

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

00:06.930 --> 00:13.210

You are now listening to the Audacity to fail
podcast, A podcast about Miss stepping into

00:13.210 --> 00:16.830

success.

Get ready to dive into conversations and real

00:16.830 --> 00:22.700

stories from leaders as they share how failure
activates a growth mindset is an important part

00:22.700 --> 00:26.420

of learning and motivation for improvement.

I'm your host,

00:26.430 --> 00:32.210

dr Shari Dade psychologist with the National
Center for Organizational Development.

00:32.220 --> 00:34.840

Thank you for tuning in.

Let's get started.

00:41.030 --> 00:45.410

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

Support for this Leadership podcast comes from
the National Center for Organization

00:45.410 --> 00:49.270

Development N. C. O. D.

Aims to increase the long term growth and

00:49.270 --> 00:53.180

performance of the Department of Veterans
Affairs by collaboratively working with the

00:53.180 --> 00:56.900

leaders throughout the V. A.

To improve organizational outcomes by

00:56.900 --> 01:00.820

supporting the development of an engaged
workforce For additional information on our

01:00.820 --> 01:02.930

services, click the link in the show notes.

01:08.520 --> 01:13.950

Leadership is essentially defined as the
relationships that form with those who follow.

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01:13.960 --> 01:18.820

However, this definition does not always address the importance that lies within the

01:18.820 --> 01:23.760

depth of those relationships.

One of the greatest areas of opportunity that

01:23.760 --> 01:29.330

leaders have is to carve out time to cultivate these relationships with those who follow.

01:29.650 --> 01:36.070

For this month's episode, I am joined by Onika Coke-Munoz the Director of learning and

01:36.070 --> 01:41.520

Development division of the Veterans Business Administration's Office of Human capital

01:41.520 --> 01:46.010

Services In this role.

She leads organizational change in

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01:46.010 --> 01:51.240

infrastructure improvements within the
multifaceted training enterprise providing

01:51.240 --> 01:56.950

instruction program, design and development,
professional development consultation,

01:57.090 --> 02:03.470

diversity and inclusion and employee engagement
initiatives in service to the 26,000

02:03.470 --> 02:09.180

employees nationwide.

Get ready to join us as we explore the journey

02:09.180 --> 02:10.970

of Miss stepping into success.

02:11.220 --> 02:18.020

This is the audacity to fail podcast episode
nine, how to build a supervisory relationship.

02:18.380 --> 02:21.940

Hi, Onika, how are you today?

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I'm great, how are you?

02:21.940 --> 02:25.960

Sorry, I'm doing good.

It's so great to have you on today's episode

02:25.960 --> 02:31.510

and I cannot wait to dive into the dialogue.

Let's get started.

02:31.520 --> 02:38.390

Leaders are often pressured to know it all to
have the answer to every question or at least

02:38.390 --> 02:41.285

to find the roadmap to every outcome to
success.

02:41.295 --> 02:46.565

And of course we know that this isn't always
realistic, but there's often this unspoken

02:46.565 --> 02:51.005

culture or expectation for many leaders.

At what point in your career,

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02:51.005 --> 02:55.715

Anika did you begin thinking about failure as a pathway to success?

02:55.795 --> 03:02.170

I think for me this goes back before my entry point into public service and

03:02.380 --> 03:09.330

before coming to Vienna, I worked in the field of higher education and had an opportunity to

03:09.330 --> 03:15.980

work for my undergraduate alma mater and I wanted to propose a new idea

03:15.990 --> 03:22.890

for the university to consider opportunities to increase enrollment of a particular niche group

03:22.890 --> 03:26.700

that was deficient over many, many, many, many years.

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03:26.710 --> 03:33.530

And interestingly enough, although they supported the idea of me going forward,

03:33.530 --> 03:40.050

gave me the approval to go ahead and plat my my way, I was met with a lot of

03:40.060 --> 03:43.796

um how would I describe it?

They were very supportive,

03:43.806 --> 03:48.276

but they were also very skeptical, right, didn't have any resources,

03:48.286 --> 03:52.736

uh didn't have a ton of stakeholder engagement.

They said,

03:52.736 --> 03:54.926

hey, if you can figure it out, figure it out, good luck,

03:54.926 --> 03:57.876

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but you're on your own with this one.

And so I feel like,

03:57.886 --> 04:04.606

you know, from a very earlier part in my career
development and my understanding in

04:04.606 --> 04:11.212

terms of the potential of pitfalls and failures
a lot of times that that has been presented

04:11.212 --> 04:14.922

like directly to me in terms of like, yep, you
want to think outside the box,

04:14.922 --> 04:19.792

you want to be innovative and creative and
think about something new and different by all

04:19.792 --> 04:22.342

means, go figure it out, but you're on your own,
right.

04:22.342 --> 04:28.332

And so it's interesting that for me that that

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came at a time where I'm just leaving my

04:28.332 --> 04:33.792

undergraduate experience, I'm working for my
alma mater because a lot of my leadership

04:33.792 --> 04:40.720

lessons that that I still value to this very
day come from that experience of

04:40.880 --> 04:43.780

uh which kind of leads to like my own like
leadership mantra,

04:43.780 --> 04:47.760

which is find a way or make one, find a way or
make one.

04:47.760 --> 04:50.240

I love that.

Yes, that seed was planted many,

04:50.240 --> 04:55.140

many, many years ago, and that has sort of
given me the audacity if you will to really

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04:55.140 --> 05:00.890

think pass and through and beyond challenges
and really have more of like a strategic

05:00.890 --> 05:06.770

mindset to kind of mitigate and anticipate
change or issues as they present themselves.

05:06.770 --> 05:10.237

It's not always gonna be fig sometimes you're
the person that's gonna have to,

05:10.247 --> 05:14.647

you know, come with that contingency plan, even
if you're not given permission to do so you've

05:14.647 --> 05:17.457

got to be ready because if you stay ready, you
don't have to get ready.

