field of leadership development. For her, developing skills is necessary but not sufficient to practicing great leadership. We also need to develop qualities of leadership. In particular, the qualities of what Buddhists call a Bodhisattva, which in my own terminology, is someone who develops themselves to their full potential so they can be of greater service to others and to the world.

Pam is taking mindfulness in a new and I would say larger direction. It's pretty interesting to me and why we focused on this in our conversation. In particular, three core qualities of a Bodhisattva in leadership: clarity, courage, and curiosity. According to Pam, clarity is about not just what I want to do. It's about what really matters to me. Courage is about stepping out of the familiar everyday with deep faith in our basic goodness. Curiosity is about cultivating the beginners mind.

Now something cool about these three qualities. Pam not only talks about them and coaches people around them but she's actually designed and for many years has been running a very remarkable programs for groups of leaders. The program is called PEP or the [Personal Excellence Program](#). It allows leaders to cultivate these three qualities and others over a period of months. In our conversation, we talk about these three qualities of clarity, courage, and curiosity. How it's actually very challenging in many organizations to develop them when there's such a premium placed on speed and velocity.

Finally, Pam takes a stand in the debate over what comes first, physical energy from sleep nutrition, getting lots of breaks or cultivating these kinds of leadership qualities like curiosity, courage and clarity.

For more about Pam and links to the resources we mention on our conversation, go as always to [amielhandelsman.com/25](http://amielhandelsman.com/25). I want to say, it's really awesome that so many viewers are sharing this with your friends. If you're not yet subscribed to *The Amiel Show* on [iTunes](#) please do so today. It's very simple. For a few quick pointers on how to do it, again go to the URL I just mentioned. I give the directions. Now, here is my conversation with Pamela Weiss.

**Amiel Handelsman:** I wanted to start by asking you about a way you talk about leadership as a way of being. What do you mean by that? How is that different from some of the ways we more conventionally talk about leadership, particularly in organizations and elsewhere?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, I think there are two things to say to your question. One, I think traditionally, we think about leadership as a role. I'm not thinking of it that way. I'm thinking of it as part of what I mean by a way of being. Anyone, no matter what our role is, can take on a way of being that is a way of engaging with life from a proactive perspective as an agent rather than as a victim. We might say as someone who's fully in charge of our own lives.

One of these ways I like to talk about is we tend to think the flip side of leadership as followership. I think it's not such a great way to set it up. In fact, the key goal of leadership is creating fellowship, which obviously has some religious or spiritual overtones, which I'm borrowing liberally from.

I did it intentionally because I think essentially the role of a leader is to first be connected deeply to what is important to themselves and to move in the world from that place but also to ultimately be creating community, collaboration, connection, to facilitate the ability of a group of people to support each other and to come together in ways they can do more, accomplish more, than any one person could do on their own.

**Amiel Handelsman:** When you think about fellowship, are you including those people who are practicing leadership as being part of that fellowship?

**Pamela Weiss:** Absolutely.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Okay. So it's not just for others to be in fellowship but it's to be part of that.

**Pamela Weiss:** No. I think it's part of the central role of a leader is to really create a robust and nurturing community. Of course the person who is in a leadership role is part of it, but in a way everybody in the community has a leadership role. Everybody's job becomes being clear about what's important to them and then supporting one another. Creating an environment to support everyone together to be able to do more than any one person could do on their own.

**Amiel Handelsman:** I'd like to ask you about the first part of that, which is being connected to what's important in your own depth. In your panel discussion at Wisdom 2.0, you mentioned that in the work place there is a yearning for depth. I wonder if you could say a little bit more about that, what you see.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. So I think if I back up from your question a little bit, the sort of soap box piece I've been on for a while around leadership is the wish to offer this archetypal, what in the Buddhist tradition is called a Bodhisattva, as a model for leadership. A Bodhisattva is very much as you were describing to me earlier, a person who's on his or her own path. The heart of a Bodhisattva is someone who's dedicated to supporting others to do the same.

