EPISODE 65

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world, with Rick Torseth and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast for regular listeners and new people where we have conversations with people who have made some decisions to work in what I call the swamp issues of life and the world. They can come from all sorts of places and sectors. Today is a hybrid combination of those sectors brought together. My guest is Joanne Murphy.

Joanne is a Professor of Inclusive Leadership at Birmingham Business School. But Joanne, that does no justice to who you are in the world. I'm going to give you a chance to explain that in more detail here. Joanne's an academic. She's a consultant. I would call her a prolific writer. She's an author of some books that I will put in the show notes. But she's really made a decision to work in a very difficult place and help people develop their capacity to lead in these really hard and tractable problems. Without further ado, I want to bring Joanne Murphy into the room and give her a chance to say hi. Joanne, welcome.

[0:01:16] JM: Well, hey, Rick. Thank you so much for having me. It's an absolute pleasure to be on your podcast. I've listened to loads and loads of your episodes, and it's a real privilege to be able to take part.

[0:01:25] RT: I'm glad to have you. I will say, I learned in my research that you got a little bit of a hand in your own podcast, too. I did not know that until I came across it, so it's cool. Let's give people some orientation before we get into our conversation. What is it you want them to know about you that you think helps them establish some context and orientation for your work and what we may talk about here in the next period of time?

[0:01:46] JM: I think that's a really great question. I suppose, whenever I think about me and I think about my development and the trajectory of myself and my work, I think those things are really intertwined. I'm someone who grew up in Northern Ireland, and for anyone that knows anything about Northern Ireland, probably what you know is that we are an environment which has suffered very significant intergroup conflict over a long period of time. When I grew up here, we were right in the midst of that conflict. I was born in probably the worst year of that violence. I suppose, for my formative years, my understanding of the world, it was very much through the lens of that conflict, what is often called internationally the Northern Ireland Troubles. For those, I suppose, that don't know, that was a 30-year period of time when there was a great deal of armed conflict and violence on the streets of Northern Ireland. That's obviously a very complex, very difficult, very complicated conflict to explain.

Certainly, as a child and as a young person growing up in the midst of that, that was very formative for me, and it made me very interested in leadership, because leadership is so significant in relation to those very contested, conflicted environments. But it also made me interested in conflict itself. Actually, ironically, my primary degree was in political science, but my interest at that point wasn't so much in the conflict in Northern Ireland, it was in conflicts around the world. I was particularly interested in what was happening in the Middle East, which is obviously a huge area of concern and focus at the minute.

I spent some time in Israel and the West Bank and in Gaza doing work in conflict-related projects. Then I came back to Northern Ireland, and I worked in an area which is known as the community relations sector. The community relations sector was really an organization within that sector that was looking at building – peace building initiatives within communities and groups and organizations in Northern Ireland, but of course, at that point, I was still really a political scientist in terms of my perspective on the world. It was only really whenever I was in that organizational environment that I realized that management and leadership, as we talk about it in terms of leadership development was actually a thing. That was wonderful for me, because it opened up a whole world of not just academic concern and academic thought and scholarship, but it also opened up for me what I think is a whole area of new practice.

Then I went and I'd done some work at that point within placing and security already, and I did PhD in placing and security in business school in Trinity College Dublin, supervised by the

wonderful John Murray. I have to give him a bit of a name check, because he was such a fantastic, wonderful scholar and advisor, and he's no longer with us.

Then I began to really see what I could do as an academic, but I've always been drawn, as you've said, to what are quite difficult and sometimes quite contested and conflicted environments and wicked problems. I suppose my work, now I – and my work to date has really reflected that background and that experience of growing up in a very volatile, very unsafe, very conflicted world.

[0:05:07] RT: Right. That whole piece that you're describing, we're going to get into in just a second here, but I want to ask you to amplify what you call inclusive leadership, because I think that may mean something to other people and let's make sure we're all on the same page here. When you speak about inclusive leadership, what are you talking about?

[0:05:24] JM: I think that is a fantastic question, because I think this is one of the things about inclusive leadership. I don't really think that there is a properly agreed definition of what we actually understand inclusive leadership to be. All I can do is give you my definition and give you the perspective that I have on it, and I'm very privileged to have a chair in inclusive leadership in the University of Birmingham, which is wonderful. Going through that process has allowed me to think about what it actually means and forced me to think about it in some detail.

Whenever I talk about inclusive leadership, I'm talking about a type of leadership, which builds on a hinterland of work around equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. But one of the things that I think is very important to understand about inclusive leadership is I think it's got three components. Now very often when we talk about inclusive leadership, we are talking about that hinterland of work around equality. But I think it's a lot more than that. I think it draws on work that we will be familiar of within leadership more generally, so it draws on these big bodies of leadership theory and thought around things like, authenticity, around things like, ethical leadership, around adaptive leadership, those approaches that we know well.

