

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh



Episode #: 22 Title: Walking through challenges and honoring where we are

**Guest:** Doug Foresta **Guest Title:** Co-Host

**Date:** September 21, 2016 **Guest Company:** Empower radio

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(Intro Music)

Debra: Hello this is Debra Ruh and you're listening to Human Potential at Work. Thank you so much for joining today's episode. I am excited about the topic and I have my producer and my coach; Doug Foresta joining us today. We're going to talk about the topic of really vulnerability in regards to human potential. Before we start I want to congratulate Doug because he actually became engaged this weekend to a lovely young woman and I am very excited about the engagement. Doug tell us about it.

Doug: Thank you Debra I appreciate that. Yes, I did in fact get engaged this weekend to my, now, fiancé. What would you like me to tell you?

Debra: The engagement story.

Doug: Well, I proposed, it was her birthday and I proposed in front of her entire family. So that included her nieces and nephews and so it was very interesting because when I got down on one knee one of the kids grabbed the ring and ran away with it. I had to get it back and one of the other children screamed "Do it!"

Debra: So it was very real.

Doug: It was very real, yes exactly. It was interesting so thank you so much I really appreciate that.

Debra: Well I'm really excited about this new chapter in your life and she is a wonderful woman. So thank you again for joining me on this episode. It's interesting because I know that as my coach I have been sharing some of this walk that I've been taking and it's been a very difficult walk. I'm not through it yet. I was watching a super soul Sunday program the other day and the guest had said one thing I pray for is that when problems come into my life I can be, you know, really disciplined enough to really explore why the problem is here and what can I really, truly, learn from it and not just wish that this problem would go away. I just thought that was such wisdom because generally when I have a problem or perceive a problem I just want it to go

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away. I just want to solve it real quick and move on and this has been one of those. You can tell that because it wants to stay because it's a life lesson for me. So as a global disability inclusion strategist and many of you all know this; I have worked with multi-national corporations, national corporations in the U.S., governments, U.N. agencies, I am really blessed to be at the top of my game in the disability inclusion field and so proud to be here. Even though in this field, you know, it is changing and moving and shifting and there is so much to know and learn that you can't do it by yourself. I also have talked many times about that I have two grown children and my oldest daughter Sara was born with down syndrome and my husband and I, Sunday is our thirty-fourth wedding anniversary. So Doug, I wish you and Johnny as much success in your marriage as my husband and I have had. My son just had his twenty-eighth year birthday on Tuesday so I remembered what I was twenty-eight years ago on Tuesday and I am going to remember on Sunday what I was doing thirty-four years ago. Real blessing in my life, but the reason why I bring that up is because our daughter Sara is twenty-nine years old. We recently, my family, my extended family has been celebrating weddings and babies and two of my nieces got married last month. One in cape cod, Haleigh and then Casey got married in Buffalo. Two beautiful ceremonies and you know something came up with my daughter that I was thinking we had all solved. I think my daughter is really looking at her life and saying well wait a minute. I want to get married, I want to move out of the house, I want to have a baby and over the years we will talk about this as a family. Sara will, I remember when her little brother, Kevin, started to drive and she is like well, I want to drive and unfortunately, Sara just can't drive. Sara has the intelligence to drive, she has the intelligence to learn to operate a car, but the reality is; I had a driving instructor once say there are three parts of driving. There was learning the mechanics of operating the vehicle, there was learning the rules. What are the rules for example in Virginia for driving? Stop at a red light, slow down at yellow don't rush through, you know what are the rules? Don't text and drive, but there's also the third one, almost the instincts, the reaction. If all of a sudden a deer jumps in front of your car or a bee is in your car or a squirrel or whatever. A car swerves in your lane, the reaction. Many experts have said that they did not really think that Sara would have quick enough reactions to drive and it would be a dangerous situation. When they first told us, Doug that Sara was born with down syndrome when she was four months old my husband and I and our family walked a grief process. Not that we were sad about this beautiful child in our life, but we thought Sara was someone else and now we were told by the experts that she had down syndrome. We walked the path of grief and understanding and acceptance and I've built my life around this work. I am an "expert" in this field. It sort of surprised me, being the optimist I am, that all of a sudden her I am walking almost a path of grief again. A path of grief with my daughter as she realizes her life is different from others and she, in some ways, focuses on what she can't have. Which we all tend to do from time to time, but also as I walk that path with her again and I get surprised sometimes that the grief is still there because there is so much she is doing. Doug you have been a wonderful sounding board with me during this process.