The word Bodhi is sometimes translated as enlightened, awakened, or enlightening, awakening. It's also wise. Sattva is a being, but a sentient being. I like to think of a Bodhisattva as a wise feeling being. That specifically is a person who's dedicated to supporting the welfare of others and really understands the depths of our inner connectedness. And that out of sort of aligning ourselves with that as a possibility we can begin to tap into not just engaging with what I call 'the superficial', putting out fires day after day or trying to navigate through what is, I think for most of us, kind of a fire hose of information, data, content, issues, moment by moment. To have our own sense of, we might call north star or inner guidance that is giving us a way to navigate through that with some sense of meaning and purpose.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah, I like the way you described that. I don't know if you noticed this but there seems to be a lot more kids getting name Bodhi these days. I know at least three or four.

**Pamela Weiss:** It's like mindfulness. Mindfulness is from the poly word Sathi. It has become such a buzzword and pop term now. Everybody is talking about it. I think it's true similar perhaps with Bodhi becoming more of a popular thing. My soapbox wish is I would like the term Bodhisattva to become as commonplace in our vernacular conversational language in the same way that, I don't know, like cappucino used to not be. Right?

**Amiel Handelsman:** Oh when it's quite a bit more rare?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah.

**Pamela Weiss:** I would hope that in a decade that term Bodhisattva becomes part of what we are familiar with, call on, and draw on, particularly in the domain of leadership. That it just becomes kind of a commonplace framework, as I said, kind of an archetype of understanding what leadership is really about and what's needed to be a leader.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. Well, it has a lot of syllables, which will be the challenge, I think Nobody can spell it but it does point to serving something larger than ourselves, which is not how mindfulness is typically interpreted. We can see the difference.

**Pamela Weiss:** That's right. Well mindfulness comes out of the teachings of Dharma, which are a much bigger ocean. I think mindfulness, at least the way it's being presented in the public now, is sort of like, here's a new skill set you can learn. You could go to the gym or you could learn this mindfulness training.

Mindfulness training is just a fraction. It's a subset of a much larger understanding of what it takes to become a whole and mature human being, which I think is all under the rubric of what it means to be Bodhisattva. Again for me, in particular I think that term and that framework could be so useful in the context of leadership.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. Well I want to continue this conversation by asking you about some of the qualities of leadership that you've spoken about in other places. I think you have five or six Cs of leadership. I have three in particular that I mentioned to you before this conversation I want to ask you about, but could you just mention the bigger list before we hone in?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. I just want to name that I made these up. I cleverly came up with just a little bit tongue in cheek for me. There's the four this and the six that's, and the seven whatever. So came up with my own list. The qualities are clarity, courage, commitment, compassion, curiosity. Recently I taught this at Dharma Leadership training program that I'm co-leading. Somebody came up with the idea we should add creativity. So that's an add to the list then everything with Cs

**Amiel Handelsman:** Are you going to apply for a different patent now that you've added creativity? I know someone by the way who can help you with that. He's like a patent expert. He probably knows something, too.

**Pam Weiss:** To get my Cs down as mine. .

**Amiel Handelsman:** [Laugh] Yeah. The three that you talked about in this talk you have on your website that I was most curious about were clarity, courage and curiosity. Maybe we could, I'm most interested how they are related to each other. Maybe you can break them down one by one starting with clarity.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. What I mean by clarity is really at the heart of what it means to be a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva is a person who lives by aspiration or by intention, by vow in a more traditional religious context, rather than living by reactivity, habit, or karma. It's that north star that I was talking about.

That's what I mean by clarity. It is understanding in the middle of being in this, I described, fire hose of constant technological flood of information, issues, data and so on. The key for each of us is to have some sense of what's really important to me. I think in traditional leadership, maybe clarity means; what are my goals? What are my three goals? That's more about what do I want to do. And that is important.