For me, that's the second component that builds on the idea of equality and diversity and inclusion. The idea that we already have some of the building blocks for inclusive leadership within leadership theory and practice at the minute. I think there's a third component, which I

think is probably the most important thing and this is where things get forgotten. From my perspective, I think there is an enormous component of challenge within inclusive leadership, because the types of approaches, the types of norms, the types of things that we accept as a good thing in relation to equality and diversity and inclusion and belonging, for me, are always under threat.

Those things are not necessarily norms everywhere we look. In order to be genuinely inclusive leaders and in order to think about and write about and practice inclusive leadership, we have to be absolutely aware of the challenge that is inherent in that, because this is not something which ends anytime, it's something which constantly has to be enacted and re-enacted, giving the challenges and the difficulties it faces. For me, inclusive leadership is a concept with those three components; the equality perspective, the leadership perspective, but then really, really importantly, the challenge perspective, which forces us to really think very carefully about our own positions and about the positions of our organizations.

[0:08:06] RT: Okay. So, almost immediately, you take me off script a little bit here, which is fantastic. Would you talk more about what you mean by the challenge and the threat? Give us some substance to it, or some orientation to it, because right now, it seems like a concept for people they might struggle with. What are you speaking to when you talk about that?

[0:08:25] JM: Well, I think everything is contextual, isn't it? It really depends where you are, what that threat really consists of. I'm situated in the UK at the minute. When everything's like, the equality legislation that we depend on originally came into force, that equality legislation was really quite strong and it had quite a significant institutional hinterland behind it to ensure it was enforced. But over the past 15 years, that institutional hinterland has been gradually eroded. Other things have happened within the wider political environment, particularly around refugees and asylum seekers. We've heard various governments talk about hostile environments for immigrants. That's how they would phrase it.

That has created an environment which I think really causes us to think about what we mean by inclusivity and it causes us to understand that none of the norms and the possessions that we have as inclusive leadership can be taken for granted. Now, again, I mean, if you were in a different environment, maybe if you were in the United States, for example, you were thinking

about these processes, you might be thinking about something like Roe vs. Wade, you may be thinking about things like Black Lives Matter. You might be thinking about things like Defund the Police.

I think that there is a much greater need for us to think of inclusive leadership as something which really has to be fought for and has to be continually protected and continually managed and continually looked after. Because if we don't, we understand that environments become very rapidly less inclusive, very rapidly less focused on providing environments of belonging than they might have been previously.

[0:10:05] RT: Wow. I want to stay with this for a moment, because you mentioned Roe vs. Wade. As you're saying this, I was realizing that it's been challenged and successfully challenged in certain states in the United States of recent period. But that didn't happen overnight. What I'm mindful of based on what you're saying here is that we, the keepers of this condition have drifted potentially, or become assumed that it would always be permanently in place, so we didn't have to tend to that. We needed to tend to future issues.

The next thing you know, somewhere things have slid and somebody's got the upper hand and something changes, and is a reversal to that status. Is that a fair fiction of, for example, that topic that reflects what you're talking about here?

[0:10:49] JM: Yeah. I mean, I think, I know previously in your podcast, you talk about things, like wicked problems and we might well come on to wicked problems as the conversations develop. But I think inclusivity is a wicked problem, in the sense that it constantly has to be managed. We can never fix it. It is never over. There is never a point at which we can be satisfied, or happy with where we have got to. We constantly have to be looking for threats. We have to be looking for words in which inclusivity is undermined.

I think Roe vs. Wade is fascinating. As an undergraduate student, Roe vs. Wade was one of the huge, big pieces of legislation that everybody looks at, and I'm sure, certainly not on my own in that sense. Very many of us will remember where we were when Roe vs. Wade was overturned. I was standing in the archaeological museum in Naples, and I saw it flashed up on my phone and I remember just the horror of it. Those are huge totemic processes that we're aware of. But

there's lots of little processes that happen within organizations as well that maybe people feel that they're not appreciated, they're not accepted.

When we think about inclusivity, very often, I think this is another very important point that is missed. We think about it in relation to things like gender, and we think about it in terms disability and we think about it in terms, of course, of race, and all of those are the categories that are very often enacted within legislation. But one of the key issues around inclusivity is very often, social class and people's availability in terms of both information and being able to realize what they want to realize as human beings and access and issues around privilege are incredibly significant within that.

For me, inclusivity and inclusive leadership is wrapped up in all of those things, all of those very difficult, wicked issues that we struggle so much to deal with as individuals and organizations and societies. But inherent within that is that degree of challenge and the need to fight for these processes and to fight for an inclusive world, or certainly a more inclusive world than we have at the minute.

[0:12:57] RT: Okay. I think you're right. I think we'll probably come back to this. But let's get a couple other things into the conversation here. When you and I first met, and I can't remember now. It's been a few months back. More than a few months back. You told me about a book you'd written called *Management and War,* which all by itself is a pretty provocative title. *How Organisations Navigate Conflict and Build Peace*. Then you connected me to the book itself and I started reading them.

