

51. Henna Pryor on good awkward, improv exercises, redemption stories, and magic words

Michelle: [00:00:00] From Bosstrack, it's Her HypeSquad, a show about amazing women who've made incredible strides as leaders in their industry. They're here to support you and your leadership growth to encourage you and hype you up as part of your hype squad. Hello everyone. It's Michelle Harris. Here to bring you an all new episode of Her HypeSquad with Bosstrack.

Today, we're getting awkward with Henna Pryor. We talk about her book, Good Awkward, what it is, and embracing awkwardness in leadership, using improv exercises with your team to build trust and encourage open communication, the power of telling ourselves redemption stories in place of contamination stories, and so much more.

You'll really enjoy the awkward moment. In the middle of the podcast where we try to figure out where the bubbles on the screen are coming from. You really never [00:01:00] know when you'll experience those quirks and unexpected moments, but before we get into the conversation I'll share Henna's bio to set the stage for our talk.

Henna Pryor, PCC, is a highly sought after workplace performance expert and an award winning two times TEDx and Global Keynote speaker, author, and executive coach. Her clients call her their secret weapon for impossible change. And honor she wears proudly. She's known for her science backed approach to improving the performance habits and actions of a hungry high achievers in her fun, no nonsense, no jargon way. to move them from their first level of success to their next one. Henna founded Pryority Group, a fast growing performance growth firm, to expand on her belief that the key to most people's success is leaning into awkwardness a little bit longer to skyrocket strategic risk taking and be braver in the work that we do.

She's recognized as a Success [00:02:00] Magazine Woman of Influence. And her best selling book, Good Awkward, was endorsed by NFL quarterback Russell Wilson and former HBR editor Karen Dillon, and was named a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2023. If you enjoyed my conversation with Henna, be sure to subscribe to our channel and help more people find us by sharing this episode with others or by leaving a review.

Or subscribe to our weekly newsletter filled with things we found that we're excited about and inspired by Along with valuable leadership advice to watch listen to or read. It's a little bit of joy for your inbox each Monday You can subscribe at www.thebosstrack.com www.thebosstrack.com www.thebosstrack.com

[thebosstrack.com](http://www.thebosstrack.com) Okay, so now let's get into my conversation with Henna Pryor. Hi, Henna. So nice to have you here today on Her HypeSquad with Bosstrack. I'm so excited to dig into this conversation. It's definitely something that I got excited about as soon [00:03:00] as I saw your book. So thank you so much for joining us today.

Henna Pryor: Thank you for having me. For those that are listening and can't see, I'm just really thrilled that my hot pink shirt matches Michelle's hot pink glasses right now. So we are, we are off to a great

start.

Michelle: I love it. We are. And we've got some blues, coordinating as well. So we're, yeah, we are ready to go.

Yeah. Love it. Well, we, we did provide a formal bio of you before our conversation, but I'd love for you to share a little bit about you in your own words. So before we get started and dig in.

Henna Pryor: Yeah, absolutely. So my name is Henna Pryor. I am a workplace performance expert keynote speaker by day. That's how I spend most of my days.

I also do a little bit of small group masterminding specifically for women leaders and executive coaching and the last few years. I'm really proud to say that a lot of my emphasis has About about emerging women leaders. So I was one of the early founding guides with an organization called Chief. That [00:04:00] is a network for executive and women in leadership and also involved with my alma mater, University of Delaware's Women's Leadership Initiative and some other partnerships as well.

So this particular group of ambitious change makers has my heart in a way that I don't think many others do. So I'm just really excited to be part of this.

Michelle: Great. I love it. I love it. And, um, that just reminded me, you're from the Philadelphia area? That's where I went. I went to school up there myself, so I, I I miss that area a lot.

Henna Pryor: Yeah. Yeah. Born and raised in Delaware. I now live in Chester County, Pennsylvania. And, uh. I have to do a little go birds because we are in football season, but, uh, yeah, it's, I love where I live. It's beautiful around here.

Michelle: Yeah. Well, let's dig in and, you have a book, called good awkward. And I'd love to really start out by, cause I think this is going to shape a lot of our conversation.

Uh, maybe you could tell us about what inspired you to write, write that book. Like where were you at in, in your own [00:05:00] career that you said, this is, this is what I want to write about and focus on. Yeah,

Henna Pryor: yeah, I always jokingly say, I don't think, you know, seventh grade Henna thought she'd write a book on awkwardness one day, but in many ways, it surprises no one but me.

Everyone who's known me is like, yep, this makes sense because my story from childhood, really all the way through to college was one of college. Feeling awkward often. So my parents are immigrants to the United States. I'm first born American. And so my clothing was never quite the same as my friends. My food never smelled quite the same, you know, and I constantly had this feeling of the me that I wanted other people to see.

Always felt like it was clashing with the me that was on display and not a day went by where I didn't feel impossibly awkward about that. And so I grew up, I went to college and in college, I think like many do, I started to find a little bit of my own. Who am I? You know, where are the other people that are sort of like me, [00:06:00] but really the interest in this topic.

For the book and what actually ended up being the first TEDx was, you know, when we got into the professional spheres and I started to take an interest in professional development, I remember that our Queen Brene Brown, who I know many of us are fans of, she would end her podcasts or her interviews with a very specific tagline.

She would say, friends, stay awkward, brave, and kind. That became her tagline. And I would hear that and I would think, stay brave? Yes, I know how important that is. Stay kind. Agree. My parents taught me that one. Stay awkward? I don't think so. Lady, I've been trying to get rid of this my whole life. Like, what are you talking about?

So I got very curious about that specific word and that specific emotion as it related to the workplace because all I ever knew was bad awkward. All I ever knew was an emotion that held me back and it made me feel really yucky and gross. And it became just an interest for me. How is this [00:07:00] something that we want to stay?

How is this a good thing? And thus began the deep dive.

Michelle: I love it. I love it. And we will share your TED talks and the show notes for anybody looking to, uh, to, to, to check those out. And I love that you shared the, uh, the photos. of you when you were younger. Is that something that you knew you were going to include or is it something that was kind of an evolution?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, I mean, I think everyone's experience is shaped by their conditioning, right? So, so one of the main through lines of the book is, you know, in order to manage this emotion is we have to unpack our relationship with this feeling and where does it come from? And it doesn't come from nowhere. In fact, no one, you know, save for very few that are maybe extra super for the most part children do not feel awkward It's a it's a self conscious emotion that develops around age eight or nine according to social psychologists most children not all but most children Younger than eight or [00:08:00] nine don't experience the emotion of awkwardness.

