

# BWF\_Syl Trepanier Transcript

**Syl Trepanier:** When you start working on something, there's a lot of power into saying it out loud. Find the circle of people that you trust, that will always offer you the right feedback at the right time. Share with them what is it that you're working on and give them permission in any settings as you see fitness, as you feel comfortable to give you feedback around how you're progressing in that journey.

**Tim Spiker:** As a leader, are you telling the people you lead what you or working on to improve your leadership? If not, you're missing out on a great opportunity. I'm your host, Tim Spiker. And this is the Be Worth Following podcast on this show, we talk with exceptional leaders, thinkers, and researchers about what actually drives effective leadership across the globe.

And over time, you just heard from Dr. Syl Trepanier, senior vice president for Providence St. Joseph health in his position as system chief nursing executive. He serves as a voice of nursing at the senior executive level, representing 38,000 nurses in 52 hospitals and at over 1000 healthcare clinics. With all of his credentials and experience, you might expect Syl to talk about leading as if he's on a mountaintop, separated from those he's leading. But that's not what you're going to hear today. Instead, you're from a leader who sees it as his role to be with and beside those he leads. You're going to hear about how he shares his own need for growth as a leader, With the very people he's leading.

And you'll also get a chance to hear the simple concrete and a little bit surprising first step he takes in order to encourage and inspire others. But first we get to hear about the people who gave him one of the greatest gifts any of us could ever hope to receive and about what brought him to the conscious acceptance very early in life, that he was in fact, a leader.

**Syl Trepanier:** I believe that the thing that influenced me the most. And still to this day, is the fact that I was very fortunate to be brought in a very loving family. My, my parents we lost dad a few years ago. I still have my mother, which I love dearly. And I was, you know, I have one sister and we, we were loved like unconditionally.

And that's not lost in translation for me. I know that that has. like a tremendous impact on who we are. And, and we were very close to my grandparents too on my mother's side and felt as much if not even more love, you know, for, for them. And so, we can never underestimate the impact that we have on children.

And loving them and showing them that we love them. And it really, that to me is the foundation of everything. So, I would want to start there.

**Tim Spiker:** You know, it's interesting as we, as so many people, when I asked them this question about background and influence and how do I end up being the leader that I'm told so many people do talk about their families.

And yet we know that a number of people haven't necessarily had. A picture-perfect family growing up. And so, you know, what I, what I would say to those who maybe have that as an experience is that we get a chance to perhaps straighten out some curves in the road. Maybe we weren't dealt the best hand, but what you just said is so impactful.

I think the idea of this idea of kind of unconditional love is like, Whoa, wait, this is a leadership podcast. Did we just, what did we start the counseling session? It was like, well. It turns out, it turns out that leadership is about relationships. And if we can connect with people, not in the same way as a family does necessarily, but if we have some unconditional regard and respect not meaning to conflate work with family, cause they're two different dynamics and yet they're all filled with people.

And so, if we weren't dealt the best hand I feel like I had pocket aces. As well, so it seems like that really was, you know, I really, I really was blessed and yet, even if you weren't. There's a chance to, to pay it forward in a sense and, and do things that maybe weren't done for you. So that's why I just wanted to offer a little hope for those who maybe didn't have that as an experience, even as you and I feel very blessed and fortunate.

**Syl Trepanier:** Yeah. Thank you for that. Absolutely. It, it offers a moment for us to pause and you're, and you're spot on and, and I, and I suspect we'll go there later on in the conversation. But to me is showing up as a loving person. Is the essence of how we can actually be better experienced as a leader.

So, to go back to your initial question, so a two-pronged answer, family wise and the other is I I was a really shy kid. I did really didn't have a lot of friends when I was a young kid. And somehow, somewhere, I was very I was drawn to drawn to acting and took some courses very, very early on.

I, I want to say I was probably 12 years old when I started acting courses in school and started with, like, community theater stuff. And by the time I was 16, It had been like, you know, close to six years or so that I I think I was either 10 or 12, I forget exactly, but anyway, it's like four, four, between four to six years

that same group of friends that were, were doing this in the, in the community theater, I will always remember it was like every Friday night, I was like the thing that I so, I'm so excited Friday because we would go to this place and we would, you know, learn all sorts of stuff.

