

The HR Mixtape: Hosted by Shari Simpson with Guest Margaret Andrews, Author of *Manage Yourself to Lead Others* and Founder of the MyLo Center

Announcer:

You're listening to the HR Mixtape. Your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

Shari Simpson:

Joining me today is Margaret Andrews, author of *Manage Yourself to Lead Others, Why Great Leadership Begins with Self-Understanding*. She has created and teaches leadership and executive programs at Harvard University and is the founder of the MyLo Center, a private leadership development firm. Her clients include Amazon, Citi, Continental, Walmart, Wayfair, and the United Nations. Margaret, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to sit with me on the podcast today.

Margaret Andrews:

Well, thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

Shari Simpson:

I'd love if you could share with our audience a little bit about your journey and the book that you wrote to kind of tee up our conversation today.

Margaret Andrews:

Sure, absolutely. So my background is, I like to say that I have one foot in academia and one foot in the business world. So I started my career as a CPA in San Francisco. I've been a marketing executive and a strategy consultant

before finding what I think is my true home in higher education. So I teach a class called Managing Yourself and Leading Others, and it's been going on at Harvard for close to 20 years now.

Shari Simpson:

Wow.

Margaret Andrews:

And yeah, and I know it kind of shocks me that I can say that. And so we, you know, it's a regular class, 15, 16 weeks with papers and lots of readings and things like that. And so we also created a two-day executive program out of it, and it's been very, very popular. And so this book is based on that executive program and the class. And the idea behind it is that you have to manage yourself before you can effectively lead others. And so that's it in a nutshell. And there's lots of different parts to it as well, which I'm sure we'll get into some of those.

Shari Simpson:

Well, it's so true. You know, my husband is actually going through an executive fire officer program put on by the National Fire Academy. And they have, you know, four basically sections that they go through before they have to do a large capstone project. And the very first two week intensive is all about knowing themselves. So it's true across industries, across roles. It's kind of the center of leadership. So, you know, when you think about defining leadership in the context of today's complexities with, you know, our fast changing organizations, our hybrid environments, all the things that we're handling from, you know, changes in administration and things like that and how we have to pivot so quickly. What does that definition look like now?

Margaret Andrews:

Yeah. So I still think that the definition is the same. In my mind, leadership is about, I don't want to say it is about moving individuals and groups of individuals toward a better future. Right. And this can be, you know, in a family, in an organization, in a society. Right. So there's lots of operative words there. You know, what does better mean, et cetera. But I think a lot of it has

to do with influence. You know, you can tell people what to do for a while. But ultimately, they have to believe in it. So, you know, it's the communication, it's painting the picture of, you know, what does it look like and what does it mean and what does it mean for each one of us as individuals. And I think what really makes things a little bit different now is technology. You know, that technology comes in and changes what is possible. And so it's always very upsetting when there's a new technology because, you know, whether it was the automobile or the internet or social media or AI or any, you know, of these things, that all of a sudden things are possible that weren't possible before. And, you know, what, oh my goodness, what does this mean for business? What does it mean for humanity and all of these kinds of things? And what I tend to think of is that it's a technology and technology is all about how do you use it. Almost any technology can be used for good or for ill. So it's not the technology, it's how we're going to use it.

Shari Simpson:

You know, I've shared this story before on the podcast, you know, going back to my days of college when, you know, cell phones were just becoming more prominent and you had, you know, your different search engines that started to come alive. You know, for me, it was Ask Jeeves. And I know that's, you know, yes, I remember that a while ago. But, you know, I remember my professors at the time, there was these two kind of camps. There was the one camp who was like, don't depend on this technology, you know, make sure you still know how to use the Dewey Decimal System and the libraries and the card catalogs, all that kind of stuff. And then there was another group of professors who were very forward thinking and really encouraged us to embrace the technology and how to utilize it. And it's just funny seeing how so much has changed and the different directions that people take. So there's definitely an initial fear. I think that's pretty normal, but you're right. It's about how we use these tools to evolve and change in our environments. You know, and I think about that behavior that those different professors took in their approaches and how many different leadership behaviors there are out there. There's a million books on leadership, right? And we know that there's definitely different models, but I think, you know, I'd love to hear your perspective with all the work that you've done. You know, what are those

leadership behaviors that really make the biggest difference when you think about guiding teams through things like uncertainty?

