

## Ep 3 When mindfulness becomes a strategic skill with Gillian Coutts

Pod: I remember when I first met you and we were talking about that; I was attracted to the idea of the potential project. Like, what is that? What does that mean? You guys have written some great books, including *One Second Ahead*. Tell me more about the Potential Project.

Gillian: The Potential Project is a global firm that really works with leaders and their teams around team, effectiveness, leadership development and really bringing this capacity. You talked about the book *One Second Ahead* - this idea that if we can insert a little bit of space between when things happen and how we respond, you've got a little bit more space to be able to choose what you do next. So, a little bit more space to be able to bring your wisest self to that in whatever way that is, rather than firing off with automatic corrections and all that sort of stuff. So the organization is in about 28 countries and there's about 300 of us around the world at this stage, working with organizations. Everyone from a multinational down to a small school kind of organizational solutions that really support, leaders and their teams in these times.

Pod: I'm looking some of the stats on on the power of the program that you run, you know, increase of focus by 37%, job satisfaction increase by 23% , stress reduction by 37%. Work life balance increased by 17% and overall efficiency and productivity, 18%. They are pretty robust statistics.

Gillian: So, we have quite a large research department as well that does a lot of work to study the impact of what we do, as well as some partnering with universities to really understand, What are the one of the affect mechanisms that we have and how do we maximize these?

Pod: Mindfulness is not new, it's been around, some would argue, since the days of Socrates and variations of that, yet it has become really in vogue and very much a mainstream conversation I would think of the last five or six years, particularly in the leadership writings and discussions. Gillian can you tell us, why would a leader want to embark on a practice of mindfulness given it takes practice and it takes time, and they're usually pretty time poor anyway.

Gillian: Yeah, it's so interesting, isn't it? I may be able to best answer that question by telling you about how I got into it, it's kind of a very, a good example of how people often fall into these things. If you'd said to me 10 years ago that I'd be sitting here talking to you about it, I would have said, You've got rocks in your head, right? I am not that sort of woman. So, I started my journey after my son was born, he is now 10 and at the time I was in sales and operations at Pacific Brands.

Pod: One of the biggest brands in Australia for appealal lovers, I know my wife loves them!

Gillian: So, my kind of experience I had James, my son and then just after he was born, was diagnosed with breast cancer, so I kind of had that double slap to my head. One was becoming a parent. The other was having this disease emerged and my answer to kind of the existential crisis that evolved from that, you know, What the hell am I doing? My life and I had a meaningful impact, all of that stuff was I just had to go back to work to work harder, get promoted faster so that I could create the human centered organization that I really saw the potential for there to be, like in the people that I worked with. And of course, you know, when you're in a publicly listed company whilst deeply under pressure, you can imagine just how that actually worked out.

So I'm back at work, I've got chemo brain up the wazoo. I've got a toddler under one arm and this big new job, and someone said to me, Look, you seem a bit stressed out. Thanks for noticing that. Have you ever thought have you ever thought of like meditating on doing some mindfulness, and I said, Have you ever sort of sticking it up your taxi like that is not the time. It was where you probably use much more colorful words of the time. But it was really interesting because I've got a bit of a science background. So, I thought, well, what if I just didn't experiment? What if I did 10 minutes a day for 2 weeks and just see what happens. As a result, I can you know,

Pod: This was before the head space program

Gillian: But there was a lot of research starting to emerge in. Google was already doing it. There was a bit of that, and so I've done my 10 minutes a day and I start to feel more calm and in control, which is lovely. But what was really interesting is after two more weeks, I said, right, I'll do another two weeks of this experiment, and then my husband said to me, do you realize you're easy to live with? Wow, that's really interesting

Pod: So you so that's interesting on many levels. What a great gift he gave to you by giving you feedback, but also how courageous he was to say that

Gillian: We'd had a pretty tough time and had other family pressures. It was needed. It was

Pod: What was he noticing that made it in his eyes You're easier to live with.

Gillian: I think I was less of a bitch, Right?

Pod: Glad you said that. Not him.

Gillian: I was less reactive. So, I was more able to, bite my tongue - at the time, I probably would have described it as biting my tongue, but I would describe it differently now, but I wasn't as reactive to the things that were really annoying me.

