



Defining Moments of Leadership with Marsha Acker and Jardena London on Knowing Your Impact



Marsha Acker: Hi everyone. I'm Marsha Acker. And this is defining moments of leadership. If you've ever been in a situation where you got some feedback about the impact you were having on others and thought, "Hey, that cannot possibly be me. I'm not like that." Then this episode is for you. My guest today is Jardena London and before we dive in just a little bit about her, she is on a mission to create thriving workplaces that also feed our souls. She is a business transformation consultant, author, and keynote speaker. She's been a consultant for 27 years, serving as founder and CEO of Rosetta Agile. Jardena has spent the last 13 years focusing on business agility, sparking bold, disruptive thinking with corporate clients, and she's the author of the recent book, *Cultivating Transformations: A Leader's Guide to Connecting the Soulful and the Practical*, which is now available in audio. So let's dive in.

Welcome to the show Jardena.

Jardena London: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Marsha Acker: I have had the pleasure of knowing you for many years, and I am excited to jump into the topic of leadership with you. So for those who might not know you, I'm curious if you could just give us a little bit of who you are and how you got to where you are today?

Jardena London: Who I am, let's see. Well, I started in software, so I ran a software company for a number of years when I was younger and I just kept feeling like software wasn't the problem that we were having, like we were failing in software, but it wasn't software. So when I started to learn about Agile and

new ways of working, I got really interested. I even started out just learning how to have better meetings before I even became aware of Agile. So I dropped the software thing and moved into just helping people with better ways of working and business agility. So now I am a consultant who really focuses on that, just focuses on business agility and connecting soulfulness in the workplace because I really do think that if it's not making our lives better, what's the point?

Marsha Acker: Yeah. And I love how you talk a lot about soulfulness and bringing that into the business practice. And so it's lovely. I would love to actually take us a little bit backwards in time. Tell us a little bit about the first time you had a sense of leadership.

Jardena London: Yeah, I think as a kid, they kind of labeled me as a leader and I never understood why, because I wasn't the kid in the neighborhood organizing all the kids. That's just not me. I wasn't mobilizing people. They still labeled me and I didn't really understand why. And then I started to see now, I guess maybe in retrospect, I can tell you a story about something in fifth grade when I look back on it's like, "Oh, that's what they meant when they called me a leader."

I started in fifth grade to sell these chocolate pretzels, chocolate chip pretzels to the class. I don't know how it even started, but people started ordering them and more and more. And I was up until all hours of the night baking these things and going until like 11 o'clock at night in fifth grade. And I was like going to the store to get more and more supplies all the time. and then I negotiated with my teacher to have some space on the chalkboard for some menu. And so I can take orders, like it was a whole thing. That was cool, but what happened after that was even cooler, which is that everybody in the class started to find something to sell. Everybody was selling something, someone selling these chocolate lollipops and people would just make folders out of construction paper and sell those. And the whole classroom became this marketplace, but I didn't really realize it was my leadership that kind of sparked that, it had an impact on that whole class, but I wasn't telling them to do it. I was just doing what I was doing.

Marsha Acker: It's kind of like the concept of the first mover, right. The person that's just taking an idea and putting out in the space and seeing what happens. It sounds like there's an entrepreneurial gene that maybe runs for you. Do you find that true today?

Jardena London: Oh, absolutely. It's partially that I always wanted to have some money in my pocket, but the other piece was that I always wanted to be doing something that didn't exist. Like whatever my thing was that day I wanted to go do it. It wasn't all baked goods eventually.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. So as you think back to that time, you're talking about not actually seeing yourself as a leader, but noticing an impact that you had on a group of people.

Jardena London: I don't think I appreciated it or even knew it. I was a shy kid. I was a shy and quiet kid. So I didn't really think that I had an impact. Right? But my quiet little way was having an impact.

Marsha Acker: It's interesting to think about just that particular statement that you make about the stories that we tell ourselves about what it looks like to have an impact. And you know, if I'm shy, then I can't have an impact. I can definitely identify. I was the kid who'd actually stand behind my mom when I was being introduced to people. You can have an impact and also be shy.

Jardena London: Yeah. Everybody who walks into a space, whether virtual or physical, has an impact. But I didn't think that mine mattered. And I have a friend who says, "How you show up matters." That statement really resonated with me because I just didn't think it did.

Marsha Acker: When did you come to that realization that how you show up matters?

