

EP109

Elaine Lou Cartas: Legacy leaders. I am tired, not necessarily tired because I'm over it, just tired because I did a talk earlier and I realize every single time after I do a talk now, I am just exhausted. I want to climb and put myself in a cave. And I took this Instagram test, not like there's any validity or reliability on it, but it was a quiz to see if you're an introvert.

There's 15 questions. And out of the 15, I answered 12 out of 15. And apparently I'm an introvert now. It's clear I'm an extrovert, but. There was just questions like, do you feel wiped out after being around a lot of people? Yes, yes I do now. Mind you, in my 20s it was the complete opposite. Anyways, you did not hit play on this episode so you could hear me talk about being tired and taking an Instagram test.

But you did! The reason why you pressed play. On this episode is because you want to know how to lead teams in chaos and change, which is what is happening right now. So earlier today, I did a fireside chat with my friend, Chela Gage. Who's been in this podcast before you could check out episode 79. We did a talk on psychological safety.

I'll put in the show notes. And we did a fireside chat in front of chief human resource officers and chief diversity officers. It was an HR round table. And if you are in the HR industry with all the changes and chaos happening during this time, much respect to you. And also regardless if you are in HR or you're a leader yourself, regardless of what industry, you might be asking yourself, how do you lead during these times when we were.

And the talk, one of the leaders are saying, I was up at two in the morning, trying to figure out what this policy means to our team, but I'm not a lawyer yet. I am obviously empathetic to my team and I understand any decision I make will affect the wellbeing of my team and for my company. And that's very real.

So you're like, Elaine, tell me what to do. Well, don't worry. Me and Chela will share. So let's drop the beat. Hey, I'm Elaine Lupartas. I'm a business and career coach for women of color and allies. LA Weekly awarded me the number one thought leader and Apple News named me one of the top five business coaches.

Done doing the most as a woman of color or ally and you want to create your own definition of success and happiness? We'll grab your coffee, tea, or boba, and let's do some business and career real talk.

Audience Speaker: Thank you so much for joining us and let's give them a round of applause.

Chéla Gage: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I find it fortunate that we are, after the speakers that we've had this morning, our talk is going to be about how to build resilient teams. How many of us, want to be a mentor. Now, let me show of hands, right? I'm giving you an opportunity. 1 million fosters. Google it. And then talk to me about it at some point, but 1, 000, 000 fosters is one.

The second that I have up here is OLLI Strategies. So I am the founder of OLLI Strategies. OLLI stands for own, lead and impact. For those of us in HR, we want to own our strategies, right? We want to lead with purpose and impact the world. So that's what OLLI stands for. And I'm lucky enough to have Elaine up here with me.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yes, and can you all hear me because I have the quiet mic? Okay, and I'm using my projection more, I feel like. So speaking of mentorship, Chayla and I actually met in a similar type of event like this. It was the Women in Retail Leadership. It

Chéla Gage: was.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, and I was holding executive career coaching sessions.

Chayla came in for a session and what stood out about Chayla is Her resiliency, both personally and professionally, which is why she has one million fosters up. So can you share your story?

Chéla Gage: Thank you. Thank you. Yes. How many of us think we know the definition of resilience? Can someone, well, can someone give me the definition of resilience?

What you define resilience as? Show of hands. One person. Oh, here. And you have the softest voice in the room.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Hold the mic really close to you.

Audience Speaker: Yes,

Chéla Gage: yes. I love that. I love that. The National Positive Psychology defines Resilience as the courage to grow through stress, and we are going through that right now, right?

And how many of us have that courage? So I bring to you, as been introduced, I bring to you over 20 years of HR experience. I'm the person who HR kind of found me. I got my start in executive recruiting in Silicon Valley because of my network. I was known as a diversity recruiter. And then when my talent started leaving the companies in Silicon Valley and I realized that talent management processes weren't set up, I became the diversity consultant and I've led global teams across France, Japan, Singapore for companies like Nissan, Raytheon, Starbucks.

And I've, I've seen my fear of transition and turmoil in the professional growing up wasn't very different. I've seen my fair share of change growing up. I grew up in foster care. Between the ages of 7 to 17, I lived with 6 different families and 4 group homes. So I moved an average of every 10 months I was moving.

And through that, I found, I found resiliency. I found that I can weather through most storms. Weather through most things. And for teens It's similar. Resilience isn't about avoiding change. It's about how you respond to it. My experiences taught me the core of resilience is connection. It's human connection.

And what better place to talk about resilience than with HR professionals. And I think it also translates, resilience translates because connection is the bedrock of, of building resilient teams.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I'm actually thinking about the reason why I'm here. Chayla was supposed to do a signature talk and I feel like I've been touring around with Chayla doing talks with her.

