

Talk CNY S1X3

Andrew Fish 0:06

Welcome to a special Expert Mini Series for CenterState CEO's podcast Talk CNY, presented by NBT Bank. In this series, we'll feature experts from across Central New York and beyond to dig into our memberships' most requested topics. You'll also hear stories of successful collaborations between a few of our long standing members and CenterState CEO that could inspire your next big move.

Kate Hammer 0:25

Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for reminders every other Wednesday for our main podcast series. And be sure to catch the rest of the Expert Mini Series as well. Today we are joined by CenterState CEO member Gwen Webber-McCleod, president and CEO of Gwen Inc. Gwen has more than 30 years of leadership development experience as a leadership coach, mentor, strategic planner and diversity and inclusion consultant. Gwen is a highly sought after keynote speaker and a go to resource for leaders and organizations throughout the country.

Andrew Fish 0:59

I'm Andrew Fish, Senior Vice President of Member and Business Experience at CenterState CEO.

Kate Hammer 1:04

I'm Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. We are your hosts for Talk CNY.

Andrew Fish 1:11

Gwen, thank you so much for joining us today to talk about all the wonderful insights you have around leadership. But to start, tell us a little bit about Gwen Inc. and yourself.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 1:19

One of my favorite subjects. I am Gwen Webber-McCleod and I'm the president and CEO of a private sector leadership development corporation that's incorporated in my name. So my company's name is Gwen Inc. And we exist to help primarily mid to executive level leaders achieve their business goals by focusing on the personal leadership competencies of confidence, competence, courage and calm. And the reason we do that is because there's a core philosophy in our company that everything ,and we mean everything, rises and falls on your individual or team leadership. So that's what we do. Every single day I work with leaders as consultants, executive coaches, technical assistants, professional facilitators, to

really help them reflect deeply on if how they show up is either helping or hindering their company's ability to achieve their business goals.

Andrew Fish 2:08

It's awesome.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 2:09

I think it's pretty awesome.

Andrew Fish 2:10

Yeah!

Kate Hammer 2:11

Yeah, I'll second that!

Andrew Fish 2:13

You know, we've known each other a long time. And I remember distinctly the first time I heard you talk about competence, competence, courage and calm and it's catchy.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 2:23

Yes.

Andrew Fish 2:24

It's, it's intentional.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 2:25

Right.

Andrew Fish 2:26

And it resonates really well with you. Can you? Can you dive into that a little bit?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 2:29

Yeah, I would really love to, because I think often when people hear those words, they experience them as a set of attributes or qualities. And in my company, we position them as a set of leadership skills that we must actively and intentionally develop. And the fundamental reason for that is because what we're observing at Gwen Inc. is that there is a direct connection between the relationship between the highest level leaders in a company or organization and the company's capacity to successfully achieve its business outcomes. And so what we're observing and highly skilled leaders is not only are they technically astute at whatever industry they're in, they have this set of personal competencies that

they literally work on and build a school of skills, right? The cop the competency of being confident, confident in themselves confident in the mission confident in the team, you have to work at that, it doesn't, we don't do that naturally. When we're talking about competence, it's not only being technically competent, but understanding the set of competencies that ensure that you were building high trust relationships that will yield high performance. When we're talking about courage. You know, we're all living in really dicey times everything's really slippery. So we're observing leaders developing the competency of speaking courageously, about tough business issues, speaking courageously, when we need to challenge the status quo, speaking courageously to that employee who is underperforming, so that kind of courage. And then when we talk about calm, we believe that there is a direct connection between the condition of the leader spirit and the condition of the company or the organization. And so we are very much so proponents of leaders embedding a value for calmness and self care into everything they do to achieve business goals, and for them to be role models about that. Because our employees hear what we say, but they only believe what we see, they see us do, right? So if I'm walking around saying, Well, I want you to be calm, and I'm watching you work 2,000 hours a week. it's not setting up the right thing. And frankly, calmness is a skill set that most of our clients really struggle developing. It's a skill you have to develop.