In there, you're talking about what you term, extreme environments. I would like for you to speak a little bit about what you're talking about there in terms of extreme environments, because it's a phrase that means something in a specific form, and also critical for understanding if you're going to be in this world leading. When you say extreme environments, what are you speaking to?

[0:13:42] JM: I think this whole body of literature that we're beginning to see emerging in terms of extreme environments, or sometimes as they're called extreme context is incredibly interesting. Whenever we talk about extreme contexts, what we're talking about are

environments which are either in a situation of difficulty, or proximate to a situation of difficulty, or affected by something which is happening around them. Now, if you go into the academic literature, you'll see very specific definitions.

I sometimes think as to the lesser understanding of what we're talking about, usually, the difficulty that we're talking about is around violence, or is around danger, or is around a degree of abnormality, which is well outside what may be regarded as a normal environment in terms of people's everyday professional practice, or the way they're able to live their lives.

Now for me, very often, or almost always, extreme environments are interpreted as environments of violence, or whether there is an imminent threat of violence. Sometimes that sounds quite dramatic. But actually, if you're a police officer, that's your life, actually, really. Police officers are operating in extreme environments. If you're a doctor in an accident emergency unit and you're doing a Friday night shift and you've got a lot of people coming in that are maybe a little bit intoxicated, or a little bit angry, or a little bit of both, you're in an extreme environment as well. If you're in a nuclear power station and an accident, even a small accident is going to cause massive, massive difficulties for yourselves, but everybody else around you. You're in an extreme environment.

My interpretation of extreme environments sits within that general idea. Most of the work that I've done in this area has been in environments of conflict and usually, in environments of ethno-political conflict. Some of that has been around police and emergency services. But a lot of it, I think what I tried to do in the book was to talk about environments that actually aren't security orientated, that are in extreme environments, but that aren't really related to the place and army operations that we tend to think about.

[0:15:50] RT: What's an example of that environment, without the context that you just had at the end? Give people some sense of that.

[0:15:56] JM: There's just so many examples. One of the things I looked out in the book were people who were operating as administrators in Sarajevo during the Bosnian wars, particularly during the siege Sarajevo. One of the things that – I mean, I work in university. Universities are

pretty sedate places most of the time. I think, people within universities think they're operating in an extreme environment, without actually realizing what they're at.

One of the things that was just absolutely fascinating for me and I will never forget is interviewing a senior administrator in the University of Sarajevo, and her telling me about even during the siege when they were being shelled, students were coming to class and they were allowing them to come to class. The only bit of the university that was safe from shelling. Not only were they coming to class, but if students needed to graduate, they were enabling them to graduate. What I thought was extraordinary is that the administrator said to me, and I can absolutely guarantee you that all of those marks were correct. They were absolutely ensuring that their administrator processes, their management processes, their processes of honoring student achievement and work that those processes still were intact, even during the absolute worst environment you can possibly imagine as an administrator in a university like that.

Or, for example, I spoke to an incredible guy who had managed a pharmacy in a rural town, owned and managed a pharmacy, was a pharmacist himself in a rural town in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles, at the height of the conflict. He told stories about at one point, he was kidnapped by a local paramilitary group, and who were demanding money. He was going out of the house, going out of the pharmacy in the evening. His wife would pick him up at the end of the day. He walked towards the car. He could see his wife was looking very frightened in the car. He opened the door to the car and he realized that there was someone sitting with a gun in the back seat of the car.

He got into the car. He said to the man, "Okay. Well, it's me that you want." He got his wife out of the car. He got into the to the driver's seat, and the man said to him, "We need money. You need to get us money." He said, "Okay. I'll get you money. I'll drive you to where I'm going to get you money." Instead of driving to a bank to get money, he drove to the house of the most senior paramilitary he knew in that time. He got out of the car and he went to the door and he knocked the door and he said, "What do you think you're doing? What is this about?" The guy came out and they sorted it out and he went home.

Now, you just think the level of just absolute courage that that takes. I mean, that is an extraordinary thing to be able to do. People are operating. That is a guy who is running a

pharmacy. He's not a policeman. He's not somebody who's connected with security services in any way, but he is managing in the most frightening, difficult, dangerous environments that you can imagine in order to deliver a service to his clients and his customers. We think about these environments as being – we think about danger very often being something, which is either random. Do you get blown up in the street with a bomb? Or you're in the security services and therefore, you're exposed, because of your membership to the security services.

But one of the things actually, that we know about conflict environments in particular is that organizations have to manage conflicts. It's actually organizations that are managing service delivery that are managing education, that are managing health through conflicts. Yet, the experience of those organizational actors managing and leading in those environments is rarely paired in the attention to. My argument would be that not only is conflict operating at that level, but peace building is also operating at that level. Very often, when we think about peace building, we're very happy to talk about political actors in peace building and we're very happy to talk about community groups, sometimes paramilitary groups, all of those groups in terms of peace building, but we forget that peace building is actually enacted at an organizational level. My interest really is leading and managing in those environments and what organizations tell us about making those environments better.