What I'm talking about is something different which is not just what do I want to do, which will fall out of this, but what matters. What do I really care about in this huge context of, you know, our world is a mess. There's so much that we could step in to help with. What's most important to me? What touches me? We need to be really clear about that. That's what clarity is. It's really something that comes from clarity. It sounds like a head-centered thing. But I think in this context, what I mean by clarity is really something that comes from the heart first.

What I describe in the Bodhisattva context, we talk about aspiration. What do I aspire to? Aspiration is like inspiration and expiration. It's related to the breath. It's related to spirit. It's related to being of utmost importance about life and death itself. Without that we just end up in kind of overwhelm multi-tasking or engaging at a shallow level because we aren't clear about what's really important.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Okay, let's go on to courage.

**Pamela Weiss:** The word courage is a quality of heart from the French word heart. I would say courage, and actually, I would put courage, commitment, and compassion kind of in a bundle together. These are all qualities that are needed to put our aspiration, that clear vow, direction or wish that we have for ourselves and for the world, into action. It's not enough to just have a vision and be clear about something. We actually have to step in and engage.

The courage part of it, I think is important because leadership requires that we don't just go along with the habitual or the familiar. We have the courage to step out of the familiar. Step out of what's known. I think again if we look around at what's going on in the world, there's a lot of difficulty. The kind of changes that come, often come in from enormous acts of courage and they're often a surprise. It doesn't come from just doing the familiar.

Courage requires a really deep faith in our basic goodness, and understanding that in the end love is stronger than hate, which we saw in such a remarkable way unfold in the horrible murders that happened in Charleston, yet we saw this incredible love and courageous response that came out of the community there. That was not what was expected, but so inspiring when it happened, right?

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yes.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Curiosity

**Pamela Weiss:** I want to say one more thing about courage because it's in my mind at the moment and it's so beautifully said and also another example of what possible in a world out of courage. Which is President Obama, when he was speaking about the recent Supreme Court decision to make marriage accessible to everyone. He described it this way. He said this passing of this everyone can get married act is the results of countless acts, countless small acts of courage from millions of people across decades who stood up and slowly made an entire country realize that love is love. For me that is the essence of courage. And that's what's needed whether in a world of leadership or we're just in our lives is the capacity to take those small or large acts of courage for what's important, what we care about, what's true, and what's real.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah, when I heard that I was immediately reminded, I think it was 1991 or 1992 when I was in college. There was a columnist for the newspaper who wrote in favor of same sex marriage. He was gay. He noted in his article that, he said, for most of us in this community, just being able to move about safely and have a sense of dignity is enough. It may seem like this is a ridiculous thing to propose. At that time I thought, that's some courage. I think that's what you're talking about.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yes, it's really a key quality in what I think of as real leadership.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Okay.

**Pamela Weiss:** The other pieces, the commitment and compassion, which I think go in hand in hand here. Commitment is the quality needed to stay with. It's said in Obama's quote: millions of people across decades. The Supreme Court decision was a long, long, long time coming. It requires not just courage but commitment, a kind of staying with.

Also, compassion, which is the ability to meet the inevitable difficulties we will meet when we stretch beyond the familiar. When we stretch outside of what's known. Put ourselves on the line in various ways. We need to stay with and we need to cultivate the capacity to be kind to ourselves, so we have the sort of softness and tenderness to be able to keep going.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. Well you covered a lot there. I'm going to be kind of hold off some of my questions about how these things are related. And my favorite question of what happens when you have this and not that. Kind of wait on that for just a minute, so we can get into curiosity.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. Curiosity, I think of it as about having a beginner's mind. You know the term from Shunryū Suzuki. He pulled that term into his book, *Zen Mind: Beginners Mind*. Beginners Mind is really about having an open mind, a flexible mind, a child-like wonder kind of mind.

For me all of the really best leaders who I've met have this quality. They're really smart. They're enormously accomplished. They could easily rest on their laurels, and yet that's not how they



are. It's not how they're wired. They want to learn. They want to keep growing. They're willing to let go of what they know in order to stay open and discover more.