Kate Hammer 4:41

Yeah. So when you're meeting with a client, what do you notice right away where you realize, okay, here's this area where we're going to need to focus first or what are the types of things you're looking for?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 4:53

Well, you know, what's really interesting, often when people call us they'll say when will we're really calling you because we're having communication issues, right? And in my world, I think communication issues are a symptom of something else. Yeah. And often when we go into the company, we will hear that, and we've become very skilled at querying a leader about what could be underneath that. Because it's hard to consider that it might be you, right? And so we know how to ask certain questions to help them say, Well, what does that look like? What are you noticing when the team is having trouble communicating? Are there dynamics going on. And by us doing that, and really attaching it to business outcomes, gives people the courage to say, you know, what, what I really think is going on is that maybe my communication style isn't resonating with my CFO's. Or I have these two people on my team that are constantly colliding and I haven't figured out how to manage that communication, because when they're acting like that, it's disrupting productivity. So often, what we notice is that people will talk to us about the symptom. But to be honest with you, whenever we're in a company, because I only do this to help people achieve business goals, right? So I'm always curious about like, how is the company performing.

When there's a challenge, we can track it back to issues of leadership, every single time we can track it back to a team, we can track it back to a leadership competency. That's not a play, we can track it back to expectations weren't being set, there's not enough trust in the outcome, poor change management. And so that's why we're really supporting people in this notion that everything rises and falls on you. Because a lot of people don't think that. They really think that if I just show up, they're not awake about that, right? So, they go to work, they're just not picking up on how they're playing in Peoria. And I'm of the opinion that that's where the rubber meets the road.

Andrew Fish 6:48

You know, it's fascinating- you comment about everything rises and falls on them. Leadership is lonely.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 6:53

It sure is!

Andrew Fish 6:54

And so, you know, I think about I think about how important it is to bring someone like yourself for those conversations, because you can't have that with your reports.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 7:04

Exactly.

Andrew Fish 7:04

Right?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 7:05

Exactly.

Andrew Fish 7:05

And, frankly, reports half the time aren't going to give you the straight answer.

Andrew Fish 7:09

That's Absolutely true. Yeah.

Andrew Fish 7:10

And this is something that companies need to invest in.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 7:13

I would agree. You know, our company tagline is "because leadership isn't a job to do alone", because we are all hoodwinked and bamboozled into thinking that leadership is a job to do alone, which is kind of why I like mid level managers, right? Because when I work with them, because we're usually putting them in those positions, because it's our intent to eventually develop them into our executive leader pipelines. But a lot of times what happens to mid level managers is we promote them. And then if I'm working with them, and then ask the question, "why do you think you are promoted to a position that requires you to lead?" What they often say back to me is, you know what, when in that interview, no one ever asked me if I could lead. And what I really demonstrated in the interview, is that I have the technical ability to drive then these tasks. And now I supervise two or more people, and they're expected me to get them through change, they're expecting me to understand communication. And so I think the thing about this whole idea is that the sooner if you're promoting the highest potential mid level managers, promoting those people into those positions, I often suggest that they either be given an internal mentor or an executive coach at that point, so that they can start to define for themselves what leadership is.

Kate Hammer 8:31

And start to understand that there is power and that it's their responsibility that it comes back to them. When you say that these issues arise, you can trace it back to leadership.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 8:40

Yeah, right!

Kate Hammer 8:41

Well, if you identify that, then there's something you can do about it.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 8:44

Yeah, well, what's really interesting to me is that a lot of people who are at work not really being who they want to be. And so when we go down the path of well, what would really happen for this team, and these business outcomes if you literally just became your authentic self, and then applied your skills? Because we don't invite people to think about that I think we're all raised with what stereotypes about what leadership looks like, and what behaviors you demonstrate when you're doing it. And I find when you can get a mid level manager at the beginning of their journey to executive leadership to explore that, they want to understand that everything rises and falls on them. So then they're more willing to do that work, right? I've got to be aware of my communication style. I really need to think about how people respond to me. I need to develop these competencies that are going to help me be an effective leader and keep this team glued together enough to do work. And so I think that's where we often miss a beat. I'm a strong proponent of if you've got a high

potential mid level manager, the minute you promote them, give them a mentor or an executive coach for the first 90 days of their work.

Andrew Fish 9:51

I really liked that suggestion. I think that is something that everyone should take and run with.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 9:55

Right.

Andrew Fish 9:55

Outside of bringing in someone like yourself-

Gwen Webber-McCleod 9:58

Right.

