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**LEAD WITH WE**  
**SEASON 2: EPISODE 012**  
**Sherry Turkle, The Empathy Diaries**

Simon Mainwaring:

From We First and Goal 17 Media, welcome to Lead With We. I'm Simon Mainwaring and each week I talk with purposeful business and thought leaders about the revolutionary mindsets and methods you can use to build your bottom line and a better future for all of us. And today, I'm so excited to speak with author and scholar, Sherry Turkle, who studies how technology affects our lives and recently published a memoir called The Empathy Diaries. Sherry, welcome to Lead With We.

Sherry Turkle:

Pleasure to be here.

Simon Mainwaring:

Sherry, you're a tenured professor of psychology and sociology at MIT, and you've written several groundbreaking books about how we as individuals in society at large are changing, for better or worse, by rapidly advancing technology. And, in fact, that's how we met, because you were at this conference talking about Alone, Together, and I was at this conference talking about We First. And then, I think you gave a presentation and I came over to chat afterwards, and then we kept chatting and we went to the next room and moved onto the next room and outside and around the front yard. It was like we locked horns the first time we met, and it was such a great conversation.

Sherry Turkle:

Right. I remember thinking it was very funny, as we were trying to find a place to just talk, that like at so many technology meetings that I've gone to, how hard it is to just find a place to have a face-to-face conversation, because the thing is set up to have you use technology in all of these exciting, new, innovative ways. And here were two people who really had something in common and just wanted a bad cup of coffee and to talk to each other and people were coming in with all kinds of cameras to film things, to do all kinds of complicated audiovisual things, and really we just wanted our two bad, styrofoam...

Simon Mainwaring:

I know. It's like, "Leave us alone. We want to go lo-fi." It was...

Sherry Turkle:

We were so lo-fi. We were really so lo-fi. But we had a lot in common, we had a lot in common.

Simon Mainwaring:

We did have a lot in common, and it was interesting, because our various theses, at the time, were in some ways not competitive, but it was interesting, because you were writing about Alone, Together and this arm's length intimacy that technology is enabling and is it good or bad for us. And I was talking about how brands and consumers use social media to build a better world, so I was casting a more

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positive light on the role of technology, while you were telling a more cautionary tale. Would you say that's fair?

Sherry Turkle:

Well, I think that I'm not anti-technology.

Simon Mainwaring:

Of course.

Sherry Turkle:

I am pro-conversation. And if technology brings people together to ultimately have significant conversations, necessary conversations, I am all in. I think that my work has been mischaracterized, in many ways, as, "Oh, here's the lady who doesn't like technology." Not at all. I'm worried about technology when it makes us feel less vulnerable, people like to feel less vulnerable. They say, "Hey, I like this. I like communicating with less vulnerability. Maybe I'll do this instead of the hard work of really talking to somebody."

Simon Mainwaring:

I think that's very true. I think technology does become a surrogate for intimacy, either with ourselves or with others, and that comes at a great cost that is showing up now in data on depression and a lot of hard metrics. But I think we just feel it each day, just emotionally.

Sherry Turkle:

Yes.

Simon Mainwaring:

And even more so during COVID, where we've been forced to be separated from those most intimate relationships in our lives. I mean, what would you say the effect of COVID has been? Has this really compounded the problem and do you think that's a good thing, because it's thrown it into relief for us, that we can actually see the issue?

Sherry Turkle:

Well, I think that the first thing you have to say about technology in COVID is, "Thank god we have the technology to be able to reach out and have something." In other words, I think that you have to begin, before you get into the niceties, with the, "Thank god." Thank god that we can be talking like this, thank god that I could speak to my daughter, whom I adore, even though I couldn't see her. I mean, you have to thank god that parents could talk to their children. We could talk to aging parents. I mean, let's just begin with, "Thank god," until we get into, "Oh, but the problems, but the problems." The problem is, there's a thing with technology, if we're honest, it's better than nothing, which is what I just said, and I applaud that, till we start to say, "It's really better. It's not just better than nothing, for some purposes it's really better."

