Lenses on Leadership

Episode 1: "If we're all the same it's boring" | Dance Leadership with Etta Murfitt

Etta Murfitt (00:00): Everybody in the entire world at some point or other has danced. It's part of lots of different cultures. It's part of who we are. You... a baby moves... as soon as the baby hears like a rhythm, they start moving. It's part of us all.

You do need a leader in the room. If it becomes too, everybody has a say, then you never get any work done. So, and there needs to be somebody who's making that final call on whatever it is that you're doing. Or if you're co-directing that you have the final call and that you are leading the temperature in the room. I always think about the room in terms of the air quality. So I always want the air quality in the room to have buoyancy.

I've been on a journey about responsibility because I think for quite probably for the last five years we've tried to take away any sort of responsibility or stress for anybody who is being creative or is a dancer in a space. And then it becomes more like a weird school institution where you're telling people what they're going to be doing every day and this is what we expect of you and you should be doing A, B, D and E. And we're going back to actually, no, it's your responsibility to arrive 20 minutes before class starts. It's your responsibility to maintain your body if you are dealing with something or you've got an injury.

That's your responsibility. We are providing this space. We are working together, but there is responsibility in the room. It's not just about the person, the leader in the room that is giving everything. You have to give something back. So I am working on that a little bit.

Kajsa Sundström (02:11): Welcome to Lenses on Leadership, a Stopgap podcast by the Future Leaders, a podcast exploring leadership, creativity, access and change across the arts, presented by Stopgap's Co-assistant artistic directors and Future Leaders, Will and Kajsa.

William Spencer (02:30): Through conversations with artists, leaders, and change makers, we discuss, investigate, and explore what diverse leadership looks like in the arts and beyond.

Kajsa Sundström (02:38): I'm Kajsa. My pronouns are she / her. I am a white Swedish woman with curly blonde hair, green eyes, and I am wearing a white t-shirt and golden hoops.

William Spencer (02:53): I'm Will, my pronouns are he / they. I am a white, male presenting, medium height person with blonde highlights in my short mullet, blue sunglasses, and I'm wearing a white checkered vest with a black t-shirt.

Kajsa Sundström (03:08): Today, we are so excited to be joined by Etta Murfitt MBE, dancer, choreographer, movement director and associate artistic director of New Adventures. Etta has been part of the company for over three decades, working across performance, choreography, education and doing so as an artistic leader, she has played a significant role in shaping both its productions and its work with the wider dance community.

William Spencer (03:37): So Etta, welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for joining us.

Etta Murfitt (03:41): Thank you very much. It's very nice to be here.

William Spencer (03:44): Would you like to do a quick visual description for our audience and share your pronouns?

Etta Murfitt (03:48): Yes, my pronouns are she / her. I am a 60 year old woman who's just turned 60, I might add.

William Spencer (03:57): Congratulations!

Kajsa Sundström (03:57): Happy Birthday!

Etta Murfitt (03:58): Thank you very much. I'm white. I have brown hair with a white streak at the front, which has become kind of my signature, the white streak, which is natural, I might add. Yeah, I think that's about it.

Kajsa Sundström (04:14): In this episode, we will be discussing your journey and practice and the idea of reinvention of practices for the industry.

William Spencer (04:23): So before we begin, we want listeners to get a sense of the person behind the artist and the leader. And with that in mind, we're going to begin with some quick fire questions. Don't overthink them, just have fun, choose wisely, no pressure.

Kajsa Sundström (04:37): So we're gonna play This or That, set choreography or improvisation?

Etta Murfitt (04:43): A lot of the work that I do is task-based, so it's giving dancers an opportunity to create movement rather than just setting it. But if it's re-staging, then obviously it's set choreography.

William Spencer (05:00): What about performing on stage or performing on screen?

Etta Murfitt (05:04): Oh, stage every time.

Kajsa Sundström (05:06): New Adventures is known for reinventing and reimagining classic works and traditions. You yourself reinvented the role of Clara in The Nutcracker. Would you like to share a bit more about your journey from performing into being a leader?

Etta Murfitt (05:22): Yeah sure, so I trained at London Contemporary Dance School. My first experience of walking into the place was walking into this amazing studio with this musician who had, it felt like thousands of instruments all on the floor and he was sitting cross-legged and I didn't know what to expect and then this amazing teacher came. I mean I've obviously got a romantic idea of it now. She came in and her hair was really long and it was in a ponytail. And the first thing we did was we sat on the floor and we just did swings going forward. And the music started playing and I immediately felt something shift in my body and I knew I was in the right place. And I was only 11 then. I just was like, this is it. It was like an epiphany.

