

Episode:	26
Guest:	Jessica Bonjorni
Title:	Candid Leadership with Jessica Bonjorni
Dr. Shari Dade	You are now listening to The Audacity to Fail podcast, a podcast about mis stepping into success. Get ready to dive into conversations and real stories from leaders as they share. How failure activates a growth mindset is an important part of learning and motivation for improvement. I'm your host, Dr. Shari Dade, psychologist with the National Center for Organizational Development.
Dr. Shari Dade	Thank you for tuning in. Let's get started.
Announcer	Support for this leadership podcast comes from the National Center for Organization Development. NCOD aims to increase the long term growth and performance of the Department of Veterans Affairs by collaboratively working with the leaders throughout the VA to improve organizational outcomes by supporting the development of an engaged workforce. For additional information on our services, click the link in the show notes.
Dr. Shari Dade	As a leader, showing up authentically and candidly is critical to building trust and effective relationships. Leading with honesty, clarity, purpose and respect can often inspire and engage your workforce in significant ways. However, taking on this type of leadership is no small endeavor, and leaders who walk this path understand the importance that courage plays in being a transformational leader.
Dr. Shari Dade	For this episode, I'm grateful to be joined by Jessica Bonjorni. Mr. Bonjorni was appointed to the position of Chief Human Capital Management and the Office of Human Capital Management for the Veterans Health Administration in April of 2020. In this capacity, Mr. Bonjorni leads the strategic integration of Workforce Management and Consulting WMC, Institute of Leadership, Education and Development. ILEAD and the National Center for Organization Development in NCOD to support the human capital systems for nearly 380,000 VHA employees and over 120 health profession trainees.
Dr. Shari Dade	In her role, Ms.. Bonjorni provides guidance, information and consultation to VHA central office component VHA Health care facilities, veterans integrated service networks and external entities such as the Health Professional Organizations, Congress and other Federal agencies. Get ready to join us as we explore the journey of mis stepping into success. This is the Audacity to Fail Podcast Episode 26 The Courage to Be a Candid Leader.
Dr. Shari Dade	Hi Jessica, How are you today?
Jessica Bonjorni	Hi, I'm well. How are you doing?

Dr. Shari Dade	I'm doing pretty good. I'm doing well on this Friday. It's a pleasure to have you here on this episode. Thanks for joining.
Jessica Bonjorni	I'm excited to be here.
Dr. Shari Dade	All right. Well, let's go ahead and get into it, because I think this conversation about candidness, about courage, about transformational leadership, I definitely think it's something that's going to be a gem for our listeners. So let's hop right on the in.
Jessica Bonjorni	Sounds good.
Dr. Shari Dade	So I'm not sure if your career journey is as widely known as many other career journeys. It was definitely news to me to hear a little bit about kind of the journey that you've taken into your current role. I certainly appreciate the nuanced approach that you've taken and how this story really does shake up kind of the traditional thoughts of how one gets into leadership.
Dr. Shari Dade	How have you utilized courage throughout your career journey?
Jessica Bonjorni	Interesting question. Well, I think when you're making some of your career choices, it's hard to know whether you're being courageous or not in the. Yeah, and I have I guess you're right. I've had maybe a journey that is a little bit not straightforward. And I think a lot of our leaders have those kinds of paths, but it doesn't seem like that's the case when you're seeing them in the leadership position that they're sitting in.
Jessica Bonjorni	I had went to business school with the idea that I was going to take a specific career path that I did not take at all and ended up in the federal government, much to my surprise, after business school, doing a rotational leadership program. And in that capacity, I had a chance to do a lot of different things and didn't really know what I wanted to be when I grew up.
Jessica Bonjorni	Still at that. And that was in my late twenties, early thirties, and was still kind of figuring myself out as I continue to do today, by the way. Yeah, and in that I was trying to figure out I just felt had a feeling when I was operating in a supervisory capacity that I wanted to do something more, but I wasn't quite sure where I needed to go.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so I had various opportunities to test out some management ideas, test out my my skills doing administrative leadership. I was a direct supervisor, another kind of agency doing kind of H.R. and admin and budget type of work. And I had, like many people, might experience a challenge with my supervisor where I stayed in an organization for maybe longer than I should have because I really like the the work that I was doing.

