Episode 101
Teresa Woodland
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0:00:04 Amiel Handelsman: 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. Hello, everyone. My name is Amiel Handelsman, and you're listening to my podcast. Welcome, this week, to episode 101. Yes, we are now moving along the triple digits, where I welcome back Teresa Woodland to talk about Learning While Sprinting. Even though I am a former track runner, we're not talking about sprinting around a track, but moving quickly in an organization, in an economy.

0:00:50 AH: Teresa has a very unique experience to bring to this topic because in the mid-1980s, she moved to China and spent three decades there as both an observer, and more importantly, a participant in what many are considering the most remarkable economic and cultural transformation in recent times. China did, has done in just a few decades what here in the United States it took us a couple of centuries to do.

0:01:26 AH: She worked first at McKinsey there, helping get their China practice started, and worked there for many years; and then began her own consulting practice working with many different types of Chinese companies and organizations. What she brings to this conversation is a question which is, how can what she observed and experienced in China be relevant to all of us who live in the west, particularly in the United States? Here, she brings in lessons both from Chinese culture, some things that are quite unique and that distinguish Chinese culture from culture in the west, and some of the things that she learned while she was there simply from being a darn good, smart consultant and coach.

0:02:28 AH: This is a conversation about learning while sprinting, and I think it will be relevant to you, whether you work in a big company, a small startup firm, college, university or government agency. For those of you who are not yet receiving my weekly email updates, please do. Go to my website, amielhandelsman.com. That's A-M-I-E-L-H-A-N-D-E-L-S-M-A-N.com. Go to the upper right-hand corner, give me your email address, and I will get you signed up. For the show notes on this particular episode, go to amielhandelsman.com/101.

0:03:13 AH: Let's get into it, my conversation about learning while sprinting with Teresa Woodland. Our interview last time then convinced her that you did some important work in developing leaders in China.

0:03:29 Teresa Woodland: Yes.

0:03:30 AH: I am curious for myself, although I know a little bit, and also for listeners, you're now back in the United States of America, and I'm curious how that move has been for you on a personal and professional...

0:03:45 TW: I came back in the summer of 2016. To put this in context, the last time I had lived in the States, Ronald Reagan was president. Then I was in the States briefly when the first Bush was president. When I came back, I was like, "Things have really changed around here." I was fortunate that I had decided earlier not to get a TV because I couldn't move mine back. I had been back in the States during elections, and I thought, "You know what, I don't think I want a TV until January," and I still haven't gotten one.

0:04:23 TW: A lot... I felt like a lot has really changed in the States. Yet the longer I'm here, what I see at the community level is that... At least where I am, I don't think at the community level, things have changed that much. It's still a very warm community, it's still... We still have those sorts of relationships that I remember from growing up in the States.

0:04:44 AH: You are in or around Pittsburgh?

0:04:46 TW: I'm around Pittsburgh, yeah, just outside of Pittsburgh. I never thought I'd wanna move back to Pittsburgh. Having lived in these huge cities, I assumed that I would come back and move to New York or San Francisco; but I came back for family reasons, to be close to my mom who was turning 90, and I really like it here.

0:05:10 AH: Yeah. Yeah, I remember now, I'm reminded that in our first interview, you talked about, you had to move to China to get access to steel plants.

[chuckle]

0:05:20 TW: Yes, yes, yes.

0:05:22 AH: Have you been in... Are there any in Pittsburgh now, and have you been inside of them?

0:05:26 TW: I think there are still some mini mills around, but I have not been in them. I sometimes drive past them, but I haven't been in them.

0:05:33 AH: We'll get into what you are spending your time on professionally. I wanted to ask you to talk about, you've been spending years working in leadership development in China, adapting all sorts of different theories and approaches, some of which I'm aware of and some of which I'm not. I wanted to ask you, whose work has influenced you the most in this period of time?

0:06:03 TW: I'm a geek, and so I've read a ton of things. In my early work, I was really grounded in a lot of learning theory, and thinking about how people learn and how they grow. Years ago, I had taught writing for a bit, and that really helps you understand what's going on in people's minds, how they're structuring their world, how they're thinking. As I... I was with McKinsey as they were setting up their offices, I was part of a group of people that was doing things. In that, I began looking at some of the work of Edgar Schein, looking at how you go in and consult, process consultation.

0:06:42 TW: I got deeper into some learning things, looking at single, double-loop learning; and then got involved in the systems thinking work. I think after I had been doing consulting for a number of years, I became really interested in constructive development theory. Kegan and Torbert and Susanne Cook-Greuter, and some others in that. That has really formed the foundation of my approach. I also really like the work of Ken Wilber and the integral theory, and that is particularly resonant in China because it really comports with their view of life, and their view of the way things work.

0:07:27 AH: When you said systems thinking, there are many different approaches to systems

thinking. What were you thinking of?

0:07:32 TW: I first came to systems thinking by looking at the work that was being done out of MIT by Peter Senge and some of them. That's mostly... That's where I came into it, and that's most of the foundation of work that I did the reading on.

