

Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 4 Episode 9
Guest:	Dr. Alyshia Smith
Title:	Working Hand in Hand: The Blueprint for a Supportive Work Culture with Dr. Alyshia Smith

Dr. Shari Dade	You are now listening to the Audacity to Fail podcast, a podcast about myth stepping into success. Get ready to dive into conversation and real stories from leaders as they share how failure activates. The growth mindset is an important part of learning and motivation for improvement. I'm your host, Doctor 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	A supportive culture is the cornerstone of a workplace where people can fully engage and contribute. It's central to any thriving team. It takes a delicate balance for both leaders and team members, working together to create a culture where everyone feels supported and empowered. Central to this idea is trust and authenticity, not just as a one way street, but as a dynamic relationship between leaders and their teams.
Dr. Shari Dade	When leaders and team members work together, they can establish a culture that welcomes both the professional and personal self to ensure that success at work doesn't come at the expense of personal fulfillment. For this conversation, I'm excited to be joined by Doctor Alyshia Smith. Doctor Smith is the executive director of the Durham VA Health Care System, and is responsible for setting the strategic and operational direction for the entire health care system.
Dr. Shari Dade	The Durham VA Health Care system has a catchment that spans 27 counties and 12 sites of care, with over 3700 employees providing exceptional health care to over 78,000 unique veterans. This health care system also uniquely serves to achieve the VA's research and training mission, as they have over 1700 trainees and several hundred academic affiliations. Through her role, Doctor Smith engages with employees, veterans, veterans, service organizations, veteran service officers, academicians, and the broader community to accomplish the VA's overall mission.

Dr. Shari Dade	This episode isn't just about leadership from top down, it's about the collaboration of building a workplace where authenticity, trust, and a shared commitment to well-being create something truly special. Get ready to join us as we explore the journey to a supportive work culture. Whether you're leading a team, a part of one, or just curious about what makes a great workplace, stick around.
Dr. Shari Dade	This is the Audacity to Fail podcast season four, episode nine. Working hand in Hand the blueprint for a supportive work culture. Hey there Alyshia, how are you today?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	I am doing well. Shari. How are you?
Dr. Shari Dade	I'm doing pretty good. I am doing pretty good. I am extremely excited to have this conversation with you, just based off of some of the things we talked about that are meaningful to you, that are important, and a pretty significant part of your leadership journey that I think is going to be extremely helpful for our listeners to hear about.
Dr. Shari Dade	So are you ready to jump in?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	I'm ready to jump in. Thanks for having me today.
Dr. Shari Dade	Of course. So I know a lot of what we've talked about is just the importance of having a supportive culture when it comes to being able to have a thriving team from your experience. So what do you think are some of the benefits that leaders and team members working together can do to establish and maintain a supportive culture?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah, I would say a couple of things. First of all, in a system like ours, you don't accomplish anything really by yourself. And so that partnership between leaders and their colleagues who are on the team is really imperative. I would say it starts with really strong and important communication from a leadership perspective. And what I would say is if you're not a leader, it's an important opportunity for you to engage and really lean in sometimes, or I would say often, one might say, well, I'm waiting for my leader.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I think, yes, you have to absolutely lead from the front. But I also would encourage those who maybe are not in a formal leadership position to make sure that you're not a bystander, but that you're engaged and participating in what you believe is a supportive work culture and part of that comes with just communication that the team will hear me say all the time.