For example, psychotherapists all over the country are starting to say, "The sessions I had on Zoom with my patients who could be all over the world were really so rich and people were so honest and so

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relaxed and so in their home, and their guard was down. I think it's better than having them come into the office." And we forget what the presence of the body and what actually the effect of being in the same room with someone has on the vulnerability you need to have the kind of empathy you need to be in an intimate relationship with your therapist. I mean, so I'm just saying that that's the problem with what happens when we get into a love affair with technology, even during an emergency, such as COVID. So we say, "My god."

On the plus side, here's what I think happened during COVID, is that parents, I was doing studies that showed before the pandemic people were kind of softening up to the idea of online education. "My child will have screen applications that will be personalized. The best teachers in the world can educate him or her. Every keystroke, every mistake, every vulnerability in learning will be recorded and the AI will make sure to compensate for that and et cetera, et cetera. That'll be fantastic." Now, when I parent is presented with that kind of opportunity, a parent says, "Excuse me, excuse me. Could you please give my child a person? I think my child needs a mentor. I don't want an AI. I want a mentor for my child, someone who will talk to my child and love my child and value my child as a person."

Simon Mainwaring:

What you're really pointing to is that this technology can almost digitize us. It can erase our humanity, in a way. And help us understand, Sherry, you've drawn this arc from *Alone, Together* through *Reclaiming Conversation* to this book about empathy. What is the core of that narrative that your life's work has been building? What is that itch that you've been constantly trying to scratch? Is it our connection to ourselves and each other or is it the connection between technology and humanity? Or is it about putting technology to the best ends? What is that sort of thematic that's been carried through?

Sherry Turkle:

The theme is that technology makes us a promise that we are very vulnerable to, which is that we can be with each other without being vulnerable. That is crack cocaine. People talk, "Is it addictive? Is it addictive?" You just have to remember you have the promise of the intimacy without vulnerability. You can have a lover, but he doesn't have to know the worst part. You can have intimacy without telling the thing that you... "Oh no, not that." That is really what people, without being able to always articulate it, that's the promise. You can just turn it off when you want. So one young man who loved texting. I said to him, "Why are you always texting? Why don't you talk to this woman?" He had a crush on another 18-year-old and he said, "Conversation? I'll tell you what's wrong with conversation. It happens in real time, and you don't always know what the other person is going to say."

Simon Mainwaring:

This is so important to business, Sherry.

Sherry Turkle:

Yes.

Simon Mainwaring:

It's so important to business, and I want to talk about your memoir in a moment, but I feel like the distinction in our minds, whether you're a leader or an employer or whatever it might be, this distinction between who we are personally and who are professionally, and then who we are professionally

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together, has a huge impact on the type of leaders we are and what we can achieve together. And I've always felt, I was a staff guy for years, sometimes you walk in the door and you put on this professional avatar of yourself and you talk in a certain way and show up in a certain way, and it's almost implicit that you're not allowed to be vulnerable. Things, they always have to be okay. But what you're saying is that there's power in that vulnerability, correct?

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. There's tremendous power in vulnerability, because vulnerability really says, "I'm okay with who I am really, and I know that everybody is vulnerable and that's part of a true self, and I'm so confident about being a true self that I don't mind if you see it, because that's my superpower." I feel that in writing *The Empathy Diaries*, people say, "Well, aren't you embarrassed? I mean, it says your husband was unfaithful to you. I mean, ooh." I said, "With this book, I now have a super power. It is that I'm saying I didn't live a perfect life, I did the best I can, and my superpower is that I am whole." And that means, when I tell you something, I'm not trying to hide. You're getting the truth from me, and I think that makes a leader, because that's somebody you can trust.

Simon Mainwaring:

I've been reflecting on this lately myself, Sherry. I was sort of asking myself and talking to my wife about this the other night. Do we really spend our whole lives waiting to be seen or do we really spend our whole lives learning to reveal ourselves? Because we're the ones hiding. We're the ones hiding. Help me understand this, if you're a leader, you're a CEO, you're a boss, you're an entrepreneur just starting a small team, how do you introduce that vulnerability? Is it like, "You go first and others will follow?" Because that's hard in a corporate environment. Or is like you create a safe space and you give everyone permission to be human and vulnerable in that space and you institutionalize it? Like in my company, We First, every week we'll have strengths and stretches and you talk about what's good in your life, what's not, what you're working on. Do you build a program for it? How do you elevate it inside an organization?

