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Episode 6 Feature on FEMININE WISDOM

Guest Speaker Karen Wilhelm Buckley

Gina: Hello Karen, welcome to the rise of the Feminine.

Karen: Thank you Gina, I really look forward to being with you on the call today.

Gina: Thank you. Karen, we first met a few years ago in California because I know that you live in Mill Valley. We met at an event where you the speaker talking about probably feminine wisdom and what was so memorable for me was your story about how you looked in the dictionary and there was no definition for feminine wisdom and then you found one, tell us about that.

Karen: I will be happy to. I was involved in a high level international meeting and when they came in with the next program for the next big conference and it was all men on the program or 80% men. I said, wait a minute, what are we missing here? These are very interesting wise people, how could we be missing- how is it that we **don't see the wisdom of women?** What is it that doesn't bring that forward and that it's not considered a woman would be viable to be on this international speaking platform.

That provoked an inner dialog for me where I was choosing to no longer make anybody else wrong for not seeing it but rather to look at **what are the cultural assumptions that we live inside of**. I did an online search for wisdom and I discovered that most of the quotes are by men. Then I looked at wisdom in Wikipedia, the photographs are all of men. Old men with white beards. At that time, nobody was young and no women. Even today the percentage is significantly higher for men and photographs as men than they are for women.

Next I looked in the dictionary because by now, I really wanted to understand this wisdom because I recognised that someone **being wise was a criteria for them being chosen to speak**. There was a certain quality that was looked for there. I discovered in the dictionary that "*a wise man is a discreet and prudent man well-versed in the affairs of the world*". Then I looked for a definition for a wise woman, and I looked, and I looked and I went through many different dictionaries and I finally found one in the Oxford English Dictionary which had us out in the woods making charms while generally being ineffective. The exact definition is: a wise woman is a woman considered to be "*knowledgeable in matters such as herbal healing, magic charms or other traditional lore. A wise woman is a woman skilled in magic or hidden arts, a witch, sorceress*" especially, my favorite part, especially a harmless or beneficent one who deals in charms against disease, et cetera.

Gina: Harmless witch, okay.

Karen: I recognized who you can call to speak at your international business conference. A woman who's out in the woods, making charms and generally being ineffective, harmless, or a man who is discreet and prudent, well-versed in the affairs of the world. As a leader in an organization, who are you going to promote? As a political population, who are you going to vote in to office? That these fundamental assumptions define and guide the choices that we're not even aware of making.

Gina: This is the thing about the unconscious, isn't it? Feminine wisdom is emerging in the world, I mean, as if it ever went away and people may not have understanding of really what it is. How do you see it coming out in the world? How do you see it being languaged? You were looking up in the dictionary there but do you see it happening say, in companies. How are they languaging it, how are they using feminine wisdom?

Karen: I don't see the term feminine wisdom being used a lot in companies. I do experience it in the women, the high level women that I coach and work within their organizations, they are familiar with the term feminine wisdom and they know how to utilize their feminine wisdom when they become the kind of leader who can really make a difference.

What they recognize is that their feminine wisdom is when they began to **take all of their external experience and competency and skills and knowledge and they blend it with their deepest inner knowing.**

That comes with a certain inner maturity and that deepest inner knowing blended with all their experience and competency comes out in a couple of specific ways. 1) One is that they demonstrate that they are **seditions; they have emotional sensitivity and intelligence.**

2) Number two, they **demonstrate applied empathy.** They create something that people actually want to use or they perform a service in conjunction within relationship. There's a lot of relationship in feminine wisdom, so they perform a service in relationship with their clients' needs, their core needs.

They also take into account the emotional needs of the clients as well as the tactical or business needs. One of my clients runs a wealth management firm, a highly successful wealth management firm and she and her firm pride themselves on the value, the way in which they apply empathy. That's actually part of their value statements. If they really apply empathy in seeing the client for who they are and what they need while at the same time making sure that they get them the top results financially in terms of their wealth management and their financial planning.

Gina: Interesting.

Karen: Those are top two that I see that a woman who is feminine and wise expresses and **acts from this emotional sensitivity and intelligence and applied empathy.** Excuse me.

3) Also the third aspect that is core to a woman who is mature in her feminine wisdom is that she expresses and acts from a **relentless commitment to life.** She is looking out multiple generations. She is aware of the impact this decision is going to have on the community, on the next generation, the generation beyond that. She's aware of the environmental impacts, the social impacts, the physical, the emotional or psychological impacts.

She looks and **sees the kinds of ripples of consequences** that might be missed if she or anyone was only looking through a tactical lens. I do want to say at this point that wisdom is something that both men and women, of course, have and inhabit. The feminine wisdom has these particular qualities of the emotional sensitivity and intelligence, the applied empathy, the relentless commitment to generations of life.

The other characteristic of feminine wisdom is that the gentleness and love of a woman leader who is also wise in her feminine wisdom is that **she is gentle and loving and powerful and it's all one package.**

Gina: Often, the qualities that you're just talking about have been seen as women in men and women. That they haven't wanted to embrace those and those qualities of gentleness and love and compassion, all the things that you're talking about are so important in leadership today. Probably the word feminine, the adjective feminine or feminine wisdom isn't applied but we have a **new kind of leadership emerging**, haven't we. Where it's really drawing from inside of people more than they've previously been using. **Calling on men, maybe, to look at that other side of themselves** which they haven't really, languaged as being the feminine side, don't you think?

Karen: Very true. Absolutely. Judy Rosener from UC Irvine here in America, wrote a book called *America's Competitive Secret*. Really, what she's talking about in there is **women managers as America's competitive secret**. Rather than seeing the difference that women bring as a deficiency or a deviance or a dysfunction, to see it instead as exactly the kind of key strengths that we need in order to shift the world, in order to create the kind of results that we want to create.