0:07:48 AH: Got it, got it. You have observed to me, and I'm sure to others, that many of the models that you just described are very western. What do you mean by "very western"?

0:08:04 TW: Yes. What I mean is that there are some of them that I think can be applied anywhere, and it's because they're tools as well as models. But when I look at some of the ones that are more psychological, so the constructive development theory, some of the ways that people interact with the world around them, those are very western. It makes sense because they were developed by researchers that were working either in North America or in Europe, or in a combination of both. You're working in cultures that tend to be fairly linear, that tend to view things in a certain way without even realizing it.

0:08:46 TW: As I worked... One of the results of that is that when you look at the way that they assess people and assign perhaps a stage of development or something, the markers that they're looking for to determine where someone is, is not the same as what you might see in an Asian. Someone in Asia is going to see an integrated view of life. They're going to see the systems, they're gonna talk about the way things are interconnected. That's something that in the west, we might not have until a later stage of development.

0:09:23 AH: In other words, that particular language that in the western models indicate later stages, in China, may be more indicative of the culture, and could be summoned at any stage of development.

0:09:36 TW: Yes. People are socialized into things like that, so you see that earlier. So much of what is done in different fields in China has been imported because they're keen learners. I've seen so many people in different fields take a look at what's happened elsewhere, and apply to China. On one hand, I would say the work that has been done everywhere else can be applied to China. The difference is that the Chinese will accept it, and they chew on it, and take what makes sense to them. The rest of it, they can use; but it doesn't really become part of them.

0:10:22 TW: What I found in living in China for so many years and working with people was that they would have translated some of these things, and meet people where they were, and take the parts that were relevant, and go deeper into areas where they needed more work, but really build upon areas where they already had some capabilities. One thing that you see often when you're working with people and you're pushing their development is helping them to move from being either-or to under... To embracing paradoxes, to being able to hold different things at the same time, and navigate through that.

0:10:57 TW: That's something that, for someone in Asia, is fairly comfortable. They don't have the same need to push things one way or another. Some of the work you see in polarity thinking, in the west, it's something we have to learn how to do. I remember being at a conference and people saying, "We're realizing it might not just be two poles, it might be multidimensional polarity thinking." I'm like, "Of course." [chuckle] I just assumed everyone... Of course, it's like that. It's

much more complex.

0:11:27 AH: That would leave you with the choice of either saying to people in China, "Keep doing that, or something else." I imagine there's... Was there something else for you?

0:11:39 TW: Yes. It was... The something else for me, I think, was looking at all of these things which we consider... Which I consider best practices, and thinking about, "How do you leverage them in China?" Now what I find myself thinking of is, given what I've seen in China, what does that do to how I work with people here? How do I take some of their view of things, and think about how I address what I see as areas that aren't as strong with westerners?

0:12:17 AH: What ideas do you have?

0:12:20 TW: One of the things is, the way that... China is... Culturally, we talk about it being a high-context culture, which means that in a conversation, in the way that they think, they see the context of something. You may have read the study of showing people from Asia a picture... Or showing people a picture of a fish tank. You ask people in the west to describe it, and they'll talk about the things that they see in it and the fish. You ask people in Asia, and they will talk about the story of how the things fit together. They see much more than just the fish that's in there.

0:13:04 TW: There's a richness that Asians have of understanding the context, understanding stakeholders, seeing how different pieces fit together. Some of what I've learned from watching them and working with them is something that I can help people here to understand because as they're going through complexity, and as they're navigating through changing circumstances, some of those skills really help them to know what to do next and how to move forward.

0:13:37 AH: Let's stick with the fish tank just for a second because I, an American, am having difficulty imagining a story related to a fish in a fish tank. What would be an example of that?

0:13:49 TW: It would be, you might imagine that if there's more than one fish in the fish tank, what... The relationship between the fish, it might be that it's a pool of fish that lives in this place, and this is where they go for food, and this is how they interact together, whether or not they feel territorial about whose space is... This is where this fish hangs out, and these two fish tend to not get along. These two species may not get along, and so they might avoid each other. This one tends to stick to that stage, and this one tends to stick to that part of the tank, or something like that.

0:14:29 AH: Right. I'm not gonna ask you any more questions about the fish tank, but that's indicative of a way of seeing things, that you're getting into, that relates to working in complex environments.

0:14:42 TW: Yes, yes.

0:14:45 AH: I guess how would you help people, or how are you starting to help people in the west differently, then, based upon these understandings?

0:15:00 TW: One of the things is, first, helping people to create a shared language around the context in which they're operating. I find this is particularly important when you deal... Some of my clients are in industries that are in disruption, so lots of change. Instead of them just feeling like,

"Things are different, and they're changing, and it's hard," helping them to become sensitive to the different changes that are happening. What are the leading indicators of something? How are things connected?

0:15:35 TW: They create a shared knowledge around that, so that they're able to work together and try different things, and try little tests, and do different things. One of the analogies I just used a couple days ago was talking about white water rafting, or white water kayaking, and how when you do that, if you're going through a series of rapids, you're aware of what's up ahead, you're aware of what's in front of you. If you're doing it with a group of people, you're aware of the people around you and what their tendencies tend to be, so you know what to look out for, or how to work with somebody there.