Jessica Bonjorni	I liked my team a lot, but I had a challenge figuring out how I would be able to advance and do anything more in the role I was in. And so I ended up making a decision to take a lateral move to another organization on a temporary basis, because I didn't want to be in that supervisory relationship anymore.
Jessica Bonjorni	And that's a tough decision to make.
Dr. Shari Dade	A very tough decision.
Jessica Bonjorni	But, you know, now I can look at it in retrospect and say, hey, I learned a lot from that experience by being able to make a lateral shift and actually step out of supervising for about a year and in that capacity, I did different work, I did more strategic work, I had more time to think about new concepts and really reflect on my management style and my leadership style and do some self-reflection, looking at all the things that I had messed up.
Jessica Bonjorni	And sometimes it takes stepping out of that role when you're not in a position where you're actually dealing with a real life situation of supervising and trying to manage those tough situations and being able to do that really helped me think about what kind of leader I wanted to be and really give me time to think about how to develop the aspects of my management skills, my leadership skills that I did not quite have developed.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so I use that time to set a path for myself, to challenge myself in those areas and then regroup when I was ready to start applying for other jobs again.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. One of the things that really stick out for me is the intentionality behind the question What kind of manager, what kind of leader do I want to be? And the idea around, there's moments where that question comes up. And because you're in a leadership position, you may not have the opportunity to really dig deep and to explore that because oftentimes you kind of have to show up as the leader that's needed in the moment, right?
Dr. Shari Dade	And so I really appreciate that point around. Sometimes you do have to pull away from that space to say, how can I be intentional about even thinking and exploring the type of leader that I'd like to be? That in itself is a message for us to think about. Like how do we even approach that?
Jessica Bonjorni	QUESTION Yeah, I don't think I have a specific goal in mind to say, Hey, I need to get to this type of leadership style. But I did various assessments and inventories and read some additional books. This is my general preference. As soon as I have a problem, I think I better buy a book, will help me figure out how to navigate this.
Jessica Bonjorni	All the answers are in a book. Some are in.

Dr. Shari Dade	A book somewhere.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so I would read different kinds of leadership philosophies to try to think through what I wanted to do. But it made me realize one of those assessments is one that explains different kind of categories of leaders, and they give you examples of famous leaders that fall into those categories of what characteristics they have and the pros and the cons.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, very cool.
Jessica Bonjorni	The one that I aligned with though, was called a pacesetter, which is where Steve Jobs also aligns, which is a approach that maybe produces excellent results but does not work out well for the people you work with because it says the expectation that everyone will just keep running as fast as possible and you don't worry about how people are feeling or burnout or any of those things.
Jessica Bonjorni	And that is absolutely the path that I was on previously. And I will tell you, when I am not being my best self and when I am stressed, that is a style that I default to and I have to very actively work against that.
Dr. Shari Dade	Work against that style. Yeah. Yeah. No, that's extremely insightful. Right. To be able to say what, where, where am I defaults when I'm stressed, when I'm pushed to the limit, when I've got these impending deadlines and things don't seem to be going the way that I need them to, what's my default setting and being able to have the courage to actively work against that?
Dr. Shari Dade	I think it does take a lot of audacity to do that. I know you've mentioned a few of the spaces of missteps that happened along that journey or failures even that may have been present for you. What were some of those things that helped you redirect your course?
Jessica Bonjorni	Well, reading books again always helps and thinking. I think that's part of the challenge of, for example, going to school for a topic, right, versus actually applying it in practice. Yeah, right. There are a lot of theories of management and when you're trying to implement them, it's quite another story in the in the moment. And so really trying to take some of those lessons where I realized that I had not made effective transitions in many ways from being an individual contributor to being a manager or a supervisor and then a manager and then a leader.
Jessica Bonjorni	Right? All of those are different skill sets that require different things of you, and it is very difficult to transition. And so for me, that includes trying to figure out how to effectively delegate as one is a basic one for supervising those. Right. But making that change to say it's not about you doing the work, it's about getting work done through other people and then effectively supporting those people through servant leadership concepts, as we like to emulate here in Mena.