Jardena London: Well, so fast forward to me being an adult and I'm working. And so sometimes I showed up and had a positive impact and sometimes not so positive. So then I started to see that I sometimes had a negative impact. So there was a time of several years ago where I went to, I was working with this client in California on a piece of software. Their software was a mess. This was when I was still doing software, went to their office, wearing me and my colleague, both. I was in a black dress, black heels. And he was in like this perfectly tailored black suit. And in California you really don't dress like that. And we walked in and they were like, "You going to a funeral?" Because that's how we dressed in New York, we didn't know that. Anyway, so we walk in, we're already looking like two people who think, who the heck they are, right? Like two hot shot, New Yorkers.

And we walk in and I'm telling them about what's wrong with the software without any, completely oblivious to how that might impact the people who had worked on it for 10 years. And they kept getting mad at me and they were yelling. And I knew I was right, but they were yelling at me. And I just kept saying the same thing over and over again, like change my wording a little bit, but saying the same thing. And as we were leaving, my colleague said to me, "Did you notice them getting mad?" And I was like, "Yeah, so what, right? I was right." And I am right. And he said, "Well, when you notice people getting mad, you might want to change what you're saying."

And again, it was like, I didn't think that I was going to have that impact. I thought that I just come in, I give them the facts and I leave, but I had an impact on that space. And it wasn't a good one. And it really just had never even occurred to me that that was something to think about. So there were other times when I just learned that I am actually just by walking into a room, I used to work for a .com startup. And the joke was that when I got off the elevator, everyone had to turn down the music and get serious. And the elevator would ding, I would step off and all the fun would end. And that's an impact that you have without even doing anything.

Marsha Acker: What I hear you pointing to, is that it's also your presence. And in both of those examples, it really comes through about how you show up matters.

Jardena London: Because now I knew that how I showed up did matter. So when I started to become more conscious of it, I didn't do anything different, but I just started to show up differently, maybe more smiling, maybe more patience for a small talk. And then I started to get the feedback from people and clients that they just kind of like having me around. And I was like, I don't know how to sell that. I don't know how to put that on my resume. I don't know what to do with that information. I don't know what that means. But over time I started to realize that's just woven in to what you do. And it makes everything easier when people like being around you and they're not yelling at you every time you open your mouth.

Marsha Acker: You had someone give you some feedback. And there was something in that you took to heart and really began to pay attention to the impact you were having. If you were talking to someone who might not still be convinced that they are having an impact or that it really matters all that much, what would you say to them?

Jardena London: You know, it's funny. I had a conversation with somebody the other day who said, who was talking about knowing your audience. And knowing your audience is important, but it sort of implies that you're going to change who you are. And so we talked about the phrase, just meet them where they are, which I know is popular in the Agile community, but really it's about building that bridge. It's not about me changing who I am, but it's about, how can I build a bridge between us so that we can connect? So I think of that image when I have somebody who I am not seeing eye to eye with.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. I hear that. So notice your impact is certainly one of the things that I'm hearing you talk about. And I'm curious if you walk us along your leadership journey from the fifth grade, all the way to where you are now, is there anything that stands out for you as a real poignant moment? I definitely hear one certainly around noticing this impact.

Jardena London: So another moment that I thought was really eye opening for me, I'll go back a few years. I was working with a team, and I was not their boss, I was the peer, but I kind of take a leadership role a lot. It just kind of happens. And I ask them, "Hey, can you work on this strategic planning work while I'm on vacation? And when I come back, we'll finish it up," whatever. And I came back from vacation and they had not even opened it or touched it or had a single meeting, nothing. I wasn't their boss so of course, but it was sort of in all of our best interests, it's what we were working on. And I said, "So what happened? What, did something else happen while I was gone?" And they said, "No, but we know you're going to change everything. So we didn't bother working on it." So again, introspective, I was mad and annoyed and thought they were lazy and didn't want to take any responsibility. But also part of me was like, what did I do to create that response?

So my need, my own personal need and personal armor of having to be the know it all and know everything and have all the answers, didn't create space for them. And my impact on them was like, they were suffocating when I was around. So that's a negative. So they were avoiding pain and I was causing them pain. And I'd seen other people do this. I didn't know I was those people. Like you see other leaders do that, and you're like, "Well, look at them. They're terrible." And then you're like, "Oh, I'm the terrible one."

Marsha Acker: Yeah. I think those moments when you see in yourself, the things that you dislike in others, I would imagine we've all had at least one of those moments, can be some of the most dissonance creating spaces. Where you go, "Ah, so that's the reason I actually don't like that in the other person." And it also sits in me too, so.