And so I trained at London Contemporary Dance School. And then from there, there was a group of us that graduated together and I was in a company called Images Dance Company and we were able to tour to lots of festivals in Europe. And then after that, I had a sort of portfolio career. I was teaching, I was performing, doing smaller projects. I was doing pop videos, doing operas, all sorts of things.

But that's how I built up an amazing network of people. Then I auditioned for Matthew Bourne, got the job. It was a point when a lot of the dancers in Adventures in Motion Pictures were leaving and Matthew was staying as the only artistic director and he brought in five new dancers and I was one of those dancers and that was in 1991.

So I was a dancer initially and then I became the rehearsal director, then I became the Associate Director and then I became the Associate Artistic Director. But my job

basically now is to restage all our existing work, collaborate on all new work that we develop and also alongside Kerry Biggin, I lead on all of our talent development work and our community work.

And alongside that, I also choreograph for theatre. And one of my main collaborators in theatre is Emma Rice, and I've worked with her for about 15 years. And performed with Emma as well. Because I've always had a love for acting as well. So I've been quite lucky in that the work that I've ended up doing has been very character driven, and it's all about storytelling and both Emma and Matt are fantastic storytellers. So I suppose that's why I'm doing what I'm doing.

William Spencer (08:21): It sounded like you started quite, quite young in that, in that space at London Contemporary Dance School. But I'm wondering if there's anyone in your leadership journey that you really looked up to from an early position or that kind of it inspired you as a leader or that you recognized and thought, they're a leader because they're doing this. Does that make sense?

Etta Murfitt (08:40): I don't know if you feel like this, but I feel like all of my dance teachers have been absolutely fundamental in how I've learned to lead. So from my ballet teachers, which were Brenda Last and Ronnie Emblem, they were forces in the room. All I wanted to do was do a good job for them. Also, I was a bit scared of them. I'm not sure that's great, but I love them.

And then Jane Dudley, who was my contemporary Graham teacher. She absolutely inspired me with the way she used imagery to convey how to do a movement. And that's always stayed with me. Viola Farber, who worked with Merce Cunningham. I was really lucky. I was taught by amazing people. Viola Farber she was like Merce Cunningham's muse and they did lots of duets together and again just the way she led a room was really inspiring.

Another teacher at the young place called Iris Tomlinson, she led with a gentleness and a calmness which I really admired but she managed to get amazing things out of people and I suppose what I've learned is you have to be many different people to many different people in order to make sure that somebody feels safe and that they can do their best work.

William Spencer (10:12): Yeah. I I definitely think that's something I've learnt at Stopgap, be it being a future leader is, is you know, I come from a quite traditional world or I have up until this point and you know, like learning what do you replace fear with. Like you know, like it's not it's not a good motivational tool. And like that's one thing I've really learned from, from my journey as a Future Leader is that fear is not a motivator and it doesn't work and it doesn't get you the best results and there

are like many other ways that you can encourage and motivate and you know, work with people.

Kajsa Sundström (10:42): Yeah, I completely agree. And I think it's so beautiful the way that you use the language allowing people to do their best work. Because that's really for me, that's really what, what access is and how we can work more accessible. And something that we're really interested in and that we've done throughout this journey is how we can reinvent the dance and art to make them more accessible. And we were wondering as reinvention is such a big part of New Adventures practice, we're curious on what you think about applying reinvention into
other strands of dance and the arts in general.

Etta Murfitt (11:18): Yeah, that's such an interesting question, isn't it? Because when you're doing a new piece, for example, yes, dance has many different aspects to it, but you're not reinventing dance. What you're doing is you're looking at the group of people that you have and making a decision as to how you're going to let those people be creative and... use what they can do in order to make your dance. I don't think it's about reinvention. I think it's about the people that you're with and how you can allow them to do their best work. Does that make sense?

William Spencer (12:03): Yeah, absolutely.

Etta Murfitt (12:04): Everybody in the entire world at some point or other has danced. It's part of lots of different cultures. It's part of who we are. If a baby moves, as soon as the baby hears... like a rhythm, they start moving. It's part of us all. And I think that you just have to have a space that allows everybody to do what their best work in, in what you're asking them to do. So it's about making sure that you're giving the correct tasks or giving the right stimulus. It's about making sure that you're giving everything you can give in order for people to then respond to it, I feel.