Margaret Andrews:

Yeah, absolutely. So I'll go back to what your husband is studying, right, is that it goes back to us, that we have to understand ourselves. And this is in, I'm going to say multi layers, that it's about, you know, who are you? And what made you and who made you who you are, you know, who has influenced you in your life. This is obviously parents and caregivers and family. But it's also how you were educated, what companies you've worked in, what you studied. It was those conversations you had with your dorm mates. It is that movie you watch that you couldn't get out of your head. It's that book you read, right? It's all of these things that shape us, you know, our different way of thinking. And I'm sure we can all remember times when somebody said something you think, I never thought of that. And so you have this shift in perspective all of a sudden. So who and whose thinking has influenced us? What are our values? And I think this one comes up a lot. And I think values is something that we don't really talk about much and truthfully we don't really think about it much and it's too bad. Because they show up in our decision making, what we value. And if we don't know what they are, we may decide something differently and come to regret it later. So, yeah, I think it goes back to really understanding yourself. How do you define success? You know, do you understand the emotions that you have and also how you show up with other people when you're having those emotions? And, you know, these kinds of things, what kind of feedback have you got? So, you know, I do a lot of exercises in this and it really kind of gets at it from different facets. So it's understanding yourself. It's also saying, OK, this is who I am as a leader now. What kind of leader do I want to become? And therefore, what do I need to do to get there? So I think that that's a big part of it. But it goes back to understanding yourself and then you manage yourself towards that new level of you. But I tend to believe that if we don't understand ourselves, we can't understand other people. Because when we begin to understand ourselves, we recognize how we're similar and different from other people. And so then that gives us, like, when we think about other people, we think, well, oh, right, if I'm so different or similar, whatever it is, right, they are too. And it's really treating people as individuals

as opposed to a member of their group. You know, whether it's Gen Z or, you know, people in the accounting department or right. Everybody is so different. And I think we all know this on one level, but we don't always behave that way. Right. We want to be treated as an individual and not a member of some group. So therefore, why would anybody else want that? But it does come into play mostly about understanding ourselves first.

Shari Simpson:

You listed so many great questions. I will not be able to recap all of them, but hopefully someone was feverishly writing down all those different details that you captured as you think about who you are as an individual. What are maybe one or two questions we typically won't ask ourselves that could uncover a lot? I love that you mentioned values and we've talked about that before, but what are some other nuggets that you're like, hey, you know what? If you could dig in here, you'd really uncover some things about yourself.

Margaret Andrews:

Sure. So, you know, obviously the one about understanding who has influenced you. And these are people that have helped you and these are people that have hurt you. We are influenced by all of these people. And by the way, sometimes somebody can be on both sides of the legend. They may have helped you and fed you information about yourself that maybe wasn't true. I hear this all the time about somebody saying, oh my gosh, my third grade teacher said blank, right? Either you're good at this or you're not good at this. And it took me 40 years to get over that or realize it wasn't true. So, you know, when you start looking at that, you realize, ah, is that still true or was it ever true? But I want to go back to values for a moment because I think you're spot on that is so important. And I think that because we don't always know what they are, we're not asked that very much. We don't ask ourselves that. So I will give people two ways to think about values, right? To kind of get at those core values. You know, one is if we looked at your calendar, what would we infer about your values? Because if you think about one of your most precious assets is your time. And so where are you spending it? And you know, I know lots of people say, well, I have to work. Well, yeah, okay, that's

fine. But what do you do when you don't have to work? So how are you using that time? And an example I'll give you is that, you know, if you were to ask my husband and I, we would both say that we value health and fitness. But if you look at his calendar, it would be obvious because no matter what is going on in his life, he will work out six days a week no matter what's going on, right? He'll wake up earlier, he'll stay up later, etc. Me, I value my work a lot and I do like to work a lot. And so you would see that my work sometimes crowds out my workouts. So that's not saying it's a right or wrong. It doesn't mean that I don't value this or he didn't value work, right? It just means that we have a different priority there. But the other way to get at values is to think about what makes you angry when you hear about it, witness it, read about it, whatever it is. Because very oftentimes what makes you angry is something is that a value has been stepped on. And so if you think about are there consistent themes in that, sometimes I don't point to it. The other way I'll say, and it's actually a different question, but it also points to values is how do you define success? And this is in your personal life and your professional life. And, you know, so if people very oftentimes say, Oh, I want to get to this level in the organization, I want to start a business. And I say, okay, that's great. Why? Right. Why do you want to do that? And they look at me like, well, what do you mean why? And I said, well, what's driving that? Usually it's a value. I want recognition. Right. I want people to see that I'm a success. Or if, you know, I want to retire with X dollars in the bank, I always ask, well, why that amount? What does that mean to you? Right. So there's lots of different ways to get into those values.