0:16:13 TW: That's an awareness that I think I find the leaders that I worked with in China have it as part of their DNA, and the groups in China developed ways of talking about that and working with that. When I'm working with senior teams, they can explain things, and they very quickly develop a shared language, and they get the information out there, and they share how different parts of things are working. It's a skill that I can cultivate in people in the States, but it's something that someone who's just starting in something doesn't necessarily have as part of their way of looking at things.

0:16:52 AH: Yeah, yeah. You're working on a project right now to bring insights that you've learned from developing people in Asia to the United States. This is not just a topic in our interview, but it's a live project. I wanna quote something that you recently wrote. What has received less attention, related to China, is the personal, organizational and community learning and growth that enabled and accompanied China's economic development journey. What has received less attention is the personal, organizational and community learning and growth. I'm repeating that because I really have read and heard very little about that. Why is that particular dimension of learning relevant to us in the west? You've started to address it, but I know you have more to say.

0:17:53 TW: I think it's relevant because... First, I would say that in the west, different people have views of how China... Really, China, from the time I went there in the mid-'80s, until today, it's move from being... In the mid-'80s, it was an 80% agrarian society, and now we consider it a competitor on all levels. It took us 250 years to make that same journey. We have... We tend to think... We have views of how that happened. Part of it is the policies that they had in place, part of it was the investment. There are a lot of different things, and I have a lot of views of the things that enabled it, what enabled the context for that to happen?

0:18:38 TW: What I think is not talked about is, if you truly believe that people and talent is the key to making things happen, then you have to say what happened to the talent in China? I think about one specific area outside of Shanghai, that used to be... Back in the '80s, it was places where they were sewing shoes together, and making clothes, and doing pottery. Now they're manufacturing semiconductors, and they're doing different types of... Other types of clean manufacturing and high-tech things, and they're working on... They're designing airplanes, and things like that.

0:19:18 TW: It isn't always that you've had different people come in and out. It's the... For some people at the factory level, many of the people working there, they might... Some of them might have retired, but it really is a pretty similar workforce, a workforce that has grown from sewing

clothes and working on pottery, to working on precision machines. That's huge, I think.

0:19:48 AH: That's amazing, that's amazing. What you're inviting us to do, to bring back Ken Wilber's name, is take a more integral understanding, a more integral interpretation of the answer to the question, "Why has this happened in China?" You're saying, yes, there were political frameworks and structural issues and economic policies that we might mostly locate in the lower right-hand exterior collective quadrant; but you're also saying there are cultural and individual and personal, interior and exterior, changes in growth that have happened.

0:20:24 TW: Yes, yes. There's attitudes towards change at the individual level, and also at a community level, and that's... I think one of the things that surprised me most when I came back to the States about the culture was how... There's almost a fear that people have about all the change that's going on, and the change that will be coming as we... As AI becomes bigger, as we have... As robots become a bigger part of manufacturing, and that sort of thing.

0:20:57 TW: Yes, there is some apprehension in China, but there is... It spurs them to action because they're looking at all these things that are happening, and they're so aware of what's going on. For many people, it's, "What do I need to do? What do I need to do? Where do I move? How do I do this?" You have the learning that happens individually, and then in communities. That means that they have a different attitude. They're not saying, "Bring back the old jobs we used to have," they're leaning towards, "How do we prepare ourselves for what's next?" I really think, in the States, we need that.

0:21:36 AH: What do you think you could contribute in the States by helping people to translate those lessons?

0:21:48 TW: What I'd like to do is share... In the work that I did, a lot of the work that I did in China involved working with top teams, so working with the head of China for an organization and their direct reports. Sometimes, this was the head of different business units. Other times, if it was a large organization that was just one business unit, it was the people responsible for the business unit itself or for the company itself. I came from McKinsey. At McKinsey, the question we used to ask is, "What are the core issues affecting your business? What are the things that you need to get right? What are the things affecting your business now, and what's gonna position you in the future?"

0:22:31 TW: I started with that same question. I went further to say... Instead of saying, "Let me tell you the answer" because... Because of the people I read, I didn't believe that's necessarily the best way to approach it. It's, "What capabilities and ways of being would enable you to address this yourself?" The starting point of that is working with a group to help them to frame what the issues are that they need to be attending to, and helping them to develop a shared understanding of that, so that they can then begin to work on thinking about, "What do we do about this?" Then thinking about, "How do we need to change, and how do we need to grow to address this?" The reason I think that this is something that will help the west is it's a slightly different way of looking at development, and it's very practical.

0:23:26 TW: What I'm working on right now is I'm recruiting some organizations to be case studies because I have a lot of things I've done, but I wasn't thinking of writing at the time, and I didn't keep the notes I would wanna write the documentation I would want for a book, and I didn't get the permission. There's been so much change, that I'd rather just learn and extract what I learned from

all that work, and start afresh with some organizations, and do the background work so that when I pull together into some form of writing, I have what I need to document things. I'm thinking, how do you simplify this so that it is something that can be replicated, but also make it so flexible that anybody can look at it and say, "Right, these are the steps we need to do. First, we need to frame the issues that we're facing and start with that"?