05:17.457 --> 05:23.037

So that seed was planted for me a long time ago.
Yeah, and it sounds like being able to be an

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05:23.037 --> 05:28.317

advocate for innovation and change.

You may not know all of the answers as you're

05:28.317 --> 05:33.797

moving into these new frontiers and I think it
takes a great deal of humbleness and

05:33.797 --> 05:37.604

vulnerability to share your missteps to be able
to say,

05:37.614 --> 05:41.934

I don't know at all, and then to ask for help
with the way forward.

05:41.944 --> 05:45.044

And so it sounds like you've been able to do
some of that,

05:45.054 --> 05:50.504

which I think is uncharacteristic of some
leaders, so many leaders may be hesitant or

05:50.504 --> 05:55.674

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they may shy away from this because they may
experience a fear of thinking how is this going

05:55.674 --> 06:00.754

to be received in my workplace, how is this
going to be received from those around me?

06:00.764 --> 06:07.111

How has your willingness to share your journey
of those failures or those missteps?

06:07.121 --> 06:11.901

How has it impacted the relationships that
you've established with those that you lied?

06:11.911 --> 06:18.231

I think for me, what it does is it allows me to
show up in my authentic self sharing my

06:18.231 --> 06:22.441

missteps or my failures.

My challenge is just my realness with others

06:22.451 --> 06:28.908

around me, particularly those that I look to

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either coach or mentor or sort of live as I

06:28.908 --> 06:33.148

climb and go through the journey.

I think that people want to know that they're

06:33.148 --> 06:39.048

dealing with somebody real that they're really
they're dealing with someone that is accessible

06:39.058 --> 06:44.838

and tangible in ways that can relate to them.

And I think that failure and challenges is

06:44.838 --> 06:47.748

really, it's it's a part of life, it's
realistic for me,

06:47.748 --> 06:53.578

however, I just really try to in terms of
shifting the conversation towards solutions

06:53.578 --> 06:57.605

because, you know, we can talk problems all day
long and challenges all day long and my

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06:57.605 --> 07:03.425

missteps, but there's a lesson for me in all of these things and opportunities in terms of what

07:03.425 --> 07:09.175

sets me up for success to move forward.

And I I love the idea of sharing my stories

07:09.175 --> 07:14.525

because through that process you don't have to necessarily go through what I went through if

07:14.525 --> 07:18.205

you choose to take the lesson for whatever the take away it might be for you.

07:18.205 --> 07:24.552

So for me, I see it more as my willingness to share is it just kind of opens up opportunities

07:24.552 --> 07:29.412

for more trust and intimacy amongst the professional relationships that I've been able

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07:29.412 --> 07:33.322

to establish throughout throughout the years.

So that's been very beneficial for me.

07:33.332 --> 07:40.242

Do you see yourself as getting guidance from others who may have been mentors for you or

07:40.242 --> 07:44.012

your own supervisors who really led that path of saying,

07:44.012 --> 07:47.642

you know, it's important to be authentic, where did that come from for you?

07:47.652 --> 07:54.450

So, yes, and no, I think that my earliest

07:54.460 --> 08:01.460

lesson of authenticity in my v a career that I can speak to actually came about in

08:01.460 --> 08:04.670

a very unconventional way.

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And so essentially when I,

08:04.670 --> 08:07.790

when I came to the V. A.

I came through a pathways pro experience,

08:07.790 --> 08:14.490

it was a two year noncommittal appointment.

Uh and I came in at a time where they were

08:14.490 --> 08:18.760

getting ready to prepare for a retirement

tsunami that never happened right.

08:18.770 --> 08:23.600

But I came in and was willing to learn and do
just about anything that they asked me to do.

08:23.770 --> 08:29.770

And through that experience, I was placed in a
very high visible organization and I was

08:29.770 --> 08:35.050

surrounded by a lot of influentials and a front
office environment that reported to a political

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08:35.050 --> 08:38.670

appointee.

And so here I come in and you know,

08:38.670 --> 08:43.630

I love bright colors, I have a lot of energy.

I was very young at the time.

08:43.630 --> 08:46.170

I was just finished fresh out of graduate
school.

08:46.180 --> 08:48.605

And there there was a woman that worked in the
front office.

08:48.605 --> 08:51.975

She was a life for a long time government
employees since high school,

08:51.975 --> 08:56.345

I believe.

And she was a woman who filed intense purposes.

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08:56.355 --> 09:01.525

I looked to as as, as a mentor because she
looked like me and she's been around and she

09:01.525 --> 09:04.925

was encouraging.

She said, hey, oh, ***, we see you as a rising

09:04.935 --> 09:07.895

star within this organization and we love to
keep you around,

09:07.895 --> 09:09.625

we can see you doing many things.

09:10.160 --> 09:16.640

But she also told me that I was different and
she told me the way she said it,

09:16.650 --> 09:21.870

it was not a compliment and I was kind of like,
okay, tell me more.

09:21.880 --> 09:27.640

And so, you know, I came in, I had a large afro

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natural hair I wore,

09:27.650 --> 09:33.415

you know, I don't wear, you know boxy suits or
what I did not have that that that Washington D.

09:33.415 --> 09:36.275

C.

In the beltway sort of bureaucratic look and

09:36.275 --> 09:39.395

feel right.

And so I'm looking at this person and I'm

09:39.395 --> 09:44.665

listening to her and I'm also just sort of like
looking around headquarters and looking around

09:44.665 --> 09:48.815

the different places where they have put me on
assignments on the hill behind closed door

09:48.815 --> 09:50.075

settings, You name it.

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09:50.300 --> 09:53.470

And I thought to myself, maybe she has a point
and she's looking out for me,

09:53.470 --> 09:57.340

right?