And then we decided, let's just, let's just get an acting team together. I mean, and I'm like, I'm 16 years old, let's just get an acting team together. I will be the president of this acting team, and we're going to incorporate ourselves and let's go to the city and let's get some funds so we can get some dollars.

Cause I heard that there's some grant dollars over there. I mean, we could talk hours about that, but if that was not the beginning of Showing up and organizing myself as, you know, thinking, you know, as a leader and how do I get people excited around this idea and, you know, I've got the whole crew all, all wound up and I'm excited.

And that's an acting team that actually we held together till I was like 30 years old. Wow. Wow. We did. Yeah, we did this for a while. I even, even as I, yeah. Yeah, went into nursing school. I was doing both of them at the same time. And then at one point, I had to make a decision.

**Tim Spiker:** It was too much work. Yeah, well, it's interesting as we pause occasionally to look back.

I'm willing to guess that the picture of you leading, is clearer now as you look back on it than when you were in the midst of it. Or were you, you know, one of the unique ones that you were totally conscious of? Hey, I'm leading here. How was that for you when you were 16?

**Syl Trepanier:** Yes, I was. I made so much so and so much clarity that when I entered, you know, many years later than I entered nursing school, I entered nursing school with the intent of becoming a chief nurse.

I didn't call it that then, because that's not how they were, you know, that's not how they were called. But that was, that was the intent to lead, you know, lead with others. That's the part that I, that was very clear to me too, even back then, it was really leading with others. I was clear that I was leading with the group.

I, you know, clearly, I, I had an influence and I would inspire them, you know, in doing stuff. What was fueling me is the fact that we were doing it together. Like I was, like, it was not like, you know, still doing his thing. Yeah. It was really all of us doing that together. And that's what fuels me today. I

**Tim Spiker:** was going to say, it's really interesting now, kind of fast forward.

And you're in this, in this big job with lots of people that you're responsible for ultimately. And yet this idea of I am with. Is a very interesting underpinning to your leadership story and the fact that you started out not granted There's great ways to learn leadership and you know, you could have been You could have been working at a fast food joint You're the shift manager and that could have been it but you were in an environment where nobody had to show up Like this is all volunteer.

Nobody. There's no paycheck. There's no And I just wonder if that being your kind of initial space where you were consciously leading [00:09:00] because you know, one of the things that I like to try to remind myself and others of is in reality, the people were leading, they do have, they don't have to, they could, they could potentially, you know, especially, especially the most talented among them, they could have other opportunities in a moment.

So when I, when I say this idea of kind of leading with people how does that strike you as you look back on your experience and think about how you lead today? I'm pausing,

**Syl Trepanier:** As you ask the question, because I you know, what I really like about this conversation is, you know, stuff comes up that I hadn't even thought of before and it gives like even deeper insights into why I'm showing up the way I'm showing up now, which is influenced by how it Oh, I did back then.

It resonates with me. You're absolutely correct. We, none of us had to do this. It was all, or we certainly weren't paid. That's for sure. I probably would have, I wonder if I still have some of those paperwork to see what kind of funding we even had and how we were, you know, getting all of our monies, but we, were.

It's like a group of like, kind of, I mean, like minded individual, but also at the same time, you know, serving the same purpose. And that's really what got us, you know, all excited. And I'm, and I'm thinking about, you know, today you know, the complexity of, you know, healthcare and all the various teams that I, you know, that I, that I work with.

At the end of the day, what keeps me going, I'm going to say the chaos of what healthcare is right about now, is the fact that I have an opportunity to work side by side with individuals. That chose to come in and lend their talent in an organization that culturally, like the culture here is very much alive.

And we are we're constantly reminding ourselves and that's very deliberate on our part. Of what we are here to do. We're founded by Sisters' Congregations from hundreds of years ago. And through the generations, they were every were very deliberate about why they were doing what they were doing. And we're still doing that.

**Tim Spiker:** today. That connection to purpose.

**Syl Trepanier:** Yes. That connection to purpose, that connection to. Mission and vision and what does that mean and how does that translate every day and what, what do I bring that allows that to be alive and well, and, and, and certainly will not be the one. That messes up 300 years,

**Tim Spiker:** not good.

That's good. That's good accountability right there. Well, that, you know, that whole idea, and I love how these conversations unfold because, you know, we have some things we want to make sure that we touch on, but. Then we have the conversation, and it's really a conversation. And what's amazing to me is I think about even where we've come so far is a perfect setup for one of the ideas that you're passionate about that we got a chance to talk about offline previously around inspiration.