They don't care who's looking, you know, you may have a child or a niece or a nephew or a neighbor who is just swinging their hips in the kitchen and singing at the top of their lungs. And they don't care who's watching or if they're any good at it. This self consciousness, this, what do other people see is something that we develop as we move into adolescence, as we move into middle school, high school, into our professional lives.

And so I think understanding. Kind of the kid version of our story is a helpful starting place.

Michelle: Yeah.

I don't know if you've got the feedback, but, it's so interesting to me because I'm kind of older and in a later phase in my life. And, and when I talk to a lot of women now, they're like, they're back to that point of not caring and just living their life the way they want. So it's interesting that whole evolution of we start out that way. We care a lot and we spend our whole lives caring. And then suddenly we get to the point where [00:09:00]

Henna Pryor: so many things, I think so many things like that fall on a, you know, kind of that bell curve, you know, when it comes to, you know, the way we are as babies versus the way we are as elderly, right?

There's so many comparisons and that 100 percent Michelle, you're spot on. That is one of them where we don't care when we're younger. And then for many, we shake off that need for approval when we're older, but it's an interesting kind of top of the bell that's in the middle.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Uh, so I'd like to back up and talk about, let's define what good awkward, well, what awkward being awkward is and what good awkward is, and then maybe how we can relate that like, uh, our audience is primarily women in leadership roles, maybe, you know, new in their leadership role and, you know, how to, how, how does this apply to them and how can they think about it?

Henna Pryor: Yeah. Yeah, okay, so for the purpose of this discussion, awkward and awkwardness is the emotion that we feel when the [00:10:00] person we believe ourselves to be, think of it as our true self, is momentarily facing a gap between that and the person on display. In other words, the person we are, our internal identity, is different than who they see, our external reality.

So when there's a gap between those two identities, We tend to experience the emotion of awkwardness. So just a few other kind of defining characteristics. It is a social emotion, meaning we don't typically feel it when we're by ourselves. So if I'm just sitting here in my office, doing some work independently, reading something on a paper, and I mispronounce someone's name horrifically, if no one was here to hear me, I don't typically feel awkward about that.

But if I do the same thing in front of peers, in front of coworkers, leaders, colleagues. The feeling would be very different. Also, I love that you use the term, you know, being awkward, because also an interesting truth to anchor [00:11:00] into is there is no such thing as a factually awkward person. No such thing.

Awkwardness is subjective. It's an emotion. So we can experience it one of two ways. We can experience it as a state. It's an emotion. I feel awkward right now, but many people do refer to themselves as awkward as a trait, as in I am awkward. I am socially awkward. I am just an awkward human being. And that's fine, as long as it's serving you to say that.

Because again, awkwardness is subjective. It's not a fact. It is up to you to call yourself that, or it's up to someone else. But if it's holding you back, then we need to be careful about using that identity language. If you're using it in a self deprecating fun way, but you're still taking chances. No problem, but it's really important that we anchor into that fact that it is a social discomfort. It is an emotion and it is not a statement effect.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. I appreciate that you you clarified that because I can imagine if [00:12:00] I say well there's times that I felt really awkward and I think you give these examples in your book like when you somebody says I don't know, have a, have a, have a safe flight or enjoy your flight. And you're like, you too.

You too. Oh, darn it. That was, but you feel like it's a feeling of just being awkward because you said the wrong thing, and it, or the, you know, the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Henna Pryor: Right, right. And those moments, you know, they happen to everyone all the time. And it's, it's in that moment, if we're really going to dissect it in that moment is the person, I believe myself, someone is someone who listens or I'm paying attention to when others speak.

When I say you too, I sound like someone who is not really paying attention, I sound like I'm an idiot, right? There becomes this, you know, dissonance between these two people. Um, you had asked sort of what, what's the difference between, you know, what makes something good awkward? Well, bad awkward is typically defined by the emotion occurring, which it's going to.

Because to avoid [00:13:00] awkwardness means avoiding any uncertainty or being able to predict in a crystal ball how everyone else in the world is going to behave, but bad awkward occurs when we try something, we say something, we have those interactions, and that awkward feeling consumes us to the point, it grips us to the point that we are less likely to do that thing next time, or we avoid said situation the next time, it puts a paralysis over us, we freeze.

Versus good awkward is when we take those moments in stride, we learn not only to deal with them, but actually lean into them, embrace them, quicken our comeback rate and recognize that building that musculature, that social comeback rate is going to actually help you take risks, innovate, go for your dreams and do all the things that you want to do.

So actually leaning into it and embracing the power of it unlocks a whole slew of benefits.

Michelle: Yeah, and I do want to dig into that a little bit. But first, like, how [00:14:00] does, and maybe it doesn't, and maybe it's just a different level, but how does being awkward or having, yeah, just I guess the term awkward, how does that differ from just being uncomfortable?

Henna Pryor: Sure. So, awkwardness is an emotion of discomfort. So this is a little bit of a rectangle and square situation, right? Okay. Uncomfortable can come from a lot of different places, right? We can feel discomfort through a variety of emotions. We can have fear. We can have anxiety. We can have awkwardness. We can have nerves, right?

There's a lot of different ways discomfort can manifest. Awkwardness is specific to A, it being a social situation. We can feel uncomfortable at home by ourselves in many different ways. Um, B, Awkwardness exists in this very specific sphere of us doing a very often subconscious, but sometimes conscious mental scan for approval.

As a social emotion, we're kind of doing lightning fast [00:15:00] calculations of what do other people think or what do other people see right now? So it's very specific to that context versus more generalized discomfort, which can come from a variety of areas.

Michelle: Oh, I see. I just, um, sorry, distracted. You had something pop up on your screen.

Is that come up? Did I? I don't know. There was like a little bubble, a like bubble, which is completely fine. I was just curious.

Henna Pryor: Weird. No, this actually, no, this happened the other day. This must be some new zoom thing or some new camera thing. I think last time when I, like I did this and something. Okay, I have to figure out how to get rid of it.