So I should think more about it that weekend,

09:57.350 --> 10:02.160

went home, got a box perm relaxed, My hair went
to Macy's,

10:02.160 --> 10:07.880

got a box suit and came into headquarters
monday morning and by all intense purposes I

10:07.880 --> 10:11.380

thought she was right because I was just hit
with so many like comments onika,

10:11.380 --> 10:14.360

You changed your hair, you look great.

So I thought maybe she knows what she's talking

10:14.360 --> 10:16.750

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about, right?

And I don't want anything to get in the way of

10:16.750 --> 10:20.451

me coming in permanent.

The end of the day, I'm at the elevator and if

10:20.451 --> 10:25.241

anyone's at headquarters, you know, the
elevator takes forever and I'm waiting and I'm

10:25.241 --> 10:29.241

waiting and another elder, older black woman
approaches me and she says,

10:29.241 --> 10:32.931

hey onika you changed your hair and I'm getting
ready for yet another compliment.

10:32.941 --> 10:38.981

And she said, you know, I always wanted to tell
you how much I really admired your natural hair

10:38.981 --> 10:43.541

and I'm like, I really want to tell me more and

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she said you have no idea,

10:43.551 --> 10:47.221

but when you walk into the room and you have a
seat at the table,

10:47.231 --> 10:50.672

because you know, and and in in these circles
having a seat at the table,

10:50.672 --> 10:54.522

that means something to a lot of people and I'm
sitting with the decision makers,

10:54.532 --> 11:00.322

she's seeing me in different spaces and she
says you have no idea that you you know in your

11:00.332 --> 11:05.052

authentic self and showing up in your way gives
me permission to be myself and I was like,

11:05.062 --> 11:09.792

wow, I was blown away and I was mad and I was
mad at myself because in that moment what I

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11:09.792 --> 11:15.642

realized was I had allowed the perception of
another person to influence the decision of

11:15.642 --> 11:22.313

changing who I am and how I showed up at work
and I decided that I will never allow that to

11:22.313 --> 11:25.473

take place, that I will allow my work to speak
for myself,

11:25.473 --> 11:30.093

I allow my brand to speak for myself, but I
will never allow another person outside of me

11:30.103 --> 11:35.953

to challenge you know, my authentic self and
that you know there is something to being your

11:35.953 --> 11:39.903

authentic self and being excellent because
people are always watching you,

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11:39.913 --> 11:42.983

right.

And so when that other woman came in as like a

11:42.983 --> 11:48.424

bookend to my first day right, she just really
affirm that for me and I just sort of never

11:48.424 --> 11:51.764

looked back ever since.

And so it it just, it never,

11:51.774 --> 11:55.834

and I wish I had listened to myself to begin
with because it never stopped me from getting

11:55.834 --> 12:00.204

promoted, it never stopped me from having them
take me on travel assignments and take me here

12:00.204 --> 12:06.294

and it has never stopped that, right?

And so um I was having a coaching session with

12:06.294 --> 12:10.884

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a colleague the other day who was really kind
of concerned about the perception of others as

12:10.884 --> 12:15.745

she thinks about taking a role exit to do
another job different than what she's doing and

12:15.745 --> 12:20.215

she was really sort of focused on this issue
for herself in terms of like well what about

12:20.215 --> 12:22.825

what other people think and I'm one of my
social media posts,

12:22.825 --> 12:28.755

I read that other people's opinions about me
are none of my business,

12:28.765 --> 12:31.805

right?

And so I think that that's very empowering,

12:31.805 --> 12:38.155

but I think you have to be a courageous person,

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an audacious person and you know a fairly

12:38.165 --> 12:43.045

confident person to be able to say you know
what I'm okay with like who I am and what I

12:43.045 --> 12:46.946

contributed, I know what my brand is and it
might not be for everybody,

12:46.956 --> 12:52.666

but for those that it is for, I know that I'm
here and I'm ready to step up and to serve the

12:52.666 --> 12:55.366

mission.

Uh and so that's sort of been, you know,

12:55.376 --> 13:00.746

my pathway to answer your other question.
Yeah, I've been fortunate enough in the past

13:00.756 --> 13:07.376

seven years to work for leadership, who also
have very similar values and traits as I do.

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13:07.376 --> 13:10.346

So that's very fortunate because you don't find that everywhere right?

13:10.356 --> 13:16.427

And so I've been fortunate to work for a trip, a leader who is able to see me for who I am and

13:16.427 --> 13:20.887

has provided very intentional platforms and spaces for me to to be seen,

13:20.887 --> 13:23.857

right?

But in other cases I know that that will not

13:23.867 --> 13:27.817

always be the case.

And so I just try to make sure that I remember

13:27.827 --> 13:33.877

my time back as you know, an intern NBA and just not to forget that lesson of just always

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13:33.877 --> 13:37.527

be your authentic self and for me that's that's
the lesson,

13:37.537 --> 13:42.130

that's a beautiful, rich story about just the
power of,

13:42.148 --> 13:48.828

of mentorship and leadership and regardless of
whether someone is rooting towards

13:48.828 --> 13:54.418

you or you know, pulling towards their own
agenda, the importance and the power that that

13:54.418 --> 14:00.158

many supervisors, many, many mentors have on
professionals on staff,

14:00.168 --> 14:05.058

on people who are looking to them to give
information and lead the way.

14:05.068 --> 14:09.618

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And it makes me think of much of the
sustainability and success outcomes in the

14:09.618 --> 14:14.179

workplace can really, because Connected to the
relationships that we form with those who lead

14:14.179 --> 14:19.529

us and there's been some notable research by
gallup that found that supervisors account for

14:19.539 --> 14:25.289

at least 70% of employee engagement which is a
substantial portion.