Jessica Bonjorni	And that is a tough thing to transition to. If you're coming from where I was as a pacesetter, it's kind of the exact opposite, Right? Right. I think in addition to trying to proactively learn some of these ideas through books, I've learned them through screwing things up. I will tell you I've had some past projects that I worked on or interactions with employees where I realized after the fact I definitely did not handle as best as I could.
Jessica Bonjorni	And there are better ways to work on doing things like giving feedback. There's a great book about that. Oh, thanks for the feedback. It's one of my favorites because it really helps you think through how to separate the emotions from the actual content. That's when I help and recommend when I'm giving remarks about leadership, because I do think it's really fundamental to so many things that we do, and it's important to keep thinking about that for yourself, right?
Jessica Bonjorni	I have to think about it every time when I get a piece of negative feedback from someone that hits me off guard and I think, Oh goodness, like, that was not what I wanted to hear.
Dr. Shari Dade	Today, of.
Jessica Bonjorni	Course, But what can I take away from it and separate the content and the delivery and reflect on whether there was any nugget of truth in the content that I can actually work on. I think that falls into also what because of the scope of the work that I do in human capital, this is the kind of feedback we get every single day.
Jessica Bonjorni	People have a lot of feedback for us working in the customer service industry.
Dr. Shari Dade	We oh yeah, I'm sure even thinking of feedback. And one of the things that we did speak about as we prepared for today's episode was your desire to be more candid in whether it's feedback or whether it's just the way that you show up in your leadership style. Will you share a bit about like what this means to you to be a candid leader?
Dr. Shari Dade	Sure.
Jessica Bonjorni	It means a number of things for me, so we often get feedback of expectations for leadership that we should be transparent. But there's also another tension that operates inside of organizations that you should also not upset the apple cart. So right of your if you're in a meeting and there's a really difficult conversation happening, people try to smooth that over, smooth over the tensions.
Jessica Bonjorni	But as I say about myself, I'm somebody who likes to heat up cold conflict. So I really cannot stand being in a meeting where people are talking around an issue and not actually bringing it up because they're trying to maybe there's a more senior person in the room that they don't want, the more senior person to see that

	they are disagreeing or that they couldn't come to agreement without the boss being there.
Jessica Bonjorni	And obviously you want to try to avoid that. But when you can't, I don't think it's helpful for you to walk away from a meeting where then everybody is dissatisfied with what happened in the meeting, or if you're on an online meeting, everyone's having a conversation on the side in the chat that they're not sharing openly and that I personally often bring up those issues.
Jessica Bonjorni	So I heat up the conflict and I've gotten more and more comfortable with that over the years. Exactly, because I feel that tension in myself when it starts to happen in a meeting. And I think someone has to say something, I guess it's going to be okay to actually raise the issue that needs to be said. And, you know, I will tell you, that has a lot of interesting consequences.
Jessica Bonjorni	I often get feedback from people thanking me for bringing up issues in meetings that they also wanted to say. And then the opposite is true, where there are others who would disagree with that approach and feel like I went over the line. But that for me is an important aspect of leading and advocating in this organization or any and I would say interesting.
Jessica Bonjorni	I also just had a conversation with someone else this week around this topic and discussing this idea, what you asked about earlier about courage.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, yeah.
Jessica Bonjorni	Moral courage. And that if you are operating in a psychologically safe environment, you don't need to have courage. Narcissus Really not in the same way. And I am very grateful to work somewhere where I have a lot of psychological safety. I have that now. I can say it has not always been that way in this organization. I certainly have felt other times that I was having to use a lot more courage to do some of the same things that I do now.
Dr. Shari Dade	Certainly, and it does speak to the responsibility that we all have to create an environment where people can have candor. Sure. And not just expect it. We hear often, you know, I want people to speak up in these meetings. I want people to say what they think in these meetings. But there is a responsibility for us all in those times and in those moments beyond those moments, to be creating a culture where people can feel actually psychologically safe to hold that moral courage that you speak of.
Dr. Shari Dade	And that isn't always what we see reflected, right? We kind of jump straight into the candor without thinking about the space that is really needed to build in order for people to get there.