I don't know what it is. It just started like yesterday. I have no idea.

Michelle: I have to look that up. That's so funny. It's fun. I like it. I mean,

Henna Pryor: I don't know. I don't know why, like, what did I do? I have no idea.

Michelle: Yeah, I'm not sure. I'll have to kind kind of go back and analyze it.

Henna Pryor: weird, weird. No, I, I'm gonna figure that out.

I'm gonna make myself a note so I can get rid of it because I don't know how it's going out.

Michelle: [00:16:00] Oh well, sorry. So, I didn't mean to sidetrack for a second. So for people to kind of relate to this, idea of being, of, of awkward and what good awkward is. Do you have a story that you could share from maybe your own story or from, you know, people that you've talked to since writing the book about, somebody kind of feeling awkward and embracing awkward, um, to lead to their professional growth.

and kind of relating it to, you know, our audience, which would be, you know, women that are maybe newer in their career.

Henna Pryor: I have a great story. I'd love to share and I'm purposely going to share one that unfortunately I wanted it in the book, but we had to, you know, do some cutting room floor. Not everything can go in, but one of my favorite stories is, uh, I have a good girlfriend, Melissa Jordan.

She's fantastic. She, uh, has been in marketing for many, many years, and she Recently was telling me how she had applied to a job at [00:17:00] another organization at the time was not selected, but then a few months later they came back to her and said, Hey, we still have your information and we'd like you to apply to this.

And I remember she was like, and I'm like, I don't feel qualified for this job. This is a much bigger role, much bigger capacity than anything I've ever, ever taken on before. But she had just read something the day before from me on social media. This was right before the book came out about embracing the awkward and letting it be, you know, kind of your superpower.

And she said, you know. I'm feeling all kinds of self doubt around this thing, but at this point, they're asking me to come in and asking me to do this thing. And I don't feel like I check all the boxes on qualifications, but what do I have to lose? So she went in for the interview and here's what she did.

And I just love this. She, you know, not only kind of had, had the materials they requested, but she brought in her most. Insanely awkward childhood photo in which she had this like, just this turtleneck. It's the best picture. It's like a

turtleneck, this mullet [00:18:00] haircut. Her teeth are just a mess, you know, like something that most people and she's this beautiful chic girl, you know, woman now, she brought this in and put it up on the screen during her presentation part of the interview.

And what she said was. I'm showing you this because by showing you this, what I'm trying to explain to you is that there is nothing that is going to hold me back from trying stuff in this role, right? If I can show you this and stand to tell the tale, the worst, most awkward photo of me, you don't ever have to worry that I'm not going to take big swings in this organization.

They loved it. Long story short, she got the job. Right. So this, this thing that, you know, was a source of embarrassment for her. She was able to take and say, you know what, you can make fun of me. This could be embarrassing or I can use it. I could use it to my advantage. And I just think that's such a great example of taking something that could have been cringy for so many others and making it useful in the conversation.

Michelle: Yeah, I love it. And I think, , maybe being in the [00:19:00] marketing background, that helps too. Sure. It's such a creative idea. That's a creative idea. Yeah. I think everybody kind of needs to find their, their thing, but I like, I like, I love that.

Henna Pryor: Yeah. May I, may I share one more quick one? Just to give like another, only because I think it helps to have some other versions.

You know, there, there's another, um, group I work with and the leader of that group said something in a meeting that didn't land. Yeah. Like it just didn't land right now this was I'll admit this was a male leader, but I think this would work equally as well with a female leader, but you know the group in the meeting kind of was like all looking at each other going like, uh, you know, awkward the tension is in the air.

And what that leader said in the moments that followed I'll never forget it that leader said, Well, that just went over like a fart in church. Oh, everyone. You know, is immediately cracking up laughing. By the way, this was at IBM. This is like a polished, you know, organization. This wasn't some small startup.

This was at [00:20:00] IBM. Everyone is laughing. Everyone's shoulders relaxed. So this leader, what they did was they demonstrated, yeah, that it was awkward that what he said didn't land, but he was able to take it with some lightness. He was able to diffuse the tension in the room, and what happened as

a result, so I was, I learned this from somebody who reported to him, he said, what happened, Henna, in the rest of that meeting, is everyone's guard was down, we relaxed, he created this sense of psychological safety of, You know what?

We can also say the wrong thing that didn't quite land and it'll be okay, right? We're not going to be scolded for it. We're going to be okay trying things even if it doesn't work. And so it's such a beautiful example of turning something that could have been this like, ugh, moment into a moment of levity, into a moment of safety creation.

So there's so many ways to use these moments to actually create positive outcomes.

Michelle: Yeah, I love that that kind of blends into the whole idea of being authentic. And, we talk a lot about, you know, being authentic as a leader. [00:21:00] And I can see where this, embracing your awkward, like really ties into the authenticity, because people feel that they are getting the real the real you and provides that level of trust.

Henna Pryor: I agree with you 100%. I think the word authenticity is prevalent right now, and I believe 100 percent in my bones that it is key to our success, key to our long term performance. But what I often hear, especially from women leaders, is, awesome, permission to be more authentic at work. Why do I not know how to do that?

Right? Like, you're telling me I can be more authentic at work, and yet, why can't I just all of a sudden snap my fingers and be more authentic at work? And so what I think of as the relationship is the emotion of awkwardness is often one of the obstacles we need to overcome or become friends with more more accurately in order to access our true authenticity because we can't be authentic [00:22:00] if we can't tolerate awkwardness like the two exist hand in hand.

So I like to think of it as one of the filters or frictions that we need to address In order to access our authentic leadership.

Michelle: Yeah, so true. And can you share, obviously not giving away everything. I mean, there's so much in your book, but what are some ways that, people can embrace their awkwardness?

Like, yeah, get themselves to a state where they're more comfortable with, with themselves.

Henna Pryor: No, great question. And I, uh, You know, I can give lots of tactical examples, but largely I'll say from a zoom out perspective, it's really a two pronged approach. Prong number one is. Create some very specific space for self awareness around this emotion in particular.