This is not a small point, because when we cling to what we know we end up with dogma. We end up with fundamentalism, We end up with isms, horrible policies and, worse, and violence. Curiosity in a leader, really in any of us, is a sign of real strength. It's real power in a way to be able to tolerate the ambiguity and risk of not knowing.

It's also, of course, the source of creativity and aliveness The willingness to step out of the familiar to engage the world within an "Oh, Wow" mind. You may have heard the story about Steve Jobs. This is a story told by his sister who was at his death and described that his final words if he passed from life to death were, "Oh wow, oh wow, oh wow." That's beginners mind. That's this kind of mind of curiosity that doesn't just say okay, I'm asmart person enough, but stays open right to the end.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Of the qualities you mentioned, in my experience, this is the one that people least associate with leadership. I mean clarity, sure, courage, commitment, you can get a wide spectrum of people to agree that those are important. But curiosity, I'm not so sure. So this is clearly something important that you're adding in.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, maybe a more familiar way of saying it is good leaders listen. Because certainly again the best leaders I know are leaders who really understand that however much they know, they're sitting in a particular seat in the organization. They have a particular perspective. Most leaders are frankly somewhat isolated and often don't have a good pulse on what is really like down the chain, as it were, within an organization. The openness and curiosity to hear from other people, to really listen to the concerns but also to the ideas of others, is for me absolutely an essential part of what being a leader is.

Curiosity and clarity are partners. They go hand in hand. A leader is not only open, fluid, and responsive. He or she also has clarity about what's important, and that's what we tend to think of as a leader. But I think those two qualities are critical to be paired, if you will.

**Amiel Handelsman:** I want to nudge you a little bit on that point because curiosity and clarity are partners. I'm thinking you're saying: at ones best. I mean if you look at the world as it is, for many folks, we choose between one and the other. Or we tend to be stronger. I'm guessing that you probably see it similarly, but I wanted to just kind of nudge you and have you talk about that.

**Pamela Weiss:** So say it again. I'm not sure if I quite understood the question.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. Well I mean we all know strong-willed, forceful people who have great clarity. They don't appear to have a lot of curiosity. And we also know people who show up asking questions but you don't actually know where they are coming from. So when you said they are partners I assumed you mean that's it's an aspiration for them to be partners. But

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what actually happens is that it's hard for people to integrate both of them. I just wanted to see if you agree or disagree with that.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. I mean I think everything I'm talking about is hard. [Laughs]

**Amiel Handelsman:** Oh good! I wanted to get you on the record.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. We're talking about the Bodhisattva archive. A Bodhisattva is an archetype of something that is completely available but it's not easy. It's not meant to be easy. If it was easy, easy as just going with our habit, going with our reactivity, going whatever is familiar.

Everything I'm talking about here is going to be a stretch, and, as you said, for some of us we may tend, we may lean into clarity, but that clarity then becomes rigidity. Then the rigidity needs to be balanced with curiosity. For some of us we may be really open and curious, but it's really hard for us to take a stand about what do you care about. What's important to me? And that will be different for different people.

It's also the whole of this. It is not a checklist. I'm not talking about a once-and-done event. I'm talking about human life, which is ongoing and fluid and alive. This is a process, not a been there, done that check.

**Amiel Handelsman:** So this invitation...

**Pamela Weiss:** That's the whole idea of having qualities. It's not about a set of tasks to do. It's about a set of qualities to cultivate. And those qualities are always in varying degrees in balance with one another and also various degrees of depth within each of us.

**Amiel Handelsman:** As you talk about that, I want to ask you to just take a side tangent for a moment and ask you about a program that you created and have been running for a bunch of years now where I understand you ask people to focus on a quality, which is PEP. I wonder if you could just give a quick, for those who aren't familiar with it, just a quick overview of what it is, then talk about the role of qualities in that.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah. PEP was my secularized diversion of bringing the cultivation of these qualities of a Bodhisattva into the workplace. So the path begins with beginning to clarify for oneself what is important? What's my intention? What's my aspiration? What is, as Suzuki Roshi used to say, your heart's inmost request?

