

Episode 20

Leadership: Conscious Communication & Relationships, with Melanie Whitney

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Rushab Kamdar: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Business 360 Podcast where we will take a 360 degree view of all things business in under 30 minutes. I'm Rushab Kamdar and I help businesses, startup founders, working professionals and master students, think business, talk business, launch their business and grow their business.

What's going on business heroes. Welcome to episode 20. On today's episode, we're going to talk about something that's extremely important as a skill set that every entrepreneur and professional should have. See today, we are in the world of consciousness and what I mean by that is more and more people are becoming self-aware and understanding empathy and the importance of communication.

When I speak at business schools, I'm teaching students how to talk the language of business. Well, equally important is the ability to articulate what you're trying to say and using the right word choice. Communication is probably one of the most important currencies for entrepreneurs and working professionals.

Our guests today is going to talk about conscious communication, conscious connection, and why it is so important in the professional world. So let's get to it.



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On today's podcast, we're welcoming Melanie Whitney, who is a communication studies professor and an entrepreneur. Melanie gives people tools to have healthier relationships through conscious communication and mindfulness. Now, regardless if it's professionally or in life. Conscious communication and mindfulness is becoming more relevant and prevalent.

Melanie, welcome to the Business 360 Podcast.

Melanie Whitney: [00:01:56] Yay. Thanks for having me, Rushab.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:01:58] I'm so happy that you're here. Uh, I love what you, what you're doing because as I said, it is relevant, but prevalent at the same time. We are in the age of consciousness. And a lot more, a lot of people are starting to take a look at themselves being more empathetic and you know, when I speak to entrepreneurs and professionals, I constantly mentioned how empathy is a driving force in success today. It's not the old days where you're, you're trying to compete with someone and take them out of, out of business, you know, today it's like, how can we work together and grow together?

Um, and so, you know, I mentioned that you're, you are a communication studies professor. Uh, I know you're an activist as well. You're an entrepreneur and you have a site, MelanieWhitney.com. So we'd love to kind of let our audience know what your business is about.



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Melanie Whitney: [00:02:51] Yeah. So I'm noticing that as the years have gone on in my business, uh, mission or goal or vision is getting shorter and shorter, to be honest.

And I think that's a good thing. I think it's comes with clarity, right? So really if I'm doing it, if I was to say in one sentence, what am I doing with my business? I am giving people tools to have healthier relationships with themselves so that they then can have that communication, that meaningful communication with other people.

Now, the way I'm doing that is really just by giving people skills. And the way I came into even having this business was because I've been teaching for over a decade, you know, interpersonal communication. And I realized very quickly, once I started getting the idea of maybe I'll do this, you know, outside of academia cause it's not just college students who need this, this, these skills, it's adults everywhere. It's everybody. And as soon as I started doing my own business, I realized, wow, there are a lot of people in business and all fields that lack these basic communication skills.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:03:58] Yeah, absolutely. You know, and, and when I was young, I remember someone saying to me that, uh, business is done with people. And when you're taking that communication element out of it, you know, you're going to have a very difficult time in the world of business. Uh, and, uh, you know, it's, it's even being more and more discussed even in the sales world, right? You



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know, professionals who are in the sales world, like how do you relate with your potential prospect or client and not feel so salesy or things like that. While you were talking in your answer, you talked about meaningful conversations and meaningful connections. So let's start with the first one. What is meaningful connections mean?

Melanie Whitney: [00:04:35] So to me, when I say meaningful connection, what I mean when I say that is really connections that have a lasting impact. So when, Rushab, you and I are done here and you go about your day and you're still thinking about our conversation.

That to me means we had a meaningful connection. It was authentic. We were vulnerable, but really we were, we were here, we were present. So a meaningful connection, I think has a lasting positive impact.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:05:04] And meaningful conversations.

Melanie Whitney: [00:05:06] In order, I would say to, for us to have a meaningful conversation, a conversation that would require us first to be present, right? To be here right now, not to be in yesterday, not to be in what I need to do after we're done here, but to really be here. And I think, it's, another element is meeting people where they are. So you and I may be in different places on the topic at hand or in our journey. So I think in order for us to have a meaningful conversation, we need to be present. We need to be open. We need to be



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honest. And again, you're going to hear me say this word quite a bit today, but this willingness to be vulnerable, to be transparent.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:05:48] So in your business, you are going to be helping people get to this meaningful connection and meaningful conversation and, you know, conscious relationship. Uh, but uh, many of us who are unfamiliar with the how to maybe you can explain what your business service will entail to get to that, how to.