And so, it's, you know, it's not a, it's not a long leap from like-minded people on mission to the issue of inspiration. And so, one of the things that you shared with me that I'd love for people to hear a little bit about is this idea that leaders need to have a thoughtfulness around inspiring others, but you had a really wonderful caveat to it.

You said, even ourselves, we need to inspire ourselves. So talk about that a little bit.

**Syl Trepanier:** I think it's important that I share, you know, for the audience that for me, the reason why inspiration is so important. It's how we can get things done. A few years ago, I would. I would use the word influence way much more so than I would use the word inspiration.

And I believe that in today's environment, inspiration is way much more effective than influence. Yeah, sometimes you have to go a little bit towards the influence the influence side, but I believe that from a long-term perspective, inspiration really... It is the best is the best way to go, maybe to illustrate that a

little bit in, in, in my mind, it's going to go back to some comments that I made earlier in our conversation.

I need to first show up as a loving person, as a loving leader, and what does that look like? And I need to be very deliberate about that. And when I do that, trust ensues. People, you know, we trust each other and when trust is present, it offers us the perfect medium to inspire one another. And that's when we get stuff done.

That's when leadership, that's when the magic happens. And so I've been very deliberate about my, my journey and, and every day as, as I, as I show into conversation, how am I going to show up in this conversation today, just 30 minutes before us getting together, I'm sitting in with Another nurse leader that I get to work with very closely, and I'm understanding some difficulties that the team is struggling with and wrestling with, and I know that this and this is a leader that works.

It's really, really hard and the outcomes are not easy to achieve. So I was reminding myself just before, as I was preparing to have this conversation, how am I going to inspire this person today? Knowing how rough the last 24 hours have been, I know by the way, it's been rough for a really long time, but the last 24 have been like really, really rough.

What am I going to say? How am I going to inspire her today? How do I need to show up? Cause I feel that she needs that today. And sure enough, you know, she did. I share this with you because it's Being an inspirational leader doesn't just happen.

**Tim Spiker:** I think a lot of people have the perception of just kind of a natural gifting in that arena.

And you're talking about a very deliberate conscious version of that. And so, and so for those of us that may not see ourselves in that naturally inspirational category, what you're about to say is really important because you're going to open a door to the rest of us who might only have the option of being conscious and deliberate about it.

So, bring it. That's what that's about. Yeah.

**Syl Trepanier:** Yeah. So, the best way is by showing ultimate presence. Can't say enough about that. Ansome of us are better at it than others. And quite

frankly, some of us are really bad at it. That is true. Particularly in today's environment.

It's so easy to be distracted and so as simple as this may sound, you and I know when we get into a conversation, when someone needs our full attention, they need it. You can sense it. You can feel it. You know that they're going to benefit from it. When you feel that and you see that, then you do it.

That means that you have to be fully present. Your phone has to be off.

**Tim Spiker:** mean, you really want to go next level. Don't even put it in your pocket and let it vibrate like actually away because maybe they can't act. Yeah. I mean like full on.

**Syl Trepanier:** Yeah, For real. And it's possible. Listen, none of us are that important. I mean, none of us are. I mean, seriously, I mean, unless you're in the middle of brain surgery and then you need to have something better. Which is

**Tim Spiker:** ironic because you actually work close to that sort of thing. For most people, that's just a throwaway statement, but you're actually near the brain surgery. So, this is important for you to say.

**Syl Trepanier:** Yes, yes, absolutely. It's like, you know, it's, it's okay. And, and I don't, and, and, and we don't do that enough. We're, we're not, you know, we're not present enough, you know, simpler, but, you know, just to add another layer, you know, to that, it's also about how do you intend to show your presence?

So how deliberate are you about that? So that's, that's what I just did this morning in this example that I just shared with you. I was grounding myself on the reality that this leader had gone through the last 24 hours and tried to remind myself what it was like when I was in those shoes. The other thing that I would add to this is, and then the conversation ends, and what do you do with it?