Pod: And so now you look back in that at that time and you're able to think that the practice of the mindfulness that you had started undertaking was allowing you to either be less reactive, less angry, or just to manage it in a more proactive way?

Gillian: Yeah, I'm not sure that I was less angry but I wasn't noticing myself being angry and having just a little bit more space to choose what did I do next as a result. But the thing that really got me very curious about the whole journey – I kept going with this experiment and I'm, you know, up to at the end of month three and I've been doing the practice most days I wasn't perfect, but most days., I sit on a couple of boards and so after a board meeting, one of the guys lined over to me and said, Look, but I don't know what's going on with me, but it's like you suddenly smarter and I'm like in my head I'm like dude that is not a thing that you say out loud, but thanks very much.

Pod: This is a board that you're sitting on, obviously board being a hyper governance and hyper responsible entity for any organization he leans across to you. It says you've become smarter. Wow. So how did you mindfully accept that compliment?

Gillian: I'm really curious. And I asked what was it that you see that's different. And it basically boils down to that. I talked more and what I hadn't understood until that moment was I in that board context was a bit of a diversity hire. So, I'd started five years earlier now been on involved in an organization 15 years. But so, I had started reasonably young, and I was used to feeling like I had to have the perfect interjection before I would make a comment at the board table. And what that translated into was that I would be so busy trying to get the perfect interjection that the conversation would move on and I wouldn't speak it all. And so, I was contributing. It wasn't that I wasn't speaking at all, but I was living in my head as opposed to listen to the conversation rather than speaking

Pod: Yeah, and just to clarify for the audience who may not know what you mean by I was a diversity hire. What kind of diversity were they hiring you for?

Gillian: So, I was a relatively young woman. I was 35 at the time, and they that was mainly older, retired men and women. But there were mainly men.

Pod: They hired you for your youth and for your femininity and I imagine you know, one stage you worked strategy for a pretty serious organisation, so you bring a lot of intellectual lends to an otherwise for-profit environment. Yeah. And so, what's going back to his comment on what's really interesting is here you were they hired you for all of that, and and you weren't bringing it. But after a few weeks of practicing mindfulness, it emerged naturally for you.

Gillian: What I noticed was it became really obvious to me when I was thinking too much. So, I was starting to observe my thoughts and when I noticed that I was getting tangled up in trying to get it perfect, I'd go just say it. So, it became a mantra of just say it. And so some people who start practicing mindfulness might actually speak less because the, noticed they speak too much and they can pull it back. For me, I started to notice I was thinking too much, and I just need to just say something. And so, I was starting just to contribute whatever I was

experiencing, whatever I was thinking at that time and not in it. Look it in a in a curated way. I wasn't just a firehose, but I was contributing in a way that I hadn't done before. And that just made him think I was smarter. I hadn't changed, but I was contributing differently.

Pod: How amazing is that? Can you get a bit granular with us in terms of what actually was that 10 minutes practice you were doing? Like what actually does it look like or sound like for someone who doesn't do that?

Gillian: What I now understand that I was doing what I didn't understand this at the time is what's called a concentration practice. So, it was a breath awareness practice where you focus on your breath and you could use any object of focus for your attention. But the breath is a pretty good one for a couple of different reasons, and the idea is that you focus on that breath, and where were the physical sensations of breathing? And then when your mind wanders, which it inevitably does after two or three breaths, when you notice that, you bring it back, and so there's kind of three core muscles you're developing as you do that practice. The first is the ability to actually stabilize your attention on something you choose, which, strangely enough, was much harder than I expected at the time and remains a challenge today.

But you develop the new pathways to be up to sustain that focus as you do more practice. The second muscle you're developing as you do the practice is your ability for awareness, which is really foundation of self awareness. And by that, I mean that moment when you notice that your mind is wandering, is you observing your capacity in your thought, which is something we very, rarely do. We tend to think what's going on in the heads all the time. It's almost like we are thinking in them or through them rather than actually observing them. And so, it's like when we talk about that difference between being able as a leader to act on the system rather than in it. I think once you can observe your thought in that way, you can act on this thought rather than in it. It gives you that little bit of perspective.