William Spencer (12:49): You're taking a lot of responsibility as leader, which I think is the right thing to do, isn't it? It is to put that kind of responsibility on yourself to be like, well, let's find the task that works for you. Let's find the creative technique that works for you.

Etta Murfitt (13:01): Yeah, I think so.

William Spencer (13:01): Traditionally a lot of that onus is put on the dancer, right? It's like, why can't you get these steps? Why can't you get this, this technique? And and I think you know, moving forward, it, it's a lot more about, you know, using the

people you have, like using their best abilities and being able to work in that way that is kind of flexible.

Kajsa Sundström (13:20): Yeah, I feel like I've heard so many times teachers say that teaching is saying the same thing in a thousand different ways. And I feel like that's really valued in some parts of teaching. But I think within dance teaching, sometimes there is really this previous idea that you have to learn the way that I teach you or the way that I have been taught. And I think that, you know, part of the reinvention that maybe we want to do is like you say, that like center the people who are in front of you and not what you've done previously if it doesn't work for them.

William Spencer (13:56): Yeah, I imagine it's quite tricky, particularly if you're rehearsal directing or you're restaging work because there are given parameters that you have to to work within. But it it's it's wider, isn't it? It's more about making making dance tangible, understandable, accessible to different people...

Etta Murfitt (14:14): Yeah.

William Spencer (14:14): ...different bodies and different audiences.

Etta Murfitt (14:17): Yeah, and each sort of department in the dance world, they all have their own ways of doing things. And of course, if you're doing a Matthew Bourne piece, the choreography is the choreography, but it's how you go about trying to teach it, give people time, talk about if there's something that doesn't feel right, it's having that communication. There's time parameters on all of this as well. So we try and do our best working practice, but sometimes time gets in the way. And I think that is what's difficult. Money and time make those sort of things really hard sometimes. But every time we come to a new production, we do it better and better, which I'm really pleased about.

Etta Murfitt (15:13): But if you're doing a new piece and you've got your cast in front of you, then it's about making sure the cast feel as confident and happy to work creatively as they can. And so that's the thing, isn't it? It's we're in this together and this is what we're trying to achieve.

William Spencer (15:34): Completely agree. I think like another, you know, thing that I've learned from Stopgap is that having, having to ask for access is kind of the first barrier to access. And if you really push for time, like there are a lot of time constraints in work, like rehearsals can be very quick turnarounds.

But if you make those adjustments ahead of time and like you said how it's getting you're getting better and better at it. And I think that's, that's something that I'm

trying to strive for is to take from each process, learn what I can implement into the next one already without people having to ask. And then, you know, if I'm pushed for time I'm then not having to use time to like figure out what people need. Like if I'm kind of just putting it there.

Etta Murfitt (16:11): Yeah, it's also communication though as well because sometimes you can have loads of things in place and think you're doing a really good job but there has to be communication. Sometimes you have to ask or somebody needs to ask you because if you don't know you can't do anything either.

William Spencer (16:27): Absolutely.

Etta Murfitt (16:28): And so we talk a lot about communication because you'd be surprised how many people don't communicate and then you're like well why didn't you say something? Having open communication, setting that up right at the very beginning of any project is so important. Communication. We are doing this together, but we can't do it if you're not communicating.

Kajsa Sundström (16:50): Yeah, for sure. And I think something that I've learned a lot as well from Stopgap is also just how willing people are. They also have the desire for you to do your best work. And I think that if you're leading with fear or if you're afraid to voice your needs or what you need in order to do good work, then it's really hard. So I also think it's about setting up that space from the beginning of allowing people to ask for what they need.

And I think it comes from the history of how dance has traditionally maybe been practiced or the hierarchy that sits within a rehearsal room. And even though we have, we have a director and we have someone who is a teacher and if it's a very hierarchical space, it's really hard to have agency within that because you also want to be maybe the dancer that's chosen or you don't want to, ruffle feathers. But if again, you feel like you can have a conversation with who is the leader in the room, then you can make it work for both of you.

Etta Murfitt (17:48): Yeah, exactly. Everything's a fine balance. You do need a leader in the room. If it becomes too ‘everybody has a say’, then you never get any work done. And there needs to be somebody who's making that final call on whatever it is that you're doing. If you're co-directing, that you have the final call and that you are leading the temperature in the room. I always think about the room in terms of the air quality. So I always want the air quality in the room to have a buoyancy so that it's buoyant and people are feeling that buoyancy, creativity can feel that there's a freshness and an energy in the room. You can tell immediately if a room is flat, the air has gone flat and that's not a great place to be. So, buoyant is good.