Sherry Turkle:

Well, this is where I think leadership is very important, because a good leader looks very deep and says, "What am I comfortable with?" Not what program did I see online or what did I check and what will I try, but looks at all of those and says, "What would be good for me in order to show myself as the kind of person I really am?" And in my classes, for example, just to show you how I do it, I have everybody talk about an object of significance to them. And I say, "Look, I'm going to talk about an object of significance," and it's usually something from childhood, but it could be from now. And it has to be something where it's your head and your heart and your hopes in it. Head, heart, hopes. Because it's MIT, it's a classroom, it's not the place to just be bringing in extraneous-

Simon Mainwaring:

Is that just to unlock them a little bit-

Sherry Turkle:

Yeah.

Simon Mainwaring:

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... to get them out of their head and more towards their heart?

Sherry Turkle:

Exactly.

Simon Mainwaring:

Is that why?

Sherry Turkle:

But it's not the place to be just bringing in stories from the past out of the blue, but I want to show you that thought and feeling [inaudible 00:13:18] that when you're studying psychology it's the mind and the body and it's cognition and feeling, and also the body. Head, heart, hope, object, because you're scientists and engineers and designers, you're making things. Let me tell you, after 10 people have gone around a class talking about an object, and I'm talking about my grandmother's, her best dishes, which I talk about in my book, there's not a dry eye when people are doing that. So I've found a way that's authentic to me, to talk about design, where I reveal a lot about my family, my background, the Holocaust, what it meant to have dinner together in that family in Brooklyn, but it's not exhibitionistic.

Simon Mainwaring:

No.

Sherry Turkle:

But it's leading them to where I want them to be. In a design firm, you might do something similar. "What have you designed and what did it mean to you?" But it's always by the particular leader going deep into themselves and saying, "What would be comfortable for me?" It sounds like in your firm, you have something that works for you.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. I think that vulnerability is so important to leadership moving forward, and I'm encouraged, because you see all these CEOs around different issues like gun control and other things, really just saying, "We're doing it because it's the right thing to do," or "Enough is enough." They're kind of talking and responding in human ways. But I want to put my hand up and raise an objection to this. I struggle in my life to even know who I am. And again, I was talking to my wife about this the other night. When you put on the hat of a father, a husband, a business owner, a boss, a friend, you kind of build these layers or different expressions of yourself on top.

And I was asking myself the question, "The way that I show up in the world right now, how aligned is that with who I was when I was 17, 18, 19, or 20, before all those responsibilities were layered on top?" I share that only because this is what a leader in a company, large or small, faces. How do you overcome the challenge of knowing yourself, so you can actually be vulnerable and reveal it to others? Isn't that a preceding step, in a way?

Sherry Turkle:

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Well, I think when you speak the truth of where you are and where you've been, you never get into trouble. One thing you can do, is you can say, I think, as we're coming out of the pandemic, one of the things that I'm talking about a lot now is the process or mourning, is the process of grief. Everybody, for example, wants to say, "The return." Like, "This is great. We're back." Hold on, hold on. We've had grief. There is mourning. I don't want to say everyone knows, because unfortunately everyone doesn't know, but the process of mourning means you have to acknowledge loss. In my book, I talk about my mother who died when I was in college and I was totally not ready for her to die, and I couldn't deal with it at all, so I idealized her. We were in the middle of a terrible, terrible set of arguments. She had not let me know my father or speak my father's name or use my father's name. But we couldn't talk about it, so instead of being angry at her or to deal with any of that, I idealized her.

