



Episode 157 - Marcia Beckner

EPISODE SUMMARY

In episode 157 of *The Leadership Window Podcast*, Dr. Patrick Jinks of The Leader's Perspective talks with Marcia Beckner, nonprofit CEO mentor and culture strategist at Culture Cares, about building healthy, inclusive, empowering cultures without sacrificing the wellbeing of leaders and staff. Marcia shares how her ovarian cancer diagnosis and the founding of My Lifeline Cancer Foundation shaped her work with mission-driven leaders who are navigating burnout, overwhelm, accountability, and cultural dysfunction. The conversation explores how leaders model culture through boundaries, energy, priorities, and behavior, then introduces Marcia's CARES framework—commitment, appreciation, respect, engagement, and safety—as a practical diagnostic tool for strengthening organizational culture. For nonprofit executives, boards, coaches, consultants, and mission-driven leaders, the episode offers a clear reminder that culture is not abstract; it is the chemistry, habits, systems, and expectations people experience every day.

IN THIS EPISODE

- Marcia Beckner's journey from ovarian cancer patient to founder of My Lifeline Cancer Foundation, and how that experience shaped her work with nonprofit and social impact leaders.
- Why nonprofit leaders often build healthy cultures for everyone else while excluding themselves from the vision of sustainability, balance, and wellbeing.

- The danger of mission-driven altruism becoming self-sacrifice, burnout, constant availability, and diminishing returns.
- How leaders unintentionally set cultural expectations through weekend emails, overwork, urgency, unclear boundaries, and what they choose to model.
- A practical example of a nonprofit leader completing an \$8.5 million capital campaign while maintaining a 40-hour workweek and taking two parental leaves.
- Why saying “no” is a strategic leadership discipline when funding opportunities, board requests, community needs, and internal priorities continue to expand.
- How the CARES framework helps leaders diagnose cultural bottlenecks in safety, engagement, respect, appreciation, and commitment.
- Why psychological safety must be clearly defined—and why it includes maturity, accountability, security, fairness, and the ability to speak honestly without removing responsibility.
- The limits of surveys without action plans, roadmaps, shared accountability, and follow-through.
- How outside coaches, mentors, HR experts, attorneys, or other advisors can help leaders navigate difficult team dynamics, toxic attitudes, disengagement, and personnel decisions.

KEY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

1. Where are we asking staff to practice balance while senior leaders are modeling overwork, urgency, constant availability, or poor boundaries?
2. What are we willing to stop doing so our strategic priorities have the bandwidth, energy, and focus they require?
3. Where is the current bottleneck in our culture: safety, engagement, respect, appreciation, or commitment?

NOTABLE MOMENTS

00:00 — Introduction to *The Leadership Window Podcast* and Dr. Patrick Jinks

01:05 — Patrick opens episode 157 and introduces Marcia Beckner of Culture Cares

04:15 — Marcia defines her mission: helping nonprofit leaders build healthy, inclusive, empowering cultures

05:15 — Marcia shares her ovarian cancer diagnosis and the founding of My Lifeline Cancer Foundation

07:30 — The growth of My Lifeline and its 2018 merger into the Cancer Support Community

10:15 — The danger of altruism turning into self-sacrifice in nonprofit leadership

11:45 — How leaders model culture through email habits, weekend work, availability, and boundaries

16:10 — The example of an \$8.5 million capital campaign completed with sustainable work boundaries

20:00 — Saying no more often as a core strategic leadership practice

28:10 — Marcia defines culture as “chemistry”

30:00 — Introducing the CARES framework as a practical structure for building healthy culture

32:00 — Safety as the foundation: security, fairness, physical safety, and psychological safety

36:30 — Using the CARES pyramid as a diagnostic tool for cultural bottlenecks

39:00 — Why donors and volunteers can sense dysfunction in organizational culture

41:00 — Navigating toxic attitudes, disengagement, and difficult personnel decisions

44:00 — Clarifying what psychological safety is—and what it is not

48:00 — Reframing survey questions from “Are others doing this?” to “Am I doing my best?”

52:00 — The Culture Cares Accelerator and the importance of moving from surveys to action

58:00 — Marcia’s leadership influence and final advice from the top of the CARES pyramid

GUEST

Marcia Beckner, nonprofit CEO mentor and culture strategist, Culture Cares. Marcia works with social impact, nonprofit, and healthcare-sector organizations to help mission-driven leaders build healthy, inclusive cultures without burning out. She founded My Lifeline Cancer Foundation after being diagnosed with ovarian cancer in her twenties; the organization later merged into the Cancer Support Community in 2018.

RESOURCES MENTIONED

- Culture Cares — culturecares.com
- CARES framework: commitment, appreciation, respect, engagement, and safety

- CARES model
- CARES assessment
- Culture Cares Listening Tour
- Culture Cares Accelerator
- CEO ED Mastermind
- culturecares.com/mastermind
- My Lifeline Cancer Foundation
- Cancer Support Community
- Motivators assessment
- Marcia Beckner's book — [Title/link to be added]
- Marcia Beckner's forthcoming book — [Title/link to be added]
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Psychological safety
- Amy Edmondson
- Harvard Business Review
- Dr. Peter Hawkins
- Systemic team coaching
- Marshall Goldsmith
- Disney phrase: "We help you find your magic somewhere else."
- Feedspot ranking of nonprofit leadership podcasts

FINAL LISTENER TAKEAWAY

Sustainable leadership starts when mission-driven leaders stop treating self-sacrifice as strategy and begin modeling the culture, boundaries, accountability, and care they want their organizations to practice.