[0:20:21] RT: Okay. I learned a phrase from you in the book. I think this is what you're talking about, organizational scaffolding. Would you explain, because I don't think a lot of people, probably who listen, would know what that means, much less understand the value that creates from that. What is that organizational scaffolding?

[0:20:38] JM: For me, what organizational scaffolding is is it provides a way, a structure in which peace can be built, that makes it much more reliable and simply relying on political actors, or community actors. That what organizations do is they provide networks, they provide structure, they provide processes, they provide operations, and they very often provide confidence that peace building is happening. Whenever sometimes you can't actually see it as at a political level.

One of the big arguments that I would make is that if we look at something like security sector reform. When people talk about security sector reform, we'll hear this in the Middle East in G

Corps, no doubt. The significance of security sector reform and the need for police services and military services within contested environments to be changed, to be altered. But when we think about those processes, we're always thinking about them in terms of the political dimensions. We very rarely think about what is actually happening within the organizations themselves in order to enact that change.

Now, when I looked at policing in Northern Ireland around these processes, I didn't, perhaps – I mean, at that point, I wasn't aware of the stuff we would talk about now in terms of adaptive leadership, the things we would talk about in terms of technical problems and adaptive problems. What I was looking at were people who were really desperately trying to do the organizational work to move what was a really, really difficult process to change forward. To say, what is it that we can actually do here? Where can we make people feel a bit better on a change, which is hugely painfully symbolic in terms of these people's background and history and understanding of where they sit within this wider conflict?

These big organizational processes for me, provide the organizational scaffolding for peace. They can also provide the organizational scaffolding for war, of course. That's the irony of this. They can do both, and we've seen in very many environments where organizations crop up and continually reproduce environments that create conflict, as well as peace.

[0:22:53] RT: Yeah. I can't miss on this. In the week that you and I are recording this podcast, people in Europe are going to go to the polls for the next three days and vote on the new European Parliament. There's a lot of people who seem to think that it will take a drift towards the extremists on the right side of the agenda. My country, we got a guy running for president who's been convicted, and has a decent chance of becoming president.

As somebody who lives in this world and is accustomed to observing extremist conditions, what do you make of the current state of it that's occurring right now, thank God, at a level that's not violent, but yet, has a verbiage attached to it that certainly leans in a lot of times in that direction. What sense do you make of this and what's going on? From your perspective, what thoughts do you have about how this should be addressed by people who don't know what to do to be a counterweight to it? It's a big question, but I'm interested in your thoughts here.

[0:23:53] JM: Well, I mean, I think the first thing I would say, is that, I mean, this doesn't mean to sound alarmist, but societies fall into chaos and conflict very easily. It happens. We have lived through the longest period of peace in Europe forever, forever. The reason we've done that is because of the European Union, I think, largely. People within the EU are going through that period of elections. The EU have been as peace builders, like John Hume would have said, the greatest peace building mechanism that has ever been created.

Outside those structures, countries fall into chaos in a way which is much more simple than we may be expect. I grew up in Northern Ireland. Nobody, I think, in the late 1960s in Northern Ireland expected to have 30 years of violence ahead of them. Nobody in Bosnia Herzegovina expected that to happen, the former Yugoslavia. When we think about these environments, this is very, very dangerous territory we're playing in at the minute.

I think, sometimes people think that rhetoric – there's a big saying in Northern Ireland, as soon as you take people out on the streets, you've lost control. You can control them to get them on the streets, but when they're on the streets, it's all over. You've lost control. I look at the rise of the far right in various countries in Europe. I look at what's happening in America at times with absolute horror, because people are playing with fire. Stability, democracy, these things are not a given. They are things, again, which need to be protected against challenge. You'll be aware that there's been some really excellent scholarship recently done, particularly in terms of the situation in America.

I mean, my colleague Dennis Tourish has written a fantastic paper. For anyone has seen it, called *Is it Time to Use the F Word About Trump?* The F word being fascist, published in Journal of Leadership, if anybody wants to quickly – I think it might be open access. But really, interesting, excellent paper that asks some very important, very probing questions that should be asked.

On the one hand, I think that's the first thing I would say, that we're much closer to the edge in very many environments than we believe, that things tip very quickly without us expecting them. Then the second thing is what can we do about that? I mean, that is the really, really difficult question. I think the most important thing we can do is to again, stand up and be counted. Stand up and be really vocal about the concerns that we have. I think that there is a need for

mechanisms that we have allied to gain traction within society. I think social media is probably the most obvious one to be curtailed and curtailed very quickly, because they have – I mean, I'm not an expert in social media by any means, but anyone who is on social media and spends any time on it knows that you get into an echo chamber of your own thoughts very, very quickly, because it's uncomfortable being exposed to the thoughts of other people who you don't necessarily agree with.