And it took me 20 years to be able to really reconcile with her. And instead, I didn't mourn her, I just idealized her, and we are in danger of doing that with this pandemic. It's not like we're back. Some things have happened that we need to talk about, some things about the pandemic have been good for some of us, some of us have needed a break from the crushing of the everyday, some people have used the time to rest, some people it's been good for them not to travel. I mean, let me go first, I've had fewer migraines during the pandemic. I have to reevaluate my life. I need to admit, "Hey, people. Fewer migraines." I need to think about myself and what that means.

Simon Mainwaring:

Why that is and what... No, I've loved the lack of travel and I hope that everybody is not going to rush back to what, I don't know, was the way things were before, almost as a default, despite the fact that a lot of industries or businesses will encourage to do so.

Sherry Turkle:

But we have to speak up. We have to speak up, and we have to mourn, but mourning means acknowledging that there's something that we've lost that we need to acknowledge and bring inside and own. That's really what I'm saying, is that we need to be honest. Your question was, "What does I mean to acknowledge the many layers of who we are?" And it means acknowledging who we were in the past, and what we bring forward to where we are now. If there's something in your past, this is very interesting. In my class at MIT, we read Oliver Sacks, who for many, many years, a great writer, a great thinker, great-

Simon Mainwaring:

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat?

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. And he denied, for so many years, large parts of who he was. And it wasn't until he came to terms with the many layers of who he was that he became the genius that he became. So I would say that starting to talk about what this past year has meant for us, being with our families more or having more time in solitude or being lonely, and being able to acknowledge that, somehow. That being able to find all these layers in ourselves and share that with other people and allow this vulnerability, we can come out stronger.

Simon Mainwaring:

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I completely agree. And I'll share with you, Sherry, literally earlier today I was on a work call and I asked the guy, "How are you doing?" And I hadn't spoken to him in a long time. And he said, "Okay. Just okay." And I heard in that, the permission to be real myself. He said, "How have you been?" And I said, "It's been tough. It's been lonely sometimes." And there's so much power and permission in these words that we're otherwise not allowed to admit of ourselves. Would you say that there is a silver lining? It's a tragic silver lining, but between COVID and the relentlessness of these life and death stakes, and then tragedy, the fallout of the Black Lives Matter movement in terms of just throwing in our face the social inequities and things that we've got to deal with. It's almost like the surroundings have thrust these emotional issues to the forefront of our lives, to the front of our lives, and we've had to deal with them. Do you feel that that's a good thing in a sense? That we can't hide them, we can't bury them as easily, because they've been so visceral and present in front of us?

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. There's a wonderful concept in anthropology called liminal or betwixt and between, and that's what we have now. We have a time of great privilege, because it's a betwixt and between time. In these times that are, "The old rules don't work, the new rules aren't written," we get to see our country anew. We get to see our politics anew, we get to see white privilege anew, we get to see social inequity anew, we get to step out of the Fourth of July parade in a way that many of us have not. And we get to say, "Okay, I am seeing this." Now, different people will do different things, but the mere fact of seeing for such a wide group of people, and acknowledging is going to mean that we are going to be a different country. And I don't think that the nostalgia for the restoration, I don't think that's the way.

Simon Mainwaring:

After we've had this crisis, and we've had this opportunity to sort of elevate and sustain the priority of our connection to each other and conversation and so on, how do we, in business, institutionalize that? Because, god knows, artificial intelligence and IoT and everything else is escalating exponentially. Yet, the human equivalent isn't or we don't have the skills or the tools. As you teach at MIT and as you look to business and counsel all these business leaders, how do you elevate humanity to the same degree? How do you build it in? How do you prioritize conversation? How can we all listening to this help reset the balance?

Sherry Turkle:

Well, first of all, there are some very basic things. We have seen Congress approach Mark Zuckerberg with such ignorance. Not three years into his company, not six years into his company, what was it? 15 years into his company when he made that first... with an ignorance that... I mean, I pay taxes. I happily pay taxes so that my representatives will be able to look out for my-

Simon Mainwaring:

Your interests, yeah.