The program begins by inviting people to ask that question, which frankly many people never get to ask and certainly not in the workplace. We start with that and then we focus on a big open exploration of intention and aspiration on a quality. We invite people to consider, okay if that's your intention, that's the person you want to become, or that's how you want to show up in the world, then what quality or qualities might support that? So we invite people to pick, to focus on a quality.

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A quality could be clarity, courage, curiosity, compassion. People could pick something like that, and then they take that quality. They begin to observe themselves in real life through the lens of that quality. If my quality is courage, I'm going to now bring my curiosity and start to pay really close attention to when am I showing up as courageous and when I'm not. Then over time as people start to discover things about themselves, then they're invited to begin to create practices or actions, rituals in their lives, that support the ongoing deepening of that quality or capacity for them. That's the gist.

**Amiel Handelsman:** I wonder...

**Pamela Weiss:** Of course we dressed it up. There's a lot of other really good stuff and useful stuff. It's all palatable for a workplace audience.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Palatable. Do you give people...

**Pamela Weiss:** What I'm saying is the inspiration for it. That's what I'm talking about.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. I get that. I wonder if given this stuff's a little bit unusual, talking about qualities and looking into yourself. How do people even come up with the language of what qualities they might select?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, good question. When we give people a whole series of reflective exercises to do, one of the things we do is invite people to look around and say, who inspires you? Sometimes I think of the whole of the Bodhisattva path has going from inspiration to aspiration, and then cultivating aspiration into what's the name of my company, Appropriate Response, being able to respond skillfully and with kindness.

The beginning often comes from looking around and saying who are those people who I admire in my life, and then what are the qualities I see in them that I'd like to emulate? That's a really kind of a positive way of doing it. It takes some time because people are not entirely familiar with that languaging of qualities mostly in the workplace--especially we think about skills—but it doesn't take that long. People catch on.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah, just a follow up to that. I'm actually really curious about now is that one of the things we both know can happen is that we may choose to focus on something that actually already been focusing on our whole life. It's actually not so helpful. I might be someone who, it's all about being strong and clear. I'm going to focus on clarity. How do you prevent that from happening?

**Pamela Weiss:** [Laughs] Yeah, that's good. We get that question we get a lot. What's most important is the person pick something important to them. The whole of that program is happening in the community context as I was saying at the beginning. This is the fellowship keys. When people are in that process of selecting a quality, which we give them some time to

do, because the process of going through, finding out what the quality is, is in some ways as important as picking a word.

Part of that processes is doing their own reflection. Then part of it is going to get feedback. We ask people to get feedback both from people in the workplace and people outside. Often, what you were describing gets caught. It's caught right there. People go, "Oh! I think that I ought to be working on my being strong skills and everybody else is telling me I need to be more gentle, Huh interesting."

**Amiel Handelsman:** Ooops. [Laughs]

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, sometimes people are stubborn. I think it has to do with the level of self-awareness. If a person doesn't have a high level of self awareness they say, "I don't really care what other people think. I want to be stronger." And then they go about engaging, and being stronger. They're still in a self-reflective process. At some point, if there's even a little crack of an opening, they're going to catch on.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah, if you'd ask me back when you and I first met each other when you were leading a coaching class that I took, if courage was something I thought I had to cultivate in myself, it never would even occurred to me. It turns out that it has become one of the most significant qualities I've been focusing on, and you helped me to do that. I think many listeners know this, but the first thing that we think is important for us may not be where we actually end up. It sounds like that the discovery process is very rich for folks in the program.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, and we definitely encourage people to consider stretching beyond what feels comfortable for them. Stretching beyond what's familiar to them, not just going to the sort of same old, same old. All of those things to, you know, why would you pick that? Is it just because you're trying to entrench who you already are? Or is it because you really want to learn and grow, which is the point? And the quality is meant to be connected to a vision and aspiration that the person has. So it's a multi-faceted process that you're reflecting.