Jardena London: Yeah. Yeah. So it's interesting though, your question is a good one, like what sparks you to take a look at that and be introspective instead of blame others for being lazy. Which they were being lazy, to be fair, or whatever they were being. So I don't know. I think there's some kind of reckoning that we have to do with all of our daily activities.

Marsha Acker: Do you have a introspective process? Is that a part of your daily practice in some way?

Jardena London: That's a great question. So I have some practice where sort of towards the end of the day as I start to peter out, which happens earlier and earlier nowadays, I do mini retrospective, what works and what didn't that day. And in doing that, I'm thinking about how I impacted other people and how it could have been easier.

Marsha Acker: We talk a lot about structural dynamics here, and I know that language also exists for you. But one of the things that keeps coming up is I hear you reflect

on each of those scenarios is, there are three different languages we speak, power, affect, meaning. And the power language is focusing on action and getting things done. Meaning is a lot about, what's the intent or data behind that? And affect is where the impact on others comes in. And so what I hear you bringing into your reflection is the building of more affect into your language where I suspect maybe power and meaning come maybe more naturally, but even having that practice, do you reflect on that often? Do you ask yourself the question about what went well, what didn't go well and maybe what do I make up? Or what do I notice about the impact on others?

Jardena London: So I am high in meaning, so yes, I'm always looking for the meaning, even in the affect, right? So for me, how I'm impacting other people is, I'm looking at the meaning there, not the affect. So that's the one piece, the other piece too, on the meaning side, I am high in meaning. So, you know, the story I talked about where the people in California were yelling at me, I was really just wanting to get to the facts of the meaning. But sometimes when I go really deep into meaning, it comes across as power. So like with the people who didn't do the work while I was on vacation, that was me overstepping my power boundaries to them. To me, I was like, "We just have to get this work done." So yeah, I do, I think a lot about affect. One of my reflections on that is, and this is such a meaning thing to say, no one ever told me that, like I never knew that. Some people do it instinctually, my children who do this, have an instinct about caring how people feel, someone needed to tell me that. I didn't know that, like I wasn't born knowing that, it's not intuitive for all of us.

Marsha Acker: There are often lenses that we will look through more naturally. And at least one other that it takes stretch for us. Mine is meaning, like that has been my work to do, over the last 10 years has been to build that muscle for meaning I can overdo it in the affect side.

Jardena London: But once my eyes were open to it was like, "Okay, I can do that." I just didn't know.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. How does that show up in your leadership today?

Jardena London: Well, going back to this concept of impact, and it's not even so much about the affect piece, it's about the impact of, do what you're going to do and let people follow. So if I think about the chocolate chip pretzels or a few other things that I did like that, people were invited, people are always welcome to join me. Even as a kid. I wasn't great at creating belonging, but I'm better now, but people are always welcome in, but I'm going to do what I'm doing. And so now as a leader, I'm even more leaning into that. I'm doing what I'm doing and also making sure that people are welcomed and invited to join. But I have a lot more confidence to just do the thing I'm doing and not have

to worry about if it's what people like. I'm writing this article with a friend of mine and he asked me, "Well, who's the audience? Who's the target, blah, blah, blah." And I was like, "Us, we're the target. And if people want to read it, I would love it. But we're doing what we're doing. We'll put it out into the world and people are invited to join."

Marsha Acker: Would you say that's part of your just overall leadership stance today?

Jardena London: Yeah. That's my leadership stance. My style. I'm going to do things for me. And if people follow, they follow, and if one person follows and is inspired by that, that's great. It doesn't need to be a million. I don't need to go figure out where's the big market. I'm not going to change myself for that. If I have a market of one person, that's the market.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. You sound really clear about what I would call ground zero for you, or central to how you think and what you value and how you want to move about in the world.

Jardena London: It's new. You know, I had to mature into it. I spent a lot of years trying to be someone that would fit the pattern that was set out for success. It never felt good and I couldn't do it. I couldn't stick to it. I couldn't work for anybody. And you talked about the entrepreneurial spirit earlier, because I can't do what I'm told. I had trouble with that in school, I have trouble with that now.

Marsha Acker: You're carving your own path. When did that change happen for you?