Jessica Bonjorni	Or when I was framing the last part of my comments that were about what I would do in a meeting, there was another aspect of what I'm trying to create within our organization was human capital management, and that is something that started a few years ago at this point. So to have open forums and organization and so really for us that triggered from after the murder of George Floyd that resulted over the whole United States.
Jessica Bonjorni	Then this organization has a lot of self-reflection to understand what is it that we're doing here and how do we need to be talking about it? And we started having routine forums as a way for our employees to express themselves and talk about things that they felt were important to discuss. And I personally felt it was important to start creating that kind of space to discuss topics that I in the past might have felt really uncomfortable talking about at work like racism and how it affects all of us, how all those things affect us.
Jessica Bonjorni	That comes with being able to bring your whole self to work. And there are certainly viewpoints that you should leave certain things at home and not bring them up in the workplace. But that's really impossible because we can't segment ourselves. It's being one day at work and pretend that we're not thinking about all these other things going on outside.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so when I started holding these forums, I was frankly kind of terrified. And every single time we had one, I would get like butterflies in my stomach. I was very nervous. Yeah, what I was going to say and what kinds of challenging conversations were going to happen. And we had a lot of really challenging conversations, but it was important for people to be able to be heard and to express the absolute pain they were experiencing, not just unique to that moment in time, but over their entire lives.
Jessica Bonjorni	And then for us to be able to talk about it openly as colleagues, to be able to support each other and think about what could we do differently here to make a difference and make it feel at least a little bit more comfortable for people to be able to talk about these topics?
Dr. Shari Dade	Certainly.
Jessica Bonjorni	And I absolutely got negative feedback from people about this, usually anonymously, but not always with the concern that we I think broadly people had the so the people who raised concerns would say these are topics we shouldn't talk about at work. It's inappropriate. Yeah. Yeah, that is a tough thing to navigate because we're all colleagues here and we want to make sure everyone has the ability to feel comfortable at work.

Jessica Bonjorni	But as I often say also, you got to get comfortable being uncomfortable and sometimes you got to create that kind of space and it's okay for people to feel uncomfortable because other people are feeling uncomfortable too. And we don't talk about these issues in a way to balance that.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, and I think that is the courage that I speak of in the importance of that courage in our work spaces. I am glad that you brought that up because I've engaged in some of those open forums. I've been there where I see the the difficulty with bringing up some of these conversations and some of the concerns, especially early on right.
Dr. Shari Dade	And I've been able to witness over the last few years of having and attending those open forums the ability for people to feel psychologically safe, to ask questions, to come in and say, hey, I'm going to ask Miss Bongiorni, our chief. This question that is happening on my work level, you know that. Or I'm going to say like, Hey, this is going on.
Dr. Shari Dade	Can someone help me figure this out? I don't know the answer to this. And so the courage that it takes to do that, I've seen it move in and shift over time where as early on, the courage that was needed, like you spoke of, was was great. People really were like, okay, I'm going to stand out here and I'm going to say this thing and I don't know how I'm going to be received up until now where people feel really safe to be able to come in and they feel confident to be able to come to those meetings and say, like, I know that this open forum is going to happen and I'm going to
Dr. Shari Dade	be heard and I'm going to be listened to. And oftentimes we get these conversations from leaders around confidence in how to create confidence in themselves, but also how to create confidence in their staff. And I think it's interesting that those conversations come up, because I often say in order for there to be confidence, we have to first have some courage, some audacity to take that first step.
Dr. Shari Dade	And this is exactly what you're talking about with that open forum, the courage to create it, the audacity to have those conversations created courage in the workplace. It created the confidence for people to be able to stand and to act certain questions. So I'm glad that you brought I think that's a beautiful example of what it takes to practice courage and candidness.
Jessica Bonjorni	Thank you. And I'm glad that you've been able to attend those, and it's great to hear that you've seen this evolution. I agree with you. I think it has. Certainly the conversations have shifted over time and what people would like to bring up. But because we don't have any set agenda for the conversations. But yeah, absolutely. It seems that people feel comfortable raising all kinds of topics in that forum.
Jessica Bonjorni	So I agree.

Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. And like we just spoke about, there's going to be moments of fear or doubt or uncertainty when we're creating these things or we're being courageous for you. How has your courage and your audacity grown and shifted over time?
Jessica Bonjorni	Hmm, that's an interesting question as well. How is I you know, here's I would think of this example that I often reflect on, I guess in the last year or so is that when I started working here, which is over seven years ago now, I was absolutely terrified of public speaking. I am an introvert and I am always I was the person who would never speak in class.
Jessica Bonjorni	I never raised my hand. Whether I knew the answer, it didn't matter. And the first town hall that I had to do as a leader here was one where back before we had Zoom and teams and all those things, we were still just on conference calls at that point and I was so nervous about what I was going to say to the team and how would I say it and how would I answer any of their questions.
Jessica Bonjorni	And I think I've been able to practice quite a bit in that essentially you get thrown into doing a ton of public speaking in these kinds of roles, and it's great if you can prepare in advance and have talking points, but over time I think it really is practice getting thrown into all kinds of situations where you have to speak off the cuff.
Jessica Bonjorni	And I think of this one I reflect on, I do a lot of congressional testimony and hearings over the last few years. And one of the very first experiences I had when I started here was I went to a prep session for another or Dr. Clancy, one of our colleagues here at the V.A., and she was preparing for a hearing at what they call a murder board.
Jessica Bonjorni	I don't know if everyone knows. It ends with like when you're doing a prep for a hearing, they do like a practice session where they ask you the really tough questions to try to find That's.
Dr. Shari Dade	Terrifying and.
Jessica Bonjorni	Scary and to watch one. I thought, my goodness, this is like my worst nightmare. And I. I watched her navigate that and she's a masterful at it. And I thought, oh, that is a skill set that I will never have. And it is something that I now feel like. I can't say that I'm a master, but I have certainly improved over time by having the opportunity to be put in those really pressured situations and having to respond to challenging questions and then finding out that even if you don't answer correctly, it actually usually turns out to be okay.
Jessica Bonjorni	What what's also not evident probably to people when they watch things like a testimony or see what's happening is that it takes so many people to get ready for that. And I have an amazing team that helps me do all kinds of preparatory work to get there. And it's not it's not just me up there. It's all of them, right?

Jessica Bonjorni	So they are helping me figure out what questions will be asked and what's a trick. And like practicing being mean to me. And I like that. And so it's a it's a you don't get to see that that part is happening if you're not in one of these teams. So I think that gives me a lot of confidence is that I have a great team to work with and I know that they have the best knowledge and expertise to help me get ready to do these things that I can then in turn use to try to help the organization.
Jessica Bonjorni	Right? Because those are that's what the opportunity is, a chance to talk to stakeholders who might be able to help us help the workforce. And therefore I take it very seriously, but want to do use it as a chance to do my best to advocate on behalf of our employees.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. What also stands out again is that responsibility we all have in creating candidness in our workplace, right? Like you said, your team is there to really kind of help create those moments where you can stand before Congress or can stand before other federal agencies and be an advocate for our veterans, for for your for us, for our and the employees within the VHA.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so I think that really does zone in on that importance of we all have a responsibility in creating this space where people can be candid, where leaders can be candid, and and we can to one of the things that really popped out for me is one of the misconceptions that we often have about confidence is that you either have it or you don't, that it's kind of this binary.
Dr. Shari Dade	Either you're a confident leader and you can be candid or you're not and you can't be candid. And once you have confidence that it's there to stay. And so I really appreciate this notion around, there are still moments where there will be some of that fear, that uncertainty that present themselves in those moments for you. Are there things that you tend to do that's helpful for you to have overcome those faces?
Jessica Bonjorni	Well, when I'm gearing up for something like a hearing, I do. I actually listen to a lot of music to psych myself into something. I also one of the pieces of feedback that I have gotten repeatedly over time is that I don't always do a good job of controlling my facial expressions. I buy something that someone says I will.
Jessica Bonjorni	Often you will be able to see on my face that I think what they said was ridiculous. And so that is something that I have personally worked on. And so one of the things I do is I try to prepare and knowing I'm going into a challenging conversation, right? I will plan. I will plan to hold my face steady, which is not something I do on a regular meeting all the time.
Jessica Bonjorni	So that's a thing that I do to try to help me. I also think about all of the here. I guess this is what I tell other people when they're doing some public speaking is that for a