Another great book that was written quite some time ago but is very relevant today is *The Female Advantage, Women's ways of leadership*. Sally Helgesen works to develop a picture of the gender responses that women have. How women have in the past adjusted to the workplace **rather than the workplace adjusting to women** and the strengths that they build, and that really **women brings fresh eyes to what's no longer working** and can **identify new solutions when they're working from their feminine leadership**.

Gina: Do you see that shifting now? Do you see businesses being open out to - because it is true, isn't it? Business designed hundreds of years ago by men, it's a male space, the women came out of the home, liberation, able to go out of their homes and earn money outside the home, in the workplace. Of course, we didn't really know it, we didn't think about it as such, it was highly masculine, designed for men and it really doesn't necessarily now work for men either ... but do you think that the people are seeing that the women are bringing something that's needed now?

Karen: Absolutely. There's two aspects to that, Gina. The first is that the **workplace is recognizing the qualities of emotional intelligence in collaboration and working across boundaries**, across functions, across industries, across stakeholder groups. Recognizing that's a key skill for work and for a successful business in today's world and women bring those capacities. They bring them naturally. That is getting leveraged more and recognized more.

In addition, women themselves are recognizing what they bring and how they bring it and **loving their own women's leaderships style**. There's a great book, *How Remarkable Women Lead*, that is capturing the stories

of a number of key women leaders who have their own search and their own resolution around trusting themselves as women leaders.

Gina: I think that's key.

Karen: Trusting their natural capacity and bringing that forward.

Gina: I think that key is in trusting the self; this is our journey, isn't it? Initially, I know that I didn't know about listening to my own inner voice. When I ran a company in the '80s and projects got passed to me for the "Gina touch", I didn't know that I was tuning in using my intuition and bringing what was needed, and just seeing it, I didn't know what skills I had. Then of course, I understood what I was doing, I had never heard of intuition before. Then I began to realize, that's what I was bringing because I couldn't train anybody else in something I didn't know what I was using.

This is the point, isn't it, of **having that inner voice and trusting**. How can women develop this? You and I being part of women circles and gatherings before, we've met as women and seen each other as women and that's empowered it, hasn't it, moving out into the kind of more masculine arena, how can women develop our skills more in that area of developing our inner power and that voice and that trust that you talked about?

Karen: I love what you just said Gina because women circles are making sure, and cultivate, what one woman leader called the **heart lunches**. Not just have power lunches but have heart lunches with another woman or a man who **really listens to your core** where you can speak frankly and intimately about your process and the way you see something. Women have a clear insight with a **lovely ability to discern what really matters** and they ask from that clear insight, they ask insightful questions that challenge assumptions.

[Both?] those capacities have been seen as dangerous by the system, by the status quo in the past. In today's world with the emphasis on disruptive industries and the emphasis on the next innovation that's actually going to take us out of the status quo. This ability that women have to really discern what matters and then **to ask the question that challenges the assumption** that might be keeping us locked in becomes a skill that has more collateral to it, more capacity.

Gina: Interesting because recently we've had issue in the news where a senior government ex-minister was caught off guard by the TV cameras and referred to our new prime minister Theresa May as a "**bloody difficult woman**". It set off a whole series of tweetseveryone going, I'm a bloody difficult woman. Whatever that meant.

Karen: Exactly.

Gina: These dangerous questions make us bloody difficult, don't they?

Karen: Yeah. There's a great bumper sticker, I don't know if it's over there in the UK but it's here in America "**well-behaved women rarely make history**". I think that's exactly true. **You have to be difficult, you have to say what's so** because it matters and you **need to trust yourself**, so sufficiently that you'll take that stand and that you will find inside of yourself what really matters, that you'll listen carefully enough in the context of the organization or in the context of your consumer or client, so that you really understand what matters, you rivet your attention on that.

Then you develop structures, systems, processes that will support that in getting fulfilled. One of my clients is head of a large library system and that library system had been pretty static and everything had been very holding still for a long time. What she did when she came in was began immediately by listening to what do the library patrons want, what does the community want, what else might there be and then design structures and processes that match that so that when someone came in, the whole way they interacted with the library felt more in line with what they most wanted to be experiencing and creating in their life.

In addition to looking at structures and processes, women are very good at looking at behaviors and am I behaving in a way or are my staff behaving in a way that **will engender trust**. There's a lot of social media that we've all seen that does not engender trust. It's very difficult to see. Then there's other people who are really wise in how to develop a campaign, an email campaign or how to post on Facebook in such a way that people begin to move towards you, begin to trust you, begin to feel engaged and like they have a conversation going with you, and that's something that **women are very good at**.

Gina: We're very good in that space. Karen, we're coming to the end of our time now, we need to end. I know that you've got a lot of research on your website, so we'll put that on resources for women about feminine wisdom. We'll put that on the Facebook page. We could have a whole session talking just about listening, couldn't we?

Karen: We could, indeed. We're talking about how do we cultivate wisdom. I have a women's retreat that I lead each year in Hawaii and that's the entire purpose of it. Is to deepen, to take the time and have the space where we can **discover the still beautiful voice of our own wisdom** and learn how and gain the strength and power to take that back into our workplace. It's so much more fun, Gina. As you know, it's so much fun.

Gina: I know. Yes, we learn and have fun. Karen, thank you so much for joining us today. I must come back and talk to you another time because there's a rich conversation here and I very much appreciate spending time with you. Thank you so much.

Karen: Look forward to it. Thank you, Gina.