**Amiel Handelsman:** And you mentioned something in there about that program that just relates more broadly to cultivating these qualities that I'm wondering about, because it's a design choice, which is that you have people observe themselves before they try and practice something new. Did I hear that right? And what's behind that?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, there are several things behind it. The truth is we do give people some basic practices to engage like practices of reflection. We do a basic, we call, three-center check in: head, heart, body. It's a kind of meditation practice.

We're helping people get basic self-awareness practices. We teach people a centering practice. There are some core practices that everybody is engaging. But fundamentally, we're looking to have people learn how to gather data from their own observation and shape it into a practice that will really support them in a unique and particular way.

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That could be very different, like, if you and I, Amiel, both picked courage as our quality, and we observed ourselves over three months, a practice that I might design for myself for courage could look really, really different from a practice that you design for yourself based on courage.

Our idea is that the practice comes out of observing when you do it well. If I am observing myself around courage, I'm going to notice all the time that I'm screwing it up, that I'm being a wimp, right? But, in fact, if I really refine my capacity to observed and I start to really pay close attention to the times when I do speak up, I do stand up, I am courageous in some way, then that becomes the seed of a practice that I can then hone, refine and actively plant as a seed in the middle of my life. It comes out of my life. It comes out of something nascent. It just needs to be watered, if you will.

**Amiel Handelsman:** This is a question I have with all these qualities, how do you know when you gather this data that what you're experiencing is, say, courage?

**Pamela Weiss:** Well, it's up to you. You're the one who is picking that word to describe something that you want more of, right? It's not really for me to say what that is. It's for you to say, and you know, right?

If you're someone who tends to not speak up in meetings, or you're someone who when you see someone else in trouble doesn't come to their assistance, whatever it is. If you're someone who talks a lot but is never very vulnerable, those are all different aspects. That's what I meant when I said that if you're picking courage and I'm picking courage, it's going to be different for each of us.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yes.

**Pamela Weiss:** The word is not what it's important. Really what's important is the process of engaging in an aspiration toward learning and growth and then an ongoing process of self-observation and cultivating new practice.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Great.

**Pamela Weiss:** I always say this to people pretty quickly, because people get really anxious sometimes with, "Oh I'm not going to pick the right quality blah blah blah." We give them a long time and explain that the process is as important as the product, if you will. Also, it doesn't really matter what you pick. Really. What matters is that you are engaged in the process of learning and growth. What matters is that quality you picked is important to you.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yes

**Pamela Weiss:** And as you said, that it's not totally off base, right?

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah, it's not totally off-base and probably if you're doing the practice or the observing in earnest, you might discover that actually it wasn't that important to you. It really wasn't.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, and often that exactly what happens People start with something that's more surface level like what they think they're supposed to be like. Then as they get into it they discover, "Oh, really it's about patience. Or really it's about \_\_\_\_" They find something else and that's fine.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah

**Pamela Weiss:** That's part of the process. You're not wed to your thing that you picked in stone.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yeah. Let's bring into this conversation the notion of speed and velocity in the work place, the pace that I think many people are in. How does the attempt to cultivate these qualities intersect with the sort of relentless pace and pressure that many people experience?

**Pamela Weiss:** It's hard. [Laugh] I don't think cultivating the qualities is that hard. I think the relentless pace of the workplace is really hard. In some ways, I think this is a much better approach than asking people to pack off and go away for a week at a time to go to some course, which is really useful and people can slow down, and that's part of what people enjoy about doing that. But then you have to come back. What we're trying to do is give people a set of ways of engaging and shifts in perspective in the context of daily life that aren't asking them to go and completely change what they're doing.

Now, a lot of people do end up slowing down some or putting in periods of quiet into their life, because they find out for themselves it supports it. But we're not insisting on that. We basically want all of that discovery to come from the inside rather than be imposed from the outside.