Dr. Alyshia Smith	Don't make assumptions. Don't assume that we know. And so make sure that you're you're sharing what works for you and what you think are great ideas for the team. When I talk to people and they have suggestions, I the first question I ask them is, are you willing to help us make that change or make that happen? Or if you were me, what would you do next?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Because it gives me insight. Again, as a leader, you don't get anywhere on your own. And so, you know, you kind of have to try and be sure that you're, you know, that you're traveling on this journey together. And so it does take a team to be successful in all aspects.
Dr. Shari Dade	I love this idea of the collaborative nature of what it takes to be able to build that supportive team, or to build a supportive environment. Can you share a little bit about some of the things that have been really useful for you as you work to create and to build? Like you said, all these partnerships that are a part of such a huge system like a VA Durham.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yes. And so one of the things I've been here at Durham for about two, not quite two and a half years now. And so Durham has a remarkable reputation within VA, which I feel really fortunate to be a part of. And so for me, coming into a well-established team, and I'm talking about the broader 3700 employees, important for me to come in and really assess, observe and learn and then challenge us to continue to excel.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And what does that look like? And it looks a little bit different every year based on how we operationalize the priorities for the health care system. And so building that team and building that, that sense of partnership and collaboration happens in a number of ways. But again, I think what's most important is through communication and people getting to know and trust you.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And it's interesting, trust is such an interesting word because at some point you just have to do it right. I mean, I think, you know, you trust is something that you have to extend to someone else, right? You can say, well, respect is something that someone earns, but trust I have to really extend, I can't another individual can't make me trust them.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so, you know, what I say is at some point you have to just have to give it a try and maybe, you know, start with the thing that you feel most vulnerable about, but you start to test and assess how much you can trust your leaders. And, and some of the things that we do formally, from a culture perspective is we try and celebrate and acknowledge when people bring things forward and one of the things I really have emphasized is, yes, I love that our clinicians bring things forward.

Dr. Alyshia Smith	And also, you know, there are there's a support services, the other people that are kind of behind the scenes, maybe not seen as much, but just as an important. And so I'm really looking for those team members to bring things forward and allowing us to address and celebrate. So we had someone in our engineering team that brought something forward, and we had it on posters across the health care system.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	With his photo, I've had many individuals not necessarily come to me, but but through any reporting mechanism, I've also we've had people that have actually reported externally or raised a concern. And you know, what I want to say to the team is, is most important that we get to the root cause and make sure that we address those challenges, whatever they are.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	So we are very intentional, and I'm very intentional about saying thank you. And that's important for me because as a leader, I'm often very focused on the next improvement and how we are continuing to raise the bar. And so pausing to be really intentional about thanking an individual, a team, a group for bringing something forward that allows us to improve and we get those in a number of ways through formal reporting through rounds.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	But most important is that we establish that trust and that communication.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, I think one of the things that really stood out to me and what you stated was for leaders allowing people to get to know them, allowing for people to start to know who you are and start to know you as a leader that they can trust. And so when you think about your journey, what are some of the things that you've been able to do that has helped with building the trust of folks?
Dr. Shari Dade	How have you been authentic in your space that helped with that?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	I love that question because it really speaks to my maturity or maturation as a leader. And so one of the things that I do often is I try and tell a little story about myself, and I don't do that to make the interaction about me, but because I'm an introvert. Some of the feedback I've gotten over decades right is that I'm a it's a little hard to get to know me.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so while I kind of feel like I'm an open book to people who say maybe not so much, and so I try and share, a little piece of myself that resonates with people. So one of the things that I share often is what connects me to the VA mission and the work that we're doing. So my dad was an Army veteran, and he served in Vietnam, and my dad passed away when I was very young.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	In addition, I went to college on VA benefits, have VA scholarships. And so that