0:24:25 AH: You're recruiting case studies?

0:24:28 TW: Yeah, I'm talking to different... I'm going to China in a couple... Actually, I'm waiting till the summer, but I'm going in July. I hope to talk to some organizations there. I'm having some preliminary discussions with some companies here in the States.

0:24:43 AH: Yeah, the word "recruitment" is mine, not yours.

[chuckle]

0:24:46 TW: Yes.

0:24:47 AH: Right, okay, just so everyone understands that. Framing as a place to start, you actually have a framework of four elements of leading in complex environments that you shared with me. The first one is framing, where you're drawing attention to key issues and crystallizing the central issue. You're saying to me that that's different from where we start in the west. If that's different, what is the more common or conventional place to start?

0:25:17 TW: What I see so often in the west is that the people working in complexity have some solutions, have some tools, some frameworks that help. What I see happen in a lot of leadership development courses, even in action learning, is that they have certain things they want, they feel... It's based on experience, it really helps if people know these things. They say to participants, "We're gonna do a course around this topic, and what we want you to do is think about in your organization, what sort of thing you can work on. What are the issues in your organization? Then we will teach you these tools, and we will... You will then apply these things that we're working with you on to the situation that you're doing." That works. It is effective. There's a reason why people do it.

0:26:09 TW: It's also, in my view, western; and I think that I have chosen to do it a different way. I have to say, it would be easier if I just had a toolkit that I rolled out and said to an organization, "This is the way we're gonna approach this." But I find, particularly because of the pace of change in China, and because of how pragmatic Chinese tend to be, that getting attention... Getting a senior team's attention requires focusing on what's most important to them. That means they...

0:26:48 AH: That's different for projects.

0:26:51 TW: Yeah, yeah. That means that they leave... At each stage, they leave, having made progress.

0:27:00 AH: Yeah, that does seem to be a big difference, and an area that we can learn. Walk us through some of the other elements of how to lead in complex environments that you're adapting from east to west...

0:27:15 TW: After you framed it, it's really thinking about crystallizing what the issue is, and doing a problem statement, looking at who the stakeholders are, looking at the different constraints, getting some agreement on what's the root of what we're trying to address. Then thinking about, there's so many tools out there for problem-solving. Some organizations might have lean, they might have Six Sigma, they might have something else.

0:27:44 TW: I have a pretty broad toolkit that I use, but it's thinking about, what are the tools that you can pull together to do this, so you have a shared approach? You think about what's the problem-solving approach we're gonna have? Let's have a shared language for talking about this. You also help them to map out the dynamics, the things that they're gonna keep track of, so that they are able to see how things are changing in the context. Once you've done that, at that point, that is... You have a cognitive understanding of the situation, you have an approach. It, in a sense, shifts towards something that's a bit more technical problem-solving. You put these pieces around it. What's nice about that is it allows people to relax a bit because there's a part of that that is just hard work.

0:28:40 TW: On one hand, you're able to track the things that are... The ambiguities, the different things that are affecting a system. But on the other hand, you've nailed down enough things that you're able to start gaining some traction on doing some work. Part of the reason why that's so important is, one of the things that I found in working in Asia is that there's just so much work that people need to do on relationships, on conversation skills, on talking about the hard things, talking about the underlying assumptions that are driving the decisions that they're making, talking about the constraints that they're facing. It's nice to balance the difficulty of changing the culture to talk about these things, with the relatively easy part of doing technical problem solving.

0:29:35 AH: I would imagine... We talked about this last time, and I don't... I may have asked you the same question, forgive me. But I would imagine that culturally in China, with some emphasis on indirect communication, that going right at some of these emotional tensions might be a more uphill battle for a facilitator or consultant than even in Northwest Nice, where I live, or the Americans now. It's like, if you can do it in China, you can do it here; but correct me.

0:30:09 TW: I think it's true. I think that part of it is that, in China, because it's a collective rather than an individualistic culture, if you're looking at some of the ways that people tend to look at culture, people have not been... They haven't been encouraged to cultivate the inner world the way we as individualists have, and so they're not always... They don't... In growing up in a family, they might not talk about bad news. When somebody dies, people will say, "Just don't think about it."

0:30:43 TW: I adopted two kids in China, and my second child was a four-year-old. I was able to have him brought to Beijing for surgery. There's a long story behind that, but I had a registered foster home that was allowed to take custody of him. He had to do surgery, and that's how we... We went from the doctor to the foster home, they fed him lunch, and we went and did the formalities. As we were leaving, and I was with the people from the orphanage, I wanted to stop and say goodbye to him, and tell him we were leaving him here. The people who came from the orphanage said, "We're not gonna tell him." I said, "You're not telling him you're leaving him here? You've moved him from a city, put him on a train, taken him to a doctor, brought him to this foster home, and now you're gonna leave, and not tell him?"