Melanie Whitney: [00:06:08] So I do, so that's always the million dollar question, right? Like how great Melanie did all this stuff now, how do I do it? And there's two parts to this answer.

One it's going to it's it takes a lifetime, right? So this is a skill set where it's not something I can go master and then just be amazing at it. It is a skillset that you acquire, and I will explain how in a second, but you acquire it and then you constantly have to learn and have the emotional intelligence of when to apply this because every single, every 7 billion people on this planet, we're all different.

And the way we engage with each other, the way I, I, you know, construct a message to you, the way I deliver the message to you, it needs to be different and tailored towards you. So that's why I believe you can never be a master of it. It's a, it's a practice. And the way how I try to help people acquire these skills and cultivate this type of communication practices is through a variety of ways.



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I mean, I'm a teacher, right? So I love to teach. So I love group settings. I do definitely do one-on-one services for people who want that focused attention, but I really love doing workshops and events because there's a dynamic in a group setting where you get 10, 20 people in a room and we're talking about, let's just say accountability, right?

How can we take more accountability in our interactions with one another? And when we talk about your experience and then the person next to you and the person behind you, there is this common thing that happens where we see that we're more alike than we are different. And if we can learn to listen to one another, it's it really just changes the way, not only that we engage with others, but the way we gauge ourselves. We talk to ourselves every day. We have self-talk and that's often where I start with people is how are you engaging with yourself? What is the relationship with yourself look like? And kind of, you know, bleed out into the world and all the things that you are doing, including your business.

So, I really start with workshops is my favorite way to do it. And we work on one skill and then we build on that and then we build on another one and you know, everyone's different, right? Everybody's different place in their journey so that's kind of why I like the group settings, but yeah, through, through workshops and through one-on-one is typically how I do it.



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Rushab Kamdar: [00:08:34] Yeah. And through group settings also there's more opportunity to build connections and chemistry with different groups that have different subsets of people.

Melanie Whitney: [00:08:43] Yeah, what I love about the group setting it was like, great we've learned this skill, let's try it right now. And it scares the crap out of everybody. They're like, no, no group work they're like no, but they do and they rip the bandaid off and they're like, oh, that wasn't so bad.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:08:57] Yeah, no, exactly. It's, it's taking that first step. In the business and professional world, we receive a lot of cold messages. Whether on social media or through email, these messages can often be vague and generic. What do you believe is missing in the professional networking, prospecting and outreach space?

Melanie Whitney: [00:09:16] That's a great question, you know, there, I can't deny the fact that in business, you know, numbers and volume matters, right? I can't deny that. There is, that is definitely one strategy that someone can undertake. But I know for me, when I think about myself as a consumer, right, receiving those emails, it's really easy for me to just be like, delete, delete, delete and clear out my inbox. But what I think people are craving, especially nowadays, especially after the crazy year we had, I mean, people are, are striving to be seen to be acknowledged to connect and they want, they want honesty right?



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People want to connect with other people, not a product. So if you have a brand, if you are your brand or, you know, if you're, if you're not your brand, let's say something like Nike does a great job of this, where they sell you on like a feeling or a concept or an idea, or a way of living. They're not telling you the, this is how we made our shoe and this is the material that we use, then this is how we put it together. Like they're not doing that. So I really think people want to connect and you can't connect with a general message.

Like I was saying earlier, people want to, to feel seen. And in order to do that, I'm going to have to know who am I speaking with? Maybe you have different types of emails that you're sending to different pieces of your target audience, you know. There's so many ways I'm not a, you know, marketing strategist by any means, but I definitely know that when I have collaborated with people to help me with my business, that's the first thing I tell them is I am not that is not my game. I'm not up for the numbers game and spamming and sending, you know, sending emails to get this.

I want people, when they see my message in their inbox, to be excited to open it and be like, oh, Melanie always is, you know, giving me tools that are relevant to right now or there's something in it for me, it's not always about her selling me something. So I think it's important that we take the time to figure out what is my audience craving? How can I connect with them? I mean, you say this all the time, Rushab, about people connect with, I forget the way you say it, but



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essentially you say we connect with people's messes, not just like their successes.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:11:34] Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That you said it perfectly. Yeah. People relate with your messes, not your successes. Exactly.

Melanie Whitney: [00:11:40] There it is.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:11:41] You remember that?