Sometimes I have the opportunity to do that in the moment. Now, you're allowing me to do that for the conversation I had earlier today by having this conversation with me. And that's very powerful. And sometimes, so, who is your thought partner? I have a thought partner. I have internally here in our organization.

We have a, we have a deliberate process where we engage into a relationship with someone that we call our dialogue partner. It's not my mentor. It's not my

coach. It's someone that where together we talk about our mission leadership formation and how, how we show up, how we are experienced, how we can keep the mission alive, how we can you know, all that stuff.

**Tim Spiker:** Did the organization bring that, or is that something that you just naturally did, or is there a structure to it that people would have?

**Syl Trepanier:** No, I can't take credit for that. That came with the that, that was something that the organization introduced that to me, and I am so grateful for it.

**Tim Spiker:** How does that match happen? How do they help you find the person that you can be dialogue partners with?

**Syl Trepanier:** Because it's a process that's in place here the organization offered me, so very early on as I started developing as a leader within this organization offered a leadership formation process. And as part of that process, offered me a list of people who make themselves available to be dialogue partners.

And I have had the same dialogue partner. I've been with this organization for over six and a half years and I've had the same, and I started this process maybe like a year into my employment here. So, I've had the same dialogue partner for over five years. And I would say that unfortunately, although it's available and its present, not everyone is taking advantage of it. And I can tell who is and who isn't.

**Tim Spiker:** Oh, wow. That's fascinating. I want to dial back to something a little bit on the present side of things. Because, you know, we started off talking about inspiration. And how can I think about, kind of deliberately and consciously, you know, just to frame it with different words, putting wind in somebody else's sails so that they can continue on and fight the good fight towards a good mission for the organization.

[00:21:00] But you began as, as you dug in, you really dug down, I would say foundationally and say, you know, this has not been a conversation about flowery language that causes people to want to run through a wall. You began. With the simplest idea, which is, first of all, let's be fully present. First of all, I mean, and, and I, and I love that because I think there are many people who are attempting to build something like exceptional inspiration on top of a shaky foundation.



It's not built on something as, as simple, not necessarily easy to do, but simple as being fully present. And I think that that is so foundational. And even going back into the idea, when you talk about showing up as a loving leader, I mean, not to oversimplify, but what could be more simply caring for somebody than to say, I'm going to give you my full attention.

And, and, and you said, and I agree with you so that it's hard today, especially because these electronic devices that we carry around in our pockets, it is hard and yet. The opportunity to stand out from every other leader is because of the, that technology that's so ubiquitous to be able to be the person who like, you know, what if somebody were to say, I've never seen that person's cell phone when I'm talking with him or talking with her.

And so the, the craziness of the technology in our world provides a pretty unique opportunity to stand out. And all of a sudden now, You are loving through presence. You're communicating value to me. You're the busy leader with all of the responsibility. And yet I have your full attention. I don't just, you know, have your ears.

I have your eyes and your, and your, your body language. I have the whole of your attention. And that is such a unique gift. For anybody to give, but especially for a leader. So, I just love how you, we start to talk about inspiration, but you begin with such important foundational ideas, like giving somebody your full attention.

**Syl Trepanier:** Multitasking is overrated.

**Tim Spiker:** Research suggests that it actually is a fallacy in most cases. You know, you can do a rote physical activity that you've done a million times and have a conversation with somebody, but outside of that, Multitasking actually makes us less efficient when you look at the statistics and the research.

So I'm with you on that. All right, we've got another spot. That I want to make sure that we spend a little time on based on some previous conversation you and I have had. And it's this idea of calling myself out. You know, what does it mean for us as leaders? How do you see the idea of calling yourself out?

**Syl Trepanier:** I had a coach mentor started as a coach ended up being a mentor for me for a few years that I worked with. And unfortunately passed away since then has had a huge impact on me. And he was the one who introduced this concept of calling yourself out. And what I was learning with

him is, is the importance of, of being very deliberate about your development journey.

And what is it that you want to do? More of he, he certainly was one that was aspiring to the concept of strength based, you know, leadership and identifying things that you do well and you, and, and if you do even them, them even better, then that's really going to take your, how people will experience you even to You know, to another level.