Pod: I've heard this phrase called the third eye. The idea being is an imaginary third eye in your forehead that just observes yourself and so does nothing other, then observe yourself. Is that what you're talking about? That notion of meta awareness is you're watching you being you in you.

Gillian: Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting. We associate with a third eye, that word. But no, that's not in terms of that perspective of almost like being on the balcony? Yes, of yourself, watching your moment, but not in a kind of forensic, or kind of scary way. And don't get me wrong. I would not spend my time all the time being able to observe myself because you inevitably come out of that. But your ability to notice it sooner and sooner is really powerful. So a really good application for me and coming back to my husband realizing that I was being less of a bitch was your ability - so often will say, like people who are really calm are people who never get rattled by something or never get angered by something or would never become impatient. What I've started to observe by seeing myself and in the leaders I work with now is that people who are calm, it's not that they never get upset by something but they are lightning fast at noticing the very first

moment that impatience or frustration start to arise and then responding to that appropriately, rather than it becoming kind of a bushfire in their brain like, it's easy to put out a spark than it is to put out a bushfire, right? So, if you can notice the very first moment when you start to become agitated about something, you can go well, look at that. This is starting to really annoy me. What do I need to do now? So, then it means there's less rumination, there's less unnecessary effort. There's more acting in the moment of what matters, rather than coming back and going 'I could've Should've would've'.

Pod: There's a story in one of your books and not sure if it's *One second ahead* book or the *The Mind of the Leader* book but it's Jacob Larson who is the president of the Finance Group, and I've heard you tell the story at a conference so tell us about that. The notion that he is a finance leader whose undertaking some of your mindfulness programs and at the end, the program he's asked what's the biggest thing he got from this? And it is the least expected answer you'd hear from a finance leader.

Gillian: He says one second. And he's had to pay for the program, he had to do 10 minutes a day of coaching every week over a period of eight weeks. Um, and so in the researchers were interviewing him and asked, what did you get out of it? And he said, I got one second and when the researchers talked about it, you could feel their jaw drop and he said that, no you don't understand. I've got this one second of space between whenever anything happens, within me or around me and the moment and I need to respond. It's really interesting lately. It's a metaphor. Sure, one second it's not like (pause) now I'm going to respond. It's I can observe and then choose, as opposed to being overcome by whatever it is. You know, the phone rings and I immediately pick it up or, you know, someone walks into my office and immediately I am angry because of interrupted my flow. It makes it more conscious a choice about what he does next with the intention of being a better leader.

Pod: As, you know, I specialize in coaching, typically CEOs early C level suite executives, and they're some of the smartest people I know are in those roles by their mere nature they are very clever and they work really hard. And then they were in those positions. But the better off those group of people have a notion off optionality. How do I keep my options open to me before I make major decisions? And the really clever investors I've met over the years, our masterful at maintaining Optionality. What I've realized in the last couple of years is part off their ability to become good at Optionality is they develop a practice such as mindfulness or something it might be a physical exercise and might be reflection piece, but it is geared towards helping them not jump into a decision too fast or a reaction too fast. Is that Is that something you believe noticed in your work?

Gillian: It's really interesting. I think this kind of three key skills we've seen in the leaders that are managing really well, leading really well and the first is this ability to maintain mental agility. So, this ability to zoom in on what's needed as a priority the ability to zoom out and see a pattern as that arises, but also your ability to switch between things. So you might, as a CEO, be needed to be dealing with the decision about, um, workforce cash. We had this cash flow issue with a workforce that we need to stand down. You might be having a

conversation with investors, or you might be needing to console an employee that doesn't agree with the situation or whatever it is. You've got to switch so many different contexts. But not only that, you probably also and frankly in this moment at home and dealing with your family and any of the complexities that arise there.

So this is this ability to zoom in as needed, the ability to zoom out and see patterns and the ability to choose is that that's kind of been one really cool thing. We've seen the leaders who I'm moving towards thriving during really well, I think the next piece has in the context of so much suffering. Although everyone's impacted by what's going on, it is definitely, uh, there's been some leaders we've worked with who have really leaned into what we call the empathy trapped like. You can see that people are suffering and what's interesting neurologically about empathy is the way that we know someone suffering is that we take on what we experience is their situation and run it through our own pain networks in our brain, and if we come up with ooh that hurts, then we go ooh they're hurting. So literally what we do is we resonate with someone's pain and we feel that pain as we empathize people.