Shari Simpson:

I love that example of thinking about what makes you angry. You know, you said that and I was thinking of, you know, and I've done values exercises being in HR for 27 years, so there's lots of models. But I love that that was so practical because I was thinking about, you know, when you're in the grocery store and there's a person who is in the middle of the aisle and they're like blocking the aisle. I have a visceral reaction to that. And it's because I value considering others and that, like making that connection. It's very simple. So I love that you shared that because sometimes it's hard to know where to start when you're trying to go down this values road, especially if you don't have

access to some of the assessments and tools and people that, you know, those that have been in HR for a long time have access to. You know, as you think about this role of self-awareness that leaders really need to grasp, how does that help them leading more effectively when they're under pressure?

Margaret Andrews:

Yeah. Because when you understand yourself, right, and values, of course, being part of it. We have to make decisions when under a lot of uncertainty, a lot of pressure. Sometimes the stakes are very high. So, you know, one of the things I talk about in making decisions is, you know, first of all, what's your goal? Right. And therefore, what are you trading off? Right. You can't have everything. So what's your pecking order in these things? But the other is to think about, you know, whose values, what values are at stake here? And so I just think that understanding those values helps you stay rooted in making decisions. And you know the winds are buffeting us all the time. So if you understand your values, you have those roots, right? And you're not buffeted as much. If you don't understand them, and I'm sure we've all seen this, people make decisions that they come to regret later. They hadn't thought it through. They, you know, made a quick snap decision. And, you know, guess what? Even if you understand your values, you might do that too, right? We are all human. We all slip. So I think sometimes you just have to give yourself some grace, apologize if you messed up, and take the lesson and try not to do that one again.

Shari Simpson:

Well, and there's so much power in that integrity and ownership of your mistakes. You know, we all make them. It's just like you said, it's just human nature. Some are bigger than others. Some have more consequences than others. That's just kind of the reality of the world we live in. But having that, you know, that wherewithal to say, Hey, I'm going to learn from this experience. And go back to what you value, you know, how you want to, how you want to engage with that experience. You know, I found that leaders that are able to be proactive and thoughtful and strategic end up doing better and have more space for things like innovation on their team, more space for failure, less stressed out employees. How do we help leaders move from that

reactive state to a more proactive state with the caveat that they have all these things that are being bombarded at them? I think especially about that middle manager layer where they're managing, you know, creating great employee experiences, right? And all the questions they get from their employees. But they're also dealing with all of the expectations and business impact and outcome that, you know, the executive team wants. So they're in a really interesting position.

Margaret Andrews:

Yeah. Interesting is an interesting word. Yes, on that one. Absolutely. You know, I think it is hard. I'm a big fan of questions, you know, asking ourselves questions, asking our team questions, asking our boss questions, you know, and one of my favorite questions is, you know, if we're making a decision for whatever it is and the bigger the decision the more important this question is. But right before we say okay we are choosing this one, my favorite question to ask is okay if we do this what could possibly go wrong? And the reason why I like that is because there is somebody in the room that doesn't love this decision and they are holding back because they're afraid you're not going to like it. What about this? When you ask that you just gave permission to everyone in the room to shoot at that decision. Whether it's yours or somebody else's. And so you want them to do it. That's when you want them to tell you what could go wrong. Because the worst thing, I think, is when, you know, we all say, Oh, yeah, yeah, we're gonna make this decision. Something goes wrong. And somebody says, Oh, I knew that would happen. And you did? Why didn't you say something? Right? We could have saved a lot of, you know, time, money, effort, whatever it is. So, but I think it takes somebody who is self-secure and secure in themselves to ask that question because you are inviting criticism. You are inviting people to tell you why it won't work. That's one of my favorites. But the other is, you know, asking the person, you know, maybe that's saying, you know, we need to do this. Then, you know, to say, OK, you know, think about what's our goal here? What are our priorities? What are we trading off? Who's going to be involved? Right. Because it's not just the decision. I mean, the decision is one part of it. But how are you going to implement it? Right. We oftentimes think that that's separate. But really, it's part of the decision.

