

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

Podcast Episode: 007

Topic: Uncertainty: Charting Your Path to A New Normal, Interview with Holly O'Driscoll

00:31 Monique: So, Holly, as you think about this current pandemic and this strange place we all find ourselves, from your perspective and those you're working with, how are individuals successfully moving themselves forward through this data of ambiguity?

00:54 Holly: Yeah, that's a great question, Monique. I think one of the things that we're seeing is, this realization that none of us were trained to really lead through this kind of a situation such as that pandemic. And then that brings forth a lot of learning opportunities about ourselves and this opportunity to step into this space and say, "Wow what is my point of view?" because I think there's a couple of points that stand out. One is, I think we've been educated, socialized, and conditioned to be right, and that's reinforced in corporate life as well, right? So, how do we forgo this need to be right or to have all the answers and to not be able to step up and say, "I don't know, I'm figuring it out as we go along as well," because none of us were trained to really navigate this space?

But I think the other thing that's showing up, Monique, is what a time for us to practice being uncomfortable and kind of letting that set in to the place where we get comfortable being uncomfortable. And that includes this kind of discomfort of ambiguity and really pushing through and leading any way because frankly, we have no choice, right?

02:18 Monique: Exactly.

02:20 Holly: Right now, I think one of the points that's driving so much uncertainty is, we don't know when the end is going to be. So, in the meantime, how do we work on ourselves such that we can really navigate this ambiguous and uncertain time with the very best of what we can bring? What an opportunity for growth. If you want to look at the half-full side of the glass, it's such an opportunity for transformational growth as leaders and as collaborators, as we look to the future of our businesses.

02:51 Monique: And along those lines, I've been working with young professionals across the country who really are just asking more questions, and they want answers that really aren't there. It's for them to discover. And so as you think about techniques and tools to help individuals successfully navigate, what comes up for you?

03:15 Holly: Yeah, I think the most important one, and where I coach teams and individuals to spend some time, is building their self-awareness, right? And it's really hard to understand how to take the next step or what kind of scenario is happening before me and how am I going to manage my team.

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

Podcast Episode: 007

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If we don't also pause to say, "What am I feeling? What am I thinking about in this moment? How am I showing up? What are those stories, those internal narratives that are kind of playing in our heads?" and to pause and really get to know ourselves in that space.

When I think about self-awareness, this is knowing how you show up and impact others, right? It's not about thinking, "Oh, my self-awareness is I really like the color blue or I prefer to wear this style of shoe." Well, that's not what I mean, right? And I think we'll get a little confused on what is self-awareness, but it's knowing yourself and the impact that your behavior has on others.

04:24 Monique: And that's such a big point of what I oftentimes work on because it's, yes, these are your ideas, this is your self-awareness, and that has the potential to get in the way for the success of groups or teams moving forward. And so, we're all responsible for learning how to ebb and flow what we know to be true about ourselves.

04:46 Holly: Yeah, it's so true. It's exactly right. And so, one of the things that I'll offer to the listeners is a tool that I use quite a bit, and it's called the empathy map. We'll make sure you get a file attachment. But essentially, if you can imagine a two by two in your mind, on the right side of that is think and feel - think on the top and feel on the bottom. On the left side is say on the top and the left side of the lower part is do. Really map out yourself to try to understand what are you thinking, what are you feeling, what are you saying, what are you doing. Doing is the behavioral component. Get in touch with that along with how that's showing up for others. Boy, that can be so powerful.

05:33 Monique: What I really love about what you just said is, because even if someone identifies what they're thinking in the moment, it's that question of hmm and how true is that?

05:46 Holly: Yeah.

05:47 Monique: And then they're like, "Well, yeah." Like, they've given energy to something that really may not even be true.

05:54 Holly: Yeah, you're so right. Boy, it's not easier to do when you're really stressed out, right? One of the things in an exercise I do with teams is framing the gap. So, what's the from-state and what's the to-state, and what does that gap-filling that happens? As humans, we often fill in the gaps with things that aren't true at all or were really loaded with assumptions. So, I think self-awareness is really important and the empathy map is a great tool to really help people dive in and ask themselves, what am I feeling, what am I assuming about this moment, this situation that might not be true, and in what ways are my past experiences really influencing my reaction. So,

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that's what I mean by self-awareness, like the whole picture of, what are those stories, what is that current moment, what's the past that's kind of showing up in this space, and what are we projecting? So, some really important steps to take, especially in this time of ambiguity.