14:25.299 --> 14:29.109

And so your story just made me think about this
next question.

14:29.119 --> 14:35.239

So for you as a leader, what benefits have you
experienced when you've started to develop

14:35.249 --> 14:40.109

those strong supportive supervisory

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relationships with those that you lead.

14:40.770 --> 14:47.370

And I'm going to give an example from A.

V be a perspective if that's okay and

14:47.380 --> 14:50.100

okay.

So in my opinion, one of the things that I

14:50.100 --> 14:54.780

think that B. B. A.

Does exceptionally well across government.

14:54.790 --> 15:01.280

So this is in addition to subject matter
expertise and technical expertise of of job

15:01.280 --> 15:05.760

functions.

Um and I'm saying this because I did not grow

15:05.760 --> 15:10.650

up within the veterans benefits administration.

I grew up in headquarters and have had other

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15:10.650 --> 15:17.380

roles and eventually have landed where I am now.

And so and my background is sociology.

15:17.380 --> 15:20.560

So I'm always observing these interactions and

behaviors.

15:20.560 --> 15:25.740

And one of the things that I can tell you for

certain in terms of a benefit that VB.

15:25.740 --> 15:29.220

A.

Offers internally is relationships.

15:29.590 --> 15:36.460

The folks here who thrive and who are

successful are those who engage very

15:36.460 --> 15:41.610

well in terms of their ability to have inter

relations with others.

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15:41.620 --> 15:45.830

And so I'm saying that to say that when it comes to the supervisory core,

15:45.840 --> 15:51.570

I believe that the supervisors, the managers, the leaders that have this willingness to share

15:51.570 --> 15:56.940

and be open and to connect with team members and up and down and around through throughout

15:56.940 --> 16:00.035

the enterprise.

I think that they open themselves up to not

16:00.035 --> 16:05.515

only increasing productivity, which obviously is a main state goal of the administration,

16:05.525 --> 16:10.415

but I think that they also put themselves in an environment where they can cultivate and foster

16:10.415 --> 16:15.085

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cultures of collaboration.

So historically via is the second largest and

16:15.085 --> 16:21.165

the second oldest cabinet agency.

We historically work in these siloed entities

16:21.165 --> 16:24.145

and get rewarded for it because we meet those
production goals.

16:24.155 --> 16:30.110

But when you have leaders, supervisors,
managers that are willing to still continue to

16:30.110 --> 16:35.010

do the business of the mission that's required,
but you are also very effective in establishing

16:35.010 --> 16:39.810

those relationships and building coalition and
bringing people together to move towards

16:39.810 --> 16:43.830

solutions.

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I think that you do something that is dynamic

16:43.840 --> 16:49.100

and something that people want to be a part of
because they see themselves in it and they see

16:49.100 --> 16:53.730

themselves connecting to other people who care
and who can see them.

16:53.740 --> 16:56.390

And so I just think that that's just it's
beneficial.

16:56.390 --> 17:00.720

It's it's sometimes a hard sell in an
environment where you know,

17:00.720 --> 17:03.580

we're focused on the numbers were focused on
production.

17:03.580 --> 17:08.940

We're focused on a very specific goals.

So sometimes when I have these conversations in

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17:08.940 --> 17:12.100

leadership circles or in our our core
leadership programs,

17:12.100 --> 17:15.860

some people, the people who get it, they get it,
they're all in there are others,

17:15.860 --> 17:19.770

however, that it takes a little bit more
convincing to really say,

17:19.770 --> 17:22.270

okay, but where is the measure of the metrics
on on that?

17:22.270 --> 17:25.180

Because, you know, we're not we're not graded
on what you're talking about.

17:25.180 --> 17:27.710

We need to get the work done.
So tell me about that.

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17:27.720 --> 17:31.010

But it's not an easy thing.

But if we don't get the human thing right,

17:31.020 --> 17:36.300

if we don't get the relationship thing right,

then everything else in my opinion is at risk

17:36.310 --> 17:40.450

of being challenged or not long term and not sustainable.

17:40.450 --> 17:44.780

So that's just from my, my perspective in my

lens, there's someone in my mind as you were

17:44.780 --> 17:50.150

asking the question that reminds me of a story

of a national leadership program that we were

17:50.150 --> 17:54.080

running and by all means the individual was

highly successful.

17:54.080 --> 17:57.890

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

They had made it up to a particular rank and
they were getting ready to move on to a senior

17:57.890 --> 18:01.440

level position within the administration.

And so in their mind,

18:01.450 --> 18:06.310

they didn't need the power skill stuff for the
soft skills stuff for the um the inner

18:06.310 --> 18:08.580

relationship stuff that I was talking about,
right?

18:08.590 --> 18:11.340

That they were not buying anything that I was
trying to sell them.

18:11.340 --> 18:12.980

They're like, I'm not interested, don't sell it
to me,

18:12.980 --> 18:16.700

I want to rent it.

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

And so an interesting thing happened in the

18:16.700 --> 18:23.120

cohort discussion whereby a colleague that had worked with them in a prior office said,

18:23.120 --> 18:27.050

you know what, I just want to say something and I hope you don't hate me,

18:27.050 --> 18:31.770

but and gave like real authentic about their experience of that person,

18:31.780 --> 18:36.190

not being approachable, not being, you know, relatable, not being you know,

18:36.190 --> 18:38.890

accessible and they're like, and I'm telling you this as my friend.

18:38.900 --> 18:44.460

But I also can only imagine the people who don't know you who just who may be affected by

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

18:44.470 --> 18:48.830

how you show up in the environment that you're trying to lead.

18:48.840 --> 18:53.450

And so they thought about it, they still weren't buying it by the end of the session.

18:53.460 --> 18:58.290

But I did was I was able to at least give them a leadership challenge to go back and try

18:58.290 --> 19:01.460

something different.