Andrew Fish 9:58

What should they look for in terms of that mentor? How should they think about going about finding the right person for them? Is it within the organization? It was without? Does it depend?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 10:09

Yeah, you know, I think that's interesting. One of the things that I think companies have to do to front end, the identification of a mentor is to have spent some time thinking about, literally, what are the philosophy skills and behaviors of the most successful managers in our company, and then find that mentor, right, who that person who is literally consistently driving business outcomes. When I connect with that kind of person, they've understood somewhere along the line, that it truly is a combination of who I am, and me being able to set the environment and communicate this technical business outcome that we need to drive. So I would say, first and foremost, Andrew, the company needs to really be thinking about what are the philosophies? What does leadership look like in our business? And what does successful leadership look like our business and then as you're onboarding new managers, identify people in your company, that are literally living in that vision, and make them a mentor? And it has to be I think, when companies do this, they have to be willing to create a safe, confidential space for this manager, because this is true for the CEOs I work with, you know, we all are dealing with stuff that we gaslight ourselves all the time, right? And so you need to have that person that will give you feedback, like, No, you're not crazy, but maybe the environment is right. Or you're maybe what why are you saying that to yourself when there's evidence that you're being successful every day. And so I think that mentorship has to really be aligned with with embodied by a person who's truly living the

mission vision values, demonstrating the capacity to achieve the company's goals, and demonstrating the capacity to get people to trust them enough to follow them into all of the decisions and changes they have to drive. When you find that person. That's the person that I would recommend be the mentor.

Andrew Fish 12:06

That's fantastic advice. I guess the only follow on question I would have for that is like, probably shouldn't be that person's direct supervisor, though, right?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 12:14

I say often not, because, but I do think that supervisors need to learn how to coach a little bit.

Andrew Fish 12:19

For sure.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 12:19

But I don't think it should be that person's direct supervisor. Because there's a difference between what your manager does and what your mentor does, right. And you want to keep that space between the two. Because the mentor can get really valuable input and feedback about how mentoring is helping the mentee by how the manager is expected experiencing that employee as a result of having a mentor. You want to keep that space. And the mentee needs to be able to feel to say, be able to say to the mentor things that they might not say to their manager.

Andrew Fish 12:55

Right.

Kate Hammer 12:56

A safe space.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 12:57

Yeah, it's got to be a safe space.

Kate Hammer 12:58

So what is the difference between a manager and a mentor? What are some of those clear differentiating factors?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 13:04

Yeah, so when I think of a manager, I think of a manager is someone who was literally charged to inform you, educate you, prepare you to do the work that you have technically been hired to do. And I would say to managers, that that includes setting up an environment that helps that person be a good teammate, right? A manager is monitoring your performance, reviewing your performance, evaluating your performance. A mentor is someone who really sits with a high potential employee, and creates the opportunity in the space for them to ponder questions and to be asked questions that will help them define what it means for them to be a good manager, or if that's the kind of person I'm thinking about, right? Or define what their strengths and weaknesses are, and then help them find the support systems they need. So the mentor isn't someone who's evaluating or assessing their work, the mentor really becomes a process partner.

Kate Hammer 13:05

Oh, I like that.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 13:18

It's a process partner, someone that's going to ask you questions, someone that can help you find resources, someone could even help you frame a conversation you want to have with your manager, but might be too afraid to do it. And so for the mentee, it really is a safe, respectful, confidential environment where they can start to develop themselves and define themselves in terms of what being a mid level leader or manager is to be to get that nuance of difference.

Andrew Fish 14:31

Yeah.

Kate Hammer 14:31

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 14:32

Right. And a lot of times mentors are someone else's manager, right? And what those kinds of mentors say to me when I grow so much from having the experience with a mentee who isn't someone that I supervise, because it causes me to self reflect, right. Yeah, causes me to think about, you know, I got a dicey relationship with somebody, what could I be doing better? So, yeah, it's exciting.

Andrew Fish 14:55

You know, I hear you using a lot of terms that are general.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 14:58

Yeah, right.

Andrew Fish 14:58

Businesses, organizations, those things. This is really something that's universal.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 15:02

Absolutely. Like if you're a parent these things, strategies will work for sure. Because I think we, I think of myself, we call our family team, Webber McLeod, and my husband and I jokingly call ourselves the Co-captains. And we believe and know that we are leading in a different environment with a different mission, vision, values and goals. But everything I do in my company, I'm pretty much practicing as a mom and a grandma. And so we really are proponents of living one life when you're a leader, and you're right there universally applicable. High trust families have high performance of family goals and outcomes. Right?