Jardena London: I started my own company. I go, "Well, I want to go work for somebody so I can be molded. Somehow I wanted to be molded or be coached or something." And then I couldn't do it. I couldn't deal with it. And then I would leave and go do my own thing again. And then I go, "I want to go work somewhere. Because now they're going to hire me at a higher level. It would be better. It'll be different." And it wasn't. And so finally, fairly recently, with the pandemic really, so it's in the past couple of years, I said, "I'm not going to go on that hamster wheel again. I'm not going back to go..." Because I would feel like, "Well, I can't sell work. I can't do this. I don't want to do all the overhead, but I can't do it. I just can't do it."

And so I'm just leaning into, this is what I need to do. And it needs to be multifaceted with all of my weird interests need to be rolled into one, because it can't be one thing. Because you're in a job, and the job's like this narrow, right? It's so narrow, you try to fit yourself into that box and only do the things that are required for that job, and not all the other things that may be sort of peripheral. And now I feel like all of those things have value. So I wrote a book that wouldn't have been part of any job, I don't think. Maybe some jobs, but not jobs I had. And I can go write this article and it's

interesting and put it out into the world, and is it in my core sweet spot of consulting? No, but I have space to do these things.

Marsha Acker: What's that like, the space?

Jardena London: Well, some days I don't have as much space. Some days I have more space than others. I'll tell you what it feels like. It feels like I'm retired, but I'm not. Because I always would say like, "When I'm retired, I'm going to write articles and I'm going to read things and I'm going to participate. I'm going to be on the board of stuff." Do that now. So it feels like I'm retired and I can do what I want, but I still work. I have that freedom to explore things that, and I look around the world and they're not being explored. So why is that something that you have to not have a job to do?

Marsha Acker: Yeah. I hear a real difference as you talk about those two things and I love how you described the feeling of being free to make your choices and decide what you're going to do and not be limited to one particular swim lane that someone else defines. I think it's the difference between intellectually knowing it or hearing it, or hearing people say phrases like that. All the way to actually being able to do it, like onboard it into how you think, how you act, what you believe. And I think the gap between those two things is often what the journey is all about.

Jardena London: That's where I think inspiration and innovation and all these good things come from when you're not inside the box of your roles and responsibilities.

Marsha Acker: So how does all of this inform what you do today?

Jardena London: Steve jobs did that talk on connecting the dots that he did, that Stanford commencement speech. So it's kind of like that. I have space to do things that I'm not sure how the dots connect, but they oftentimes do come back into my work in organizations, helping organizations think about new ways of working, new and better ways of working. They explore areas that maybe are a little bit ahead of where I am with a client, but a lot of times I'll be hired as a speaker to give a keynote. So I can use some of that inspirational work material that I'm doing for a keynote speech that may not be part of the consulting work. It all ties back in because being able to inspire people that there are different ways to be, all ties into the consulting work. I do a lot of leadership agility coaching too, with leadership teams. So this work all ties in.

Marsha Acker: Is there any advice you'd give someone who might be noticing, or maybe catching a tiny, tiny glimpse that they're having an impact and they're maybe not totally excited about the impact they're having, but what would you tell them?



Jardena London: You know, one of the things that made a huge impact for me was how am I being of service to the other people around me? How am I being of service to the company? And so that might be something to think about when you're not loving your impact so much. Is, is it because I care too much about what people think of me? Which is what I only cared about exclusively for a really long time. Or am I thinking more about how I'm of service to the people around me? So when I stopped thinking about... Boy, I used to go into a meeting and think about, make sure that I'm sounding smart, I was really focused on sounding smart, saying something that's going to make an impact, but make a positive impact with some kind of facts or knowledge. And it was really stressful. It was really tiring. So the whole time I have this talk track in the back of my head like, say something smart, say something smart, say something now, try and interrupt and make sure you can get in there to say something, to being able to just sit back and say, "How can I be of service in this meeting? How can I help this meeting be productive?" And I didn't always need to jump in.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. It sounds like you placed your attention elsewhere out into the room.

Jardena London: Yeah. Right, I stopped, yeah. And it wasn't always about me and my ego anymore.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. Yeah. I just, I love the different stories that you're sharing. And I certainly, having had known you for a number of years. I definitely see it's fun to sort of watch you step up and lead a new thing or lead in a different direction. And my experience of you is often having a really positive impact in that way, so.

Jardena London: Thank you. And you knew you knew me when I was in the box too.

Marsha Acker: I know, I did. Yeah. And I love hearing you talk about sort of being outside of that box and I hear a life giving to you, but I think that's also the place of innovation and creativity, so.

Jardena London: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. Well, Jardena, we're coming up on the end of time and I have this last series of kind of speed round questions that I'd love to dive in with you.