	kind of full circle moment for me is really important. And so I say to the team, if you hear that I have a lot of expectations. That's true, and I do. I expect us to be excellent. Now I don't expect perfection, which as I talk about my maturity, I've moved away from, you know, expecting perfection.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	But I do expect us to be on a quest for excellence. And the question I ask is, would it would this be acceptable if that were my mom or my dad, my brother or my sister? And if the answer is no, then I know that I need to retool. And so I'm just very transparent about that sort of how I'm feeling, what concerns me, what I am thinking about, but also when I'm talking either individually or in larger groups, I try and share a little bit about myself so that people get to see a little bit more of the real me.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	There's some, I think there's some mystique, if you will, about the doors to the director's office. And, so, so, trying to really take away some of that mystery and just help people to know that, yes, we're in this together. And I really and sincerely mean that. And my job is to really advocate and get barriers out of the way and then represent us well in the public spaces.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Just because I get I get to do that on behalf of an exceptional team, for sure.
Dr. Shari Dade	Using storytelling as a tool that allows for people to connect, to get to know you, to get to see a little bit behind the door, right, to see a little bit behind the title. That allows for folks to feel like they can share parts of themselves in a way that is real and authentic. As a fellow self-proclaimed introvert as well, I think sometimes that can be really difficult.
Dr. Shari Dade	That can be really challenging. And so have you ever experienced a situation where being an authentic leader is challenging, and then how did you navigate that?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah, so I have I have two experiences I'll share. One is a few years ago, I was talking and somebody said, you know, I don't really know your story. And so I'd like for you to tell your story in this broader setting. I think people would appreciate hearing your story and a little bit about your path.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And because it's your story, you sort of think it's okay. I mean, I'm maybe not comfortable as an introvert, but it's my story. So I can I can tell it. And, I stand I stood up in front of this group to start to tell my story, and I had as I was just sharing kind of the connection between my dad and how I ended up at VA and, my uncles and, and just the difference that since my dad passed away when I was young, but my own old, my mom's brother has received VA health care, I just the difference that I was able to witness in their lives and in the lives of

Dr. Alyshia Smith	the family. I was so emotional. I couldn't bear. I could barely get through the story. And and I was, you know, I was shocked. I mean, I didn't expect to have that reaction, but it was just a pivotal moment for me because afterwards, so many people came to me. I was embarrassed because I was just, you know, in tears.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	But so many people came to say, thank you so much for sharing your story. And I think what really resonated with people, not so much the tears, but I think that the the heart place that they were coming from, my hope is at least that people could really sense all the sincerity that was in that moment. But more importantly, that's the sincerity that I bring to work every day.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	So I am passionate about what we do and how we interact with one another and how we fulfill our mission. And so I would say that's one time that I was a little bit caught off guard by being my authentic self, but after that, it's sort of I sort of gave myself permission to show a little more of that humanity that, it just it just is it is a reality.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	It is, you know, it's a part of who we are. And it's it's nothing other than that. So it's not a sign of weakness. It's not a, sign that something is missing. And I think people really sensing that there's. I would just describe it as there's this real heart connection with what's happening. I think my ability to sort of less and learn to sort of let that guard down and be more of myself really helped me to connect with people.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	So now if I'm if I'm sharing an experience, talking about a event because sometimes it'll happen, I'm talking about a veteran and I just that interaction and I'll get emotional and I don't shy away from that. You know, I might acknowledge I might kind of say it out loud just to keep myself from absolutely melting. I might say, you know, I feel a little bit emotional.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so I just want to let you all know what's happening. But I have been able to sort of come into my own, which is why I, like, you know, the song and written. And I think that that is so important for leaders and also for the people that we lead and and from a leadership perspective, you know, you don't have to disclose every detail of your life.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I think it's just letting that guard down. So people see again that that heart connection and the humanity that's there behind the person who's trying to get things done every day.
Dr. Shari Dade	I think that's very amazing examples around how to be able to show up as yourself fully, to be able to allow for people to see that. Like we said, beyond the title, behind the title, that there are moments where there can be connection, where there can be similarities, where there's also differences. But to see the connection