And I was doing some work, some work with him. And then he introduced the concept that when you start working on something, there's a lot of power into saying it out loud and find the circle of people that you trust that will always offer you the right feedback at the right time. And share with them, what is it that you're working on and give them permission in any settings as you see fit and as you feel comfortable to give you feedback around how, how, how you're progressing in that journey.

And then what's even more powerful is that if you find yourself doing it well. Or not doing it well, just say it out loud because when you're showing a lot of vulnerability and you know, you and I could be talking a lot about the importance of being vulnerable as a, as a leader and it's in positive impact that it has on others and yourself.

So ever since, I've been I've been practicing this, but I've also been encouraging others to do the same, just to illustrate what, what I mean by that, there was a something that I was working on, you know, at that time, I was a I was a brand new system CNO, and I felt, not I felt, I knew that there was a lot of opportunities for me where I did not necessarily speak up, particularly depending on who the audience was.

Okay. And especially if it was not necessarily thinking like what the others are thinking. And I would always figure out a way to make the statement or share my perspective, but I would do it in small groups like I wouldn't do it with like the larger team that it's courage that I just didn't have for one reason or another.

It's just I just was not there. But I knew that in order to be effective and successful, I needed to develop that because it's key. Because that's what I'm paid for. Right? I mean, at the end of the day, right? That boils down to it. So, let's do it. So, I kept on, somehow, somewhere, the way that I found the courage to do that, is I would always start my sentence by saying, I would say something like, I apologize in advance if that is going to offend anyone, and here's what I'm thinking, and my thought are not complete, not completely arranged.

So, it may not, may not come out exactly how I want to say it, but here it is. Like, it's almost like I'd put like a disclaimer in front of it. And I, and I realized, oh, well, that was the first step in order to do that. But then I realized Why am I apologizing for saying something that I believe it? I shouldn't apologize for that.

Yeah, So, on my journey, as part of my development, eventually my goal was that I will stop apologizing in advance for saying something that is controversial. That was my thing. And I kept on telling people this is what I'm working on, just so you know. So, if you see me apologizing, I need for you to call me out and say, "Why are you apologizing?"

Yeah. Fast forward. Not, but six months ago, now I have the privilege of sitting on a national a board. I'm in a conversation and I, I get the mic and then I start and then I say out loud. I apologize if I'm going to be offending anyone with this. And then I start to talk and then I was like, I'm sorry, I need to stop myself here. And then everyone just looked at me. I said, I just need to call myself out. I'm actually not apologizing. I take it back. And here's what I have to say. And then boom, I said what I needed to say.

**Tim Spiker:** I love it. I love it. There is so much, and you said it, there's so much power in saying something out loud. I mean, and again, in the position that you sit in, Syl, it makes a difference because when the leader in front of people that they influence are responsible for says, Hey, this is what I'm working on.

Well, first of all, Sad to say, there are some leaders who are not even able to say I'm working on something. So, you've at least, you know, you, you've passed that first hurdle, but you have then invited others who would have the courage to say, Hey, yeah, you did that thing. It's, it's, it's like accountability.

People in the podcast have probably heard me say this before, but I'm going to say it again. Matthew Kelly says there are many things that make us unique as human beings. The need to be held accountable is not one of them. And so, what you're doing is you're essentially inviting others who in many cases report to you that you're being accountable to them in a way, or at least inviting them to help you be accountable to the thing you're working on.

So, there's humanness, there's humility, there's vulnerability, but in the end. In the end, and just as your last story pointed out there in the end, it helps you take the steps that you need to take as a growing as you're growing into courageousness as you're growing into the role that you've been given to.

And so I love the idea of, hey, for those of us who want to reach our potential as leaders. Maybe one of the first things we need to do is invite the people around us to call us out on the things that we're working. You're not going to get shot. We're not going to shoot the messenger. I'm actually going to hopefully say thank you.

And then you get a chance to prove that, right. When somebody actually does call you up. But I love it for so many different ways. The top one is your own development, but I also love it for. The connection and the humility and the vulnerability and the opportunity it is also to build relationship with the people around you.

So, you're achieving many things that are positive at the same time by leaning into the idea of calling yourself out. I think it's awesome.

**Syl Trepanier:** You know, it's interesting because I just I was chatting with a group of aspiring chief nurses a few months ago, it must have been last year actually, and I was sharing with them this concept and calling yourself out.