**Amiel Handelsman:** I see. I'm seeing a lot of people who think like, for example, that they get enough sleep, yet they're always tired or their blood sugar levels, which I know you're familiar with, go up and down. I wonder, and these are the kind of things your co-panelist there at Wisdom 2.0, Tony Schwartz, talks a lot about. But what kind of basic life self-care practices do you think are important while you're working on these qualities, whether or not you ask people on that particular program to do or not?

**Pamela Weiss:** Right. Well, I would say it as: those kind of things you are describing which certainly are rampant, valid and important. They are also symptoms. I think if from my perspective, if someone is so tired, or their blood sugar is dropping so frequently, or they're so sleep deprived, whatever it is, that they can't engage in this practice we're discussing here, of picking a quality and observing it some, then they need to back off and really do some more radical self-care. If not, this is more way of looking at not just what are the symptoms, but what

are some of the root causes? Because if you begin to practice courage as a quality it may allow you to have the courage to say no to responding to email at 10 'o'clock at night or turning off the TV or whatever it is.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Where everybody is going out for drinks, you know, the whole group is coming for drinks till midnight.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, exactly. It's more going to the source that will then support the ability to do that. In some cases, as you're describing, someone maybe so worn out or so beat down that they don't even have the capacity to engage on something like this, that's possible. In which case, yeah, you need to step back, drink more water, get more sleep, eat nutritious food, get some exercise. Those two things aren't mutually exclusive certainly.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Right. I have a few more questions. One of them is I want to circle back to where we started, which was the sort of two part notion of leadership as a way of being and the fellowship, the community, and connection. It occurs to me that for many folks, it is difficult to have authentic connection with other people in the workplace for all sorts of reasons.

In fact, I don't advice people to—and I'm sure you don't either—to, well share everything that's on your mind. That's so stupid. Yet there is a lot of navigating around tricky political waters, and I see politics in terms of recognizing people's interests. It comes up all the time. But I wonder how this building of fellowship can happen when you have a lot of people kind of worried about, kind of covering their rears, so to speak, for good reason.

**Pamela Weiss:** Well I see it in two steps. The first is I think that even before people having trouble making real connection with other people in the workplace, which I agree depending on the place, it can be quite fraught, is a lot of people have trouble making real connection with themselves.

So we're starting there. Let's help you connect in a much more deep way to yourself, and that has to do with giving people an opportunity just to pause, reflect and consider what is important to me? What do I care about? That's a rare opportunity in a workplace, to be offered even the chance to even ask those questions. That's first and foremost.

If you don't want to share with anyone else, that's okay. But this program context is basically a group coaching process. We're creating little safety pods where people can begin over time to share with one another what they care about, what they're working on. Give each other feedback.

We're creating a really safe environment where that happens. What I've seen in some of the organizations where we've worked over an extended period of time is that that capacity for people to connect initially in the small groups starts to bleed out into the wider organization.

And the quality of real relationship, real community, real contact just has built and built and built. It doesn't happen overnight, and it can be broken down by organizational culture.

**Amiel Handelsman:** It's different from just when you're working one on one with someone, when no one around them is doing it. Yeah.

**Pamela Weiss:** That's right. It's a really essential piece of this program. For me, as someone who had done a lot of individual coaching, I said this before about the Personal Excellence Program, but I was a little skeptical like I don't know if this is going to work. There's only one of me, and there's ten of them. [Laughs] Because I thought, I was really important.

When we started putting people together in groups, I was astounded because really the power of the group, it just made the growth factor exponential. But it takes some care and tending. You can't just throw people together and, as you said, say "everyone share your deepest darkest fears." No, that's really not a good idea. That's where the commitment and the compassion, those pieces are working over time, are really important.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Maybe this is why we limit group sizes a lot. It's okay if I'm one tenth as important as I used to be, but one fiftieth? I don't know about that.