Melanie Whitney: [00:11:42] I really think, yeah, because it's so true. I mean, think about it. We, who wants to, and again, it comes, I think about people versus product, like, people want to connect with me, right? People want to connect with you when they're listening to this podcast, they want to know more about you because there's a million podcasts out there, but what is it about you that they feel connected to? I, so I really do think people are, are missing that connection.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:12:04] Yeah. I'm going to have to do more solo episodes because usually when I do these interviews, it's all about the guests.

Melanie Whitney: [00:12:10] Of course, of course it is. I'm going to come back and interview you, Rushab.



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Rushab Kamdar: [00:12:14] There you go. Exactly. Um, so, you know, we, we talked a lot about how important this is in the world in, life, in general, but specifically here in the entrepreneurial side to professional side.

Are there any tips or strategies that you can give anyone without giving too much away at what you teach in your workshops? Are there any tips or strategies that you may have for any entrepreneur or professional out there that says, you know what, I want to get more meaningful in my connections and my com and my communication.

Melanie Whitney: [00:12:46] Ooh. Yeah. That's um, I mean, this is deep work, right? That we're doing that we're trying to put in a sound bite. But I would say a really pivotal place to start, one thing, something very simple that every listener can do right after this is becoming aware of how we use the words I, we, it, and, but. So there's this language, we call it the language of responsibility in communication studies.

So these small words we use every single day, but the way we position them sometimes communicate an intention that perhaps we don't mean to communicate. For example, if you're out networking or you're speaking to your employees, you know, whoever, whatever it is, whatever aspect of your business, if I say, like, for example, this is it's easier for me to give like, relationship examples, because I do that so often, if I say Rushab, you left the dishes again in



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the sink. Gosh, you're such a slob. Is that going to make you feel good? No, right? And everything was focused on you. No accountability for how I'm feeling.

So if I went into that same scenario and I say, let's say you're an employee that's been late consistently for this whole week, right? I can, I could easily be like Rushab, you've been late this whole week. What's your problem? It's not going to cultivate any type of connection or meaningful conversation. But if I say, Hey, Rushab I've noticed. So I'm giving an observation. I'm not evaluating your behavior. I'm saying I've noticed you've come in late the past couple of days. That's not really like you, I'm a little worried. How are you doing? Is everything okay?

So I'm, I'm making it about how I feel. I'm taking ownership over my feelings by using that word I, right? And then also describing what I'm seeing from you without evaluating. So there's this description versus versus evaluating that I think is really crucial. And, you know, when it comes to business, we're so quick to evaluate.

We're so quick to analyze and offer advice and, you know, really jump in where there's not much listening that's occurring. So if somebody after this podcast really wants to take action, I would say, be mindful of the word I and You and how you use it because when we say, you, it inevitably banks, the other person feel like we are placing blame, right?



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So if we are going to say you make sure you're describing what you see and not evaluating what you're seeing. And then I would say, uh, the word, but, is also when we hear a lot where it's like, yeah, I hear what you're saying, but. So the moment we say that and negates everything that the person just said.

So we want to focus on things like yes and. Yes, Rushab, I hear your idea for this project and I want to give it a fair shot. Is it okay if I share with you my concerns? Okay. So I I'm saying yes, and I'm leaving room for both of us. So that word, I just think the whole phrase. Yeah but, we use way too much and it, and it again drives disconnection between two people.

And I would say the second biggest thing, like I already touched on is the listening. Uh, there, someone could easily probably Google the different styles of listening and there are different habits as well of listening. So listening styles, there's a continuum, right? But just to keep it simple, one side of the continuum is very reflective and less directive. I'm not telling you what to do. So if you've ever engaged in silent listening, people sometimes answer their own questions and solve their own problems, right? You have, I'm paraphrasing where I say, is this what I'm hear, is what I'm hearing, correct, Rushab? This is what I heard you say.

So I'm not telling you what to do, right? But again, I noticed this with a lot of entrepreneurs and I don't mean to stereotype and I throw myself under the bus here too, is that we're so quick to give advice or analyze or offer, you know, it, you know, well, according to, you know, your things that you're doing, this is



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what I'm seeing is wrong with your business. Or if we jump to directive where I'm giving you direction on your life, when maybe you didn't even ask for it, right?

So I think it's, it's being aware of our listening habits because the truth is we're all really terrible listeners. We're not great, you know? And it's because like you said, we're bombarded with so much information and everybody's grabbing at our attention in the world we live in.