Unless, you are very instrumental in keeping yourself open to those other voices, it's very easy to end up in an echo chamber. That in itself is a radicalizing form of engagement. All those things are incredibly dangerous. This is the one interesting point about all this set of elections, and there's an election in the UK at the minute as well, so we have European elections, American elections, Indian elections, and UK elections and probably others as well, I'm sure I'm missing out, other democratic processes. But these are the first big set of elections that have been exposed to artificial intelligence as well, and that is going to no doubt, it will have an impact on these elections, and I'm sure it will have an impact on elections down the line in terms of misinformation.

I mean, one of the things when I'm teaching students, particularly when I'm talking to MBA students, one of the first things I do with them and all my former students will remember this, because they always look at me as scants when I do it, it's to say to them, "What are you reading?" I don't mean Harvard Business Review. I mean, books, novels. What are you actually reading? Because novels, particularly great novels tell us things. You look at something, like George Orwell's 1984, and you look at the world as it is at the minute and fake news and you think, "Well, nothing new under the sky." Someone understood this long before we did.

We have to begin to think outside our own traditional notions of what is possible. We have to be aware of the enormous dangers that a lack of compassion, a lack of understanding other people's perspectives, a lack of perhaps, being able to understand the significance of the rule of law and what that does, and very many of us have huge concerns at the minute about that locally, about that nationally, and also, about that internationally. Because things like the international criminal court are there for a reason. Things like the American Supreme Court are there for a reason. These institutions have been built over time not out of nothing, because we needed them and we still need them.

[0:29:24] RT: You and I talked about this. I think you know this. Part of the reason I started this podcast was the idea that there are people who are trying to build their capacity to lead, and if they listen to a conversation like you and I are having, they may pick up a few things along the way that they could implement, or put into a practice. I also am influenced in my own practice around the work of Heifetz at Harvard adaptive leadership, particularly in the area of leading being a choice and an activity, and then it can come from anywhere. I suspect you probably don't disagree with that.

If we're sitting here and people are listening, what coaching, council advice do you have for these people about the specifics that they could do to develop some capacity to use more agency to be more active in addressing this drift that we're in in order to safeguard some of the things that we hold sacred? I mean, you teach people this. What ideas do you have about what they might be able to do to actually get more effective in their work?

[0:30:17] JM: I think that's a really great question. I think, very many of us are interested in leadership for exactly that reason. We're trying to achieve things. We're trying to get people to do things. We're trying to create change, and trying to work out what allows you to do that is just a brilliant question. For me, I've been thinking about this a lot recently and I've been thinking about this a lot in terms of wicked problems and trying to address some of these really intractable challenges that face us at organizational and societal levels.

I think for me, there's a number of different approaches and they're obviously big, intellectual and scholarly interlines around these approaches. Very many of them come back to exactly the work that you've mentioned in terms of Heifetz and adaptive leadership. But one of the things I always say to people whenever I'm having these conversations is really, take framing and reframing seriously. Think about how you frame the world. Think about your default approach to the world. Because your default approach to the world is not everybody else's default approach to the world. Bowman and Dale have done lots of really interesting work around framing and reframing.

It's very important for leaders to understand their perspective. Do they tend to see themselves as part of a hierarchy? Do they see themselves as part of a human resource family? Do they

see themselves as a symbolic transformational leader? How do they see themselves? Then, how do they see other people as well and how do they see the organization? Where is their ability to switch their perspective? Because you have to be able to see problems in more than one way, if you're going to unlock those problems. For me, one of the big significant things that we know about leadership is that being able to reframe a problem in a different way very often, is the unlocking mechanism that allows you to get to the absolute core of that problem. Framing and reframing is one of the key things I talk about.

Very often, people talk about communication and leadership and we not understand the communication is really important. I mentioned books and novels. I always say to people and again, I think it must be very unpopular with people, but I always say, how well do you write? How well do you write? Because actually, still, a lot of leadership is done by writing. There's a fantastic guy called Professor Richard English in Queen's University in Belfast, who's a professor of terrorism. Richard does this thing on leadership as well and he talked about – I always remembered it. I always thought it was a fantastic way to think about the world. If you do not write well, if you do not write cleanly, if you do not try to take out stuff that you don't need, so you're getting your message across in the most succinct way you can, then you're not going to be able to lead.

Because still, a lot of those messages are happening by email now, rather than on paper. But that's still how people are being communicated with. If you're not great at that, get better. There's plenty of resources out there that allow you to be able to write better. Read good people. You learn to write by reading. Again, a lot of it comes back to that. One of the things as well, and this really fits into the whole the whole adaptive leadership processes that we talk about is the ability to practice disruption in a way that you can manage and the people around you can manage, and to be able to hold the tension in that.