Doug: Well thank you Debra, I appreciate it and I think what it just points to is that, there's that piece about being an expert and what does it mean to be an expert and we are experts, but we are also human beings right? It's interesting because when I worked in child welfare, I remember I used to have to testify a lot and they wanted to swear me in at one point as a child welfare expert and I was so uncomfortable with that because I just didn't know what that the heck that meant.

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They said well an expert is someone who would know more than the average person would on a topic and they said do you know more than the average person on this. I was like, yeah I have been doing this for ten years, of course I know more than the average person. The other piece I like is what Irvin Yalom talks about in “The Gifts of Therapy” he says that we should look at ourselves as fellow travelers and that’s how I see you Debra. You are someone who you know a lot more than the average person about challenges and so forth. But, I don’t think we have to put ourselves in a position where we never struggle or if you’re looking for an expert that is perfect and has all the answers, I think you’re probably looking for someone who is lying to you.

Debra: Because how can we know everything? We’re still trying to figure out so much about the human mind, the human body, our world around us, I like that explanation of an expert. I get it sometimes I get people will look at me and they are like, well you have been in the field and you have counseled countries like Egypt and Singapore, you’ve worked with China and all these big countries and little countries and the U.S. and Canada. So obviously you’re an expert and it’s like well, but there’s so many things I still don’t know there are things that I really get about life and the workforce and human potential and I still believe that to look at my daughter Sara and decide that Sara adds no value to society is wrong. But, is Sara on a different path from many other women that are twenty-nine years old? Yes, but in a way we are all on different paths right Doug, I mean you just started a new chapter in your life? We’re all on different paths.

Doug: You know even with my Son. I am grieving the loss of him as, Sam is eleven, there is part of me that is grieving the loss of him as my little baby. He’s defiantly, he gets more snippy with me and I don’t know what I’m talking about. He’s not cuddly anymore the way he used to be, right?

Debra: Yeah.

Doug: He is in that stage of like moving away and there is that grief and so I think there is a unique challenge for you, for Sara, for the family. The reality is that there are a lot of things that Sara can do and will do in her life right?

Debra: Right.

Doug: I mean she can do a lot, but at the same time there may be some things she won’t do, right that other people around her she sees doing. There is not always a fix to those things. It’s not always about fixing, it’s more about kind of living through and coming to acceptance.

Debra: Right, right and also who wrote the playbook that, you know, we all have to have certain kinds of lives? We have to get married, we have to have children, we have to. I mean that’s ridiculous and I know it’s ridiculous, but what’s interesting is that when Sara sometimes; It is very interesting as I try to understand Sara and I believe that I probably understand Sara as well, if not better than anyone else in her life and I love her deeply and I know she loves me the same way. She has a unique relationship with me and a different one with my husband, a different one with her brother and her cousins and stuff. Before Sara has told people that she is engaged or she is divorced or she is pregnant or, and it’s fascinating because most people; First of all, they will look at me, if I’m in the room they’ll either ask me or they’ll say congratulations or something.

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Depending upon on the situation I am in, if I am in the grocery store line and Sara tell the woman or the person checking us out that she is engaged and they'll will say oh congratulations are you excited and I will say yes I am excited because I don't want to take the time to explain the nuances. It has also been interesting; Sara has at times has been around her friends with autism. I remember a boy with autism really liked Sara and she told him she wasn't interested because she was engaged and he said to me is Sara engaged, I said well not really and he said then she's lying. I said well she's sort of not lying either, Sara just lives in this really cool imaginary world sometimes right?

Doug: I think we have talked about this before, but think it's she is very imaginative and it's right. It's not a lie in the sense of intentionally misleading someone it's her own wish fulfillment.