06:52 Monique: Something we explored before we actually came into our time together here for the podcast is on this notion of ambiguity and the notion of how we, in fact, make it bigger or make it better. I loved what you had to share there. What are some thoughts for the listeners to share?

07:09 Holly: Wow. So, I think that each of us, probably on a daily basis, are given the opportunity to choose and to choose which way we want to take on that ambiguity that's facing us because it's going to be there and it's probably going to be there for a while. We think about, we've got a choice of making it bigger. What does that mean? Making the ambiguity and the uncertainty and the challenge of that worse, right.

Some things I think that pop up that make the ambiguity harder for people is when we allow our insecurities to take over, when we have that sense of self-doubt on, "Wow, I don't know how to do this in this moment. I was never trained to do that," (Well, neither is anyone else.) and to pause and say, "Wow, how do I think differently about that?" It shows up in not helpful ways. For example, micromanaging of team members. That makes ambiguity worse, right? Because what does it signal? Maybe you're not feeling too great about the direction or maybe there's too much wrapped into that. And out of that, this spiral of creating and then reinforcing fear.

I'm a huge fan of Amy Edmondson's work out of Harvard Business School on psychological safety. The last thing that organizations and team members need right now is fear. How do we really be conscious of, there's things that we can do to make ambiguity bigger, some of which I've just discussed. And then there's also ways where we can really step in and make ambiguity better. When I think about how to make that better, there's curiosity. And how does that curiosity, almost childlike curiosity show up on a regular basis, right? And what does that behavior look like? Asking loads of questions, even the hard ones, and stepping into that space of the unknown.

I kind of remember Joseph Campbell. I don't know if you followed his work, Monique, on storytelling. He has a book called The Hero's Journey and 19 Steps to Storytelling. But one of the ways that shows up in our modern leadership paradigm is a quote that he shared around: "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."

09:31 Monique: Ooh.

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

### Podcast Episode: 007

#### Topic: Uncertainty: Charting Your Path to A New Normal, Interview with Holly O'Driscoll

09:32 Holly: So, I think about [09:33 inaudible] basis right now. Wow, what am I feeling some stress about and how do I plow through it anyway? That's classic Joseph Campbell as he's thinking about story architecture, but I think it really resonates here too in a way to make ambiguity better.

09:50 Monique: And I have to admit, along those lines, I have found in certain situations in coaching a client and inviting them to sort through their memory on times in their paths where they entered the cave using Joseph's quote. Their analogy is whenever you entered the cave before and discovered treasure. And they kind of think like, "I haven't done that." Okay, take a moment. Think about it and give it... providing them the space to think about that for themselves, they're like, "Oh yeah, I forgot about this time. I did just that." How powerful that is.

10:31 Holly: And I think that's the invitation that we're faced with every day now on this. How do you make ambiguity bigger? Do you make it better? How are you going to feel when you walk into the cave? Because it might just be the best thing. Some of the clients I worked with, I asked them, what about this moment a year from now is going to make you look back and go, "Oh, I am grateful for the opportunity for growth and for learning and I'll do it on a very expedited pace"? But gratitude, what's going to make you feel gratitude for all your learning in this moment a year from now and to look back and go, "Wow, look what I've accomplished. Look what I've been through"? And so, giving yourself some grace now on suspending the judgment of, "Oh, I don't know. Oh, I'm afraid of looking bad." Really leaning into that curiosity.

I mentioned this self-awareness around challenging the assumptions. What's important about challenging assumptions is to first state them. And one way to go at this ambiguity is to declare, "Here's the assumptions that are baked into this." For example, I got a note from my kid's school today, saying, "Here's the intention for return to school in the fall. Here are the assumptions that are baked into that." And only when they're stated can you go back and go, "Does that really have to be true?" or, "What can we do to go test that right now?" But it starts with naming them.

11:58 Monique: There you go. And by naming it, it also aligns people to some common go forward thought process and/or plan.

12:09 Holly: And it gives you an opportunity as a leader to step in and say, "What am I missing?" You're inviting those alternate perspectives. And what does that do? It signals your vulnerability. It really helps you grow as a leader because who doesn't want to connect with someone who's got their own story that they're proud to share with you?