Because I think, we all like to be sure about stuff, don't we? We all like to be certain. It's actually so much harder to not know the answer, to put yourself in an incredibly difficult situation. Maybe where you're getting attacked on all sides and still be able to hold that tension, because you really believe that there is a possibility of change. I say that, because I'm doing a piece of work at the minute on a leader, Irish political leader called John Hume, who many people will know,

he won the Nobel Peace Prize. This is the problem with academics. You're doing something, you get slightly obsessed and you have to talk about it all the time.

One of the things that he did which was really, really unusual and massively unpopular was that he was a leader. A leader of non-violence, someone who had protected non-violence as a political strategy all through his life, but had gone into talks with men of violence, and was absolutely castigated for it, put under relentless political pressure, threatened attempts were made in his life. His own political party pretty much, I don't want to say, didn't support him, but certainly, had very significant reservations publicly and privately in terms of what he was doing. Yet, he continued to do it.

He understood that there was a chance and he was prepared to take the chance. Being able to engage in that level of disruption and hold that tension, I think for me is one of the most significant things about leadership. Living in that ambiguity, even though it is incredibly hard to do and having the courage to do that. Because leadership fundamentally, we always come back to this and I think it's key and it's particularly key at the minute. Having courage from a personal perspective, I look at some of the stuff that happens in political environments and you see people who make mistakes, but having the courage to say, well, I got that wrong. I got that wrong. I wasn't right on that. Taking the consequences of that is rare and yet, it is so extraordinarily valuable.

Standing up and saying, "I don't agree." When I think about leadership, I wouldn't have been a huge fan. It has to be said. You can see behind me, Mamas for Obama. Our little bumper sticker that's still there. I wouldn't have been a huge fan of John McCain in terms of his political perspectives. But, oh, my gosh. What courage, what courage to stand up against what he didn't believe in at so many points in his life? Huge courage. For me, all these things come back in the end to having that courage, the bravery to act, even whenever you're terrified and everybody's against you, and I think that's the most significant thing.

[0:36:43] RT: Let's keep this going, because I know that your current project is on John Hume. I think a lot of listeners may not know exactly who he is, much less how significant he is to the history of Ireland. You introduced me to the phrase, duty of hope, a few weeks ago when we were talking about this. Can we get into this a little bit, because you're in the middle of

something that's important, but a lot of people may not know. First of all, go ahead and take the time it takes to try and explain who John Hume is and why he's significant, and not just in Ireland, but really significant around the world.

[0:37:17] JM: Well, actually, ironically, the thing about this was this project wasn't even on John Hume, to start off with. That's the thing. That's what's so extraordinary about this. The wider project is a piece of work on a group of diplomats who were all Irish diplomats, who were members of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and were very often part, or were moving in and out of a unit within that wider government department. The unit was called the Anglo-Irish Division.

I spent a long period of time interviewing people, some of whom are still within the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, who are still serving diplomats. But very many who have retired, some who have retired for very, very long periods of time. One of the things, and when I set out to do the project, my interest really within that division. I'm someone who works on organizations really. So, I was looking at this organizational unit as an incredibly effective unit within the Irish piece process, something that had been hugely successful, but hadn't in my view really been studied appropriately, and as much as it should be.

One of the things that occurred in those interviews was that one political figure was absolutely dominant in terms of those interviews, and there was no getting away from it. That political figure was this extraordinary person called John Hume. John Hume was a leader of a political party in Northern Ireland called the Social Democratic and Labour Party. He was a political figure who had come to prominence in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, which was modeled on the civil rights movement in the United States. He was someone whose political hero was Martin Luther King, and he was someone who, through his entire life, had worked for and argued for non-violent responses to conflict.

He is from an area of Northern Ireland called Derry. Now, Derry used to be this city that not many people really knew very much about. But, of course, for anyone who has Netflix now, you may well have seen Derry Girls. John Hume features in the first episode of Derry Girls. There's a little snippet of John Hume. I think Lisa McGee, who's the author, the writer behind Derry Girls would say herself that she's a big Hume fan.

John Hume, for me, is just an incredibly interesting leadership figure. We try not to talk about individuals in terms of leadership. We understand that leadership is fundamentally a collective process that we enact together. But what Hume, I think, was able to do was he was able to engage other people in this collective process of peace building over a hugely long period of time, and in a way that was fundamentally, incredibly successful. Whenever I was doing this project with these diplomats, I kept coming back to Hume and thinking, what was it that Hume did? What was he able to do which made him so significant in the eyes of these people I was talking to, and also so significant in terms of the story of the peace process as a whole?