Sherry Turkle:

... interests. Hire a consultant, so that when you interview Mark Zuckerberg you know what his business does people. I mean, that's not calling for revolution, that is absolutely being a citizen and saying, "Excuse me." I'm not even suggesting particular policy changes here, I'm saying everybody has to get on it and say the most important industries now are digital, my lawmakers have to be all over this, all over

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this. Because when I interview people, still, they talk about Facebook as one of the free luxuries of life. Now, that is the success, because, I mean, I'm an honest researcher, if I had some happy story to tell you about how the revolution has come, I would share it. I interview people who talk about Facebook as one of the free luxuries of life. If you have a marketing campaign that has convinced the populace that Facebook is a free luxury of life, you have one great marketing campaign.

Simon Mainwaring:

Sure.

Sherry Turkle:

That requires a political response. A lot of people have to learn that Facebook is not a free luxury of life and nor are Google searches. And actually, nor are all the applications... I happen to have my-

Simon Mainwaring:

Smart phone?

Sherry Turkle:

... iPhone on, because I'm recording this conversation, so you can have a backup tape. My iPhone turned on, means that my iPhone is collecting information, different apps on my iPhone are collecting information about so much about where I am, what I'm saying, the timbre of my voice. I've lost my voice. Health applications are worried that I'm ill. I mean, I can't even keep track anymore, as I try to turn these things off.

Simon Mainwaring:

You're a set of data points now.

Sherry Turkle:

I'm a set of data points that soon, by tonight I'll be getting ads for Robitussin and it's because I sound like this. I'm not joking. I'm not joking.

Simon Mainwaring:

No, absolutely.

Sherry Turkle:

We simply have to treat this as a political problem, not as a mystery that we can track. And every author has a favorite line they've written.

Simon Mainwaring:

Sure.

Sherry Turkle:

They call them your darlings.



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Simon Mainwaring:

Your darlings. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course.

Sherry Turkle:

Your darlings. And you're supposed to take them out, but I have one that I love. It was from my TED Talk in 2012. And it's "Just because we grew up with the internet, we think the internet is all grown up," which means that just because we were babies when it was a baby, we say things like, "The horse is out of the barn," "It's got to be the way it's got to be," "It's too late." It is not too late. I mean, it's like saying, when the Model T was marching around without a top and certainly without any kind of protection for the driver or anything, "Well, the car was invented, there it goes." It's like-

Simon Mainwaring:

And just let it do its thing. Yeah.

Sherry Turkle:

Let it do its thing that car. That car can go. What an incredible thing that car.

Simon Mainwaring:

No, we need to manage it. And you hear a lot of dialogue around the need to make sure that humanity doesn't serve technology, but rather technology, authentically, serves us. And as we look to the future I think each of us-

Sherry Turkle:

But Simon, can I interrupt you for a moment?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, please.

Sherry Turkle:

Because I really want to nail this point, because I feel that this is so important, this is a political problem, and too many people shy away from that final... I mean, I'm stopping you and it's not out of lack of respect, too many people shy away from making that final point that to get this done, in the United States, you have to get involved with your elected representatives. This is a political problem. It doesn't have to do with whether or not you love Google or really like what they say. This is a problem of industries that need to be controlled. It's not whether or not people have their heart in the right place.

Simon Mainwaring:

I think that's a fair point, because I think what we are seeing is there's a greater call for participatory multi-stakeholder capitalism. You can't leave it to anybody else. Your choices, daily, affect the impact on the planet, what companies are able to succeed and grow, who are penalized. And, in the same way, you're really calling for, "We've got to embrace the participation in the democratic process, as well." And we've got to be clear-eyed about it and we've got to know what's really going on.

Sherry Turkle:

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Yes, yes. Because the advantage of my method, where I interview people face-to-face, is that still talk to young people, who say, "Wow, it's good that I don't have really a great desire to get involved in politics, because anything I say would be captured online, and everything I say would be known to everybody, nothing is private, and I'm so afraid of that." Essentially, we are moving towards a society without wanting to, that's so suppresses speech, because people are so afraid of who is going to get ahold of their speech.