	lot of the topics that we work on in our organization is that in general, you know the most about this topic.
Jessica Bonjorni	If you're reading, ask the questions about it. You are you are the smartest person in the room about the topic you're talking about. And so you take the time to explain to people how things work. And it's okay if you have to go back and ask someone else or get back to them, that's totally fine to do, but feel confident that you are the one who is there to be an expert in the topic.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so people are going to listen to what you say when you come in to give that kind of feedback. But yeah, absolutely takes for me, it's taken years, many years to be able to get to that point, to feel comfortable with that.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. And I think that's a message for people to hear that, you know, I'm very much like you. I am. I'm not the public speaker. Right. I typically shy away. And I also say those shy away. I typically if someone were to ask who wants to do a speech today, I'm not going to be the first one to raise my hands.
Dr. Shari Dade	Right. But when people hear that about me, they're often surprised in spaces because they see me in spaces where I am kind of standing in front of folks and kind of talking and having, you know, these podcasts and things of that nature. And I often say it's not that the fear, the uncertainty doesn't exist, it's just the degree to which it exists has changed over time.
Dr. Shari Dade	So the practice, the feedback that I've gotten, the ability to kind of do something and say, Oh, that didn't go well, let me not do that again, or a lot of the things that you're talking about, it's kind of the spacing of perfecting the craft of being candid, perfecting the craft, of being confident. And so I often let people know that it doesn't exist on that binary either.
Dr. Shari Dade	You are, you aren't. We set ourselves up when we think about it in that way.
Jessica Bonjorni	Yeah, absolutely. Because it also is going to depend on kind of what are you talking about when you're passionate? I was recently with a group who used as a and as an icebreaker. They asked people, what if you had to give a five minute speech about something, what would it be? And this is a group of strangers, right?
Jessica Bonjorni	And so that's a great way to find out what people are passionate about. And so if you just think about it that way, you could everybody could give a five minute speech about something that you really love, right, And you get excited about. And so I think, yeah, for me, this my my work here I am excited about I'm passionate about it.

Jessica Bonjorni	And so I have a lot of reason to want to be able to advocate for it strongly. But it's a it's a very different position now than years ago when I started here. We were given a task that was like, come up with your elevator speech about why these certain things would happen. And I agonized, How do I give an elevator speech about this?
Jessica Bonjorni	My goodness. And now, yeah, you know, the elevator is.
Dr. Shari Dade	You're like, which one do you want? What's the brand today? So, Jessica, what would you encourage leaders to do if they're looking to harness more courage to be more candid? How would you encourage them to show up for confident with confidence? Hmm.
Jessica Bonjorni	I think it absolutely takes practice and you can start by doing it in spaces where you are already comfortable to give it a go with folks who you know are going to support you. One thing that I worked on when I worked elsewhere with my team is to try to help them work on public speaking. And this is when I wasn't really.
Jessica Bonjorni	So I'm certainly not an expert now, but I definitely wasn't meant. And we practiced giving presentations to each other just on our small team about topics that we knew about as just like it's like a test, right? You're in a safe space, you give a presentation, they can kind of goof on you and help you figure out whether your slides are good, work on your talking points.
Jessica Bonjorni	And internally now with my team, I do that as well. I often will say, Hey, let's look at the talking points that we drafted for we we get asked to do them often for other leaders and let's practice like if you had these talking points in front of you and you didn't know anything about this topic, would you be able to speak to it?
Jessica Bonjorni	And sometimes you realize you couldn't. And so that's a good thing to to test out. And it's hard to say to do that because none of us have any free time to be doing this kind of practice. But I think it's a good it's a good test case to give it a go on. The other aspect of competence, I think it really is about how you're reflecting on yourself.
Jessica Bonjorni	I guess I have spent a lot of time working with an executive coach, so try to make sure that I am bringing my best self forward and not letting my not so good tendencies come out when I'm frustrated or stressed and finding ways to do things like set boundaries that will allow me to show up in the best possible way.
Jessica Bonjorni	And that is extremely difficult for me personally to say no to things and to get comfortable with maybe not meeting everyone's expectations, but in an organization like ours it is. You're never going to meet everyone's expectations, right? They're infinite. And so I also know something about myself from taking various assessments that I am somebody who also relies on organizational or positional authority.