What I in the end have concluded and there's a piece of work on this which is under review at the minute, but what I have concluded, I suppose, is that the absolute essence of Hume was actually his liminality. Was the fact that he sat betwixt in between different ideas all the time. Hume is known, internationally known as a leader of nationalism. He was a leader of nationalism in Northern Ireland during the conflict. Actually, ironically, the more you read about him, the more you read his own material, the more you look at interviews, he wasn't a nationalist. He was a leader of nationalism, but not actually a nationalist. His most famous saying was, "You can't eat a flag." That was his grandfather saying it. You can't eat a flag.

He was a leader of nationalism, but he wasn't a nationalist. He was someone who had absolutely championed non-violence. But as we talked about earlier, resolutely engaged with people of violence, even though he was absolutely slated and attacked at every level in every way possible, with a level of viciousness, which when you look back on it now, it's quite extraordinary. He still did it. Some of the work that he did was instrumental in achieving the IRA ceasefire, which then, of course, unlocked so many other aspects of the peace process. He was someone who believed in economic development and economic engagement.

Whenever almost the entire of Irish America stood beside a thing called the McBride Principles, which were set around equality in Northern Ireland, Hume stood against the McBride Principles, because he was scared it would impact inward investment. He was an absolute contradiction in terms of so many of the possessions that he adopted. Please-based leader as we would say, but actually, the person who had the greatest possible access to the White House. Someone

who was elected to the British Parliament, but he spent most of his time with the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.

A fascinating character. I think that there are lessons in Hume's story, for people who are trying to lead through these incredibly intractable, difficult problems, sometimes conflict, sometimes other problems, because we really desperately need to find examples in which these wicked problems that face us, whether they're climate change, whether they're issues around things like obesity in the West, whether they're conflict, whatever they are that where we can see leadership practices and behaviors, which allow us to move these problems on a little bit. I think Hume is a very rare example, actually, of someone successfully doing that.

[0:43:01] RT: Okay, so you used a word back there that I want you to expand on, because I think it's a linchpin in what you just said. When you say, liminality, what are you talking about? What does that mean for people who may not heard that word before?

[0:43:13] JM: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm always talking about liminality these days. I mean, even my kids. It's like a secret code word, liminality. Liminality is this really foundational principle in anthropology. Liminal processes are processes that change you, okay. If you think about a marriage ceremony, okay. Before the marriage ceremony, you're unmarried. After the marriage ceremony, you're married. But what happens in between when you're getting – when you're actually going through the ceremony? It changes you. That's the liminal period. That's the liminal pause.

Liminality is all about these threshold experiences, where you move through the liminal process and you come out changed and different. Liminality is it's incredibly important in anthropology and it relates to very many of our human experiences. We think about becoming an adult, the ceremonial processes that we very often put children through, that tell them that they're adults at the end of it, the ceremonial processes that we use to bind ourselves to other people, or that we engage. But liminality is becoming really important in relation to lots of things. For example, so if I'm working with leaders and I said to them, everyone appears to be very stressed at the minute. Do you feel that you're constantly endlessly connected with work, for example?

Very often, people say, "Yes, of course. Got my smartphone. I'm never not at work." You say, "I'm busy. It wasn't always like that." It used to be the people left their house, got into some transport device, whether it was a bus, or a train, or a car, got to work, then they were in work. That transition, that transition from home to work gave them a little bit of space. Then they did the same thing reverse. They left work and they transitioned home again. We don't do that anymore. This transitional process is missing, but those transitions are incredibly important for us as human beings. We have to find ways to build those transitions into our understandings. Liminality now is becoming something that people are thinking about much, much more in terms of how we live as human beings.

[0:45:24] RT: Right.

[0:45:25] JM: It pops up in all sorts of different ways, I think, is what I'm trying to say.

[0:45:28] RT: When I was reading the paper you're referring to that's still under review, you mentioned somebody I really respect, which is Seamus Heaney. For folks, a question for me, to what extent do you think creative arts play in the development of one's capacity to lead?

[0:45:44] JM: Oh, I think that is a fantastic question. I would say, that they are hugely significant. I would say, that creative processes are very often transformative processes for people at individual and organizational levels. That's what they do. The author, CS Lewis, who very many people will know from the Chronicles of Narnia, who was actually a theologian, an academic, and CS Lewis said that we read to know we're not alone. You read to know you're not alone. But I think that that is true of so many of arts processes.

If you look at great art. If you're exposed to great music, whether it's classical music, or whether it's pop music, whatever it is, great music, those are transformative experiences. They feed us spiritually in a way that as human beings, we really, really need. We need that. If leaders don't understand that, they don't really understand much. I think in order to lead effectively, we have to know about people. Fundamentally, it's about people. Knowing about people is understanding that art is something that human beings have created in order to nurture themselves. That is an incredibly valuable strategy for leaders.

[0:47:03] RT: Another chance for you to give counsel here. I can imagine some people listening, thinking about this last little piece of our conversation and the creative forces that art can bring and say, honestly and authentically to themselves, "I don't really have any of that in my life. I don't see it, or I don't do anything, but it makes sense to me what Joanne is saying here." What do you think is a point of entry for people for whom, they don't have a practice of creative arts, but they see the value of? What's the starting point for them, do you think?