And they did and that individual,

19:01.460 --> 19:06.580

well they did a 1 80 but before they did, what happened was that monday they go back to the

19:06.580 --> 19:11.110

workplace and they did something miraculous. Instead of going to their office and closing

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

19:11.110 --> 19:14.850

the door and doing their work for eight hours
like they normally would have done.

19:14.860 --> 19:18.350

They went to their coworkers said good morning,
how are you?

19:18.360 --> 19:21.590

How was your weekend?
And the and I said, well what was their

19:21.590 --> 19:23.720

reaction when you did that?
They they said,

19:23.730 --> 19:27.220

well, they were shocked you okay?
Is everything all right?

19:27.230 --> 19:31.850

You know, because for four years they never
reached out and never even exchanged

19:31.850 --> 19:35.570

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

pleasantries.

And so as a result there was a pivotal moment

19:35.570 --> 19:40.100

where something, you know, magical happened and
it was a shift and a change,

19:40.110 --> 19:44.580

not just the relationship dynamic between that
individual and their team,

19:44.590 --> 19:47.990

but it really set a path forward where this
individual goes from.

19:48.000 --> 19:54.230

I'm not buying this power skill stuff Monica to
then going on and establishing their own

19:54.230 --> 19:59.830

station leadership development program so that
they they could then start to have an impact at

19:59.830 --> 20:04.870

their office level and then went on to

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

establish another station leadership program at

20:04.870 --> 20:08.660

a district level affecting more offices.

And I was just like who is this person?

20:08.660 --> 20:12.480

Like are you the same person?

So you know, it's easy to talk about this stuff

20:12.480 --> 20:18.480

but it's so much harder to do, especially for
the leaders who are more technically driven to

20:18.480 --> 20:21.760

support the mission.

They're not interested so much in the other

20:21.760 --> 20:25.020

stuff, but I'm telling you you got it's not
either or it's both.

20:25.030 --> 20:30.800

And the higher up you climb the latter within a
system like via or any organization,

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

20:30.800 --> 20:35.180

be a private sector or public sector.

The more it's about the relationships,

20:35.180 --> 20:38.040

the less that it's about your technical
abilities, right?

20:38.050 --> 20:40.930

Because you've got people to do that, the
higher up you climb,

20:40.930 --> 20:45.600

the more we need you to be strategic and big
picture and vision and connecting the dots and

20:45.600 --> 20:49.700

having the political savvy and the global
awareness and the perspective to be able to

20:49.700 --> 20:54.330

bring everything together.

We need to develop leaders that have that

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

20:54.330 --> 20:58.450

mindset and empowered mindset.

So I will stop there for now.

20:58.460 --> 21:02.670

I think that's wonderful thinking about the

balance between the function and the

21:02.670 --> 21:07.280

relationship and how both of them are uniquely

important in their own right,

21:07.290 --> 21:09.810

right?

We can't only focus on the function and let the

21:09.810 --> 21:15.200

relationship atrophy and vice versa, right?

We can only focus on the relationship and

21:15.200 --> 21:18.540

completely forget about the function And so

being able to have,

21:18.540 --> 21:25.150

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

as you said, an empowered leader who is able to
hold both and and navigate that at times can be

21:25.150 --> 21:27.390

really difficult.

One of the things in that story,

21:27.390 --> 21:32.160

I think you said that was really powerful is
that you spoke to that leader and you said,

21:32.170 --> 21:36.790

hey why don't you just try something different?

Not saying that it's going to be the end all be

21:36.790 --> 21:41.510

all, it's not going to be the high score but
let's try something different for leaders who

21:41.510 --> 21:47.290

may be looking to begin fostering and
cultivating those more supportive relationships

21:47.300 --> 21:51.240

with those that they lead.

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

Are there specific places that you suggest they

21:51.240 --> 21:54.720

begin or specific strategies that you'd have
them to do?

21:54.750 --> 22:01.730

I think they have to start looking within and
ensuring that they have what they need first

22:01.740 --> 22:08.700

in order to fill up the buckets of support for
themselves before they start digging in and

22:08.700 --> 22:13.820

trying to affect change within their
organizations And so what I mean by buckets in

22:13.820 --> 22:18.940

my opinion, I feel like every successful person
and aspiring leaders should have four buckets

22:18.940 --> 22:22.100

filled at all times.

And so there's I think that you know,

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22:22.100 --> 22:25.450

they need to start making sure that they've got the mentor bucket filled,

22:25.460 --> 22:31.650

that person outside of your direct line of supervisory ship or even outside of your direct

22:31.660 --> 22:35.100

office or organization.

That safe space where you can talk to someone

22:35.100 --> 22:39.750

who actually has achieved, you know, your goal or aspiration,

22:39.760 --> 22:43.250

whatever that looks like that you have a formal mentor in that bucket.

22:43.260 --> 22:48.850

The second bucket, I think that needs to be filled is having a coach and executive coach,

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22:48.850 --> 22:54.960

someone that unlike a mentor who is giving you advice um is someone that you can go to to talk

22:54.960 --> 23:00.020

about, this is where I am now and this is where I want to pivot towards the future,

23:00.020 --> 23:04.540

but I've got some challenges that I want to talk through and where the coach comes in as a

23:04.540 --> 23:07.180

partner and accountability partner and asks, you know,

23:07.180 --> 23:11.180

they'll stop provoking questions and utilizes the coaching framework to help build towards

23:11.190 --> 23:14.800

future success.