William Spencer (18:43): No, I agree. And I think people, they look to leaders for that right?. Like you have to – I find people are very reflective. Rooms are very reflective of the leader and that if you go in with energy, even if the energy's low or it's been a really tough morning, you've been rehearsing something really difficult or it's been a tough note session, but if you go in and you go in with super energy, then people will match that. And if you go in and your energy's not there, people are very reflective and they – it's just kind of... yeah.

Kajsa Sundström (19:08): Yeah. But I think it's also our job as artists to be sponges, both from the teachers and our leaders, but also from other dancers, we need to be able to connect with each other, especially if we're going to be aligned on doing this work together. So I also think that we are maybe more sensitive and more attuned to other people's energy than maybe other people are. So I think we have to be even more aware of that quality.

William Spencer (19:37): I think there's definitely more of a group responsibility that can be taken for the air quality, right? Like it is on leaders to hold the air quality and then it's on kind of all the artists to maintain that. Yeah.

Etta Murfitt (19:48): Yeah, I've been on a journey about responsibility because probably for the last five years we've tried to take away any sort of responsibility or stress for anybody who is being creative or is a dancer in a space and we're going back to actually, no, it's your responsibility to arrive 20 minutes before class starts, it's your responsibility to maintain your body, if you are dealing with something or you've got an injury, that's your responsibility. We are providing this space, we are working together, but there is responsibility in the room. It's not just about the person, the leader in the room that is giving everything. You have to give something back. So I am working on that a little bit as well at the moment. Joint responsibility for the
thing that you are doing.

William Spencer (20:45): Yeah, I think that's that's really key and that is something we talk about at Stopgap is having – we talk about access as a group responsibility and we talk about like a battery and having like a group battery so that if you're feeling like you can't do something one day then then someone else will they'll will care for you and vice versa. But you know, the battery always stays charged for the group rather than having to rely on the individual people. But the responsibility of access kind of belongs to everyone, the responsibility of the piece belongs to everyone and everyone has to play their part in order to be able to achieve that. So that's really interesting what you're saying about the relationship with responsibility because it's a really interesting thought.

Kajsa Sundström (21:24): Yeah. Now, thank you so much. Should we move on?

William Spencer (21:27): Move on to section two, which talks about leadership. Yes. And the question we have for you, Etta, is what does diverse leadership mean to you? With more artists identifying as neurodivergent and a growing awareness of different lived experiences, has that changed the way you lead, teach or approach different learning styles over the span of your career?

Etta Murfitt (21:46): Yes, definitely. My leadership style has changed massively over the years that I've been doing it. That's to do with experience. It's to do with my age. When you first start out, you usually emulate somebody that you've admired. And I suppose I was, when I was training, all of my teachers were pretty tough. And I think I was pretty tough as well. Because you're just using the experience that you've got.

And when I think about diverse leadership, the first thing that comes into my mind is you're always having to create a team. If you're working on a bigger production or even a smaller production, you've got a team. There's usually a leadership team that are helping you get a show on. And when I think about a diverse leadership, I think about making sure that I've got... excellent people who all bring a different skill set that when it's all together works really well and we can get a show on.

That's what my take is on that I think. It's about: have I got somebody who's going to be looking after all the new dancers that are doing this production? Have I got somebody who's going to be able to teach principal roles, solos, duets? Well, have I got somebody that's going to keep the room bubbling with jokes and skill. And so it's about building a team of people that do have all different skill sets and can bring something to the team. And that's probably not what you're asking me, but that's the first thing that came into my –

William Spencer (23:36): Definitely

Etta Murfitt (23:37): – like into my head. It's about that. It's about creating that leadership team that is going to help every single person in the room.

William Spencer (23:46): Like I agree that I think the more diverse leaders you have in the room or the more diversity of people, then the more lived experiences you have and then the more choices that people bring you. And I find that leadership is often like editing choices. And so I think the more choices that you have in the room, the more scope of lived experience that you can draw from or that people can draw from, then kind of just the, the better the piece because you have more to edit.

Etta Murfitt (24:08): Yeah and you don't want just a room full of all the same person. Yeah. Especially if you're storytelling.

William Spencer (24:15): Yeah.

Etta Murfitt (24:16): That's why I do love New Adventures because a lot often it's multigenerational as well and so you have lots of different experience in the room and I appreciate that. If everybody's the same it's a bit boring.