So I get it. We seek refuge, you know, to get away from that, but be mindful again, of those little words that I said. And then your listening styles, I think are pivotal if you really want to create connection.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:17:32] And it's so funny because it's to your point and, uh, not, not trying to be that stereotypic entrepreneur to give advice, but I'm here listening to you saying this and I literally was thinking that this in itself is a, a workshop for entrepreneurs or sales professionals on. And I was thinking all the tips that you were saying, because I have done the you and the but and all that other types of ways of saying things without doing the yes and, uh, which brings back to that consciousness of, of speaking.

Here, even in podcasting, like I speak actually, I, I, I think, you know, this, I, I speak at universities across the country and I keep it a lot of work into my craft. I'll practice speaking, um, in my office, literally, I just used the word, um, I do my



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best not to say um, I practice avoiding those types of transition words. So, I really see a lot of value.

And I think there's a course in it itself. So some advice by an entrepreneur for you to do one of those. Um, but I will ask you with this one question. I remember one time, maybe two, three months ago on your Instagram account. I believe it was yours. So correct me if I'm wrong, you had put out a question about word choice and I think it got a little confrontational, um, with some of the people. I won't say, I won't say confrontational, but I think it got into a debate, a healthy debate. And it was the use of, of people saying, guys.

Melanie Whitney: [00:19:04] Uh, yes, it got really spicy, people got really defensive. Yeah.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:19:08] And I, I'm very guilty of that. I, and I know men and women say it as if it's just general, you know, vernacular. So what's your, what's your opinion on that?

Melanie Whitney: [00:19:20] So, you know, it really, it depends on like which lens you want to wear, right? Are we, are we coming, which lens, what type of academic are we going to, to look at this from and dissect it? You have people who say, you know, this word used to mean a group of people, right? That it doesn't mean, uh, male or female. It's just a group of people. And I, you know, my, and I hear them. Okay. I hear that. I don't know the personal history and I



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couldn't pull it up out of my mind. I would have to actually go research to validate that, right? But my question then is, well, if it just means a group of people, why do we have things in society like guys night or, Hey, she can hang with the guys.

That clearly has a sex assigned to it. That's, that's referring to a group of males, right? So that's my, my, um, quote, unquote, let's say beef with the word, but Rushab, I use this word it's so deeply embedded. I learned it so young. I still, as a communications expert over here, use that word and I catch myself.

All I can say to people is if you're trying to have an inclusive environment, it's a very small thing to correct. You could say everyone, you can use the whole Southern, like y'all could do that. It's there are easy ways to, to quote unquote course, correct that if you so desire.

And I think it shows even just the effort would make people feel nice. And same thing goes with like pronouns. You know, people are, are being a lot more observant about using pronouns. He him, she, her, and that's another way to make people feel, you know, included. So I just think it's about what kind of culture, what kind of climate you want to build at work?

Rushab Kamdar: [00:21:10] How about anything in the general business world of leveraging this meaningful connection and communication, um, how they can, uh, use it within their, with their employees, uh, how to foster a culture within a company.



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Melanie Whitney: [00:21:22] Oh man. I mean, that's everything like if you think about what's on every job description that you've ever applied for written oral and communication skills, right?

So if you want, if you're going to be working with people in any capacity, this is going to be necessary. The, the skillset of having strong interpersonal communication skills, emotional intelligence, and it really just comes to like, do you know your, how well you know yourself? Because if you can't regulate the self-talk that you have, when no one is around, then how are you going to regulate the conversations that you're having with other people?

So I think it really starts with the internal work, right? And, and that how you engage with yourself. There's that, that quote, like, I don't know who said this, but essentially you can't have, if I want to have compassion for others, I need to have compassion with myself. So your employees will, how you engage with your employees, how you speak with others is a reflection of really also how you engage with yourself in here in your head.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:22:31] I mentioned to you this before, where I am a big empathy guy, and I think empathy plays a big role in creating culture. So how do, how does someone leverage empathy and utilize that for a meaningful communication and meaningful conversation, meaningful connections, you know, conscious relationships?



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Melanie Whitney: [00:22:52] Yeah. Empathy is huge. I'm glad you bring that up specifically. And you know, when I, it's people have different feelings about empathy, right? Some I've heard some old school folks be like empathy in the workplace, like, what are you talking about? Like, this is business. Businesses is business, but like we've talked about things have changed. And I think the first distinction I would want to make to everyone listening and it's a common mistake that I see when I've been teaching is empathy and sympathy.