Shari Simpson:

You know, such amazing insight as we think about, you know, how we make decisions and how we get to be great leaders. You know, you've gotten the wonderful experience of being in the corporate world and in higher education. And I'm curious, you know, how can leaders learn more from higher education and research as they apply that to, you know, the business context that we live in and function in?

Margaret Andrews:

Yeah, there's, there's tons of research, you know, coming out, whether, you know, whether it's in finance or economics or organizational behavior or psychology or sociology, et cetera. I mean, you know, and of course technology. So it depends on what you're interested in. You know, lots of people want to read, you know, the financial press because they want to figure out, you know, what's the newest thing in financial engineering and goodness knows there's a lot of research that goes on at universities in that. But also, you know, psychology and sociology, because, you know, so many companies say, hey, our people are our biggest assets and really they are. And so it behooves us to get to know about those people. So, you know, how do people behave? But the other thing is, I always say is, is that, you know, they're a collection of individuals as opposed to, you know, a group of some age group or something like that. And, I will say that I think the biggest lesson, most effective lesson I ever learned about leadership was from having kids. And I have three, and before I had kids, I had spent very little time around kids. I never changed a diaper. So when I was, you know, coming home with my son, my first son, I remember thinking if they knew how little I know about this, they would never let me leave with him, right? That would be child endangerment. But they didn't know and they let me go home. And so I had to learn everything. I had to learn how to change a diaper and all of those things. But more importantly, I had to learn about him. Right. He had his own moods and ways of doing things. And really, even as a young child, his own sense of humor and things like that. And so when my second son came along, I thought, all right, now I know how to do this. And I was shocked at how different my second son was just as an infant. Right. And I thought, oh, wow, this is surprising. OK. So I had to learn about him. And then, you know, I had

my daughter and thought, all right, got this now. But no, I don't. And so I had to learn all about her. And that was when it really hit me was thinking that, you know, if my own three children who share the same genetic material and are raised in the same household, if they're not really similar in how they think and behave, why would I ever expect this random collection of strangers in my office to be the same? And I thought, oh, you know, I think that's a big, that's a big thing. And that really is behind why I think we have to treat everybody as an individual as opposed to a member of whatever group it is.

Shari Simpson:

What a great example. And I'm sure so many people listening can resonate with that. My three boys are wildly different as well. And so I felt that as you were kind of going through that experience, as you look ahead for, you know, core competencies for leadership, what do you think are going to remain like the non-negotiables no matter how work continues to evolve for us?

Margaret Andrews:

Mm-hmm. I think I'm gonna say there's there's three and they're in different proportions. And I think that they are actually they've always been important. You know one is, you know, can you learn quickly? You know, it's some level of intelligence of being able to pick things up. But you know part of that is also unlearning. It's, you know, changing we used to do it this way and this made perfect sense and now it doesn't, right? So that's this learning type of things. And another is you have to be competent in whatever you do, right? Whether it's data science or surgery or, you know, firefighting or any of these kinds of things, you have to know what you're talking about and be able to do it. But the third is interpersonal skills. And those are actually, you know, there's been a lot of research that, you know, in terms of leadership and people that you would follow, it's those interpersonal skills that are way more important than the other two. And I'm not saying that intelligence and learning and hard skills are not important, but what makes the difference between a good leader and a great leader often come down to those interpersonal skills. And I think that that's going to be more true.

Shari Simpson:

Well, I couldn't agree more. This has been such a fascinating conversation. And the fact that you get to talk about this, you know, every semester with students and you're teaching the next generation these concepts, I have a lot of appreciation for that. So thanks for taking a few minutes to sit down and chat with me.

Margaret Andrews:

Thank you so much. It was a real pleasure.

Shari Simpson:

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtape.com. Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.