She's like, you know, it's better if you just are with me cause we connect and we could just feel the energy of the room. And so this is just an example of connection.

Chéla Gage: She makes me better.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So what lessons did you learn when it comes to resiliency?

Chéla Gage: Yeah. Yeah. So One thing that stands out for me for my time in care is that it's important to find your constant with so much change.

It's important to know what isn't going to change. And for me in care, my constant was the State Department. I knew that ultimately they were responsible for my well being. They're responsible for making sure I knew what I needed to do. Where to go to, to get my questions answered. And that's basically what our employees are looking for out of us.

In teams, it translates to intentionally building those moments of connection. Those strong team bonds. Those predictable communication patterns. Clear values that people can hold on to. Resilience isn't about just bouncing. It's about having something to hold on to during the bounce. During tumultuous times, I've tried to create this constant for my organizations, and I've seen the success of that.

And some of us, we just talked about COVID, and how we've created constant, or how we've gotten through COVID. One of my organizations, after the summer, After George Floyd's death that summer, we were having a hard time getting employee sentiment, and I was leading talent in DE& I at the time, and I realized I didn't have enough bandwidth to address all of the concerns that were coming in from my organization.

And so to solve for this, I created DE& I Office Hours. And every other week, my team and I, and it was a global team, we got on the line and we answered questions directly from the employee population. We were having questions come in. It was something like an all hands, but with empathy, it actually started becoming called empathy circles.

And we would begin inviting other leaders to sit in on these circles. And one of the things that we found out. The leaders started then disbursing the communications one step further. They started having empathy circles in their team meetings. And that's that what it started doing is allowing for people to have a constant place to go to get their questions answered.

Elaine Lou Cartas: I want to add to that, not internally, but externally as an executive coach. 500 leaders, folks that are in the big four. And out, like with different companies, I hold office hours a weekly, I don't record it and people just show up and actually not everybody talks, I'm just like, show up as you want, turn off your camera.

Sometimes people just need to listen to other people knowing that they're not going through it. You were sharing about being an accountant. So my partner, he's an accountant and there's a Slack channel of accountants from different industries. So when a lot changes, Hey, does anyone know how to handle this?

So it doesn't just have to be an office hour, it could be a WhatsApp channel, or Slack.

Chéla Gage: Or Slack.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Yeah, very well said. So, what practical steps do you have when it comes to

Chéla Gage: Yeah,

Elaine Lou Cartas: being in crisis.

Chéla Gage: Yeah, you know, my research shows that there are five facets to creating resilient teams. There's connection, right?

Connection is key and core. Second is communication over communicate. Constantly over communicate and do it in multiple, multiple channels. One of my organizations was going through an executive leadership shift. And during this time, we were also changing our values. So imagine going through mission vision changes at the same time where you're changing your.

I said executive, but it was our CEO at the time. We had to help the under the organization, understand why we were going through this. So we created a video series called my, why, and each leader of the executive leadership team created a video explaining why the values were important to them. We tied it to their personal stories, sometimes their personal upbringings.

And what we found out was after the employee survey was launched, our employees, They saw themselves in the stories of the executives. They felt more connected to the executives, thus more connected to the values that were coming down. And what we found out was the leadership change, the CEO leadership change wasn't as detrimental, as negative as we thought it would be because we had so many executives.

It was more important. For the organization to see themselves and the executives that reported to the CEO versus the CEO. So that's one is connection. Second is communication. Third is adaptability. Adaptability is key. Fourth is leadership. And leadership is the linchpin. We all know it. And then fifth is data, data and measurements.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So you talked about adaptability. There's so much that is going on every day as we were talking about the news. policies. How do we have a culture of adaptability considering hierarchies that are probably in place?

Chéla Gage: Yeah, I'm a geek when it comes to the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution is how we are set up with hierarchies, right?

And hierarchies are the biggest, it's one of our biggest failures for communication. But an opportunity to create adaptability is through communication, and it is through a resilient culture, and it is through making sure that you are taking risks and leaving an opportunity for failure. Encourage experimentation, innovation, and make sure that your leaders are showing that they are adaptable as well.

One of my organizations was going through a small change initiative and needed new ideas on getting to a small niche in a market. And this organization was often told that they. Feedback was a concern. They, we were never getting good feedback feed. The feedback loop would go in one door and it would not come in the other.

Like it just, it was not a loop. One of the leaders came up with an idea of a shark tank. Teams would come up with creative ways to present their ideas to leadership and leaders would judge in the moment. So people were getting immediate feedback and this created trust. Transparency, and it showed that our leaders could actually be adaptable at another organization, aerospace organization.