So where does that awkward feeling come from? What are the stories that you've been conditioned to believe about other people's approval and how they are looking at you and how much emphasis they have on your actions, on [00:23:00] your missteps? So, you know, re, rewinding a little bit. Are you a, uh, someone who grew up in a household where you were not encouraged to step out and speak out because other people were looking, right?

So, um, I grew up in a South Asian household. There was an expression in South Asian families like, logh kya kahenge, meaning, what will other people think? That was literally an expression I grew up hearing, like, don't do that because what will other people think? And so that was messaging I received very often growing up that I had to examine and re kind of evaluate.

Is it still serving me in this moment in time? Often we also don't slow down after an awkward moment to do a little retroactive, right? Why do I feel so awkward about this? What was I expecting to happen? Awkwardness exists an uncertainty and it also exists when whether we mean to or not we have certain expectations of how an interaction was going to go.

So, I'm walking down the street, I'm on the sidewalk, I trip over my own two [00:24:00] feet while a million people look on. Mentally, whether I realized it or not, I had an expectation that I was going to make it to the end of that street without that happening, but that expectation went sideways. So just a little bit of intentional time spending around either ahead of those moments with our previous conditioning or following those moments, what did that experience represent? What story am I telling myself about that experience? And then the second part of this, the second prong, which I think is really, to me, feels most important in the moment in time that we live in, is conditioning.

And specifically conditioning our social muscles. Because today, Michelle, you know, the year 2023 going into 2024, we don't need to talk to people that much. That's true. The world, the world has optimized against it. I can order my dinner on DoorDash. I can send somebody a Slack. I don't have to talk to people anymore.

And when everything is asynchronous like this, and we're [00:25:00] not, you know, having these rubbing elbows moments naturally where we have

opportunities to practice social interaction, we do lose musculature. Research says that when we don't practice with each other on a daily basis in just regular little conversation, then it actually makes other conversations more awkward feeling, much more clunky, much more uncomfortable.

And we know this. We all know this because after the pandemic, this is not just for introverts, by the way, you know, I wrote a book on awkwardness and I'm not an introvert. I'm an extrovert. But after the pandemic, we can all remember that first moment where we went into a large gathering and we were like, um, what are we shaking hands?

Are we hugging? Like, do you want me to stand over here? We got out of practice at understanding other people's cues and facial expressions and comfort levels. And it took us a while to figure that out. Research supports that we need to keep these muscles practiced and the more we don't interact with one another in live [00:26:00] context, the harder it gets to endure awkwardness when it occurs.

So practice, conditioning, is another huge element of this.

Michelle: Yeah, and I can I can contest to that. I mean, even after it doesn't matter like 25 plus years in corporate and interacting with people and talking and I mean, I'm just a big proponent of networking and getting out there and talking and if it's a few days or, you know, a week before I go out to another event and talk to somebody, I feel like, oh, I don't, don't remember what to say.

Like, until you get back into it, it just feels a little awkward to start having those conversations. So it's, it's so true. And yeah, the pandemic made it all the worse.

Henna Pryor: Right. I think the pandemic kicked it off, but then just the way, you know, technology and everything has, has evolved. It keeps that.

Unfortunate that that social weakening going and you know what what we can do [00:27:00] sometimes it doesn't even have to be at work like practice in the small moments and I would just make a little challenge to the listeners. Next time you go to the supermarket or to the grocery store, just try this one time when you're in line to not take out your phone.

See if you can catch eyes with someone. Next time you're in an elevator, don't hammer the close door button shut. Things like that where we can create little micro moments to remind ourselves that there's value in social interaction where

what happens as a result is not known. Right? And if you're in the coffee shop, just leave your headphones out.

Just give it, give an opportunity to see what a unpredictable social interaction might look or feel like. And I promise you, you're building the necessary muscle to tolerate social discomfort like awkwardness when you actually need to. But without it, it's going to feel that much harder.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting.

So then, so that's like step one and step [00:28:00] two. Do you say, you know, do you say hello or do you not even have to go there? Yeah.

Henna Pryor: Yeah. It's, I mean, listen, not everyone's going to be a home run, right? And this is also contextual, right? If you live in New York city, maybe if you smile at someone, they're going to be like creepy.

But, but what do you have to lose? Right. What do you have to lose? And this, this is a little bit of. You know, exposure therapy, right? If you can put your phone away in the grocery store line and just smile at the person who catches your eye checking out in front of you, maybe that's all you do that day.

But maybe the next time you try to say hello, maybe next time you make a comment about something they're buying or something, you know, we've gotten away from this human to human stuff, but this is where we get the repetitions required to tolerate. Oh, didn't expect that, right? Otherwise. These things feel like a much heavier lift.

Michelle: Yeah. And I think that leads into, um, deliberate discomfort. Are there any other, you know, do you suggest like challenges [00:29:00] that people can do to start feeling discomfort? And besides getting And maybe that's why, we want to experience that is to get used to and comfortable to this, to, , with the awkwardness, but are there any, any things that you would suggest, to kind of exercise that muscle?

Henna Pryor: Yeah. So, so just to, to maybe define this idea of deliberate discomfort is really speaking to this, which is seeking out opportunities to do things that you know are not, you know, right, right there in your comfort zone, but understanding that what you're doing is slowly building blocks of strength for when you need them.

So from a professional context, we can do similar things. I often suggest to leaders, Hey, if you're, you know, an emerging leader or current leader, even if you have a small team, big team, doesn't matter at the beginning of a meeting, try to set aside five minutes to do a couple of exercises that are specific to this sort of social mental muscle [00:30:00] building.

So some of my favorite examples, you can go around and ask your team to share a cracked egg story. A cracked egg story is essentially what's something that happened in the last two weeks that was a spectacular failure or made you feel embarrassed or was awkward. It just was like not, not what you wanted, right?

Didn't quite go as planned. Uh, another example is a bad idea brainstorm where the leader specifically and deliberately says, Hey, for the next five minutes, let's just brainstorm some ideas together, whatever their, their project du jour is. But here's the one rule unrealistic ideas only. Right? Not realistic ideas, unrealistic ideas only.