Leaders who stay in that space burn out really quickly because what they will tend to do is then become. Apparently, we had one leader we were working with who was unable to write a piece of communication to the employees because they were so overwhelmed by the pain that they were going to inflict in the communication. That's not helpful in that moment for the leader or for the people. But what we tend to do then what we noticed latest into two is then dissociate so they will dissociate from the experience and so almost become kind of calculating, strategic, but very dismissive of people's pain. Go yeah that's there and I'm I'm not going to feel that. So it's almost like they squash it down because it hurts too much. Whereas the ones we've seen really adapt and really leverage this moment for culture building for shifting focus. Those that have been up top right?

What would say from a place of wise compassion. Interestingly again, if I stick you under name for my scanner and ask you to empathize, certain areas of your brain will light up when I ask you to connect with your intention that another not suffer and start to think about what you could do to help them. Actually, the areas of love and reward in your brain start to light up. So, as you start to connect with an intention that you don't want another person to suffer, and you want to be of service to them. This different, every area of the brain's engaged. And so, leaders who are able to leverage in that capacity, then can operate in a really strategic but very caring way that sends enormous signals to the organization.

Pod: I suppose this was on a public stage, the Prime Minister of New Zealand is someone who displays that really well and has been called out all of the world for her ability to do that. It would appear so,

Gillian: Yeah. I mean, she's really, really interesting. I, um, having read one of her biographies, she has been deliberately cultivating herself for many, many, many years, both as a skilled political communicator, but her foundational mantra is

kindness. She will, as a default come from a place of how do I help people not suffer? What can I do for people in that way?

Pod: It's really intriguing. The word compassionate and strategic in the same sentence because that's not something that a lot of us would think about naturally. And I know in my own development is a leader in my own development as a human being I use the mindful leader app from the Potential Project and the notion of cultivating compassion is part of that practice. I've noticed in my own development when I'm sitting in that pause moment. But now I'm thinking of what's going on for that person. Where are they coming from? what might be happening for them as my starting point, which it wouldn't have been a number of years ago and I can certainly say that some of the decisions I make these days are now coming from that place than before and I would suggest that in terms of complexity, they are definitely better. Decisions are disturbing, felt in a better way than in the past. So, I'm pleased to hear my egotistical brain's pleased to hear that I must become more strategic, becoming more compassionate.

Gillian: We talked about this idea of wise compassion because I think compassion can have a bit of a bad rap, particularly in businesses, around being overly caring and so we make a distinction around, you know, compassion without wisdom, without business insight and intelligence is really folly like because you're not actually serving the broader good in that way, just the same as wisdom without compassion is and can be manipulative or brutal. And so that sweet spot where you can be both wise and compassionate- I mean, it's a sweet spot but it is a hard spot because I think even myself, you know-I can remember when I've needed to run redundancy programmes and think that I remember they're shutting off of, What would it feel like to go through this experience, having been made redundant myself?

You know I remember having to physically shut off from that experience because I didn't have these kind of practices, all kind of ideas available to me at the time, and we made some terrible decision to, you know, not allow people who had been working for us for four years to return to the desk after we after they've been told that they had to leave. That was heartbreaking. That was the feedback that I got was that there was the most cruel thing that I could have possibly ever done to have allowed that decision to unfold in that way. And I hold that today, like I I think there's still the right thing that needs to be done. But how do you do it in a way that's doesn't cause unnecessary suffering to other other beings?

Pod: Yeah, there's something in that isn't there? I've also being at the receiving end of actions like that? And logically, you can understand making the decision for the business, and I think most people accept that. But the way it makes you feel on the way out the door can be dramatically different that I know for me personally I feel like a pariah after having given my heart and soul to this particular place. And there's no need for that. You know, the logical decision can be, it could be done with compassion and you leave feeling good. You talk well about the organisation for a long time afterwards.