I think the third bucket for me is you know,

23:14.800 --> 23:19.580

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the cheerleader, those individuals who are you
know shouting your praises and there to rally

23:19.580 --> 23:24.070

you on that, think that you are great and
amazing and can help to expand and grow your

23:24.070 --> 23:28.170

professional network because you never know
where that next opportunity might arise and

23:28.170 --> 23:33.930

then the fourth bucket is really important and
something that I always make sure that that

23:33.940 --> 23:36.720

that bucket is completely full and that's your
peer group,

23:36.720 --> 23:41.040

your tribe, the individuals that are either on
the same level but they are not,

23:41.040 --> 23:44.700

they may have, they may be different grades or

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different positions within the organization,

23:44.700 --> 23:50.810

but the core thing is that you all have a
commonality in terms of being connected by

23:50.810 --> 23:54.920

shared values.

Uh, and perhaps shared goals for the future and

23:54.920 --> 23:58.090

that you all sort of travel together throughout
the career journey.

23:58.090 --> 24:01.330

Right?

So I feel like in short before you start

24:01.340 --> 24:06.470

thinking about how to, you know, leverage and
fix and cultivate environments for your own

24:06.470 --> 24:12.940

organization, I just wanna offer that, take
care of your own developmental needs and your

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24:12.950 --> 24:18.040

your ecosystem of professional support first
because there's a lot of things there as you

24:18.040 --> 24:23.670

look inward can help you as you look outward to
help your organization grow in similar ways,

24:23.670 --> 24:26.600

shape or form.

So in other words, you know, how can you then

24:26.600 --> 24:31.140

offer the very thing that perhaps maybe a
deficit or a challenge or something that you

24:31.140 --> 24:36.530

don't possess or have yourself? Yeah.

And then as far as looking outward in

24:36.540 --> 24:41.050

influencing what that looks like for the
organization in which you are leading or

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

24:41.050 --> 24:45.800

representing, hopefully you take some of those similar buckets into account.

24:45.810 --> 24:50.870

But I think that one of the first things that would be beneficial is establishing and we're

24:50.870 --> 24:53.790

going back to this idea of the relationship and so for me,

24:53.790 --> 24:59.050

what that looks like is establishing specific spaces for certain things.

24:59.050 --> 25:05.640

I came into my current role and identified immediately that within the existing

25:05.640 --> 25:10.860

culture was a group of highly self motivated individuals but that there was some,

25:10.860 --> 25:14.530

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some distinctions and some challenges based off
of geographic location.

25:14.530 --> 25:19.310

One team is located in this city and this state
and another team is located elsewhere.

25:19.320 --> 25:23.980

And so they wanted to have an opportunity of a
common place in the common ground to come

25:23.980 --> 25:29.740

together on a regular basis during this stay at
home environment and they hadn't had that prior.

25:29.750 --> 25:33.280

Okay.

So we established that we got together once a

25:33.280 --> 25:36.340

week.

We still continue to keep that up, but I keep

25:36.340 --> 25:41.630

them in there and what they want in mind and

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creating opportunities for connection for,

25:41.640 --> 25:45.500

for excitement and for, you know, lifting up
whatever uh,

25:45.510 --> 25:48.470

that they drive and that they want to see
moving forward.

25:48.470 --> 25:54.040

So we hold that space for them on a weekly
basis and that has gotten a lot great feedback

25:54.040 --> 25:57.610

in terms of addressing that particular desire
for community,

25:57.620 --> 26:00.330

right?

But then there's also the individual needs of

26:00.330 --> 26:03.210

employees.

And so one of the things that I've instituted

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26:03.210 --> 26:08.090

immediately and something that I've done in the past is I sit down and I have one on ones right.

26:08.090 --> 26:13.170

I have monthly performance reviews.

I don't use it as a means to necessarily hold

26:13.170 --> 26:16.210

folks to what I will do at the end of the performance cycle,

26:16.210 --> 26:20.160

where it's a formal thing.

But I do want to create and cultivate spaces

26:20.160 --> 26:24.010

where people know that they can come to me, we can have conversation and I really just

26:24.010 --> 26:27.470

highlight some observations and some opportunities around some of the things that

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26:27.470 --> 26:31.810

I've seen them do and perform and give them
some feedback and have a chance for them to

26:31.810 --> 26:38.320

give me feedback in return by doing that.

I now effectively am being more

26:38.320 --> 26:43.940

responsive to their needs beyond, you know, the
visa requirements for a mid year and an end of

26:43.940 --> 26:47.360

year so that by the time that we get to the end
of the performance cycle,

26:47.370 --> 26:50.490

you now know what I'm thinking because I've
told you,

26:50.490 --> 26:54.590

we've talked about it and we've come to get in
conversation and when we get to the end,

26:54.590 --> 26:59.040

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you're not surprised at what your performance
looks like on paper because we've taken the

26:59.040 --> 27:03.960

time to cultivate that relationship and
establish that and have that awareness and have

27:03.960 --> 27:08.750

those opportunities for growth or opportunities
for me to be better informed in terms of how I

27:08.750 --> 27:13.930

might be able to support you so I can be
proactive versus getting to the end of

27:13.930 --> 27:19.010

something or coming to, you know, an impasse
when we have an issue that perhaps I wasn't

27:19.010 --> 27:19.830

aware of.

Right?

27:19.830 --> 27:22.820

So creating the those spaces and those

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opportunities I think are really,

27:22.820 --> 27:25.710

really important.

So that's just, that's just a few ideas.

27:25.720 --> 27:29.370

Those are great ideas.

I think you really summed up like three big

27:29.370 --> 27:33.110

components.

One is being able to be a little introspective

27:33.120 --> 27:36.800

and looking at your own supportive
relationships as a leader?

27:36.810 --> 27:38.880

What are those things?

Do you have a mentor?

27:38.880 --> 27:41.530

Do you have a coach?

What does it look like to have a supportive

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27:41.530 --> 27:47.770

friend group or supportive leaders that are in
your circle and then being able to say you know

27:47.770 --> 27:53.050

how do you build community as a supervisor, how
do you make space for those that you are

27:53.050 --> 27:56.690

leading to build community?