And people say, well, why, why would we do that? Well, twofold. If you're only inviting realistic ideas from your team, because they underestimate their ability to do anything else, then that's where all your competition lives, first of all, and second of all, even if none of these ideas are viable, which often people are actually surprised to be like, you know what, actually, that's not so crazy, but even if none of [00:31:00] them are viable, what actually happens is research tells us that when we create space for these sort of unrealistic volleys that the ideas and the conversation that follow are actually more innovative and generative and creative because people feel like they can let that guard down a bit. They front loaded the discomfort.

And so anything that follows is going to have more value add as a result. So leaders can create space for these types of conversations. It doesn't have to be an hour. Five minutes at your next team meeting and just see the energy change, see the impact that that creates.

Michelle: Hmm. Yeah. And we've been talking a lot recently about creativity at work and how, opening up that space and for innovation and like that, that I think that lends really well to that.

And I wanted to ask you so, the cracked egg, and I actually never heard that term. I, I, I'm going to retain that and use it. But the cracked egg stories, [00:32:00] how, and this is not in those terms, but I've had this conversation with somebody recently. About talking about those moments of, um, you know,

something didn't go exactly the way you expected, sometimes you can say, you know, how you perceived it as a failure, like a big, big or small failure.

But we were, when we were talking, you know, we're talking about, well, what, what about the people that don't feel comfortable speaking up and how, how do you. How do you suggest approaching your whole team and those exercises to involve those people that don't feel comfortable?

Henna Pryor: Yes, I'm glad you yes I'm it does make sense and I'm glad you brought this point up because I think this is Not something we can gloss over because you know, I'm often asked yeah It sounds great to be able to express or our awkwardness at work or to embrace our awkward moments.

But what about women? What about women of color and here's the truth Women, [00:33:00] and especially women of color, are still disproportionately scrutinized. and expected to be confident in a form that often translates to flawlessness. Mm hmm. That is facts, and we cannot gloss over that. That is systemic, right? And this is, you know, just a function of we are still new to leadership in now decades of that sphere being owned by white, cisgendered, heterosexual men.

Right. This is just, this is just facts. This is not an opinion. This is, you know, the systems that we live in. And so my answer is - slowly dipping a toe in the water for psychological safety, right? I am not suggesting that you spill your guts on something gone completely wrong without knowing it's okay to do so.

You know, looking to what are the leaders willing to model and if you are the leader, then this is your permission slip. Oh, forget about permission slip. This is your plea. to [00:34:00] please model this, share your cracked egg stories first, so that other people know that they can share theirs. But we gotta dip a toe in the water, you know, start small, don't share a huge thing.

But also, I think, I wanna, I wanna call out secondarily that often we confuse awkwardness with ineptitude. And I don't wanna confuse those two things, because I say in the book, you know, I wouldn't hire an inept anesthesiologist. But I'd be perfectly fine hiring an awkward one. Right. So this is, these aren't the same thing.

So if you are generally someone who is perceived as smart, competent, capable, prepared, if you generally show up as someone like that consistently, and have an awkward moment that you share, generally speaking, research says that that will not harm your standing and in fact it'll actually make you come across as

more human, more likable, it knocks you off the pedestal of polished perfection gosh they never get it wrong, right actually has upside.

That [00:35:00] said, that does not mean you have a permission slip to just be messy all the time, right? We still have to be, because of that level of disproportionate scrutiny that women are under, and women of color especially, we still have to index on being prepared, being competent, being good at our jobs. Um, but the occasional blunder is not going to ruin us the way that we think it is.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. No, I appreciate you providing that perspective. And it's, I mean, you're so spot on with all that. So in that situation, and I imagine that to even be able to approach a topic, a conversation like that, the crack deck exercise, I don't want to keep, going on about this, but, you have to already have a level of trust built with your team for them to feel it's okay to open up. So, you know, that's number one as a background, but then second, you share your story. What if, is there any way you can encourage others to, to open up besides just sharing your story or have you seen that [00:36:00] happen in exercise or something worked?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, often, often. Yeah. I think, you know, the, the answer is twofold. One is creating space for it. Don't expect that people are going to just offer it randomly in the middle. Some, some might, but it's creating space for it intentionally. This is what we're doing, right? And when you do something like a cracked egg story or a bad idea brainstorm, it's not some people are sharing them.

It's you're challenging each participant of that meeting to do it. And so when it's everyone's task, Then people generally feel more like, okay, I'm not going to put myself out there for, you know, public, you know, attack if I'm the only one sharing it. These work best when we carve out intentional space and everyone is tasked with bringing one of these to the table.

Sometimes these are best even prepared for in advance, right? You know, the beginning of this next meeting, FYI, tomorrow we're going to do this. So people have time to think about it because the last thing you want is somebody. Admit [00:37:00] something. And then the next person is like, well, I don't know. I can't really think of anything.

Everyone's got something. So sometimes it helps to give them the preparedness. But what you're essentially doing is every time you do this, slowly planting seeds for an environment of that psychological safety that everyone wants so

badly, but expects to just drop out of the sky. It needs to be designed and we can be in charge of being the leaders that helped design that whether you're in top level leadership or you're a brand new leader with one or two people, anybody can do this and it's just going to be those little little moments that you create on purpose.

Michelle: Yeah, yeah, so well said. And I don't know if this is, it kind of relates, and it might be a similar answer, but going back to when you, said about, , your, your parents and, what will people think, you that is, that is a big, uh, concern of people or, you know, fearing failure and what are people going to think are like outside [00:38:00] of the exercise we were talking about.

Are there things that people can do to, get - move past or get comfortable with failure.

Henna Pryor: Sure, absolutely. I think, you know, there's, there's a few things that come to mind. Just number one is, you know, Tom Gilovich from Cornell. He refers to the spotlight effect often, where just, just FYI, people aren't looking at you as closely as you think, right?

That's this idea that people are paying much closer attention to us than they actually are. Sometimes they are looking at us, but often it's to a much lesser degree and they're already over it more than we think. So just that reminder. The other thing is there's something called the illusion of transparency.

So in an awkward moment, it is easy to believe that people can see all those things that we're feeling and thinking, right? So some of us do turn bright red. I'm not saying this is an exclusive thing, but some of us just, you know, our hands are a little sweaty, our stomach's a little knotty, or we're feeling a little, uh.