You talk about your condition about practicing kindness and wisdom, as a foundation reminds me of. I spoke to one of my clients in maybe April or so is a CEO of I'm guessing I'm about a \$15 billion business. He has about 6000 people who ultimately report into his function. And so the notions of jumping from strategic decision to strategic decision is not new to that level. The notion of doing it from your kid's bedroom and the cot in the corner with his six month old baby that's very new. And what he said to me was, I am doing this, this and this this. I've done that every day for last 10 years. But I now have my the six month old baby in the corner of the room. Thank goodness I've been practicing for this. He realized that the work you've been doing himself is getting him ready for moments like that.

Which brings me to a different conversation. You can practice that you can get ready for it, and that the same token complexity comes hurtling down the road out of the blue, and it can knock you over, no matter how well practiced you are. Have you seen that? Have you experienced yourself and if so, what was that like?

Gillian: It's really interesting. I found at the start of COVID and when we became towards the end of March, a real issue and obviously being involved in health care organizations. I I can remember we had a board meeting and I found myself not wanting to read my board papers. And I was kind checking with myself, going, What's going on? Like you're really avoiding this good few 100 papers that need be read. So it's like it's something you want to decide to do early on, and what I found was it does a lot of work around theory. You and stuff from MIT in the States will talk about one of the responses we can have to Complexity is a desire to turn away and freeze, and I really identified my desire to not even pick up my board papers in that moment was I was overwhelmed in this environment, particularly within health care. At that time, we didn't have the proper protective equipment that we knew we needed. To be able to support the hospital if something happened now we could rely on government sources and all of that sort of stuff. But as a board member, when you're turning govern within the boundaries of what you can control, I think we were really hyper aware that we just didn't have the protection that if something happened, we would be asking our employees to put their lives at risk and that's not okay. And so I had that kind of bubbling in the background. And then I've also got the who the hell am I, to be involved in a conversation about this at this time. I have come to the board for a different reason other than healthcare and so I was having this kind of- subtle because it wasn't obvious to me at the time, kind of feeling, which was I don't know that I can contribute anything here. So there was this kind of sense of, of overwhelm and wanting to turn away and freeze. And so, luckily, dear Otto, I was reading something of his at the time and it said, you know, this distinction: turn away and freeze or lean in and engage and I'm like, I have no idea what lean and engage looks like right now, but I'm gonna read my board papers so I read my board papers and I turned up. But I'm going I've got no idea what I'm ready to contribute right now. But I'm here and I'm prepared. I was really interesting because it was it was a meeting where these meetings go for four or five hours and the CEO was at one point was describing the situation, particularly around the PPE, the lack thereof, and she started to tear up. And it was really interesting, because just after that she said I'm really sorry I broke down. And

she would have said maybe three or four more times during the board meeting. Look, I'm really sorry, but I'm fine. I'm fine. We're under control here. I'm really sorry I broke down, and she said it right at the very end is we were just finishing the board meeting and I felt compelled in that moment to say 'look what I see in in that moment where you had tears, was that you're not breaking down. You were stepping up. What you were doing in that moment was stepping up to the responsibility that you feel for people's lives. That even makes me want to stop way, talk about it now. But that is not breaking down. That is taking responsibility. That is proving that you are human and that you care about other human beings and we trust you to go on and make logical decisions. We trust you to have, you know, and yes, there'll be moments when you don't feel like you're under control, you will feel overwhelmed. We all will feel that. But that is not a moment of breaking down. And I think that was what was interesting to me on reflection of that as well was the feedback I got was, that was exactly what needed to be said in that moment, which was really ironic then, given that I'd felt like whatever I got to contribute, who am I to be, here like all of that. And yet, when I talked about overthinking at the start, all of the stuff that we have in their heads, when we can start to notice that and then choose what happens next and just show up and engage, we have far more likely to bring the abilities that we need for that moment. Then we give ourselves credit for.

Pod: It strikes me that this experience we're in with COVID, I mean, there's there's a lot of massively negative impacts of this clearly and although we have yet to understand that will ripple for many years, I suspect. But there's also an emerging positivity and you know the stuff on the environment, and your family's having more time together, less travel etcetera. I know for myself, I haven't been overseas since October, and I'm typically one who's on an international plane every three weeks. I'm loving that right now, but I'm also noticing there seems to be- and your story shows it's a taking down of the armour, to allow in, let's say humanity and you recognizing that this particular leader and the team that she leads, were doing the extraordinary best in circumstances they've never been in that. No one has ever been in - at least not at the whole world at the same time. And her honesty allowed a feedback mechanism for you to go, actually, what you're doing is exactly what we want you to do. We want you to step up into leadership.

