



EPISODE SUMMARY

How do leaders unlock engagement and performance in a way that truly honors the people they lead? This episode explores the fascinating intersection of neuroscience, human-centered leadership, and effective communication with guest Sally Mildren. Dr. Patrick Jinks and Sally unpack why understanding the brain's natural filtering mechanisms—its constant search for safety, relevance, and connection—is crucial for leaders who need to capture attention, build trust, and inspire action. The conversation provides a practical framework for balancing empathy with accountability, creating an environment where team members feel seen and valued, and leading with greater awareness in a world saturated with information.

IN THIS EPISODE

- **The Neuroscience of Attention:** Discover how the brain discards 99% of information and why your message has only 2–8 seconds to establish relevance, a crucial insight for both leadership and marketing.
- **The Power of Listening and Relatedness:** Learn how Sally's "square table talks" drove a 36% increase in employee engagement by focusing on relatedness—making people feel seen, heard, and valued as unique individuals, not just job descriptions.
- **The "Red Thread" Concept:** Unpack the idea that ensuring team members spend even 20% of their time on tasks that energize them can dramatically boost engagement, performance, and loyalty.
- **Balancing Empathy and Accountability:** Explore how to avoid "ruinous empathy" by creating a shared definition of success, enabling teams to self-monitor, innovate, and hold one another accountable.
- **Leading Yourself First:** Sally shares a vulnerable story of burnout to highlight the critical lesson that self-care isn't selfish—it's a foundational leadership responsibility required to sustain your mission and your team.

- **The Middle Manager Dilemma:** A discussion on the unique tensions middle managers face and how to shift from a victim mindset to one of innovation by working within constraints.
- **Human-Centric Communication:** Learn why “more is not better; better is better” in both internal communication and external marketing, urging leaders to focus on high-impact, meaningful connection.

KEY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

1. Considering my team is filtering information based on relevance and safety, how can I adjust my communication to better connect with what truly matters to them?
2. What is the “red thread” for each person on my team, and how can I ensure they spend at least 20% of their time on work that energizes them?
3. Where might I be insulating my team from clear accountability in the name of empathy, and how can I instead create a shared definition of success to empower them?

NOTABLE MOMENTS

- **00:00** — Dr. Jinks explains “The Leadership Window” concept and the inspiration behind the book “Leading Real People.”
- **01:18** — How “square table talks” transformed employee engagement and customer experience.
- **06:05** — Sally shares her background in traumatic brain injury rehab and how it shaped her human-centric perspective.
- **09:27** — The neuroscience of attention: Why our brains discard 99% of information.
- **11:51** — A vulnerable story of burnout and the hard lesson that leading yourself is essential for leadership.
- **14:05** — Balancing empathy and accountability; why honesty is kindness and the power of defining shared success.
- **18:55** — The “reticular activating system” (RAS) and how it creates confirmation bias in our perceptions.
- **22:30** — How to practice mutual accountability and truly “have your team’s back.”
- **26:15** — Applying human-centric principles to marketing and nonprofit communications.

GUEST

Sally Mildren is the founder of Common Well Marketing, host of the Leadership Cafe podcast, and author of *Leading Real People*. Her work is centered on human-centered leadership and marketing, drawing from a unique background that includes traumatic brain injury rehabilitation, healthcare communications, and turning around employee engagement in a Fortune 40 company.

RESOURCES MENTIONED

- *Leading Real People: A Guide to Human-Centric Leadership for Today's New and Middle Managers* by Sally Mildren
- Common Well Marketing: commonwellmarketing.com
- Leadership Cafe (online community and podcast)
- *Love and Work* by Marcus Buckingham
- Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, mastery, and relatedness)
- The Leadership Window Podcast, Episode 139 with Amy Daughters
- Kim Scott's concept of "ruinous empathy"
- Adam Grant (referenced daily reading)
- Ray Dalio (referenced reading)

FINAL LISTENER TAKEAWAY

Effective leadership requires understanding that what you focus on shapes your reality; by leading with empathy and clarity, you unlock engagement, innovation, and impact.