**Pamela Weiss:** [Laughs] Well I think if I'm talking to a group of fifty, it's a different kind of event than if I'm talking to a group of ten. I think a lot of what happens in organizations and a lot of times I'm asked to come do something, especially for a big group, it's just doing a performance. Personally, I'm not interested in doing that. I do it sometimes, but I'm much more interested in having people in an audience, whether it's ten people or fifty people, talk to each other.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Yes.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yet to do that is riskier, right? Because who knows what's you're going to get?

**Amiel Handelsman:** High risk, high reward. A couple more. One is if listeners want to learn more about you, your talks, your writings, your work, where did they go to do that?

**Pamela Weiss:** We just launched a new website for PEP. A distinct PEP website. There are now two websites. My website, which is [appropriateresponse.com](http://appropriateresponse.com), and on that website you'll find some of the video clips that you were describing of other things I've done. You'll find a little video of the Personal Excellence Program that was done documentary style. You'll find, I have a weekly Buddhist meditation group, a Dharma class, that I teach here in San Francisco. I post talks that I give there. Most weeks talks go up, and there are also guided meditations that people can download. All of that is available and free for anybody who wants it.

There is now, just as of this week, a new PEP site, we call it. So [pepgrows.com](http://pepgrows.com). It is a much more thorough description of the PEP program, how it works in different aspects of it. We



don't offer PEP to the public at this point. It's really just to inside organizations, but for your listeners you could go to either place to get information.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Great. Let's close with my favorite question, which has to do with your own life and deliberate practice, meaning something that you're doing over and over again for the sake of learning, growth, development. I know you have many and you had many. I wonder if you could just talk about one deliberate practice that you have in your life right now, here as we speak, now, the first day of July, 2015.

**Pamela Weiss:** Well, as you said, I have many. But the practice I have been engaging for the past almost thirty years, and has stayed pretty steady and true, though it changed form to some degree, is a daily sitting meditation practice. That's something I'm committed to doing and do every day. I would pair that with, for me personally, in combination with a daily sitting practice, I also have a commitment to sit a month, four weeks of retreat, every year. And with some very limited exception in the last thirty years, I've kept to that commitment.

**Amiel Handelsman:** My, oh my, oh my.

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, so when I say it's not easy I mean it. [Laughs]

**Amiel Handelsman:** [Laughs] You didn't get to the point where you could...

**Pamela Weiss:** This is not a practice for the faint of heart.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Right, that's a long time. That's a long time.

**Pamela Weiss:** I'm putting myself in a hot seat because it's what I believe and what I care about.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Do you draw a little line on the cushion so you can say I'm really putting my butt on the line?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yes, a chalk mark. Someday, I would. I was thinking more like marking how many days I've done this in a row. But no, no line.

**Amiel Handelsman:** You might need like a five-hundred year old tree if you're doing these little marks. You have big trees over there don't you?

**Pamela Weiss:** Yeah, lots of them.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Alright, it's kind of nice to end on a funny note. Pam Weiss, thanks so much for this really awesome conversation. I can't wait to share it with others.

**Pamela Weiss:** All right. Well, thanks Amiel. It's really nice to connect with you. Thanks for taking the time to listen to my stuff from before and ask wonderful questions.

**Amiel Handelsman:** Alright.

**CLOSING:** My guest this week on the podcast was Pamela Weiss. Pamela is the founder and chief wisdom officer of *Appropriate Response*. She's also the creator of the *Personal Excellence Program*, also known as PEP. For the show notes to this episode go to [amielhandelsman.com/25](http://amielhandelsman.com/25).

Thanks for listening to the show. I would love to make these interviews and ideas available to anybody who'd get value from them. So if you liked the show leave me a rating or review on iTunes. I would also appreciate you getting the word out more directly to the people you know. Send out a tweet. Email the link to a friend. I would really appreciate. All right, I will be back soon with another episode. Until then stay present and keep practicing being the kind of leader and person you aspire to be.