Simon Mainwaring:

Understood, understood. And it's a complicated issue you're pointing to here, because I want to ask a broader question which is, how should we understand or think about our relationship to technology moving forward? But factoring into that are a couple things, for example, social media, as we all know, algorithmically bifurcates reality. If you have one point of view and you're interested in certain things, it'll send you more information to that affect and you double down on how you're already thinking. At the same time, we're being used as data set points, as you were talking about earlier on. And so, if we're being scraped for data, if we don't even agree on what reality we're trying to solve for, but we can't deny our intimate connection to technology now, how do we look at it? Do we go, "This is friend"? Do we go, "It's foe"? Do we look at it and go, "Okay, I just need to be informed and intentional about this"? As an ongoing, important relationship in our life, how should we look at technology?

Sherry Turkle:

I think you have to see technology in two ways. Let me back up. When I came to MIT and I argued technology was an intimate machine, a second self, a Rorschach, people said, "Oh, Sherry, you'll never get tenure. It's just a tool." This is the story I tell in *The Empathy Diaries*, how I was arguing it was an intimate machine, and people were saying, "It's just a tool, you will never get tenure. It's just a tool." And I would say, "No, no. Look, people are connecting to it. It's culturally so important, psychologically so important." And they were saying, "It's just a tool." And that was my struggle and, in a way, your question is about that struggle. And, in the end, both sides are right. I was right, it's changed our culture, it's changed our psychology, it's changed the way we think, but MIT was right, too. It's just a tool, and we have to master it as a tool.

I suggest you approach technology on a multi-track, you're on multiple tracks, just like you're on multiple tracks, you're a career, you're a father, you're a lover, you're a husband. We live all of our life on multiple tracks. I don't stop being a mother when I go to work and I want to be a crack social science researcher. I don't say, "Oh, what is it going to be today?" Nobody lives like that. Technology is changing the way we think, it's messing with our mind, it's interfering with our ability to solve certain kinds of problems, because it's dumbing those problems down in many cases. But it also is saving lives, it's also opening up vistas that we never thought were possible. It's also making this conversation possible, which I'm finding really helpful to me in thinking about the hardest questions that are before us.

We don't gain points by making rules. We gain points by looking at the complexity of these things. Of this thing and saying, "When I think about Facebook and how it scrapes my data, here's what I'm going to do. When I look at social media and how I have to behave in order to publicize my book, here's how I'm going to behave." We need a sense of personal mastery in this new, very complicated area of life.

Simon Mainwaring:

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This points to something I wanted to ask about your book. For those who are listening on a podcast, you can't see, but I'm holding it up here, The Empathy Diaries. And the writing itself is exquisite and I say that out of enormous respect, as a fellow writer. I just want to say that. I mean-

Sherry Turkle:

Thank you.

Simon Mainwaring:

... exquisite is a very pointed word, and I choose it very consciously. Just so much admiration for that. At the same time, you look at something called The Empathy Diaries and you might look at it and go, "It's a look back," because it walks through the various stages of your life. But I also hear it as a *cri de coeur* or a call to arms to practice empathy moving forward on a daily basis, would you say that's fair?

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. Absolutely it is a *cri de coeur*. I think the best way, I'm trained in the psychoanalytic tradition, and so somebody who's trained like that doesn't tell, they show. And the only thing you can show is what's happened to you. And so, I show through examples from my life, how empathy shown to me by others transformed me, so that I can say, "Look. Look at what that did to me. Let me dissect that and show you how a relationship with a computer is not going to do that for you or your child. Move forward with that information." I'll give you a good example. I was very unconfident as a college student. I came from a high school in Brooklyn, a big public high school. Honestly, I went to Harvard, I'd read review books to get there, I'd memorized stuff, I'd done well on tests. I thought everybody deserved to be there except me.

And a great historian, Barrington Moore, took me aside and he said, "You may not be polished, but get an idea that really is your passion and just keep working at it." And basically he said, "Even though you're a woman, and there are no women who have tenure at Harvard, just if your passion corresponds to the thing you're doing, you'll never regret a minute that you spend trying."

Simon Mainwaring:

That's powerful. What a gift he gave you.