[0:47:33] JM: Gosh. Well, I mean, everyone's an individual, aren't they? Some people will be more drawn. I would say to them, well, you know what kinds of pictures do you – what sticks in your memory? Very often, people will keep quotes and things that speak to them. What speaks to you? Is it visual arts? Is it music? I mean, I'm not someone who's very musical. What speaks to me are words on a page very often. That's what speaks to me. But everyone is different. What is it that speaks to you? What is it that moves you? Because nature is really art as well. Is it, is it these great natural landscapes? Is it around things like, poetry?

There's a great line, I think, in a movie I saw recently, which said, everybody should be made to learn poetry as a child. Not because you enjoy it. You won't enjoy it. But when you're older, you will understand it. It's something like The Great Gatsby. I say to people in my MBA class, I say, "Read The Great Gatsby." If you read it when you were at school and I think it's a tragedy that very often, you're 16 and you're reading The Great Gatsby, oh, my goodness. Who understands The Great Gatsby?

[0:48:44] RT: I didn't.

[0:48:44] JM: Nobody. You read it when you're 40. You run, it'll dab a stitch you. It's a totally different thing. It's finding out. If you feel like you don't have an entry point, just think about what speaks to you, what moves you. Then gently explore that. I think it's really important to remember that there's no right and there's no wrong with this. Sometimes people feel that they're not cool enough, that their tastes aren't sophisticated enough, and that's just complete nonsense. It's absolute nonsense. Art is art is art. An art for us as human beings, I genuinely believe, is a transformative engagement process, and that helps us in ways that I don't think we really properly understand yet.

For leadership, not only is it incredibly important in terms of your personal journey and your personal leadership, but it's incredibly important in terms of your ability to communicate with other people.

[0:49:40] RT: Yeah. Actually, you're tying back to this piece about changing the story, their narrative that you have, and using some creative mechanism might actually be a vehicle, or an accelerator, or an inspiration to the design of the reconfiguration. It also strikes me that you're speaking to, I guess, the word I would use is the soul, which I think is my own view is, it's there somewhere in all of this, and it's a ready and willing agent for growth and development. But we got to talk to it. We got to be partners with it. I think the art format, or their creative space is a more likely dance partner initially than what we tend to bring in our analytical brain, but that's just my view.

Okay, so Joanne, we're coming down to it. I'm not curious about you personally, so your influences that got you going on this journey, what are they?

[0:50:34] JM: Oh, my goodness. What a fantastic question. I mean, in terms of leadership, I suppose, I've always been really interested in history. But I've always been very uncomfortable with the portrayals of leaders in history. We're always very critical of this iconic great man, heroic idea of leadership. We all know that things are more complicated than that. The unfortunate reality though is we look around us and we see it as something which is still so dominant in the consciousness of the world around us, and that is what is horrifying.

What got me interested was the capacity for individuals not in a positional sense, but in a behavioral sense to create change. For me, leadership is about creating change always. What I was interested in and some still interested in is how we create change, how we make environments better, how we make organizations better, how we make societies better, and how we make fundamentally the world a better place than it is. I grew up in a world which was a dangerous, difficult, volatile place. I think that stays with you. For me, it's always really been about that.

[0:51:45] RT: Okay. So, what's ahead for you?

[0:51:48] JM: I'm writing a book at the minute. You've alluded to it, this book about the treaty of hope. This role of diplomats. When I speak to diplomats and I say, "Well, you're leading." They say, "Well, we're not really leaders. We don't really do that." But leading is about influencing. Of course, obviously, those are leadership processes. I really need to get moving on that book. I mean, I think sometimes the longer things take, the better they are for it. I suppose, I can't – it's not that I feel I should have done it quicker, but I feel I need to get on with it now. I think learning just more about other people, about other people's experience of leadership, about the ways in which we can all create a better environment we're in and the ways in which I can do that. I mean, I'm very excited.

One thing I suppose I should have said is that I have three kids and they are all now – they're all actually, strangely very involved in creative industries. My youngest kid is hopefully, leaving school and going to college this year. I'm hoping that that is going to give me a bit more space to engage myself in this process. I feel really good. Anyone who's got kids will know what I mean. I think for me, what's ahead is being able to think about these things more. Hopefully, work with some really great groups. Hopefully, look at how to help people to create change and to do some writing, get some more writing done.

[0:53:07] RT: Fantastic. For listeners out there, Joanne, has several links. They will all be in the show notes for the episode. There's the book, you got a website, you got the Public Service Podcast, you got a firm that you're associated with called Pivotal, and probably a few other things that I don't have here that you're going to send me that we can put in the show notes. Joanne, thank you so much for spending time with us. It's been delightful. Thank you for being with us.

[0:53:32] JM: It's an absolute pleasure, Rick.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:53:36] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please, take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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