We had where our frontline workers were giving the top executives feedback on. parts that were coming in from China that were making it difficult for them to do work on a day to day. And we didn't understand it was a supply chain, but we had to go down to the front level staff. And this is in a non union environment.

And then what we did was highlighted this individual. Put posters of him all over the place, shared how important it is not only to take, yes, our SME and our expertise, but make sure that we are getting the opinions and the, the advice from our frontline workers as well. That shows the adaptability and that helps create resilient teams as well.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Legacy leader. I know what you're thinking. Elaine, you have such good stuff here. I want more. So if you want more tips and advice for your business career in life, sign up for my gifts and gifts newsletter at elainelou.com forward slash join. That's J O I N. And here's three things you'll get when you join.

Cause I'm like Santa Claus. I love giving number one, funny gifts because who doesn't love means and pop culture references. This newsletter is so fetch. Number two, receive actionable gifts. That's business career and life tips that you can start doing today. Third, the gift of me, not only do you get my wins, but also my failures, my reflections, my gifts and gifts newsletter is like an up to date diary.

Think Zenga or life journal for my fellow millennials. where I share vulnerable stories, relatable mistakes, and important life tips like what to watch on Netflix, like when's the next Bridgerton season. So if you're ready for those fun gifts and actionable gifts to create a more sustainable life, then join my newsletter at elainelou.com.

[com](http://elainelou.com) forward slash join. That's J O I N. All right, let's get back to the episode.

And I will say when I'm working with clients, the one thing they complain about, especially hybrid and virtual, they just want me at meetings. There's this change. Like I'm just a robot industrial revolution. I'm not being seen as a human. So adding what human moments I want to emphasize

that. Yeah. So I know you're a consulting company, all these strategies you've done and all the companies you've worked with.

Chéla Gage: Yeah.

Elaine Lou Cartas: It's also not just the soft skills, but also the data, the measurement. Can you describe how to do that in resilient teams?

Chéla Gage: Yeah, I love this question. We measure what matters, right? And in my opinion, data and measurement, this is key. Whenever I work with a client organization, I do a holistic assessment, looking at attrition, performance management, looking at systems, tools, processes.

Whenever I go into an organization, I'm looking to see that inclusivity is embedded into the DNA of the organization. Nine times out of 10, it isn't. And there's for a whole host of reasons why, but I take those results and it helps me build opportunities to build resilience through talent development processes.

through performance management, through onboarding. And it's those five things that we talked about. Connection, communication, adaptability, leadership, and data and measurements. What I love, after when I, when I first go in and do an assessment with an organization, and my first question is always, where do you think you fall on this scale?

Where do you think you fall? And sometimes they're, they're never right. It's, it's usually too far to the left, meaning I'm not integrated. Inclusion is not integrated enough, or it's too far of the right. Like we got this. We don't even need help. I don't know why you're here. And where most organizations fall some somewhere in the middle, because the intention is always there, but the practice of it is how people.

Is where we fall short. And one of the things that I say, my background is in talent and inclusion and inclusion, that that part of inclusion, it's. I feel like it's like change management. I'm also, who's familiar with Cotter? John Cotter and yes, oh my people. I am a Cotter change certified specialist. And I treat DE& I inclusion as if I'm managing a change project.

Because you have to fully integrate it into every aspect of the business. And it has to be tied into business imperatives. What we were talking about, the, the influx of data coming at us, the influx of trying to confuse us with this executive order or that executive order, making sure that we have our guiders on, our north, our, our north star, making sure that we know what that is as organizations is key.

America is a great experiment. That's the quote that someone said. I think it is. Thank you. Thank you. That came from the depth of my memory.

Elaine Lou Cartas: So, speaking of America is a great experiment, I'm going to talk about the D word, which you kind of described earlier, right? So, D E I.

Chéla Gage: Yes.

Elaine Lou Cartas: Girl, how do we build resiliency here?

Chéla Gage: Our first speaker asked the question, what are we doing? What, what are one, what's one to three things that we can do leaving here today? And I really think it is connecting with each other. One of the things that. I often get called because I've been at Starbucks. I've been at Raytheon. I've been in Silicon Valley.

I've been in high tech. I've been at Google and meta. I get called often to say what's going on and what should I do? And I've created a CDO kind of roundtable. And what we've done is kind of like sectioned off different parts of what's happening in the policy to each other. Because with everything coming, if I take every, I only have two hands.

I can't grab all of that. So I have to lean on my peers. Okay, you take this, I'll take C, you take D, let's all come together, and then next week let's say what we're going to do. Because the way that the policies are being disintegrated right now is intended to confuse us. It is intended to, and, and this is, it's history.