Sherry Turkle:

What a gift, because I just said, "Okay, so let's say I try and I fail, every moment that I spend trying, I will not have just been trying at something that somebody told me to do, told me to do, told me to do. I will have pursued my passion."

Simon Mainwaring:

Absolutely.

Sherry Turkle:

And I pass it on.

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Simon Mainwaring:

And yeah, I do think that, ultimately, passing that on is the greatest gift. The gift is given to you, not for you to hold onto, but to pass onto somebody else.

Sherry Turkle:

What empathy, because he understood exactly my problem. He didn't just understand my place, which was as a poor woman from Brooklyn who was lost there, he understood my problem. Could I use this as a day job? And he thought to himself, "If I had her problem, I'd be worried, at the end of all this, I'd have nothing." And he said, "If that was my problem, I would want a great ride along the way. I wouldn't be worried that I wouldn't have enough money to finally get a job at the end, I'd worry that I would've just wasted my time. He put himself in my problem, and he said, "Never feel you've wasted a minute of your time. You have fun. You love this thing," and I tell that to my students.

Simon Mainwaring:

It's a huge life lesson, and also the fulfillment it gives you, because you feel fully revealed and seen as an extension of that.

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. And to your point, what computer could've given me that advice?

Simon Mainwaring:

Right.

Sherry Turkle:

That's my point.

Simon Mainwaring:

To come full circle, I mean, we met 10 years ago and you had a certain outlook with *Alone, Together*, and we've since had this exponential experience of technology ever since, and all these challenges on a human level, most acutely the last couple of years. How has your point of view changed over the last 10 years, how has it evolved? Because it always does in some way.

Sherry Turkle:

I'm both more optimistic and more pessimistic. I'm more optimistic, because things I said 10 years ago that people were saying were revolutionary and I should not say them too loud or say them in a corner. I was sort of a boutique item. Now, it seems like everybody understands them, and so what? So I feel more successful and people say *Alone, Together* and they don't even know it's the name of my book. We've been alone together, we've been together alone. They're not even quotes.

Simon Mainwaring:

You've entered the vernacular.

Sherry Turkle:

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Exactly.

Simon Mainwaring:

You've entered the vernacular.

Sherry Turkle:

Exactly. They're not even quoting me. I think that's fantastic. I think that's just the best. I feel very successful. On the other hand, I'm very pessimistic in a certain way, because when I interview people who talk about Facebook at one of life's free luxuries and who still don't understand what is being done with their data and the way that contributes to an undermining of democracy and individual autonomy-

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, and self-determination.

Sherry Turkle:

... and self-determination, it's hard not to be frightened.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. And I think this is true of all of these large platforms that have seamlessly just infused our whole lives. I don't think it's unique to Facebook. I think it's the nature of how we exist now. I want to ask you another question, just in terms of the experience of writing *The Empathy Diaries* itself. You've written these business books, these technology focused books, and now you've done a memoir. And what I've found in the writing process is that you learn something very powerful by writing the book itself. I always find, I don't quite know what I'm writing about until I've written it and then I go, "Oh, this is what I was writing about all the way along." It teaches me a lesson. What lesson did you take away from writing such a special and personal book?

Sherry Turkle:

That empathy is what I've been trying to write about all along. If you'd asked me 10 years ago, "What's the theme of your work?" I wouldn't have said, "Well, empathy. Obviously." I mean, I was of course writing about it. I mean-

Simon Mainwaring:

That's super interesting. It's true. If you look back at all of your books, *Reclaiming Conversation*. It's all about what's intermediating, what's getting in the way, what are we losing, what are we gaining?

Sherry Turkle:

But I didn't see it. I didn't see it. I would've said conversation. I mean, I had all kinds of other ways of thinking, and there was a clarification. There was a clarification, a purification of my message and that brought it back to my personal life and my personal struggles, because I talk about how empathy, for me, really wasn't a given. People were not empathic to me in my life. I had to struggle to get empathic communication. And that struggle made it all the more important to me. That doesn't mean I'm always the most empathic person in the world. But when I'm not, I never take it lightly. In other words, when I'm

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not I'm not like, "Oh well, next time." I really go back and think about it and struggle with it and try to do better and it's very important.