Kajsa Sundström (24:31): Yeah, I feel like we've already really touched on this, for me, my neurodivergence and lived experience as a dyspraxic and neurodivergent dancer has hugely shaped the leader I am and are becoming through future leaders.

And do you feel the same? What do you think perspective of your lived experience brings to your leadership? Maybe a situation that you wouldn't want to put other people in, or maybe situations where you're like, I want everyone to experience this.

Etta Murfitt (25:01): God, it's difficult, it's really difficult. From my own experience, I'm dyslexic and I never ever spoke about it at all. I went through my entire career, more or less, not saying anything and sort of dealing with my own demons and how to mask the fact that I was.

William Spencer (25:24): Thank you for sharing that.

Kajsa Sundström (25:25): Yeah, thank you.

Etta Murfitt (25:27): Well, it's, you know, but it's also because of my age. In the early 80s when I was training, people just didn't talk about stuff like that at all. And there's so much, there's so many things that I can access now that I would never have done when I was younger. And I'm only just now starting to access those things and I'm hopefully getting somebody who will be dealing with... all the things that I find difficult. But that's happening now.

Obviously, dancing is a joy, a freedom. So when I was dancing [takes a breath of fresh air], as I've become older and I've had to write more, I've had to talk more, I've had to be more of an administrator sometimes. That's what I found really difficult and has often put me into like, a bit of a like, ugh zone, like, this is too difficult. Like trying to get this sorted, you know, get on the podcast even. Those sort of things I find quite deflating because I just can't do them.

So in terms of that, in terms of my own leadership, I think I always try to make sure everybody is feeling that they have got what they need and that we are all at the same point. We all arrive at the same point at the end of each day.

Kajsa Sundström (27:07): Yeah.

Etta Murfitt (27:08): That's what I try and do. I try and make sure that everybody feels that they've achieved something, that they feel good about what they've done. If they haven't completely got it, that they're going to get it the next day or the day after. So that is part of what I – try and do, I try and make sure that nobody – everybody gets stressed, everybody does. And every artist who's working, everybody struggles with something.

William Spencer (27:40): Yeah,that's something to reframe is rather than I can't do that is that maybe that's the support isn't there and that you're now trying to provide that support to make sure that people don't go away with that mindset.

Etta Murfitt (27:51): Yeah, also we're not superhuman, are we? Nobody is and we all learn differently and we all absorb differently and we all take things on differently. So it's just acknowledging that at the beginning of whatever rehearsal period you're working on, then we will all get there in the end, but we will all get there differently. And I think as soon as you say that people relax a bit.

Kajsa Sundström (28:17): I think that's so beautiful. And I also think something that we do quite a lot or every day, we do check-ins, but we also actually do checkouts because sometimes you may, you know, might like run over or do someone else in the studio and you just have to run something one more time and then like get out of there. But actually having that time as a group together and to be like, how are we feeling? Like, you know, checking out together. So you kind of bookmark the beginning and the end.

And then, the things that we don't need to bring into the studio, we don't bring them in. And maybe things that we don't have to bring out of the studio, we don't also bring out. And I think that like can allow you to really also be more present in the process.

William Spencer (29:02): I think life can be so busy, can't it, that, often until I actually take that time to reflect or to be introspective on how I'm feeling, then I don't actually know because it's, it's too busy for me to think “oh god, yeah, how am I feeling in this moment?”

Etta Murfitt (29:16): Yeah, reflective process is always really good, isn't it? And also at the end of the day, what you've achieved. Look what we've done. We've done five minutes. That's amazing. Right. Let's see if we can push on more the next day. Cause it's hard. I think people think that dancing is a lovely, amazing thing. It is, but it's really hard.

Kajsa Sundström (29:36): Yeah, really hard.

Etta Murfitt (29:37): It's really, really hard. And so that's why keeping buoyancy in the room and you know, I want people to work hard, but I also want them to have fun. It's too hard. It's too hard if you're not having fun.

Kajsa Sundström (29:52): Yeah, one of my values that I really try and lead with as a leader and a teacher and a dancer is joy.

Etta Murfitt (29:59): Yeah, always.

Kajsa Sundström (30:00): You can definitely tackle subject matters that are not joyful, but I think there needs to be joy in the space in order for you to do that well.

William Spencer (30:10): Yeah, that's something I find myself saying a lot to people I'm working with at the moment is before they go on stage, particularly if the piece is like long running or they've been doing it a long time, I always say, find the joy, find the journey. You know?

Etta Murfitt (30:23): Lovely.

Kajsa Sundström (30:26): Should we move on to the next question? Will, do you have a question?