Kate Hammer 15:37

So you could just take that skill set home.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 15:39

Yeah, you have to be awake about it, though.

Andrew Fish 15:41

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 15:41

Well, you know, I encourage people to lead with strategic intent, right? Because really, often, when we enter a company, people are either blown around like windsocks. They just don't know what-

Andrew Fish 15:54

On fire, yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 15:55

They're reacting to an environment, right? Or they're just not awake. I think most people are focused on the management part of their job and not the leadership part of it. That's true for CEOs a lot of times.

Kate Hammer 16:07

I mean, the day to day is harsh.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 16:10

Right.

Kate Hammer 16:10

There are many fires to put out.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 16:12

Right.

Kate Hammer 16:12

It's easy to lose focus on that big picture.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 16:14

Yeah. And I think what we can do is help them remember that every single success they have is directly connected to a relationship that they have with someone inside or outside the company. And when the company is facing a challenge, that every single one of those challenges is directly connected to the condition of a person or team in their company. And it's for that reason that you have to lift your head up, right? Because there are companies that are driving outcomes, but it's so hard for them to do it because the condition of the workforce isn't what I would define as healthy.

Andrew Fish 16:52

Sure.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 16:52

Right? And so a lot of people were like, "we're achieving our business goals". I'm like, "great, let's walk around. How many meetings did it take you to get to that outcome?" Right? "We talked about this for 20 months before we did it."

Andrew Fish 17:04

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 17:05

I said, "that's a symptom of something".

Kate Hammer 17:07

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 17:07

Right? So it's, it's us helping people pick their head up off their desk, and focus to that most critical thing. I truly believe relationships really matter and I think they are the only thing. I feel strongly about that.

Andrew Fish 17:20

I love that line. And you know, it is a testament, I think, to the success that I've seen from firms that have engaged with you have brought in this outside perspective.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 17:30

Thank you.

Andrew Fish 17:30

And also, you know, from a personal perspective at CenterState, we love having you on our Board of Directors.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 17:34

Thank you, I love being here.

Andrew Fish 17:36

The voice that you bring, and the insights that you have in our boardroom are significant and also help us you know, really cultivate better relationships and think more strategically about what we're doing as an organization.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 17:48

Yeah, I am honored to be on this board. And I'm at a place in my career where I call myself in the legacy building years of my career. So I'm sitting in your boardroom with strategic intent and hoping that my presence, the courage, I have to speak truth to power or discuss tough issues or offer a not so prominent point of view is really part of my legacy building. And I think that if we're going to be have our butts in a seat somewhere, then we need to be conscious about why we would be there. And so I sit in your boardroom from strategic with strategic intent.

Andrew Fish 18:20

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 18:21

Excited about it.

Andrew Fish 18:22

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 18:22

Honored actually.

Andrew Fish 18:23

We're thrilled to have you.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 18:24

Yeah, thanks.

Andrew Fish 18:25

What would be something that we haven't covered that you think is really important for, you know, business owner, a leader in an organization, nonprofit, you know, professional service, whatever, because as we said, it's universal- What's something that you would really want someone to take away from this conversation?

Gwen Webber-McCleod 18:40

Well, a couple of things, just very high level is to really contemplate the notion that everything literally rises and falls on you. Something else would be and this is critical to contemplate because your employees hear what you say, but they only believe what they see you do. And it's that connection between word deed alignment that builds of a kind of trust between and among leaders, managers in the workforce, that's absolutely required to thrive in this volatile environment of change. connected to that, I would say that it's critical for leaders to really develop the skill of leading change, because what we're really doing when we announce change is pushing people into what I call a grief loss cycle. In short, we're asking them to stop doing things they know how to do, love do, feel competent doing, and asking them to start doing things they really don't want to do. So there's a whole body of work out there. I invite people to look at the work of John Kotter, because he provides a framework for leaders to follow when they're thinking about planning the change before they announced. The other thing is, I would say to focus on embedding self care as a resource and a value into the work of the company. Tired exhausted, people make tired, exhausted decisions and tired and exhausted leaders can't have effectively pour into a workforce and keep that workforce productive. And then the last thing is something we were talking about beforehand, as I'm inviting all of my clients to ponder this question, what is the future calling you to do? And I think it's so critical to be thinking about that, as you're building out a strategic framework, because every company I'm in, and I work across industries, is having the exact set of challenges and trying to solve those challenges by leaning on strategies that worked 25 years ago. And so when you really pause and say, look at your environment, look at your trend data and ask yourself that question, what is the future calling this company to do? What is this? What is the future calling me to do as a