Most of the time, [00:39:00] people can't see that. The illusion of transparency is, oh my gosh, they must see right through me. They must see how ridiculous I feel right now. More often than not, they don't. So just again, just anchor into these ideas first. The second thing is, there's, uh, I love the research from Dan McAdams from Northwestern University.

He refers to two types of stories we tell ourselves, contamination stories and redemption stories. So contamination story means after an experience occurs, We tell ourselves a story about how awful that thing was. I just, you know, I mispronounced someone's name in the meeting or I messed up that presentation.

And a contamination story is, Oh my God, I'm clearly not ready to do this. I'm not going to raise my hand to present the next time. It's contaminated the future experience versus a redemptive story is, you know, my language around this is looking for the gifts in the garbage. Man, that presentation sucked.

It did not feel that good. However, you know what, Henna? You raised your hand for it. [00:40:00] You don't normally. And you got through it, even though it didn't feel that good. That's just one, one rep in the direction of getting better the next time. And hopefully the next time it'll go better. You learn from it.

It'll be easier. Can we tell ourselves a redemptive story? Our brains are wired to survive, not thrive. Our brains have a negativity bias, so we need to understand that our brains will naturally want to default to a contamination story, but we have opportunities to get intentional and override that story, but we have to create the space to do it.

What is the redemption story in this, and can we take two minutes to find it so that it keeps us moving forward instead of sliding backwards?

Michelle: Yeah, and I, I love that exercise and I, I picked that up in the book too. It's just, , how can you turn those moments into a positive situation, and, and, and the learning oftentimes it can be a learning experience or it can just be, you know, well, like what you said, well, I was brave enough to go into that and I, I took a chance [00:41:00] and, looking at through that lens and, Yeah, so I don't want to be, I want to be, careful with time.

You have a hard stop at 12?

Henna Pryor: Uh, do I? Hang on. Let me check. I don't remember. Hang on.

Michelle: No, I'm okay. Okay.

Henna Pryor: Yeah, I mean, probably by by like 1215. I probably do need to jump. But no, I'm good for now.

Michelle: We should still we should still be fine. I should keep you on schedule. But I just want to make sure before we get too far.

So when we talk, so one of the things that we talk a lot about is team building and collaboration. And is there a way to use This, idea of, awkwardness and embracing awkwardness in, building a team. You know, we talked about it from

leadership to, employee. And but is there, you know, a way that we can look at that with, with team building?

Henna Pryor: Absolutely. Yeah. There's actually a very strong, again, it's a social emotion. So there's a [00:42:00] strong through line with team building. So, um, one good piece of data to know is that when teams do something together that they are not guaranteed to be good at. That they are likely to feel awkward about. So I'll give you one example of this.

Uh, with, with teams, with leaders, I will sometimes do a workshop where we do poetry. I will say, okay, you know, we do this fun thing where we have to like assign topics and write five lines of poetry. And most people are like, oh God, right? Because most people in business are not poets. It is rare that I do this in a room and they're like, oh, I love writing poetry. Like most people don't. And so they're all like, oh, you know, cringe face. They do it, and then everyone shares it. And they are laughing and loving life by the end. It is a huge confidence builder, but the data tells us that when people do things, you know, that they're feeling a bit awkward about, that they're not guaranteed to be good at together as a team, it actually skyrockets relationship satisfaction and trust amongst team members doing something that no one really feels [00:43:00] naturally good at together, is a huge relationship booster. The other thing is that one of the best ways you can embrace awkwardness and condition these muscles as a team is through improv exercises. So improv is an accelerator for embracing our awkwardness because improv is built on this principle that you don't know what the other person is going to say next, but you're going to lean in anyway, right? It is based on that principle entirely. You know, yes and. I, I have no idea where you're going to take this, but I'm going to tolerate that awkwardness of this went sideways, but I'm going to stay in it. And I'm going to keep going anyway improv is designed to do this and so a lot of companies corporations teams of all sizes have taken to including improv exercises as part of their team development to strengthen these muscles around enduring awkwardness about not caring so much about what others see or think and about adaptability agility all these [00:44:00] byproducts that come from embracing this emotion.

Um, so this is, you know, I lead, I lead teams through these improv exercises all the time. And similarly, a lot of people have not done improv exercises as a team. So it's got the benefits of all that stuff that I just said and the doing something new together, which improves satisfaction. So tons, tons of upside.

Michelle: Yeah. Do you have any, um, so for people that are not lucky enough to be in teams where they do embrace improv and have improv exercises, is

there any way that when, or not women, people can get involved in improv with, without having that opportunity? Like, I imagine like the group, there are groups that you could join.

Henna Pryor: Sure. Oh gosh. Yeah. All around the country. There's, there's troops you can join. And again, if you don't, Have the time or investment to be able to do something like that. In the book, actually, in chapter eight, there's a bunch of exercise, specific exercises. I think I include at least three or four. Um, you don't have to go to a class.

You can just bring, you know, bring that page to the office [00:45:00] and say, Hey, can we try one of these? Right? There's, there's simple ways to practice. And at a very minimum, the easiest thing you can do is just start incorporating yes and language into your day to day. So improv is based on the principle of yes and.

Instead of saying no, instead of, hey, this isn't gonna work for me, it's, okay, I didn't expect you to say this, but let's go with yes, and here's what I'm gonna add to that, or, and here's something, you know, I would twist in addition to it, it's just about staying in the moment, versus, you know, let's just go back to the previous example, that went over like a fart in church, good, Here's where I think this actually could be valuable, right?

Like, is there something we can take where we can continue to move the ball forward instead of letting it stop us in our tracks and the whole thing shuts down? That, that skill is immeasurably helpful in the workplace because certainty is not guaranteed. It hasn't ever been and it never [00:46:00] will be.

Michelle: I love it.

I love it. Is there, are there, like, since you've been on, like, you've written the book and the book is out and you've been on your tours and talking about the book, is there a time, just where you still have felt awkward in a situation that you might be able to share with the audience?

Henna Pryor: Oh, always.

Oh my god, always. Okay, so I'll make this very real. Two days ago, I gave a keynote For, um, for Sanofi, a large pharmaceutical company, and it was 500 people, and the man introduced me. He was super friendly. I said, Oh, did you get my intro script? He said, Yeah, I read it, but you know what? I'm not going to use that.