Jessica Bonjorni	And so I would say I'm in a position now where, depending on what context or what room I'm in with people based on where I sit, I have a lot of privilege, privilege and responsibility to advocate for things on behalf of other people based on the meetings that I'm invited to and the rooms that I get to be in.
Jessica Bonjorni	And I need to be able to speak up because other people aren't able to be there. I have that privilege based on the position I'm in, based on some of my demographic characteristics that maybe other people don't have, that they might not feel free to speak up on. But part of this is also having a track record which takes time to build up.
Jessica Bonjorni	If you're able to get to a point where you've got enough accomplishments or successes or reputation, then that gives you a little bit more freedom to say things that you might not otherwise feel comfortable saying. So all those factors play into it.
Dr. Shari Dade	Now. I think that's wonderful for leaders to sit with and to not rush this space, right, Because I think it's so often and so easy for us to say, I need to be confident, I need to be able to be candid with my team. We're going to try it next week, you know, and that can often put us in a space where it just isn't realistic and it's a process.
Dr. Shari Dade	And I think in all of those factors that you spoke of, the thing that really shone through the ribbon was intentionality right from the beginning of the episode, all the way throughout is this space of sitting with intentionality to grow as a leader in a way that feels best for you, and that also matches the purpose and the space that you want to go in, the direction you want to lead in.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so from the beginning of figuring out what type of leader do I want to be and then intentionally taking the steps to become that leader, learning from the missteps along the way, I think that is where it can lead into this space of being confident when trying to be a candid leader and what that might look like for for teams, for our organization, for you.
Dr. Shari Dade	Jessica, what have you found to be some of the benefits of leading with candor?
Jessica Bonjorni	I, I think about this in a before I really would define myself as a leader. I would often get people saying things to me after I after I spoke to say, well, thank you for your candor. And they said it in a way that didn't make me feel like they were actually thanking me for my answer. More like you said, too much is what I took away from that.
Jessica Bonjorni	However, I think maybe that has helped me feel more comfortable with it now. I have practiced in many ways the way I deliver the candor to make it easier for people to hear. And so sometimes that's important, right? Because if they're not

	able to separate the content from the delivery and you deliver it in a way that makes people upset, that doesn't always achieve your desired outcome.
Jessica Bonjorni	And so I think it's it's been helpful for me to see some successes of that kind of candor. And that has probably emboldened me more to continue to be candid, because there are absolutely big, big issues that need to be tackled in a large government agency people might not want to tackle because they're too hard. And that's exactly why we should be tackling them.
Jessica Bonjorni	And I think when I think of both for myself and for other leaders who want to work in the government for the long term, is that one of the key things you have to be, in addition to being candid, is just relentless and you can't give up because it will. A bureaucracy is very difficult to navigate and it will it will try to beat you down.
Jessica Bonjorni	Right. It's not a it's not a person. It's a whole system that will try to discourage you from getting to progress because it's so hard to get some things up, which is why you have to be ready to keep trying every single pathway. And that is going to require some candor and some difficult conversations with people in positions of power in order to do it.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. Well, that is a great message to wrap up on the idea around being a relentless leader and the things that it takes to be able to sit in that space, to sit in that pocket. Right. Because it's not the easiest way to move through leadership, but it is a very needed it is a very critical and crucial way to lead.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so as we are wrapping up, I want to play this game of word association. So I am going to say a word of phrase and I want to get your first thoughts on that. Okay?
Jessica Bonjorni	Okay.
Dr. Shari Dade	All right. Here we go. The first one is candid leadership.
Jessica Bonjorni	Absolutely required for any leader.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. Next, relentless.
Jessica Bonjorni	I would say my core competency is my response.
Dr. Shari Dade	Oh, I like that. Oh, we could do it episode on that. And then lastly, Audacity to fail.
Jessica Bonjorni	Mm. That for me is what we all need to be doing and the importance of what you're trying to do with this podcast and are doing successfully is giving people the perspective that people did not get where they are through some linear path that

	all worked out spectacularly. They messed up a lot along the way. I certainly have and I know other leaders have.
Jessica Bonjorni	So thank you for creating the space to let people know that that's how it works.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. That is definitely the goal, right? Many leaders say fail fast and fail forward. And so it's great to have you on today's episode. I appreciate it and love this conversation. And so thank you so much for your time and your willingness. It's greatly appreciated and thank you for your leadership. It's definitely needed.
Jessica Bonjorni	Thank you for having me and thank you for what you're doing here. I think it makes a big difference.
Dr. Shari Dade	So we've come to the end of another great episode of The Audacity to Fail podcast. Thank you for tuning in to learn how missteps can lead to growth and success, Be sure to check out the key lessons in the show notes for a refresher. To request services from the National Center for Organization Development, check out our Web site also linked in the show notes.
Dr. Shari Dade	Remember, if you missed the target 100 times, you have not failed. Instead, you've simply found 100 strategies that did not work, Be well and continue to go forward until next time. Thank you.