And then how do you make space to give

27:56.690 --> 28:00.580

authentic feedback?

And I think that mixture of all of those things

28:00.580 --> 28:03.710

starting with So first I always say leaders go
first, right,

28:03.720 --> 28:09.360

so starting with so first and then branching
outward and saying how do we create community

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

28:09.370 --> 28:13.670

for those who we lead and how do we create spaces for feedback?

28:13.680 --> 28:19.160

I think that definitely builds on the space for building those supervisory relationship at

28:19.160 --> 28:23.960

least the supportive one.

Well we are almost at the end of our time

28:23.960 --> 28:30.730

together and I think yes I went by really fast um and I think you gave some amazing

28:30.730 --> 28:34.850

pointers.

I do have one last question that I think we

28:34.850 --> 28:39.760

often think about supervisors connecting to those who they lead.

28:39.770 --> 28:44.830

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But there are times where leaders may be doing
well with building supportive supervisory

28:44.840 --> 28:51.050

relationships with their direct reports but
they find it hard to cultivate relationships

28:51.050 --> 28:55.450

with their senior leadership.

So to to do it in reverse,

28:55.460 --> 29:02.250

do you have any thoughts on how they might best
be able to navigate that process of cultivating

29:02.250 --> 29:03.630

those relationships?

29:03.990 --> 29:08.110

I think that there are a number of different
starting points where you could you know

29:08.110 --> 29:14.940

potentially take this and one of the places
where I like to start off with is studying

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29:14.950 --> 29:17.650

the leader.

I think that successful people really

29:17.650 --> 29:23.340

anticipate the needs of their leader or their
supervisor.

29:23.350 --> 29:28.730

And so for me in order to do that it requires
me to be very present and cognizant and

29:28.740 --> 29:32.510

observant of the leader in which I'm in service
to.

29:32.520 --> 29:36.220

And so that's gonna change depending on who
that person is sitting sitting in that seat.

29:36.220 --> 29:39.950

It's gonna change depending on the individuals
who are in the room at the time.

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29:39.950 --> 29:45.470

Because you may have a very clear path in terms
of who your direct leadership is.

29:45.480 --> 29:48.950

But working in an organization such as via
there are multiple.

29:48.960 --> 29:53.440

There are a multitude of leaders that we're
serving sometimes at the same time.

29:53.450 --> 29:55.440

Right?

And so you just have to have a sense of

29:55.440 --> 30:00.340

awareness of who's in the room, who's who and
who needs what.

30:00.350 --> 30:06.350

And so so when I think about navigating
relationships with senior leaders,

30:06.360 --> 30:11.980

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I think about a story I have when I first came
to work at V.

30:11.980 --> 30:16.290

A.

And I was a speechwriter for a political

30:16.290 --> 30:21.830

appointee who had an invitation to a keynote at
the leadership V.

30:21.830 --> 30:25.950

A. Event.

So I traveled with him to hear the speech and

30:25.950 --> 30:32.400

part of the comment that I heard of the
individual who was introducing the speaker said

30:32.400 --> 30:37.090

something that I'll never forget and he said
that if you I want to be successful in

30:37.090 --> 30:40.930

establishing relationships in B. A.

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And in Washington D.

30:40.930 --> 30:42.400

C.

You need to know three things.

30:42.410 --> 30:46.600

And he said you need to know who's in the room,
you need to know who works for who and you know

30:46.600 --> 30:48.930

who's sleeping with who.

And I thought to myself,

30:48.930 --> 30:51.780

I thought to myself, oh my God, what have I
done?

30:51.790 --> 30:55.000

Where am I get me out of this crazy place, this
is this is crazy.

30:55.010 --> 31:00.020

In the moment I didn't realize it.

But the message that he was really getting at

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31:00.030 --> 31:06.760

and everybody else in the room picked up on immediately besides me was about the ability to

31:06.770 --> 31:12.850

be politically savvy and exercise a sense of global awareness.

31:12.860 --> 31:17.940

And I remember going back after that event and telling my boss what I heard and saying,

31:17.940 --> 31:22.240

oh my God, can you believe that this person said that and my boss said Onica,

31:22.250 --> 31:24.800

he says, listen, I just got to give you some feedback.

31:24.810 --> 31:28.370

He said you are you know, book smart, but you are not street smart.

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

31:28.570 --> 31:31.470

I was offended because I had not spent all this money going to school,

31:31.470 --> 31:35.210

getting an education to come here to have somebody tell me that.

31:35.220 --> 31:39.420

But essentially, you know, it clicked and I think that he was right and I think that that

31:39.420 --> 31:44.280

gets to the root of the question that you're asking in the sense of when we think about

31:44.290 --> 31:50.500

pivoting and taking those steps to create relationships with our most senior leaders

31:50.500 --> 31:56.960

within our organization, we have to demo a sense of political savvy and awareness,

31:56.960 --> 32:00.330

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situational awareness because if you don't know
who's in the room,

32:00.340 --> 32:04.500

if you don't know who's who reports to who,
what the power structures are,

32:04.500 --> 32:10.000

who the decision makers are, who has the
relationships with whom in the room that you're

32:10.000 --> 32:14.240

trying to navigate and get things done, it
could literally be a career ender for you,

32:14.250 --> 32:18.650

if your mind feels could be out there if you
don't exercise that level of awareness.

32:18.660 --> 32:25.640

And so for me, I think a lot about that before
I enter a room or a space before I participate

32:25.640 --> 32:30.890

in a project or an initiative before I join

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interagency workgroup,

32:30.900 --> 32:35.690

I've been thinking about the dynamics of what's happening, who's in the room and all of

32:35.690 --> 32:39.300

those elements because ultimately that can lead either towards a project,

32:39.310 --> 32:42.880

project being successful or not successful.