I did a bunch of research on you. Da da da. I'm just going to do my own thing. So I didn't know what he was going to say about me going up, uh, right before he introduced me. Gave me a great introduction. But then he said, and, you know, now I want to introduce you to Henna Priority. My name is Henna Pryor. My company is Pryority Group. Pryority, yeah. So literally, right as I'm about to walk on the stage, he said my name wrong, which is kind of like, [00:47:00] ah, do I say something? Do I correct him? Right? It was, could have been. But I jumped up on the stage, I smiled, and I said, you know. Lane, thank you so much. And by the way, it's Pryor, right?

And I, I felt, I felt a way about it. I felt awkward about it because I didn't know if he was okay being corrected. And I didn't really want, want to correct him, but I did it playfully. I leaned in and, you know, kind of use it as a message. I said, you know, pretty, pretty funny, wrote a book on awkwardness and here we go.

My name's actually Pryor, right? Like it just, it was a moment where I could use the feeling. And make it part of it, versus trying to, oh gosh, now what do I say? What do I do? The audience didn't feel uncomfortable about it, I didn't feel uncomfortable about it. You know, well, I did, but I didn't let them see that, because I leaned in instead.

So I think, you know, I don't think I will ever stop feeling awkward about things. And that is not the goal. You know, I really, I need to emphasize this. Yeah. The goal is not to eliminate awkwardness. That [00:48:00] is a fool's errand. We are humans wired for social belonging. The goal is to improve our comeback rate.

The goal is to be able to have one of those moments, lean in and move through it lightning fast. But eliminating it, that's a, that's a race no one's going to win. So I think another strategy will serve us all better. And, you know, I, I always like to use this term like that cool as a cucumber confidence. I will never know it.

I snort when I laugh. I bump into things constantly. My husband is like, why do you have another bruise on your leg? I'm like, Oh, cause I ran into the desk. That's been in the same spot for 20 years again. Like I just cool. It's not coming for me. But when I kind of realized that the people I admire most aren't polished and cool, they just have a fast comeback rate.

Like, you know what? Awkward confidence. I can do that. That feels better. I can do that. And so this work is really designed for people who feel like that

too, right? If cool feels out of reach, screw it. [00:49:00] Don't be a cool leader, right? Awkward confidence is the new cool.

Michelle: Yeah. I love it. Yeah. So I, you know, personally, I want to thank you for bringing this all to light because I myself have always been very similar, very awkward.

And even when I'm talking socially, I'll like dive right in. And you know, sometimes I of course, can say the wrong things or things don't come out exactly the way I want. I mean, even when I'm talking on these podcasts, you know, things can sound a little awkward. And I, and I've, you know, of course over time embraced it, but nobody really gave a voice to it. And I mean, probably people have, but I haven't like until I, I saw you speak about it. And, uh, you know, now you're, you have the book and you're talking about it. It gets, uh, it's nice to have somebody actually putting a voice out there for it.

Henna Pryor: I appreciate that. I get that feedback a lot, which is, did you write this book for me?

I'm like, well, you know, we Authors tend to write the book they themselves [00:50:00] most needed, so the truth is I wrote it for me, but I realize there's a lot of people like me, right? So yes, I wrote it for you. Yes, I wrote it for you, and I wrote it for all of us who feel like we shouldn't feel like this. But guess what?

We all do. So, so come on board, right? Like we are all in this together. We are all going to hold hands and trip over our own two feet and say people's names wrong and have typos on our presentations. Like welcome aboard to reality. Let's have some fun with it and let's learn how to stay in it because it's not going away.

Michelle: Yeah. And so just to kind of close out the conversation, what is maybe the most important takeaway you would want, , women leaders, to, to have on embracing awkwardness and, all of, all of what we shared or what you've shared in the book?

Henna Pryor: Sure. Um, two things. A, awkwardness is everyone's experience.

If you, you're going to feel it and when you feel it, I guarantee at least once or twice or maybe more than that, you're going to feel like it's just you. [00:51:00] No one else feels as ridiculous or as uncomfortable or as embarrassed about this as I do. Confident people don't feel like this. I assure you, yes they do.

So awkwardness is everyone's emotion. And the second thing is, social tolerance, discomfort of this particular kind, awkward tolerance is trainable. Social muscles are a muscle, like physical muscle, like mental muscle that require attention. So the good news is this isn't like she's born with it.

Maybelline thing. This is a, we can do things to improve the way we feel in these moments. And it's up to you. It's in your power to do so. So walk into the world, knowing that you can make adjustments in your life that will slowly build the necessary muscle to succeed. No matter how you feel, you're naturally wired.

Awkward tolerance is built, not born. So, you too. You too can do it.

Michelle: Great. Perfect. Love it. And, so moving over to a couple of like, our standard questions we ask all of our guests. One of the things that we [00:52:00] highlight, of course, with Bosstrack is mentorship and that's really the whole point of Her HypeSquad with Bosstrack is to provide that mentorship from afar.

Do you have a mentor that you can attribute your, career success or your path, um, to?

Henna Pryor: I have many, but if I had to pick just one, uh, for 14 years I worked in staffing and I was honored to see that someone who was once my kind of indirect director actually was promoted to COO. Her name is Kai Mitchell.

She was the only female in the C suite at this organization and she was invaluable to me because, you know, in my 14 year staffing career, I got married and I had two children. So a lot of my career was, I had babies, I had toddlers. You know, staffing. I was 100 percent commissions. And so I was desperately looking around going, how does a working mother do this?

Yeah. Right. How do I, and she was one of the first ones who looked at me and said, your way, you do it your [00:53:00] way. You don't have to follow the blueprint the way you did it. I was working from home. A few days a week, well before, you know, now the entire world does, but before COVID, I was one of the few in the organization that they trusted to come into the office only a couple times a week.

You know, she was one of the first ones to, ones to show me that there were different ways to be successful. And so I think that really opened my aperture to what are the qualities or environments of a successful person. And so I give a

lot of gratitude to Kai for really paving the way for doing things in a way that felt authentic to me.

And that really informs a lot of who I am today. Yeah,

Michelle: so yeah, it sounds like such a transitional time for somebody to come into your to your life and be able to help you through. I can't. Yeah, so that's a lot. So I feel so far removed from that. How old are your kids?