People use those words interchangeably. And they are not the same. They are not the same. So one, we got to get that clear, right? So, and there's, um, there's some research. I know there's I think she was a nurse formerly Theresa Wiseman has these four attributes of empathy and it's perspective taking, staying out of judgment. So being able to listen to someone without assigning judgment. Being able to recognize their emotions and what they're feeling, and then being able to communicate, Hey, Rushab, this is what I'm seeing and, and, you know, feeling on this end. So those are the four qualities and those things what they found that empathy, empathy, when we practice empathy with people, it actually creates and fosters connection between us.

And when we practice sympathy, the opposite happens, which is kind of crazy. Cause I grew up thinking sympathy was a good thing. We should have sympathy for others, but what we see is that it falls short, right? So yeah. It's just like, oh,



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you feel bad, but then you kind of are done with feeling bad and you want to move along or he wants to be like.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:24:28] It's pity and then yeah.

Melanie Whitney: [00:24:30] Yes exactly. We were like, oh Rushab, I'm so sorry that happened. Did you want to go get dinner? It's like, I'm ready to move on because it makes me feel uncomfortable. And when we empathize with people, we have to be willing to sit in that discomfort with them. And I think sometimes that triggers something inside of us and it could be difficult to, to sit with that. And so that's why I say we need to really learn to understand our landscape inside. So you know your boundaries.

So you know your triggers, you know how much empathy you are able to provide today. Cause I'll be honest, Rushab, like it's so funny when you, and I'm sure you've gotten this in your field of work where I do workshops and people are like, wow, you know, because I do communication, they think I must be a perfect communicator and have empathy all the time.

And it's just not true. There are days I've developed a self-awareness or I'm like, wow, today I'm feeling a little short fused. And I have that awareness. So I'm not going to put myself in situations at work or with my colleagues where I'm gonna workout, you know, my, my anger or whatever on them. And again, that empathy, we just got to, we got to learn to have that with each other because that's really



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how, and with ourselves, again, it goes back to that. If you can't have empathy and compassion with yourself, you're less likely, research shows us that you're less likely to practice it with other people, because why would you, you, you can suck it up and get through the day.

Why can't other people suck it up and get through the day. So that empathy I just think is, is such an important part of that, you know that experience, uh, I mean, at least for me having a whole, a wholesome, whole-hearted, authentic, uh, you know, environment where people will thrive, right? And feel safe.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:26:22] I couldn't agree more. And I think you exemplified it so well and why it's so important in the business world and the professional world, and also in the personal world.

Uh, so I want to leave you off with this. Um, what parting advice would you like to give to any professional or entrepreneur that's listening to this podcast specifically centered around meaningful communication and connection.

Melanie Whitney: [00:26:51] That's a big question, Rushab. Is that where you left it at the end?

Rushab Kamdar: [00:26:55] Yeah. That's what I left it at the end.

Melanie Whitney: [00:26:57] I would say that's tough. Um, I would say my parting advice would be, and in this may sound a little cheesy, but to be patient,



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to appreciate wherever you are in your process right now. Because as hard as it may be, maybe right now, maybe things don't look or did not come out to what you thought they would be.

I always say that whatever's happening right now is a piece that I'm going to need to build the thing that I'm trying to build, where I'm trying to go. So I need right now, whatever it is, even if I don't like it, I need right now. And really I'm sure we've all heard this phrase, but trusting the process, right? Really surrendering to what is happening right now. Uh there's I think it was Bruce, was it Bruce Lee? Who said be like water and to really just be in flow. You know, when a water, when water in a stream hits a rock, it doesn't stop all the water. It goes around, it adapts. It's flexible. So I think really the more present we are and we are just surrendering to right now, we find gratitude in right now, it allows us to kind of release all the expectations we put on ourselves or that other people put on us. And it allows us really to practice letting go, which then builds our muscle of resilience. And God, if, if an entrepreneur needs any trait, it is resilience. So I would say that would be my partying advice.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:28:29] I love it. Uh, Melanie, I want to thank you so much for being a guest on the Business 360 Podcast.

Melanie Whitney: [00:28:35] Loved it. I will come back anytime you want.

Rushab Kamdar: [00:28:39] You're always welcome. Thank you.





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Number one, if you only listen to someone's successes and not their failures, you've only heard half the story and number two, compete with yourself and help everyone else.

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