Debra: Right, right and in a way I think what does that hurt anybody, but it actually there has been times when it has become problematic. I have actually started discouraging it these days because what I don't want her to do is fall so much into her imaginary world that she is not living in this really cool world that we have. When I think about this walk that we are taking as a family and there's no easy answers even though we're figuring it out, I think about once again we are individuals and we move and we flow and we change and our lives change, our children change, our spouses, our loved ones and we do all this while we're working. You and I were talking before we started the episode today about how really busy you are at work and I'm really busy too. How do we find that balance between getting everything done and fulfilling our obligations, but being fair to ourselves? It's interesting because as I walk this with my family sometimes it's distracting at work. It distracts me a little bit at work, but I think also if I take the time to honor it I'm better at work because of the work that I do. I think that's something we need to understand in the work-force and certainly as we tap into human potential because we are here experiencing a human, you know, existence and sometimes it seems like everything is going right and sometimes everything is going right at work, but there are problems at home or maybe I don't feel good or my friend doesn't feel good or my family member doesn't feel good. It's part of the human condition which is life and could we be strong enough just to allow our lives to unfold even during the difficult times. I was mentioning to you Doug that yesterday happened to be a real emotional day walking this path with Sara and my husband. You know we are worried about Sara's weight and you know just typical things, I worry about stuff and I remember confiding in my sister about what was going on. Because I haven't really talked about it much because I'm sort of a mindset sometimes and maybe this is because of the difficult childhood that I had, but don't focus on the dark stuff, don't focus on the problems. Be grateful Debra, be grateful for everything going right in your life, but at the same time do I accidentally dishonor the things in my life that actually need my attention. Is it fair for me to say because I'm really deeply trying to explore this with my daughter, which I should, that I should run away from it and just stay well yeah I'm grateful, I'm grateful, grateful, grateful and I am grateful for her, but at the same time, I don't want to dishonor this walk that she's taking or I'm taking or other family members are taking by pretending that we are not walking a difficult path.

Doug: Are you familiar with, Debra, are you familiar with Margret Paul's work Inner Bonding have you heard of it?

Debra: No, it sounds interesting.

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Doug: So Margaret Paul has a really great, she has this really great system she calls inner bonding. One of the things I learned from that, I wanted to give her the credit for this because I didn't invent this, but this is something that I think about for myself and for clients and certainly share this with you and listeners. That when we say to ourselves just be positive, just be grateful the problem with that is we need to really treat our emotions the way that we would treat a child. If our child was upset right, especially when they're little or even not our own child. Just a child, if you went to a party and there was a child they're crying and they said I'm crying because I lost my favorite teddy bear right and you said be grateful you have other toys and close the door. How would that child feel?

Debra: Yeah, good point.

Doug: What essentially you are saying? What you're saying is shut up. When you're saying be grateful look on the positive side, what you're really saying is you are invalidating that child's grief and loss. Ok yes, it isn't the most important thing in the world, right, in the scheme of things you as an adult can see that it will be ok, but to that child in that moment if you don't acknowledge how painful that is for them, it really is invalidating and makes them feel worse and that is often what we do to ourselves.

Debra: Good point, good point I remember many years ago, I am a big fan of Mary Ann Williamson and I have talked to you about her before Doug. I just am a big fan of her work and I remember reading something years ago and a woman had gone through a real traumatic experience, she had lost a loved one and she had said; I just couldn't take the grief it was so dark and it was just so debilitating, so I went to the doctor and got some medicine to help me get through it because I was afraid if I didn't I would just stay in my bed for weeks and sob. Mary Ann said, well what's wrong with that? The woman was like that's not acceptable, but what is wrong with that? Why can't we really just take the time to be really authentic with our feelings and I love the inner bonding, that's a really good example. Even yesterday as I was walking, you know, a difficult day as we walk this path. I was talking to my sister and I told my sister what was going on and I got upset and started crying a little bit and my sister is like; I want to help. How can I help? What had occurred to me is that I have been so busy being strong for my daughter and my family and everyone around me that I forget there are people out there that can help me too. My sister and I came up with a great plan that my daughter is so stoked about. It is one thing to be strong and we have talked about it Doug as you are coaching me to find my voice. You know can we be venerable like Brene Brown talks, can we be authentic, can we truly be ourselves and can we take the time to honor the grief in all our feeling can we really do that Doug?