	between the two.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so I think that is a really great way for leaders to think about how they can start to build and even maintain the trust of their teams, and how sometimes that can feel difficult and we can kind of bumble around into it and then realize like, oh, wow, this is really helpful. This is something that did allow for folks to see past maybe their own perceptions of who I am and build an environment where they feel more connected.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah. And and I would hope that people also will. What will resonate is they'll see a little bit of themselves. And so, you know, sometimes you think the optics is it looks a certain way. And so maybe if I have this trait or if I've had this experience or, you know, I, I've responded in this way, that that position, that role, that scope of responsibility may never be mine.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I think seeing a little bit of yourself in the person who says, well, yeah, I saw that same emotion that I have about certain things I share, you know, personally in my life, I, I, I say to people, listen, I am the product of a village. A number of people have poured into my life and, and so when you think about that, that village that comes around to raise you that.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah, absolutely. You know, many of the of the things that are so important, we have, a product of public schools, you know, people think, well, did you go to private school? No, I went to public school. And and so I just think for me, particularly as an introvert saying some of that out loud again, normalizes for people who perhaps may have a different perception of what it takes.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	I just think it's just important to know that there are many paths that can lead to an individual aspiration. It doesn't have to be any one particular road. And so perhaps people will see a little bit of themselves in me and be willing to broach the subject or have more of a conversation.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, absolutely. I know you talked a little bit about with that example moment of feeling the unexpected reactions that happened in that moment. But there can also be moments where we are attempting to create something supportive and something authentic. But we missed the mark, right? We we don't always accomplish that thing that we are setting out to do.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so in what ways do you think failure has shaped the way that you approach creating a supportive environment or a supportive workplace within the organization?

Dr. Alyshia Smith	You know, I think one of the things I would say is that my grandmother, you know, lived her life with these little statements that she just would say all the time, but they really shaped the way I saw myself and what I could do. And one of the things that she would say all the time is to just do your best.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And she would say, that's that's what I require. I require that you do your best. And if you've done your best, that's all you can do. And you know, as a young person, it's sort of tongue in cheek and you think, yes, yes, okay. But in life, there are certainly times where it feels like your best isn't good enough.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I remember years ago she's passed away now about driving home from work and talking to her and not really sharing the details, but just saying it was a tough day at work. And, you know, it was really difficult. And, I was very emotional. And she said, you know, Alicia, if you did your best, that's all that anybody can require.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And the real sort of gut check is, did you do your best? Right. And so if if you don't feel like you did your best, then then be upset about that. And then next time do your best. But if you did your best, that's really all that you can do. And in that moment, sort of something emotionally, you know, you sort of have to process it.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	But but something clicked. And I think as things have gone and unfolded since then, I've been blessed to be able to have the perspective that if it didn't happen the way I planned, what can I learn from it? What can I do differently? And then how can I, if I need to? How can I acknowledge, you know, this didn't go as planned and then how do we reset?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I have done that in what I would say are maybe what one might consider a small ways. And so there are things that come across my desk or maybe come to my attention for decision, because even though I'm an introvert, I'm not shy and I'm not short on opinions. And so I may have reacted quickly and said, yeah, I don't think so without hearing the full story.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And it just happened a couple of weeks ago. And then I later on because again, as an introvert, you reflect and think later. And so later on, I thought, you know, I'm wondering if there's something that I missed there. I was so quick to say no. And I sort of had one focus on my mind. Let me just circle back and ask a few more questions.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so what I did was I, I asked the staff who were leading the project, tell me a little bit more about this, because I feel like I'm missing something. And when they explained what they were trying to accomplish, I thought, well, okay, I think what I'm reacting to is the title, not the premise. And so I said to the person, I said, you know, initially I was going to sunset this, but but I appreciate you talking to me and, and really educating me on this.

Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so I'm going to go back and circle back and say, yes, we can move forward. But what I want us to do is change the title, because I don't want your audience to be distracted by the title and maybe miss the intent. And so, you know, that was a small example, but it's it's a reality is I initially was pretty, not as open minded as I would like to have been.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And then I had an opportunity, got some kind of white space, and I thought about it. I ran into the person who was leading the effort, who at that time didn't know I had had this conversation with somebody else, but I just asked her to educate me. She did. And I thought, yeah, I think, I think maybe I missed the mark here.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so rather than just, you know, kind of keeping it inside, I just said, yeah, I changed my mind and, and that's what I say to people is, listen, I think not making a decision is a decision. So let's make a decision. And and what's the worst that can happen? Most of the time the worst that can happen is you have to come back and say, okay, I've learned more.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	I have more information. I'm okay if we pivot or I'd like to pivot. And I feel really blessed because over the years now, I have I have become more comfortable in saying, yeah, I didn't quite get that right. Or maybe now I have more information and I'm willing to revisit if you're willing to revisit and I have found that people are very tolerant.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	You know, I actually think from a leadership perspective, the system is tolerant. You can't be irresponsible with your decisions, obviously. But if you need to pivot or course correct and you're transparent about the course correction, and you can share why, I have found that to be really successful. So that's just an example that I just had just a couple of days ago.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And what I've tried to do is just again, because I would internalize it, I've tried to just say it out loud and let people know and really kind of what I would say model that it's okay to say, yeah, I'm rethinking that. Let's go in a different direction. I'm rethinking it now.
Dr. Shari Dade	That's an amazing example. I know you said I know that's a small example, but that is a huge example of the importance of being able to acknowledge when there is a misstep or when you do need to change course in a way that allows for folks to still feel supported, to be able to come back and say, you know what?
Dr. Shari Dade	This is what I decided based on the information that I have. But now that I have more information, or now that I thought about it more deeply, this is the direction that I think we should go in. And that is a huge part of being able to allow for people to feel like they also can show up authentically and also can come back in

	and to have what I call like an experimental mindset, right?
Dr. Shari Dade	To be able to say like, let me try this out. I'm not really sure, you know, I've thought through it and I'm intentional about where we're going. But if there is this shift, if there is a change like welcome that in right and so there's so much importance in being able to be honest about missteps or when there is a change or a change in course that I think sometimes we miss when we're trying to make sure that everything is exactly perfect and we don't make any failures along the way.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Absolutely, absolutely. And I think it's also important, particularly from this vantage point, is that people sense that you're you're not going to have them sort of out there on their own. Right. And so as a leader, you know, if you're on the team, what I say and I say all the time, I'm going to ask you to make a decision.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	If you need to come back, we'll we'll come back and we'll revisit it. And ultimately we're in this together. So I'm not looking to say who didn't do something right, because that's the person that we blame. But as an organization, we have to be able to take some risks. Again, you can't be irresponsible. So I'm expecting particularly leaders to think through and process and plan.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	But that's really where innovation comes from. And I think if people are going to have creative minds, then they have to have some level of confidence that they can try and, they can ask the question and I will say, listen, even if the answer is no, it's not personal, and you'll learn something from the process that will inform the next thing.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so I try to make sure that even my nose I try to be, you know, gentle and sensitive and understand that there's a person behind that I request. And, you know, and then obviously, if the answer is yes, there's usually a lot of a lot of celebration. But with the yes comes a lot of, expectations as well on approach and process.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I am expecting that the leader has really thought that through and planned. And you know, we can know what the risks are and then we're making informed decisions about those risks.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. Well, Alisha, one of the things that I really appreciate about you as a leader that has even shown up here on the podcast, you've talked so much about your family and just the value and the the lessons that you've been able to carry as a part of you based off of, of them. And it really makes me think about work life integration and how that is a huge part, an essential part of creating a supportive culture because we're human beings and that human beings.