leader, it creates an opportunity for you to be forward thinking. And the direct connection to that, for me is I'm inviting people to really with intent, put their leadership legacy in action right now. So when I'm future oriented about that, I will think differently, right about high potential emerging people in my company, and I will engage them as my mentors to talk to me about what what do you think the future is calling us to do? Because they don't think, I'm 67, my 20 and 30 year old mentors, that's what I believe that what young women are meant to me, are having different thoughts about what work will be like what leadership is going to be like. And so if we really just sit and think about that, what is the future calling our company or organization to do, you will get valuable information that will help you be a better leader position than leaders in the team in your company to drive your business outcomes. And I think you'll get better both qualitative and quantitative results.

Andrew Fish 21:41

Amazing.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 21:42

Yeah, it's exciting.

Kate Hammer 21:43

Building that time into your actual calendar-

Gwen Webber-McCleod 21:46

Right.

Kate Hammer 21:46

To do that.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 21:47

Well, I would often when people say to me, "Gwen, that takes too much time", I'm like, "let's really count, let's count the impact, not stopping for four to six hours to have critical strategic business conversations". And that's what I asked people. Like, there's evidence all over your company of what's happening, because you're not pausing to have specific business conversations. And what is the future calling us to do is just one of those business conversations. There's probably about five more I think people should be having. When I say blowing around like a wind sock, that's what I'm talking.

Andrew Fish 22:19

Right.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 22:20

Right? Because because I think it gets right down to we're doing work, right. We're all doing work. But are we doing the right work in the right way that's driving the right business outcomes. So when your budgets doing something weird, that's symptomatic, right? When people are cranky, that's symptomatic. And I'm just proposing that it's because we won't take two hours, four hours of retreat to really identify what our most pressing business issues are. And then frankly, how are we going to lead our way out of that. And it's partially technical. It's primarily about relationships. So I hope that inspires someone.

Andrew Fish 22:57

It's landing with me in a way right now that maybe, hopefully isn't showing too much on my face. Extremely helpful.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 23:03

I think that's the most critical work. And that whole idea of like, what's the future calling you to do? Because you'll be pleasantly surprised that some of your Hallmark services and programs are absolutely going to help you get there. But when you pay attention to what's going on around you, you're going to discover that there's opportunities to create new ways of being as a leader and as the way you operate, the operations of a company organization that will help you thrive into the future. And isn't that the legacy of leadership? Right? I want?

Kate Hammer 23:33

Yeah.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 23:33

You know, what do you want the fourth or fifth generation of CenterState employees entered to think about you?

Andrew Fish 23:40

Wow.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 23:40

Right, because your name is going to be floating around? I just posed that to my clients yesterday, what do you want them to think? And I think if we don't stop and think about that, then what we do is put companies in this hamster wheel of trying to do the same, do work the same way and an environment, it does not fit. Yeah, and that's a primary issue that I'm working on in the organization development side of my company.

Andrew Fish 24:05

Fantastic. Gwen, I wish we had more time because the insights are exceptional. And as I just said, I'm gonna be walking out of here thinking a little bit differently about even the stuff that happened this week for me.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 24:16

Yeah.

Andrew Fish 24:17

Thank you so much.

Gwen Webber-McCleod 24:18

Thank you so much for having me. It's such an honor to be here with you. And I'm thrilled that you're doing this for people that are busy working and leading because they can click a button and get something that will inspire them to do something differently. And that's always my hope when I share information is that someone gets inspired to a new level of leadership. So mission accomplished.

Andrew Fish 24:37

Thank you.

Kate Hammer 24:39

Yeah, love that!

Gwen Webber-McCleod 24:39

Thank you for having me.

Andrew Fish 24:41

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Kate Hammer 25:02

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