This works. And so for it to not work, we each have to have our own focus and we can't focus on everything.

Elaine Lou Cartas: We're done? Do we have time for questions? No? Okay. We

Audience Speaker: have time for one question.

Chéla Gage: Okay. We have time for one question.

Audience Speaker: I guess, how would you, talking about the, um, the empathy, uh,

Chéla Gage: Empathy circles.

Chéla Gage: Empathy circles. How would you go about, like, putting that into a workplace? Yes. Because I feel like sometimes, I'm just thinking back at my old workplaces, sometimes, like, especially with executives, they might be reluctant. Yes. So they are.

Chéla Gage: Yeah, they're they're terrified. They're like, wait, wait, wait. You didn't hire me for my personal background.

You hired me because. I have this degree from this school or empathy circles are actually better started from employees and they're better to be I handhold my executives to events or initiatives like that. And I prep my executives through their communications teams. Like there's always a comms person, right?

So I make sure my comms person gives them their talking points. But I also make sure I have the personal conversation with the executive first to kind of warm them up to the rest of the room. But empathy circles are best held from The direct staff employees. It actually feels more authentic that way as well.

Audience Speaker: Thank you so much.

Chéla Gage: Thank you

Elaine Lou Cartas: What I hope you got from this fireside chat with me and Chela is the importance of being courageous enough to connect with others, whether it is mentors, colleagues, people within your company, people outside of your company, but doing the same thing you're doing. Even before the talk today, my first meeting at 730 in the morning, cause it was 1030 Eastern time for them, I connected with a friend.

She is a nonprofit executive recruiter. I used to do nonprofit fundraising and I work with nonprofit executives. In my business, she's been in business for 10 years. I've been in business for seven and I just asked her, Hey, what have you noticed? I made assumptions, assuming because of the federal freezing and funds that are happening, that there would be an all time high to look for development advancement and fundraising executives.

And what she shared with me actually, no, there was. There's a slowdown. There's a freeze. I'm like, really? I just, I made an assumption and it was interesting for her to share that. What was also really helpful as being a fellow business owner well for both of us is she shared that what she's noticed in her business when there is a change in new administration there's a slowdown from election day to inauguration, January 20th.

And this was really validating to hear for me as a business owner, as I shared even in my last podcast episode, I vulnerably shared, Oh my gosh, my numbers in November, December were not looking good. What happened? And she, she just shared, yeah, I realized that this is a pattern. And I asked her, so what do you do when that happens?

I was like, you know, it's really easy to feel desperate, to want to post all the time on LinkedIn, to hit up all of my past clients, see if it's renewals. But I've learned to lean in. I was like, what do you mean by lean in? And she just shared, this is when I edit my systems. See if there's anything I could cut, see how I could improve in my business, catch up with friends, especially when, when it's not a busy season.

And I really was grateful for that. And thankfully, things are definitely picking up in my business. But just that conversation was alleviating to here. And I'm being more intentional to connect with others. And not necessarily for me. Seeking advice and mentorship, yes, but also giving back. For example, in the talk, there was an MBA student that came up to me and we're doing a coffee chat because she wanted to get advice.

So, it's not just what can I get, but also how can you give back. And to be vulnerable, yes, I know times are tough right now, but when I look back, I started my business in 2017, specifically to support women of color and allies in leadership positions. I start off as a career coach before I added business coaching.

Because I didn't see a lot of women of color, then 2020 happened three years later and we all know, you know what this decade, man, 2020 happened and that was COVID pandemic, the shutdown George Floyd. And I remember people telling me, wow, your business is so perfect right now. It's going to be trending because you serve women of color and allies.

And I had to remind them, look, I didn't quit my business. So it could be a trend. I saw a need. And in 2025, it has flipped with DEI being an attack and question. People have asked me, Hey, are you going to still keep your business and executive career coach for men of color and allies? My answer? Yes, I am.

Cause even in the musical Hamilton, a pointed question Alexander Hamilton had to Aaron Burr is if you stand for nothing, what will you fall for? And my constant, even before I became a coach, has always been to serve and support women of color and allies to create a sustainable career and to find their own definition of success.

I am a proud daughter and granddaughter of farmers who immigrated from Philippines to Central California to work in the grapevines. And because of their challenges and sacrifices, so I could have this privilege of choice, this privilege to record this podcast episode to you, if this is what I want to stand for.

And if you need further support and you're possibly interested in working with me when it comes to leading your own team through chaos and change, then schedule an introductory call with me at Elaine Lu. That's E L A I N E L O U dot com forward slash call. And if you want to learn and connect with Chela, I will add her LinkedIn profile and website to the show notes.

So I'll catch you in the next episode.