12:33 Monique: And that's along the notion of that clarity over certainty, right? Because we're in uncertain times, we have no choice. It is what it is. And so, how

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

Podcast Episode: 007

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do we grasp onto the certainty, or excuse me, the clarity that keeps us whole and keeps us moving forward?

12:53 Holly: Yeah, it's a great point. One of the people that I follow and have had the pleasure to work with when I was in corporate life is a guy named Bob Johansen, and he's out of Institute For The Future in Palo Alto. His new book talks about this model for clarity over certainty in the future, and it really resonated with me. And so that's what I'll be tackling now, which is really focused on the future's going to reward clarity and punish certainty. And as I reflected on that, you can see it coming to life and a lot of the daily news that we see. Because there's so much uncertainty, what we need right now is clarity. And sometimes clarity is 'I don't know.'

13:42 Monique: Right. It's just as simple as that.

13:45 Holly: Yeah. The candor of that moment and the clarity of, hey, we're going to lean into this with curiosity and we're going to be bold about the level of transparency that we bring, because that's clarity. Telling everybody it's going to be okay or it's not going to be okay, or kind of dancing on the fence isn't helping either.

So, when you think about what are some of those challenges of communicating with clarity, one of the ways you can do it is to start to do more storytelling. I referenced Joseph Campbell earlier, really great points there, but how do you storytell, how do you talk about, "Hey, we don't have all the answers right now. We have never done this either, but we're going to figure it out and figure it out together. And you can count on me as your leader to be there every step of the way and to keep you onboard and to keep asking you what you think, and how do you drive that [14:43 inaudible] relationship." So I think stepping into that curiosity and openness is really, really a wonderful strength and signal of clarity.

14:52 Monique: I really liked that 'reward clarity, punish certainty'. And as I heard you say that, I start thinking, well, because certainty in a certain way keeps us playing small.

15:06 Monique: It keeps us playing small. And then we're not--

15:11 Monique: Yeah. We're not open to those big... the possibilities of what can be, what will be as a result of broadening our horizon.

15:20 Holly: Yeah. And I'd like to think of that as kind of this possibility mindset. And one of the things that I'm seeing now is that the teams and organizations that are really operating with a future back mentality. What do we mean by that future back is, what do we need to do to be successful now such that we're going to survive and be successful in our organizations, and a year from now or five years from now? And if you can imagine the future

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

Podcast Episode: 007

**Topic: Uncertainty: Charting Your Path to A New Normal**, Interview with Holly O'Driscoll

and use that as an opportunity to inform your strategy and your behavior as you think about navigating ambiguity, starting with your own self-awareness of "Holy cow, I might be really afraid right now," or "I might be super pumped and I like to take risks," boy, this is a time to go do it. People are all over the map on that front. But if you think about the future back, how do you map a path starting now that's going to get you to the future that you want to live in?

16:20 Monique: Nice. Really nice. And that's very powerful. And that as well come parallel how individuals now are seeing their career, right? Because there may be that, "Oh my goodness, am I going to have a job? Am I not going to have a job? What's my job going to look like?" And as you think about the 'Well, where is it, what will I be doing in 10 years and five years?' and take some comfort in the clarity that yes, you are going to move forward and there is a place you want to get at what is possible for you today to start moving closer to that direction.

17:01 Holly: Yeah, it's exactly right. And I think that can be big things and little things. So, if you think about one thing that you want to try on starting today to really increase your ability to navigate this time of uncertainty, one little thing, it can be showing up with a question or kind of leaning into that curiosity to say, "Wow, who haven't I heard from on this issue? Whose perspective am I missing?"

17:32 Monique: Nice.

17:33 Holly: And what am I feeling internally that I need to be more in touch with? And how is that shaping my behavior? And what are the assumptions I'm making? These are some examples. One thing, if we can choose to lean into one thing every day, Monique, I think of this a bit as a fitness trainer would. So, if you think about one move, a behavior you can make every day, nobody will promise you the idea of being fit and trim if you're at the gym once a week. But they will tell you that a commitment to doing some small things does add up over time.

And if that's one thing you can do every day in service of making it through this ambiguous time and being really self-aware and intentional about the actions and the behaviors that you're bringing, the growth is going to happen, right? Just like at the gym where that repetition leads to results over time. And boy, we're in a time where I think the invitation is there for us to stand up, lean into our time to really practice self-awareness, to decide. Are we going to make ambiguity bigger or better? And how do we model this really clear communication style, right? Signals of clarity and those signals over the certainty that really we can't be sure as certain at this point.

## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

### Podcast Episode: 007

#### Topic: Uncertainty: Charting Your Path to A New Normal, Interview with Holly O'Driscoll

18:58 Monique: Yeah, real exactly. I mean, if anything else we've learned is, hey, tomorrow may be a different day. Tomorrow will be a different day, and--

19:10 Holly: And we don't know what it's going to hold. We're going to get through it and we have all the tools that we need to do that if we are open to being vulnerable and asking for help and taking that time to reflect because none of us have been trained to navigate this, right?

19:26 Monique: Exactly. And we truly are all in this together. So, I really appreciate the overarching nuggets that you've shared, Holly, in particular, around the self-awareness - how to make ambiguity, how to make it bigger or make it better - and around this notion of clarity over certainty. And some of the nuggets that I've captured as I was listening to you is, you know what, none of us, we're not trained to navigate this space, and to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. And yes, this is an opportunity to build self-awareness. And as Holly referenced, there'll be an opportunity to pick up some tools in the show notes and support of our conversation here with Holly today.

In addition, this is a period of growth and opportunity for growth and gratitude. And I just love the perspective of future back, and what one little thing can you do today that will move you closer to where it is you want to be, how you will be successful. And you will be successful.

20:41 Holly: That's right.

20:43 Monique: And so in terms of moving toward a close in our conversation, Holly, what are the final thoughts that maybe you haven't had an opportunity to express as of yet.

20:52 Holly: Oh wow. For me, it really is dialed into that committing to one thing. And it doesn't have to be the same thing every day, right? In fact, shaking it up, I think, improves the outcome. But what's one thing and kind of dialing into getting comfortable being uncomfortable. Change happens when we get uncomfortable. And so let's lean into that and start to really dive into our self-awareness and ask ourselves, wow, we think about future back, what is it that a year from now or five years from now that's going to make us look back and go, "Yeah, that was hard and I made it through. Here's why I'm better for having that experience"? So, I think there's some invitations to listeners on, wow, how do you want to experience this moment and where are those opportunities to get to know yourself better and to set the vision for where you want to be in the future.

21:45 Monique: Awesome. And I have to ask you a personal question, Holly, as we're both working moms during this time. And let's have a little fun as we draw to a close, but as you discover a little bit of time you find for yourself, what is



## Tuesday's with Coach Mo

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a favorite, let's say go-to TV show or a movie or a particular actor that just brings you some joy?

22:14 Holly: Oh my goodness. Wow. I don't actually work remotely very well at my house, so I don't know why it's so hard, but my seven-year-old seems to have it cracked and I screw it up every time. So, I tend to tune into podcasts.

22:34 Holly: The podcast I'm loving right now, I'm really, really enjoying it, is Brené Brown's Unlocking Us.

22:42 Monique: Yes.

22:43 Holly: And I feel like I am nodding and sometimes I'm like, "Oh my God, did she crawl in my head?" She's saying the same things that I'm thinking and feeling, right?

22:51 Holly: So, I find that to be a really great one. Another one that I'm a huge fan of is Michael Gervais, G-E-R-V-A-I-S. His podcast is called Finding Mastery. And most people probably do know Brené Brown's name. Gervais is a little less known, but I'm a huge fan of his too. He's the sports psychologist and mindfulness coach. He's done a bunch of work driving mindfulness practice in NFL teams. And so I have a huge love of football. So, I'm glad that all this pandemic isn't happening right now in football season.

24:03 Holly: So, those are my favorites - Michael Gervais, Brené Brown - very different perspectives and very different ways at going at personal growth and development, which I really appreciate.

24:15 Monique: Yeah. Awesome. And to know where those pivot points are for you to find your piece of joy, whether it be on the other end of the remote control, which I'm like you. I can't figure out how to navigate that darn thing.

24:29 Holly: I'm not so good. But I read like crazy.

24:34 Monique: Yeah, over book. Uh-huh. Awesome. Well, thank you so much for your time today, Holly. It was an awesome pleasure to connect with you. Absolutely, and I'm going to invite listeners to check out and follow you in particular on LinkedIn because you post some really good stuff.

24:54 Holly: Yeah, thanks so much for having me. It's such a pleasure to chat today.

24:58 Monique: Absolutely.