And so for me,

32:42.880 --> 32:48.470

I also reflect back at that time, in terms of some lessons I got in my earlier via career and

32:48.470 --> 32:53.680

I'm thinking about being at 18 Vermont Avenue and if anyone's been in that building,

32:53.680 --> 32:58.130

you know that there's a lot of talk about the 10th floor because the 10th floors were the

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32:58.130 --> 33:02.510

Secretary's office resides and so a lot of people would say for example I'm getting ready

33:02.510 --> 33:05.770

for, you know, a meeting on the 10th floor and so that triggers,

33:05.780 --> 33:08.750

so that's very important because you're getting ready to meet with some important people,

33:08.910 --> 33:14.340

but for me, I made it a point that while I was, while I reported there that I got to know

33:14.350 --> 33:19.290

everybody from the first floor to the 10th floor, but also everyone from the A level all

33:19.290 --> 33:24.690

the way up to the first floor.

And so the A level is really three floors below

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33:24.690 --> 33:28.850

the earth, the bi level is two floors below the
earth, and then you've got the sea level,

33:28.850 --> 33:33.600

which is the main basement level.

And I made it a point to get to know the folks

33:33.600 --> 33:36.940

who did the janitorial services, the people
that work the mail room,

33:36.940 --> 33:40.470

the people who did so security, the people who
did jobs that we can't talk about,

33:40.480 --> 33:45.590

the people who worked in the cafeteria all the
way up to the 10th floor and treated them with

33:45.590 --> 33:48.980

an equal level of respect, equal level of
interest.

33:48.990 --> 33:54.530

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And I also made it my business to connect and align those relationships because oftentimes we

33:54.530 --> 33:59.720

may think of asserting a lot of attention and and we put a lot of,

33:59.730 --> 34:04.940

we put a lot into the relationships with people who are the most senior in the room and that

34:04.940 --> 34:09.950

has its place and I get that, but there are often times if we don't pay attention to the

34:09.950 --> 34:14.780

people who support the leaders in the room who really are operationally responsible for

34:14.780 --> 34:20.330

getting the work done, you can really miss opportunities to leverage and be successful as

34:20.330 --> 34:24.000

you aspire to cultivate those relationships

How to Build a Strong Supervisory Relationship with Onika Coke-Munoz

with the most senior person?

34:24.000 --> 34:27.690

Right.

And so for me it's really an exercise in

34:27.700 --> 34:33.160

expanding and having and cultivating
relationships at various levels because you

34:33.160 --> 34:37.570

never know when you need to phone a friend and
to get things done,

34:37.570 --> 34:42.360

and if you're only focused upward, if you're
only focused on the person who has the title,

34:42.370 --> 34:46.120

you can really be missing opportunities to set
your mission and your task,

34:46.120 --> 34:50.030

your initiative, whatever your love, what
responsibility is for up for success,

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34:50.030 --> 34:53.230

Right?

So you've got to have a very broad and wide

34:53.240 --> 34:57.200

understanding in terms of what that means, how you navigate through that.

34:57.200 --> 35:01.700

Because if you don't, it can mean the difference between achieving success or not.

35:01.710 --> 35:04.390

Absolutely.

And it draws out that space of being

35:04.390 --> 35:09.190

intentional and being purposeful when making these relationships whether you know,

35:09.190 --> 35:14.200

they are with those who follow your direct reports or with those who you follow your

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35:14.200 --> 35:15.340

senior leadership.

35:15.620 --> 35:19.660

Alright, well this has been awesome.

It's been great talking with you and we have

35:19.660 --> 35:26.340

come to the end of today's podcast today's
episode and what I enjoy

35:26.340 --> 35:32.000

about the end of the episode is that I play a
game of word association at the end of each

35:32.010 --> 35:36.560

episode.

And so what this what we'll do is I'll put out

35:36.560 --> 35:43.310

a word or for, and I'd like to get your first
thought your authentic thoughts around this

35:43.310 --> 35:48.630

word or phrase and will will jump from there.

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Okay, alright,

35:48.630 --> 35:52.350

so the first word, the first phrase is
vulnerable. Leadership.

35:52.860 --> 35:57.150

Yeah, definitely.

What about authentic leader?

35:57.580 --> 36:03.780

I like that goes with that story that we talked
about earlier for sure.

36:04.630 --> 36:09.030

And the last phrase is audacity to fail.

36:09.700 --> 36:12.930

Those are some really great words connected to
each of those.

36:12.930 --> 36:18.890

And so hopefully our listeners were also able
to think of words that connect to vulnerable

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36:18.890 --> 36:25.150

leadership, authentic leadership and the
audacity to fail as we were playing this game.

36:25.150 --> 36:28.360

But thank you so much onica for joining us
today.

36:28.360 --> 36:33.930

I think this is a great conversation and I
definitely think it's going to really help with

36:33.930 --> 36:39.370

leaders who are thinking about the importance
of creating those supportive supervisory

36:39.370 --> 36:41.170

relationships.

You're welcome.

36:41.170 --> 36:44.710

It has been a pleasure chatting with you today.
Thank you.

36:44.720 --> 36:50.190

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So we've come to the end of another great episode of the Audacity to fail podcast.

36:50.200 --> 36:54.890

Thank you for tuning in to learn how missteps can lead to growth and success.

36:55.000 --> 36:59.670

Be sure to check out the key lessons in the show notes for a refresher to request services

36:59.670 --> 37:02.490

from the National Center for Organization Development.

37:02.500 --> 37:05.190

Check out our website also linked in the show notes.

37:05.200 --> 37:09.570

Remember if you missed the target 100 times you have not failed.

37:09.580 --> 37:14.030

Instead you've simply found 100 strategies that

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did not work,

37:14.040 --> 37:17.660

Be well and continue to fail forward until next
time.

37:17.670 --> 37:18.520

Thank you