Gillian: Yeah, that if you're not affected by this at this time, what are you exactly?

Pod: I was working on a different team and they had their leader, the CEO had only joined the organization like three months earlier. So was still very new to this organization. It was a big organization than the one they had come from before. And then suddenly now they're in COVID. And everyone's looking to the new leader and in the early days of their experience, I think it's right to say that the team this leader stepped into lead was dysfunctional before the leader got there, so the team and three months in hadn't enough time to bring the team together into a functional team. So suddenly a crisis comes along and teams typically go either way. They either band together as in we're all in this together, or it fragments the team even more so. It looked like it was starting to do the second option and her question to the team was, 'What if we don't do this together as this team, who's going to do this?' Reminds me of a story from Intel, and I've

heard you tell this story as well around selfless innovation. If a different team came into the situation that we're in, what would they be doing?

Gillian: Yeah, absolutely. It's a great story. The idea that there was -I'm always gonna get the words wrong because the technology is so old, Forget it. But I think it was, microchip versus microprocessors and Intel was making a decision in the early nineties about which investment they should double down on going forward. And there was a leaning towards continuing microchips because that was what they already had invested in and where they were already at. And the founder at the time really turned the CEO and said, 'look, if we got sacked and someone great came in tomorrow, what decision they would they make'? and everyone around the table, we unanimously said microprocessors. That's what we need to do. We have to be so invested in what's already gone because we built this or we can't see possibility. So this other skill, which we've seen one is about mental agility, one is about wise compassion. The other skill we've seen is this ability for selfless innovation, this ability to pivot as Organizations have had to do to find new ways of doing things that where you can begin again. We bring in a beginner's mind.

Pod: Yeah, I noticed on one of the blogs on your website, it talks about the opposing mindsets, the challenge versus threat mindset and I talked about three shifts cultivating self compassion, Beginner's Mindset, what you just referred to and also moving from a fixed to growth mindset has been really important right now. So a question, I notice on this one is given the complete lack of time everyone's on Zoom calls from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., or whatever variation of Zoom you're using there's a real lack off physical contact because we're not the same office and therefore that kind of ad hoc, tacit sharing of information just is not happening other than on email or telephone. What are you noticing from either leaders individually or leadership teams, that their ability to grow that mindset during this time, what are they doing that is helping that? That then lead to the pivoting that you talked about. Is there a degree of practices? A degree of questioning techniques? Is it a degree of whatever to allow that to happen?

Gillian: It's such a good question. The analogy we've been using is this idea of bees wax that in crisis bees wax warms up. So when bees wax is cold, you try and bed it and it cracks -like it just it snaps. But when beeswax warms up, you can mold it into a new shape. And it's kind of this potential we have at this time that when things are in crisis, we've seen massive shifts that organizations have been able to make working from home or to completely retooling their plans to be able to create a different form of PPE, because that's what's been needed by society or something that they would have said would previously take months, if not years. Really decades to get to where it needs to be. I think there's a few different things. One has been the different voices that are invited to the table.

So, One leader was telling me about how, um typically, if they were strategically trying to think about something for when they had plenty of time. They would have the usual suspects around the table, and they prosecute the case. In this environment, they pulled in people from all different places because they didn't have time to kind of brief the senior leaders about it. And he was saying that he was astonished by the capacity of the people lower down in the organization to

bring fresh thinking, to bring new ideas. So I think there's a little bit about who he paying attention to asses the practice like, How did who you invite into the conversation? So those that are navigating really well are seeking multiple voices and at the same time there's a bit of, you've got to be prepared to listen. So how do you create the space within yourself that the first impulse you have, which is, you know, that we talked about this- Selflessness is your ability to transcend your own ego impulse, which is to go 'oh no we tried that before. No we did that. Whatever it is that the brake pedal that we tend to put ourselves around ideation and and thinking. So that ability to even know that about yourself and allow a bit more space.