Henna Pryor: They're 13 and 11 now. So, you know, it's, it's been a journey and a half, but you still never forget those people that gave you permission to do it [00:54:00] your way early on.

Michelle: Yeah, definitely. Amazing. And another thing, we appreciate and really focus on is, is wellbeing. So, you know, when you can't lead well, if you're not taking care of yourself first. Is there a routine or a ritual that you do daily in the morning or the evening that you attribute your mental well being to?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, this is going to sound a bit bougie, but my, what my daily well being routine is my skincare routine. I think it really picked up during the pandemic and I'll be honest, it started because I was incredibly acne prone. As a kid, I had to. I was not one of those lucky people who got to just like have clear skin.

Oh, God, no. I had like the worst skin, the worst acne. And so I've always had to do that. But now that I've grown out of that a little bit, what I find is those moments for me in the morning and in the evening. So I do it first thing and I do it at the end of the day. They're my forced slowdown. They're my forced kind of meditation where [00:55:00] just rubbing the cleanser or the moisturizer or whatever into my face.

I make a point of not having it be this quick thing like the way I do when I brush my teeth. I make a point to really just, you know, rub my forehead, rub my cheeks, but it feels nice. So they're just these little moments that I force myself to breathe. and slow down. Um, I think everyone has their own thing, but my skincare routine is mine.

It's my, it's my, the day has started and the day has ended thing.

Michelle: I love it. It's like your little mini meditation.

Henna Pryor: Yeah. Yeah. And it punctuates my day on either side. So it feels really nice to look forward to it in both places.

Michelle: Very nice. And is there a song, like, do you have a go to song when you need a little confidence boost or energy boost in the day, during the day?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, I have, again, a lot. I have a lot. I love One Direction. It's like my little, I say guilty pleasure, but I don't feel guilty. I love it. I'm unabashed. Um, and this is how we do it by Montel Jordan. I don't know why that song just gives me like the, [00:56:00] the wings I need on the days that I'm extra tired. Like, yeah, this is how we do it.

We do it however we want. That, that one gets me, gets me going.

Michelle: Got it. Yeah. Love it. Love it. And is there something that you've bought in the last year or so, around a hundred, under a hundred dollars that has improved, your life in some or made a difference in your life some way?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, I was thinking about this because I am kind of like a gadget junkie, and I was like, okay, well, like, will I think of a gadget?

Actually, it's not a gadget necessarily. As a speaker, I travel often, and so there's a lot of accoutrements I have for traveling, but I will tell you I recently bought at the recommendation of a friend a Beis, so it's B E I S is the brand. Mini Weekender, which is just, it's a bag that has, yeah, it has the, you know, the, the pulp, the, What do you call it?

A pull through for the luggage handle, right? So you can go on top of your luggage. Let me tell you, I've always used a backpack because I just think it's easier to hold than a shoulder bag. This bag is just perfectly designed. Like the, the shoe thing at the [00:57:00] bottom, the amount of pockets with the zippers with the I'm very happy and it is 98.

It is reasonable priced, really well made. Um, I really did not need another bag. Let me tell you what, I have, I have a lot of bags. But this bag is a 10 out of 10. So if you're, you know, in the market for just a, a weekend or bag or something that goes as a carry on over your luggage, big fan, super fan.

That's good.

Michelle: That's good to know. I think I've seen the advertisements for that bag come across. That's always nice because they show like all the like putting it in

and where things go and so that's, that's good to have heard somebody had a, had a good experience with it. I, I, they're, they're pretty bags too.

Henna Pryor: Well, you know, who recommended it was a friend who's a flight attendant. So that's how that's how I knew. I'm like, well, they know. They're probably pretty particular about functionality. It's beautiful, and it's really well designed. So yeah, super fan. Sponsor me Beis. I'll take more.

Michelle: I mean, obviously your book, but [00:58:00] is there a book that you've read in the last year, or not even in the last year that you would highly recommend the audience check out?

Henna Pryor: I read a lot, so this is hard to pick favorites, but I'll just say recently ish, I finished Magic Words by Jonah Berger, and I am a word nerd.

I love the power of word choice and language, whether we are speaking it to others or the self talk we use with ourselves, and I thought that book was really interesting. It gave me a couple of nuggets about how our choice of language can help shape our mindset, so that's one I would recommend. I

Michelle: haven't heard of that book.

I'll definitely check that out. It

Henna Pryor: just came out a couple, couple months ago.

Michelle: Oh, okay. Great. Thank you. Yeah. Okay. Well, Henna, you are officially a part of our audience's hype squad. So, um, with that is, are there any last words of advice, inspiration that you'd like to leave the audience with before we end the conversation?

Henna Pryor: Oh, okay. Two things. Number [00:59:00] one is. My second TEDx, one of the things you'll hear at the end, your, your audience will love because I also like the term hype squad. So watch them both, but definitely watch the second one. And the second thing I would leave them with is one of my favorite mantras is do it awkward, but do it anyway.

Yeah. Don't wait until you're ready. Do it awkward, but do it anyway.

Michelle: Yeah, I love it. Great, great words to end by. Well, thank you, Henna, for joining us. If our audience wants to find you, where, what is the best way to find you? Can they reach out to you? Where's the best way to reach out to you?

Henna Pryor: Yeah, I'm Henna Pryor in all the places.

I would say LinkedIn and Instagram are my preferred playground. So I think I'm the only Henna Pryor on LinkedIn and at Henna Pryor on Instagram. Please link up. Um, you know, it's not awkward. I want to be your friend. I'd love to hear from you. And you know, if you do buy the book and something resonates, tell me, I would love to hear it.

You know, part of your challenge is we're trying to improve our [01:00:00] social musculature. So if you feel awkward about reaching out, I'm going to encourage you to do it anyway, but please, uh, link up. Love to make new friends.

Michelle: Yeah, and I'm just a shout out. I love the book and I do encourage everybody to read it.

So thank you. Thank you so much for spending time with us this morning and really appreciate the time that you've given and I look forward to staying in touch and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

Henna Pryor: Thank you, Michelle. It was a blast.

Michelle: Hi, everyone. This is Michelle again. If you enjoyed this conversation, hit subscribe so you don't miss out on our weekly episodes.

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