Simon Mainwaring:

Well, help all of us listening to this or watching. We're pulled in so many directions every day, in terms of the roles we play, let alone all the competition for our attention. But as a daily, intentional, mindful practice, give us a couple of pointers about, as individuals or as bosses or as leaders or as employers or whatever it might be, how can we practice empathy? Are there a few things we can do?

Sherry Turkle:

Yes. If you're an employer, begin your day with each person you meet on your job, and try to meet a few more of them, actually, in your job, not by assuming you know what they're thinking, but stay in a position of humility, by assuming you do not know what they're thinking. Empathy begins with not, "Oh, I know how you feel. I've been divorced. I've been there." That's not empathy. Empathy is, "I don't know how you feel. Tell me how you feel." It's the assumption that you don't know how they feel, but you're there to listen. And secondly, so that's the first thing, come to each person with the humility that you actually want to hear, not that you, "Uh-huh, uh-huh."

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, we're all guilty of it.

Sherry Turkle:

We're all guilty of it. Or, "Oh my god, yes. I'm so ready to go back to work. Post-pandemic, yes."

Simon Mainwaring:

No, I'm not. I just want a glass of wine and cry and go to sleep-

Sherry Turkle:

Exactly.

Simon Mainwaring:

... or whatever.

Sherry Turkle:

Or whatever. "I just can't wait to have drinks with you all." Well, maybe there's somebody who actually hated those drinks and wouldn't dare tell you that.

Simon Mainwaring:

Sure.

Sherry Turkle:

That's the first thing, is humility, listening, the assumption of ignorance. And then, the second thing, I think is come to a conversation with commitment. The thing about Barrington Moore, and about the

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other people I described who were empathic with me, is that they committed themselves to me. I mean, I don't want to exaggerate what they did, but at one point, I lost my scholarship on a technicality. I had a stepfather who wanted me to come home and take care of... I had a half sister and brother and he wanted me to drop out of Harvard and take care of them. He said that in the old country, this is what would happen. Well, we weren't in the old country, and I wanted to continue school.

Simon Mainwaring:

Sure. Well, that makes sense.

Sherry Turkle:

And I lost my scholarship, and these were white, male, old school professors, but when I lost my scholarship, even though it was against the rules, they found a way to find a scholarship for me, even though there was no parent's confidential statement or whatever. They sort of found a way to make it happen, so I could go back and finish my college degree. It would've been the easiest thing in the world. I mean, I was just one among many, I wasn't famous. It wasn't like I was writing books or anything. I was just in college, half finished with her junior year, hadn't done anything yet. [crosstalk 00:44:24] But I had a bump in my road, and they understood my problem, and they said, "Bend the rules for her. In the long run, it'll be worth it."

Simon Mainwaring:

I mean, I don't think we can overstate how transformative an empathetic approach like that can be.

Sherry Turkle:

That changed my life. I mean, it changed my life. If you have a chance to bet on somebody, I mean, I can't tell you how easy it would've been to not bet on me. I was going to say I looked like shit. There are pictures in the book and the pictures from those years, I am a bedraggled person. I mean, I was very bedraggled.

Simon Mainwaring:

We've all had our humbling days.

Sherry Turkle:

I mean, I was depressed. My mom had just died. I was just a bedraggled soul. If you have a chance to bet on somebody, to listen to them, to understand them, hear them, and commit to them, and make that part of your empathy. Make empathy an action, not just a listening. And those are my two pieces of advice.

Simon Mainwaring:

I mean, I'd love to encourage everyone to take the time to invest in themselves by reading The Empathy Diaries, because I think it's one thing to understand this intellectually, it's another to have a visceral experience in the practice of it. It kind of provides a blueprint for how you can apply it to your own lives. And I think the book does that so beautifully, but so effectively, as well. Sherry, so nice to see you, and thank you for sharing your insights. And everyone, please go and grab The Empathy Diaries and give that gift to yourself. Thank you for your time, Sherry.

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Sherry Turkle:

Thank you.

Simon Mainwaring:

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