Jardena London: I love the speed round. Yeah, let's do it.

Marsha Acker: Yeah. Nice. Cool. Okay. So the first one is fill in the blank. Leadership is...

Jardena London: Personal.

- Marsha Acker: A piece of advice I would give my younger self.
- Jardena London: Don't worry so much about what people think.
- Marsha Acker: Yeah. I wish somebody told me that too. One thing people sometimes get wrong about me.
- Jardena London: They think I'm a perfectionist.
- Marsha Acker: Something that brings me joy.
- Jardena London: Outdoor pools.
- Marsha Acker: Oh, nice. So when you look forward into the future, what kind of leader do you want to be?
- Jardena London: Inspirational.
- Marsha Acker: Well, it has been lovely having you on the podcast. I am curious if people want to get in touch with you, what's the best way for them to do that?
- Jardena London: Well, the best way for them to get in touch with me is on LinkedIn. And it's Jardena London, but also you can check out my website is, rosettaagile.com.
- Marsha Acker: And you just wrote a book, but you just re-released it, right?
- Jardena London: Yes. We just released the second edition and it's on audiobook and it's almost going to be coming out in Spanish like any minute now.
- Marsha Acker: Ooh, exciting. Yeah. And you have a workbook that goes along with it.
- Jardena London: Yeah. There's a journal, a little accompanying journal for you to make your notes. There's little journal prompts at the end of each chapter. So there's an accompanying journal where you can do that journaling work.
- Marsha Acker: Awesome. And what's the title of the book?
- Jardena London: The title is *Cultivating Transformations*, subtitle, *Leaders Guide to Connecting the Soulful and the Practical*.
- Marsha Acker: Nice. You pulled on a lot of experience about your own personal journey around agility. So it's really helpful. I think it's a very practical guide to helping people navigate transformation.

Jardena London: Yeah. Thank you. It kind of helps you look introspectively at yourself, outward at others, and then also expanding that to how the system is working. So all of those three lenses we look through.

Marsha Acker: Perfect. All right. We'll put the links to all of those in the bottom, in the show notes. And it was lovely having you, thank you for coming on.

Jardena London: It was a pleasure. Thank you for having me, Marsha.

Marsha Acker: I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Jardena. I love what she says about how we show up matters. And I don't know about you, but it's certainly true in my experience. And I feel like I learn this over and over again. If I walk into a situation or to a meeting or a virtual meeting, and I'm upset about something, it's an entirely different experience than if I walk in ready to engage, open-minded and curious, two different energies, two different sets of actions and definitely two different outcomes from both me and others.

If this is an aspect of your leadership that you're working on, here are a couple of things that you might think about in terms of practices. So you heard Jardena talk about a practice of checking in with yourself at the end of each day and just noticing what worked, what didn't, what was the impact you had. You might also keep a journal, but I've also found my own experience that I don't always know the impact I'm having on others. So I often make it a practice to ask. Particularly we teach in our facilitation workshops at TeamCatapult, this notion of impact feedback. But I think to be able to be the one that's actually asking for feedback and doing it in that way can open up the door to really learn things about yourself and what you're doing in the moment that you might not otherwise learn. And because you're really asking the other person to take a bit of a risk in giving you some of that feedback, I think it can really change the experience that others have when you ask for it yourself. So the way that it sounds, the structure is, when you did this, the impact on me was.

So when you think about giving someone impact feedback, if I was participating in a meeting and let's say somebody really spoke over top of me, actually several times. And I didn't get to say what I wanted to say, I might find a time at the end of that meeting to just talk to them one on one and say something like, "When you spoke over top of me during the meeting, and it happened in three different instances when I was talking about this and at this last time, it actually caused me to shut down and withdraw. And it didn't seem like you needed or wanted to hear what I had to say." And then I just pause and listen to the other person about what they might think or say. So impact feedback can be a great way of actually getting some data, particularly if you're not sure.



You will also have heard Jardena and I talking about the language of communication domains and structure of power affected meaning. And so if you want to learn more about that language for naming and working with behavior, you can check out our programs on advanced facilitation and change of behavior and high stakes at our website, teamcatapult.com. I truly appreciate you being here. If you want to continue the conversation, come join me on the Facebook group, Defining Moments of Leadership. We'll find links to all the things that Jardena talked about on the website, teamcatapult.com/podcast. You can find the show notes there, keep growing your leadership range and defining your own model for leadership, and I'll see you next time.