Pod: I hadn't even thought about that at all and the analogy to bees wax is a fantastic one. I'm going to steal that, thank you very much. But I was interviewing some board members of an organisation last week and one of their observations around COVID was their usual board meeting Exco interactions had changed because now everything's on zoom for them. But what it had done was it had allowed an opportunity for everybody on the executive team to present in a way they hadn't done before on a very frequent basis and suddenly, levels of expertise that sat on the exec team became apparent to the board that they hadn't been used to for a range of different reasons. It wasn't necessarily Machiavellian or on purpose. But they had suddenly realized, a whole depth of talent here that we hadn't even noticed that's existing within our leadership team don't mind the theam beneath that, and that's allowed them to develop. Let's call it the word committees for the sake of a better word, but new task forces or committees to target different ways of thinking and different strategic plans for the future of this organization in a way that had been sitting on the strategic plan but never had actually been done. And it's only through the emergence of seeing different people speak to, they realize we don't need to go externally. We have all the talent here, which I think goes to your point of who you're listening to.

Gillian: Absolutely. And at the other thing. I mean, Zoom, particularly on our board meetings is that people show up differently. There's something about being able to -we have less than 25 people who would be in the board means you can see everybody on Zoom at the same time. Um, introverts talk more is what we've noticed or or there's an equality of voice maybe that you don't necessarily get in the physical space, which is really interesting

Pod: Because you commute everybody, you control that. We're coming to the end of our conversation. I've got a few questions I'd like to throw at you, which I throw at everybody, if I could. You've had an extraordinary career in the sense of you started at Shell, you moved into SOCOG which the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympics way back in 2000, yet have been in your logistics role. There you moved into head of strategic projects for Rail Corp, a large infrastructure organization within Australia. And then you work in the apparel organization, which is now part of Haynes. 60,000 person organization. You're on various board roles as well as your Potential Project role. When you look back at all of that, a question without notice for you, Gillian. What would you be telling, say, the 30 year old version of yourself from a leadership learning point of view? What's all the wisdom that if you could impart to them, you do? So from the point of view you have today.

Gillian: the first thing that comes up to me is chill the hell out. I would use a different word. But I think there's one thing that kind of happened for me when I was around 30 was I'd come, had been doing a lot of kind of process, re engineering, kind of change leadership roles. And I was used to always having a logical answer as to how you got to everything like that. You know, you proved that you were gonna save this amount of money and then you execute and you'd make sure you actually delivered on that. And I can remember being tasked with some big what at the time sounded "highfalutin", but its strategy job within a retail organisation, which was really just a cost cutting exercise, and I hadn't grasped that in its political dimension and one of the things I went through, what I would I would call now a bit of a mini mental breakdown to be honest.

Let's say it was I was tasked with finding \$5 million worth of savings, which wasn't insignificant for the patch that I had to play within within the organization. I can remember coming back to the table and saying 'look I can find really logically 2.5, I can't find the other 2.5.' And the answer at the time was Speak to the hand, Jill, the answers five. And I literally drove myself nuts trying to solve for 'How are we gonna find 2.5 more? And the answer ended up being a little bit of Machiavelli and political shenanigans on behalf of my boss at the time. But that was always the answer. But I never saw it if that makes sense. So I would say to myself, Is there's multiple ways of solving problems, and by definition, you won't know even a quarter of them but keep your eyes open, but chill the hell out. It's gonna be okay.

Pod: My last question for you. I know you're a bass player. I know you are a classically trained pianist and a choral singer. I know you create cabaret type shows and then all the things like that. The most important question of the day is what is your favourite song?

Gillian: Today? Because I think it changes on a day to day basis. My today, my favorite one. Good. I'm gonna fall apart on the who actually think that. But it's **These boots are made for walking.**

Pod: It has been a complete pleasure to have you in this episode today. We'll have links to the Potential Project in our show notes and links to your the mindful apps that you guys have. But thank you so much for coming on the show and thank you for the work that the potential project do because it's I think could appear has being under the branch of soft skills, but actually what you've said to us today, it's actually strategic, and helping the leader to have the space helps them to be more effective. And that's effectively what this podcast all about.