0:31:36 AH: They said yes.

0:31:37 TW: They said, "If we tell him, he'll be upset." [chuckle] That is so... That's very common.

0:31:53 AH: Right. Even though you had been in China for, what, 25 years at that point, the American part of you that said, "What?"

0:32:03 TW: Yes.

0:32:03 AH: Yeah. There's this third element of leading a complex environment that I think we're getting into, that you call emotional engagement.

0:32:07 TW: Yes.

0:32:08 AH: You talk about regulating tension caused by disequilibrium. What do you mean by that?

0:32:17 TW: I mean that when you're moving away from something that you do well, and you're moving into something new, which is what you have to do if you're facing disruption or you're trying to move into something else, you're leaving a place that's comfortable to a place where you're trying new things, and you may fail. You need to fail to learn. If you're not failing, you're not trying... You're not being bold enough, and taking enough risks. You're gonna be taking on... This means that you're gonna lean into problems that you could ignore until they blow up.

0:32:51 TW: You're going to be helping a group to face the fact that things are changing, so it's you processing the things yourself, but also leading in a way that leaves people optimistic. That means helping them to talk about things and understanding what's going on, and helping to build communities of support, so that they can talk to somebody both to learn, but also to say, "I'm struggling with this," so that they have someone who walks beside them in something, and is a sounding partner, is someone who will be able to just be there so that they don't feel like they're doing it by themselves.

0:33:31 TW: It also is... There's a push towards helping people to balance the risks, so not to be so risky that you're rushing into something almost with your eyes shielded, so you're only seeing what's ahead of you because, "I just have to do this," but you're looking at the risk, and you're going into it with some fear. It's okay to be afraid, but you have the courage to go into it because you have people behind you who will help you to see what you can't see, who will help you to solve problems, who will pick you up when you're feeling like, "Wow, this is really tough," and who will help you to extract what you can learn from it, and to make the adjustments.

0:34:11 TW: Because so often when you're trying something, it feels like it's going okay, and then you have this downward dive. Then pulling yourself up, so that you're... If you're gonna continue to learn, you have to continue to recognize that there are gonna be failures. How do you quickly recognize that, and begin to make changes, without it making you wanna withdraw from that, and go back to a place that's safe?

0:34:35 AH: You have this phrase, "learning while sprinting." I don't know if that's yours or someone else, but I'm...

0:34:38 TW: Yes. [chuckle] No, I use that. Yes. Because things are changing so fast. The rate of change in China is so fast.

0:34:49 AH: There's a distinction here that I'm seeing, that I alluded to a minute ago, between the first element and third, which, the first one was framing. That sounded like something that the Chinese generally do better than the US, or it's more part of the culture, and so you're saying we can learn from that. Emotional engagement, I'm not hearing you say that the Chinese do that better, but I'm hearing you say that your experiences with them give you something to teach the west.

0:35:15 TW: It's a way that I walk beside people, in doing that. I would not say that, for most Chinese, this is a strength.

0:35:25 AH: Yes, Yeah.

0:35:28 TW: It's also really important.

0:35:31 AH: Okay, the fourth element is stakeholder management. What's that?

0:35:36 TW: That's... I think this happens throughout. It's really understanding who are the people involved. How do you listen to them? How do you bring them along? How do you invite them to participate? How do you build buy-in and support? It's understanding that in the start, as you're framing and you're mapping out a system, seeing who's in the system, and then thinking creatively about not just what you need from them, and what... It's, you're moving away from a one-way communication to really think about, "How do you involve different people along the way? How do you expand the community of support? What are they sensitive to? What do they care about? How are you gonna tailor messages to them?"

0:36:24 TW: There's a technical side of this, which is mapping and analyzing stakeholders, thinking about what you do with messaging. Then there's another side which overlaps some on the emotional engaged, which is, "How do you involve people in this process? How do you help... That you create an environment inside and outside in an organization where people feel like they're able to partner?" A lot of that happens through conversations, it happens through seeing... Having a different vision for what these relationships might look like.

0:36:53 TW: So often in... I see in business, the stakeholder part of it, there are stakeholders that are always in the front of mind because they matter most to people maybe because they're evaluating them or something. But often in change management, there are stakeholders that really just get attention pretty far along. When you get... When you run into... Part of the reason you run into resistance is that there are people who feel like this is something being done to them, rather than something that they're being part of. I'm not saying that you open this up and you invite everyone to participate, but there are light touches you can do so people feel like they recognize what's going on, and they don't feel like this is something being done to them, but something that's happening.

0:37:39 AH: Because there's some assumption that a group would make to say, "Those folks, we can talk with them later. We don't actually need to talk with them now."

0:37:47 TW: Yes, yes.

0:37:48 AH: I've heard that a lot. There's an untested assumption that you can test with this light touch. Give me an example conversationally speaking because you're talking about a conversational skill of a light touch with stakeholders.