Dr. Shari Dade	Right? And so we bring ourselves to work. We bring those who are with us, our villages, into the space with us as well. Can you talk to me a little bit about how important being able to have that work life integration and have that be a part of how you lead, can build a supportive environment for, teams, for leaders, for your organization?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah, this is really important. And it's important because I've mentioned a couple of times I'm very driven and, focused on really doing well. I think we've got a lot of veterans. I say to people when we look at data, there's a person behind every data point. So I feel that sense of responsibility. And I also know that it is important to make sure that that's in balance and that I in balance, and that I am taking care of myself to take care of myself, but also to role model to the team that that's important.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so, some of the things that I do is I try and be very transparent about when I am taking leave, like I tell everybody, I will announce it in the in the Chiefs meetings and then periodically, I'll remind people that it is important that there's nothing wrong with making sure that you take your time and take your time off.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	The other thing I will say is that, you know, some people are early morning people. Some people are late evening people. So I'm a late evening person. So my brain really starts to click and I get like a lot of ideas mid day and late into the afternoon or evening. I always say if if I wasn't married I'd work like 2 to 10.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And you. And so what I say to my team is I'm not expecting you to do anything after you leave work. If I need you, I will call you. So I don't expect you to be in and out of your email looking for a possible email from me. And I've gotten a little bit better now because I will time my emails to go out during business hour, so I will show them up.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	So it allows me to work. And if I'm working at 8 or 9:00 at night, if I send an email, invariably somebody will answer the email. Even if I say, I don't expect you to answer it. So I cue it up so that they'll go out in the morning or during what are normal business hours. And I really try to make sure I stick to that.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And that is, if I need you, I will call you so that you don't have to anticipate. So and I talk about and challenge leaders to make sure that they are taking their leave. We just had a panel discussion in our mentoring program, and I talked with one of the panelists. We shared a panel together, and I was sharing with her that I was getting ready to go on vacation, and I was feeling a little bit of anxiety because I wasn't taking any of my government furnished equipment.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And she said, you know, I'm going on vacation too, and I feel so much better knowing that you're not taking yourself. And so again, I think in that individual

	interaction, but I try and be as intentional and, and overt about expressing that. The other thing I would say is I say to, to people, you know, don't assume that you can't trust your leader.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	If you need something you have to ask for.
Dr. Shari Dade	It's good.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah. Your leader may not know. I mean, you'd like to think that you have the sensitivity to pick up on those subtle cues, but you may miss them. And I think back to the example. I was relatively new in my leadership career, and I was, you know, had kind of this self-imposed perfectionism. It wasn't really my boss's expectation, but I was just working tremendous hours.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I don't know that I really noticed what was happening until I saw my daughter's grades. And I thought, you know, this is a sign. You know, how you have that parent guilt, maybe that maybe I but I was feeling like I wasn't spending enough time. And I knew and I knew I needed to pay attention, and I just I talked to my boss and I said, listen, I need to get things back in balance.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And she was very she was very supportive. She understood and really challenged me to do that. And and she also was not at all aware of what was happening and so or how I was feeling, I should say. And so had I not talked to her, I didn't really it wouldn't have given her the opportunity to extend the support that I received.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And I say that to say to anybody on the team is, is identify the leader that you can trust and really make sure that you share and convey what you need, and give them an opportunity to sort of join alongside you in supporting you. More likely than not, you're going to find that that leaders are going to be able to identify with where you are and you may find, like she did with me, that there are some real, tangible things that on the work side that she could control that helped me get things better into control.
Dr. Shari Dade	So yeah, that speaks so much to that collaboration. It's not a one way street. It truly is a two way street. When we're thinking about things and actions and behaviors that create and cultivate the supportive environments, one of the things that really stands out to me is there are sometimes leaders who want to do some of these things, but they just want know where to start.
Dr. Shari Dade	They're unsure how to actually give it feet, right? Give it legs and let it walk. What advice would you give to leaders who want to create a culture where their team members can show up authentically, where there can be trust and there can be some support? What would be some first things that you would encourage them to do?

Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah. You know, one of the things I feel really, fortunate about in VA is that we do have some objective tools that give feedback. And, and I use the all employee survey. It's a great barometer for me. And, it helps when I think about what is working well in, in the organization and where we need to really lean in and focus.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Because I am a data driven person, it's easy for me to use that as a tool. And so one of the things that I have really committed to for several seasons now, and that is to really use the all employee survey to help give a sense of what the team needs and where we can support the team.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so I would say, you know, start if there are data sets that are available that can give you an objective picture. I think it as an individual, if you want individual feedback, consider, something like a 360 or some type of tool like that. I know there are other tools. There's the servant leader index and or servant leader assessment tool and things like that.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Now, because that will give you some, some real information. Then if you have a coach. We're really fortunate in VA for the Senior Executive Service. There is an opportunity to really partner with coaches on our own individual development. But I would start with the the data that are available and really pick a couple of things that you think could address what you're seeing, because that speaks to the larger my health care system.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	There's 3700 people. And I would say I would love to have 3700 individual conversations because that's where I'm most comfortable. But that's not practical. And so using those tools to really help, to really help drive the 1 or 2 things that you want to prioritize and then sort of see them through. The other thing I would say is I am pretty transparent with people that I have a coach, because when I talk to leaders and encourage them to consider a coach, I'm able to say, listen, I have a coach.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	It's not a bad thing, it's actually a gift. And do you know how many people in the private sector will want to have a coach?
Dr. Shari Dade	Yes.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And, you know, so I would say using those objective tools, identifying 1 or 2 things that you can focus on as the leader, and then for the people on your team that you can focus on together. Don't try to take on too much. But I would say, you know, if you're asking people, they're telling you one way or another.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so pick a couple of things that you can lean into for a period of time with the

	folks on your team.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. No, those are some really great tangible tips. One of the things that I've really most enjoyed about this conversation is just the theme of self-awareness. To know who you are, where you are, where you stand as a leader, and to then use some of that to check in to see what's needed with the team, with the team needs and what some of those individual spaces might look like, and how you can then kind of shape your leadership based off of that.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so, I really appreciated this conversation, and I think it really gives some tangible things that folks can take and walk out. And like I said, to give it legs and to actually see what it feels like to create these supportive environments and reap the benefits of doing that. Before we go, oh, I would like to play a game of word association where I just throw out a couple of terms and I see where your mind is about some of those terms.
Dr. Shari Dade	So are you ready to give that a shot?
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah. Okay. Let's give it a shot.
Dr. Shari Dade	All right. All right. So the first term is work life integration.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	It's really hard.
Dr. Shari Dade	Oh yeah.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	It's it's really it is. Yeah. And I would say, you know, quite honestly I would set myself up as the best role model. So I challenge myself every day and I do people, you know you can help me so feel free to to check me if you feel like I'm, you know, not helping you because I'm doing too much.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Just let me know. I'm I'm I'm open to it.
Dr. Shari Dade	That is. But it's really hard. I probably have that conversation at least once a week. Like I know that I can do the most. Let me know, you know, give me some.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Slack.
Dr. Shari Dade	So I can really back in. So I get it. I definitely get it. All right. The next term is authentic leadership.

Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yeah, I think for me, authentic leadership is being comfortable in your own skin and expressing that. And that's again, I, I feel like I've had to come into my own. I try to be, you know, emulate leaders that I really admire. And finally I just decided, you know, I just have to be myself. I have to be okay with that.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And, it takes all kinds of leaders to lead in an enterprise like this one. And so I'm just going to be comfortable in my own skin.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely love that. And then last, of course, audacity to fail.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Yes, I would say failure doesn't have to mean the end, and failure isn't necessarily a bad thing. The failure is a quest or an aspiration that doesn't materialize. I would say you always learn something if it's a job or role that you're seeking that doesn't materialize, you always learn something. It takes courage to take risks, but that's how things change.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	And so have the audacity to to lean forward, do your homework and be prepared. And, don't be afraid to pivot. So failure may mean that you just have to pivot.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. Well, Alisha, I am so grateful and thankful for the time that you've given to the pod today. I appreciate the self-awareness that you've brought in. Again, I appreciate the balance, the importance of being authentic, but also the importance of striving for excellence and what that looks like, and so doing those things at the same time. So thank you so much.
Dr. Alyshia Smith	Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure and an honor.
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 website 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 fail. Forward. Until next time. Thank you.