And then somebody raises their hand and then she starts to say I'm wondering if you might want to consider calling yourself in. Say more about that. And I'm paraphrasing here a little bit, and, and she was making a point that calling out has it felt to her that it was somewhat had some negativity to it had some connotation that may come, you know, with it when you call somebody out, like you're, and if you invite people in and you're calling yourself into. I just say this out loud because I'm actually still kind of pondering whether, it should be calling yourself in or calling yourself out. I don't care what you call it, right? At the end of the day, it's the practice.

**Tim Spiker:** You know, one of the things that I appreciate about the discussion with Syl is how he had some, some really broad ideas, but we got a chance to hear some very simple.

Not easy, but simple, practical application. And so, if I begin with where we ended up the conversation, where sale was talking about calling himself out, inviting others to speak into his own development and just, you know, I just love them. The vulnerability of that, if that's a healthy vulnerability, that's showing your humanness to your team, that's inviting them into the story.

I mean, how many leaders have you ever followed or worked for who said, hey, here's an aspect of my character, my leadership that I'm working on. And if you see something that's in violation of this, please, please remind me, please let me

know. How many of you have ever seen a leader like that and thought less of them?

And the answer is you haven't because we think more of people that show up in that way. Now maybe there's an exception or if somebody would say like, every single thing, every single day, I need you to call me out on because I'm terrible. There's maybe some extreme examples there, but in. You know, I'm going to make up a stat here in 99 percent of cases when we're working for and following leaders who have the conscious mentality of what they're working on for themselves.

And they invite us as followers to speak into that, to help them. It's just so effective in so many ways because it's a, there's a connection there between leader and follower on a human level, but you're also genuinely asking them for their help. And you're showing them that we all need to be growing and developing regardless of the position that we're in.

So many positive things about that and such a practical application as well. Another point that I want to bring our attention to is that the leaders that sit in very influential positions, the leaders that are high up, they were not always the leaders that they are today. They were on a path they've been progressing and are progressing as well.

And I so appreciate Syl's transparency to talk about how he was working on the issue of courage and something that he didn't have as much previously, but it has been working on it and continues to work on it. And I just so appreciate his humility, vulnerability, transparency to share that. But it really helps us all remember that as we might see shortcomings or things that we need to work on, when we look in the mirror and see the leader that we wish we were, it would be wrong for us to think that the leaders that we admire, that the leaders that are, very high up in our organizations that they just have had it always.

They've always had it figured out. They've always been the exceptional leader that they are today. No, they've been on a trajectory. They've been on a path. They weren't always the person that they are today. And I share that to give us all a little encouragement and a little hope to know that. Truly reaching our potential as leaders is a process.

It's a process of growth. It takes time. It takes energy. It takes effort. It takes diligence. It takes intentionality. It takes all of those things. And so, I'm just encouraged by what Syl shared regarding his own journey. And then reminded that as he sits at a very senior level with tons of influence over many, many,

people that he too is on a development path and that we can all take encouragement from that.

If we're, you know, if we're not at that Syl level yet. Now, some of you might be beyond the Syl level and there's encouragement in what he said as well, that we all need to be continuing to work on how we lead, how effective we are as leaders. But regardless of where you sit, I do think it's worth remembering.

Reminding ourselves that leaders are in process. They don't just show up perfectly formed. They grow and develop over time. And that is true for us as well. Where I want to finish out today as we think about this episode is getting back to the part where Syl was talking about wanting to be somebody who inspires others and he talked about this idea of being conscious and deliberate about it.

And again, this could sound kind of very pie in the sky Like how do I say these nice glowing words, but did you notice where we ended up in the conversation? We ended up with some very simple ideas like giving somebody your full attention. And in fact, the word that he used was ultimate presence. I love that term.

That's a wonderful two-word combo. That is a challenge, probably for all of us as leaders, when we show up as leaders, paying full attention to others. It is magical because the world is so loud and noisy. And frankly, because of the positions that we hold, that attention means more. I'm not saying it should, I'm just saying that it does.

And so, we get a chance as leaders to make a big mark. Positively with the people that we're leading, if we could just be fully present, fully attentive. And so that leads me to the question that I want to leave you with today. And that is this with the people that you are leading, are you giving them your ultimate presence?

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