0:38:06 TW: A light touch might be if you are... Let's say you manufacture something, you have suppliers that do components. You might have your design people who are working on the next generation of something, they know some of the design people of the component, who work on the components. Without going across lines of intellectual property or strategy or anything like that, you might let them know... You might share in some way that you're working on something, or you're testing some different ideas. That would allow the people that will be designing the component that you need for what you're working on to be aware of that, and you might begin to have conversations.

0:38:45 TW: You might have some information-sharing, you might have them becoming aware of something. There might be things that come along so that not just that they're prepared, but that they see this as, "I see," and there might be an opening there to working together, rather than coming to a supplier later and saying, "Right, we're redesigning our... We're redesigning this, and we're gonna see who can... We need suppliers that can do this specific thing." It changes, it moves the relationship more towards a partnership without inviting input, unless you want it.

0:39:24 AH: That's a big distinction, isn't it?

0:39:26 TW: I think so.

0:39:29 AH: Some people assume that once you reach out, you're automatically inviting input, and perhaps even committing to acting on that input, and you're saying there's other ways of doing it.

0:39:39 TW: Yes, yes.

0:39:40 AH: Just to stick with this theme of conversational skills, I know that you've created and run some programs that help senior teams work on their conversational skills as a way of developing their modus operandi, or way of being. One of them we just talked about was conversations for enhancing relationships with stakeholders. There is one called conversations for exploring disagreements and disappointments. We got into that with the emotional engagement. When you're talking about disappointments, what are conversations for exploring disappointments?

0:40:19 TW: I'll give you an example. I was working with a senior team, and we were working on... They were doing a strategy for something, and so I was using a model where I was helping them to use their decision-making in the strategy as a learning process. They were learning from each other and learning more about the system as they were making this decision. The first part of that was really framing what's the decision we're trying to make. Then it was sharing some underlying assumptions, and beginning to explore the issue. One of the things that came up was that they were just explicit about what they were being told from headquarters that they had to do.

0:41:04 TW: On one hand, you could say the strategy is we have been given this, our marching orders, and now our strategy is, "How are we gonna fulfill these?" But there were different things

that had happened with the businesses, where people had responded. For one part of the business, they needed to rely on another part of the business for something; but the people in that second part of the business didn't control their budget independently. That was something that flowed from headquarters. They would say, "We might change our thing, and you promise that you're gonna deliver this for us. But we know you don't always control your budget, and so you might not be able to do that." Having them have the skill to talk about that.

0:41:53 TW: It's interesting because this was... Remember, in this specific example I'm talking about, at the end of the day, the people were like, "This is exhausting," because not only were they developing a strategy, but they said this emotional bit, where we actually bring out examples and we talk about this, and we then solve the problem of designing around what can we do. Let's deal with this disappointment, but how can we, as we develop a strategy, figure out how we can prevent this from happening again? What...

0:42:28 TW: I remember the leader of the whole... Of the organization said, "I thought we'd come away from these two days with a strategy." I said, "Yeah, what would have happened then?" Then a few months later, it wouldn't have really worked, and we would have said, "Why isn't it happening?" Then we would have met again and talked about it. He said, "Instead, we've come away from this realizing that we need to go have conversations with people at headquarters. We need to go and have conversations with this entity and that entity, that we can't solve this problem until we deal with this because this is gonna keep us from achieving that."

0:43:04 TW: Those conversations were things that they weren't comfortable having, and so having a facilitator there to help to raise the issues, and to help them to get to a productive point. Fast forward about nine months, I was doing another workshop with them, and they had met as a leadership team. We were starting in the late afternoon, and they had met all morning. Someone came in and said, "We've been fighting and screaming at each other." I said, "How was it?" She's like, "It was great. We got to the heart of different issues. She said, "We've learned how... Basically, we've learned how to fight with each other. We've learned how to have these discussions." She said, "It's a good thing. It creates a foundation for success because you deal with the issues before they... You deal with disappointments, so you don't repeat the same problems later."

0:43:57 AH: That's a good light bulb to have go on.

0:43:58 TW: Yes, yeah, so it's good.

0:44:01 AH: Yeah, the third type... I'm just gonna be a systematic Amiel here just to make sure that people get to hear the rest of this. The third type of conversations that you have helped the senior teams work with are what you call conversations to contribute to generative dialogues. If I didn't know any differently, I would think that that's what we're just talking about right now, but I think that there's a distinction here.

0:44:21 TW: No, what I'm talking about here is, especially environments where things are changing rapidly, it is helping people talk about things that they're seeing. These are more open-ended conversations that might not just change the strategy that organizations are doing, but the intent, and how they're positioning themselves. The example I would think of here is an organization that was... It was great operationally. They had good partnerships, they were in different joint ventures, and all of that was going very well. They were... Business was expanding, they were selling things to

different... The Chinese companies that were then shipping these big OEMs overseas.

0:45:10 TW: What they realized is, as they were moving along, they began to realize that their relationship with customers would be changing as China developed, and as China expanded its footprint in the world; and that they had the infrastructure globally to be a support to create a platform for these Chinese companies, that were big customers for them, to succeed. This was a series of having... Structuring something so that they have these... They have conversations, and they pull things together, and they're able to see themselves differently, so that they're able to say, "On one hand, we continue what we're doing because it's working; but we also need to be conceding the possibility that our relationship with our customers is to help them succeed, not just to sell to them, but to help them as they expand globally to succeed, to help them in these different ways because if we can push them forward, that will help our business, and it changes the relationship that we have with our customers."