Doug: Human potential, like maximizing our potential is not just about always about being happy or always having the answer or always fixing something. Sometimes it is about honoring the things we can't fix and just being with and being able to comfort ourselves or allowing others to comfort us when we are in pain.

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Debra: While you were saying that, which I totally agree with you, I think it takes a lot of courage to really honor ourselves when we're in pain. I don't know that I've always learned those skills. I love the super soul Sunday with Oprah on the Oprah Winfrey Network I am just a huge fan. They had this weekend, last weekend they had Glennon Doyle Melton who wrote Love Warrior on there and Glennon's story was so interesting to me. She is a very attractive woman and I bring that up on purpose because she said that when she was growing up she was the pretty girl. She was a beautiful baby, a pretty girl, her mother was beautiful and people would come up to her mom when they would go to church on Sunday and say, you have such a beautiful perfect family. You make my family look terrible, we feel so unkempt around you and I have actually sort of said things like that before to, you know, attractive people and I never thought about the burden that you put on them. It is like you are looking at me and deciding that I am perfect and beautiful and that of course isn't true and nor can I maintain the beautiful the rest of my life because we shift and change. What is beauty anyway? It was just I was very impressed with what she was talking about and she really struggled being beautiful and perfect and you might say poor pretty girl, but the reality is I think we do that across the board in so many ways. You know, well is Sara beautiful because she has down syndrome, does Sara matter? I have mentioned before when Richard Dawkins said on a tweet if you find you have a fetus with down syndrome abort it and try again. I think wait a minute she is beautiful, beautiful in a different way as we put all of these different labels on each other. We un-validate people, I don't even know if that's a real word. We certainly don't validate them as individuals and yesterday when Sara and I were walking this and what's happening is Sara is having these, almost outbursts, behavior problems, stubbornness and this is the right word, she is acting out. So I know that she is, the other night in Zumba, we love Zumba. She was, we always stand in the front row she likes to stand in the front row to the side. So that we can see the instructor and I love it and she loves it, but she was just standing there. So I kept dancing up to her saying Sara you got to move, you got to move, because I am her mother encouraging her to exercise and she would and then she would stop. I'd walk up to her again and say Sara we are in Zumba you have got to move, or if you don't want to be in here and I'd be whispering it to her, go out and get on a machine. But you got to move that is why we are here, you know playing my role as a mother. After we got out of the class Sara and I got in an argument about it and she said I told you that I love the instructor, but I don't like the music she plays so why are you making me go to this class and I thought, oh wow. Well, I'm making you go Sara because I am your mother and I want you to be healthy and I want you to move, but am I dishonoring her now as an adult woman of twenty-nine, by not letting her have choices and is she in this in-between world where she is always going to be a child never an adult and she has to do whatever her mother says because she's living with me. It's just a real deep conversation I am having with myself and her and my husband. I know it's a powerful time.

Doug: We should really do a whole episode just on that Debra. On that piece about, how much do you let go as a parent and how much do you? I think that alone that push and pull of how much do we let go, you know, how much do we step in, how much do we step back? That itself would be a whole episode. I'd love to have that conversation because, I mean, I am struggling with that right now.

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Debra: Right and it doesn't have to be a child-parent relationship. It can be relationship with your parents, that's really relevant. Relationship with your boss, relationship with your loved one. I agree we will have to do that on our next episode Doug.

Doug: Ok cool, so we have our next topic, but I think one of the things, one of the big takeaways for me in this conversation is really about the idea of honoring where we are and yes at some point, you know there is a car trapped on your leg and you really have got to get the car off your leg right and that's an acute situation and you got to do that. But other times there is not really an acute fix for the problem and sometime we have to honor where we are.

Debra: Yes, I agree, well said Doug, we have to honor where we are and I always say the only disability is not being able to see human potential and I look forward to continuing this conversation. Thank you so much Doug.

Doug: Thank you Debra it is always a pleasure.

(Outro Music)