0:46:20 AH: Wow. That's a difference.

0:46:25 TW: It's... I think the other thing is then... Having those sorts of conversations, and then helping the group through conversation to find the balance between continuing on, because this is a company that's sprinting, [chuckle] continuing to sprint, while they're also beginning to have a view of where things might be going, so that they can begin some of the... They can begin having the conversations that... In different conversations and in different things, they can begin... If they're gonna be supporting through the global organization, they can begin reaching out to sister companies in different parts of the world, and talking to them and paving the way, thinking about what did their Chinese customers need, and what ways might they... Might people who are part of the global organizations support these Chinese customers as they go overseas.

0:47:24 AH: I gotta say something here because the more I'm hearing these examples that you bring, that what we're encountering here is a new story about what happens when you're sprinting. The story, the counter-narrative that I hear is, often, not always, once things slow down, we'll have an opportunity to reflect and learn.

0:47:48 TW: Yes. It's nice. [chuckle]

0:47:50 AH: It's understandable because people are working hard and they're tired, but people are... First of all, we're always learning. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we're learning something. We might be practicing a really bad overhead tennis shot. That's the sport. But we're always learning something. You're saying, again, I just gotta underline this, learning while sprinting. Just gonna have to sit with that for a moment here. Learning while sprinting. I'm curious, what does that call upon from you? Because we have not only managers listening, but also consultants and coaches. How does that, just to zoom out a little bit, affect your orientation, if you're saying...

0:48:37 AH: You're not saying, "I'm gonna wait till they slow down." You're saying they're sprinting, I better hustle over and get there with them. What does that mean for you?

0:48:44 TW: Yes. What it has meant for me is... The reason I start with what their business issues are is it means that everything I do, and it's partially the practical nature of Chinese because they're so pragmatic, has to help them with what they're doing now. If I'm able to do that, I win the right to invite them and to be on a journey with them as they move towards shaping something in the

midterm and in the longer term.

0:49:21 TW: It means, for me, that I... It keeps me sharp. It also means that I have to stay grounded, so that when things happen that are upsetting... There was one plant I was working with where there was an explosion, and that was of course upsetting because it had huge implications for what was happening in terms of what they were able to do. You stand with that, and then you also walk with them as they recover, and also say, "That doesn't mean that we can't think about what is happening in the future."

0:50:06 TW: But I think the other thing I would say is that when you look at the amount of time that people work on things and the energy they put towards something, these generative conversations are sprinkled into other conversations. Occasionally, you will have time to take a little bit of... Take a few hours apart and talk about them, and then link it back to what we're doing now, and what we might do to see things in the future.

0:50:33 TW: It's also realizing that when you're sprinting, people don't have time to go away for a few days to talk about these things; but they will take some time, not a few days, but they will take a few hours. There are ways, as a consultant, that I can think, "Okay, this is a conversation I think they need to have. I can put a piece of it in here, and we can spend 20 minutes talking about this here, and then later we can spend... Maybe a few days, a few weeks, a few months later, we can spend time on something else there; and then help them to weave that together so that you're not interrupting their stride.

0:51:14 AH: You are not I take it spending dozens of hours picking out perfect, beautiful retreat centers for off-sites.

0:51:24 TW: I let them do that.

0:51:26 AH: Okay. But you still do that? In other words, they find them, but you still do that.

0:51:31 TW: Yes, yes... What I would say... The other thing I would say is that in all these things I'm helping them to develop, the off-sites tend to be around a business issue, and I weave in. When I talked about the decision-making as a learning process, that was an off-site around a strategy. We met, maybe that was two days, and I spent... I would have different times when I'd weave things in, and we introduce... Would introduce something, and then we'd stop and say, "Okay, let's pause for a few minutes."

0:52:05 TW: Then we would work on something, would help them to observe what was happening in the group. We would introduce nuggets of information, things they could use right then, and then it's like we would start the conversation again. At that point, they were then talking about the underlying assumptions that they weren't bringing forward, and you could get to the heart of the conversation. I had to find a way to work with them on the business issues and intersperse the other things I wanted to put in. I have to say, had I not spent the years with McKinsey, I wouldn't have been able to go toe-to-toe with them on the business issues. Had I not been such a... [chuckle] If I weren't such a geek, and had not read so much, had been so...

0:52:47 AH: You are a geek.

0:52:48 TW: I am a geek, I am. I read everything. I would not have had the breadth of things I needed, to have things to select that would help them in the moment. Then I think the other thing is thinking about how to do this in a way that gives them enough that they can work with it. I find that after you let someone work with something and fool around with it, there's a curiosity that you can peek in some of them, where they might actually want to know more about the model. After they've used it and find it's useful, they'll say, "Wow, it's really... It's nice to learn more about that." There are a few in the group that will say, "I wish you'd led by explaining this whole model to us, and then let us use it."

0:53:35 TW: But for most people that were sprinting, they're gonna let you slow them down a little bit, so that you can do something that helps them get better. Then later, a fair amount of them will want to understand more about what it is that you did.

0:53:51 AH: Yeah. You're addressing what matters to people, you're addressing their interests or concerns. This is something that's very central to me. When I have a successful engagement, it's because I am very much listening for, "What is the world this person lives in?" And I'm gonna meet them there. Often, people get a surprise. They're expecting the external culture consultant to pull them out of their day-to-day work life, and talk about something else, and so it's a pleasant surprise. "You're gonna come and run with me. You're not gonna make me switch sports, cross-train, and go over there with you." That's a nice feeling.

0:54:37 TW: Yes, yes.

0:54:38 AH: I wanna close with a couple more questions, one related to you, and one related to next steps for listeners. Related to you, you mentioned that you need to be grounded to sprint with people, and help them learn while they're sprinting. These days... I probably asked you this a couple years ago when you were in China, but you're in a new... You're back in Pittsburgh. These days, what do you do to ground yourself, Teresa?

0:55:10 TW: I spend... My faith grounds me, and I spend time in the mornings, when I wake... Before my kids get up, I spend a few minutes meditating and just sitting, and breathing in and out, and letting myself feel grounded just in that. I also spend time writing... Usually after that, I then let myself... Or sometimes before that, dump all the things that are on my mind that I have to deal with, so that the clutter gets on a piece of paper. I think I can then decide what to do with that clutter on a piece of paper, but I don't have to carry it around my head anymore. There's grounding I have just through walking, working out, getting exercise, and through relationships. There's part of that. I have some people that I talk to when things get really tough. I have different people I can call who will listen. And I laugh. Yeah.

0:56:17 AH: And you laugh too?

0:56:18 TW: Yeah.

0:56:19 AH: Is that something that naturally happens, or do you have to set up a daily...

[laughter]

0:56:23 TW: It happens naturally.

0:56:25 AH: That's nice.

0:56:25 TW: Yeah.

0:56:26 AH: That's nice. People used to call me amiable when I was in high school because I smiled so much. Then I took on bigger responsibilities and got more anxious, and I've had to re-learn how to smile. Okay... Yo, go ahead.

0:56:39 TW: I was gonna ask you what you do.

0:56:41 AH: Me? I am playing tennis right now, as I mentioned to you, I think, before we started taping, which is amazing fun. The last time I played a match before last Tuesday was around 1983 or 1984, about the time that you were moving to China.

[chuckle]

0:57:00 TW: Yes.

0:57:00 AH: Right? That's how long it's been. I do daily stretching, Yoga, Tai Chi practice. I do little meditation. I cuddle with my kids.

0:57:13 TW: Yes, isn't that nice?

0:57:14 AH: Pretty relaxing, isn't that the greatest... Yeah, there's a breathing pace that these little... Our kids are...

0:57:23 TW: They're about the same age.

0:57:25 AH: Yeah, about the same age. Mine are almost seven, and almost 10, and yours...

0:57:30 TW: Nine and 11.

0:57:32 AH: Yeah, that's close. Particularly for the younger one, it's a very nice, relaxed breathing. There's not... Whatever happens to us as we get older, it constricts the breathing. It hasn't happened yet... I could just hold them, cuddle with them, and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm getting some returns from all that parenting investment." Alright, let me close here by asking you... For listeners who wanna learn more about your work, someone they might hire, or someone they might wanna be involved in a case study, which I know you have probably quite a few criteria, but how could people find out about you, or reach you?

0:58:11 TW: My website is still the website I had in China. They could find me on LinkedIn, or they could look at my website, or you can put my email address in the show notes, if you'd like.

0:58:22 AH: Your website is?

0:58:25 TW: It's www.wudelan, W-U-D-E-L-A-N.com, and that's my Chinese name.

0:58:32 AH: Wow, that's awesome. Yeah, whatever links you give me, I will include those in the show notes. I want to say thank you...

0:58:46 TW: Thank you. It's great to...

0:58:47 AH: Teresa Woodland.

0:58:49 TW: Yes.

0:58:49 AH: I didn't mention your name in this interview until the very end, but you trust that I know who you are, right?

0:58:56 TW: Yes, yes, yes.

0:58:57 AH: Otherwise, this was... I was amazingly lucky to have a conversation with someone who has so much to say, and I didn't even know her name in that call.

0:59:07 TW: That's fun.

0:59:08 AH: Alright, thank you.

0:59:09 TW: Really good to talk.

0:59:12 AH: My guest this week on the podcast was Teresa Woodland. For the show notes, go to amielhandelsman.com/101.

[music]

0:59:31 AH: Thanks for listening to the show. I would love to make these interviews and ideas available to anybody who would get value from them. If you like the show, leave me a rating or review on iTunes, and 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 it. Alright, I'll be back soon with another episode, until then, stay present and keep practicing being the kind of leader and person you aspire to be.

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