William Spencer (30:31): Yeah, so my question is as we embark on our own journey as Future Leaders, what advice would you give us? Or do you have any questions for us? Like what do you think the next generation of leaders should be thinking about? What questions should we be asking?

Etta Murfitt (30:45): Oh interesting. One of the things that I would say, becoming a future leader is always making sure you're communicating as much as you can, letting people know what's happening. And if you're not having a good day as well, if you're not having a good day, let people know because then they can step up and maybe shift the day that you're having.

You've already touched on it. Always reflect: what could we have done better? Why did that particular thing happen? What could we have done to circumvent that from happening? What was good? Let's make sure we do that again. In the management team I'm in, we spend a lot of time thinking about how we could have done something better or if we did it right. What did we do exactly? What did we do to make this work really well? And what we've been talking about recently is we had one company that was really happy all the time. And we had another company that was really not so happy. And as leaders, it sort of go, well, why, why was that? Was it the subject matter of the show? Was it the combination of people? What was different about it and how can we make that better.

And then I suppose individually as leaders, it's deciding what kind of leader you want to be. What kind of leader do you want to be? I'm sure you've thought about it. I had not thought about it. It's grown on me what I am and how I am and how I've shifted and changed. But I suppose it is quite important to think about what – how you want to be because – If somebody was going to talk about you – this is a good question. If somebody was going to talk about you as a leader, what would they say? What do you think that they would say about you?

William Spencer (32:51): That's, that's really tricky. I know for a long time I remember people going, well, you know, what what's your signature? Like what should people go to you for? And I just remember thinking, I just want them to say, they're really good to work with. Like they really get the best out of people. And for a long time I'm like, yeah, that's and to and still I'm like, is that enough of a is that enough of a signature? Like... maybe?

Kajsa Sundström (33:13): Yeah, this is such a good question. And what I think I get complimented on the most is probably my energy. People are like, you have a calm, grounding energy.

William Spencer (33:23): Tranquil.

Kajsa Sundström (33:24): I have tranquil energy. But I think I only have that with other people. Like if I'm leading in the space, like I feel I can be the calmness. But then outside of the space, I'm like, I need someone to be that for me. But yeah, I think for me, the reason why I wanted to be a Future Leader with Stopgap and the thing that I really want to change within the industry. I want to be the person in the room that I wish I had when I was a neurodivergent dyspraxic disabled dancer.

And I will say that I had that at times and that's the reason why I kept dancing. But I want to always be that person because I think the moments, the times when... you had that lack of support or you had that lack of feeling, maybe even a lack of worth

in yourself. You needed that leader to see that in you and to acknowledge you. And yeah, I'm really grateful now for all the people I've met through my journey who have been that person.

And I think it actually comes back to what you said in the very beginning, Etta, about like the dance teachers that are like our first leaders. So yeah, I want to continue like the good practices from all of my dance teachers who've led me here.

Etta Murfitt (34:43): Yeah, that's good. And always be thinking about shifting. It's okay to shift. It's okay to change your mind. If you've gone down one avenue and you feel like you've gone too far down it and you can't change, forget that. You can always shift and change and change your thoughts on something. And I think one thing that you should know as a leader is that you might make a mistake. And you can definitely shift and change direction because that's stronger than carrying on down a road that you realise is completely wrong.

Because you can never get everything right all the time. There will always be points in your career where you will talk to an individual or you will talk to a group of people and you will say the wrong thing or you will upset somebody. That will happen. And knowing that, that you're not always going to say the right thing, do the right thing, take the right action is okay.

William Spencer (35:47): Precisely I think that's really great advice because it's better to try and get it wrong than to not try at all. With...

Kajsa Sundström (35:53): Yeah.

William Spencer (35:54): ...access, I was like, Okay, I'm there's no perfect solution. Like this might go wrong, but actually I'd rather try and I'd rather be known for being like, let's give this a go and see what happens. So I think that's great advice that I need to keep remembering.

Kajsa Sundström (36:06): Thanks.

Etta Murfitt (36:07): And communicate. Communicate. Because you're not invincible. Just because you're a leader doesn't mean you're invincible. You're not. I learn something every single day in the jobs that I do. I learn something every single day. And sometimes I go, actually, I've learned something that has really shifted my viewpoint on something. And that will open up another way of being a leader.

You're not just one thing, I think. You have to sort of move with the different groups of people that you work with and the different organisations and there's not one fixed way of being a leader, I think, is what I'm saying.

Kajsa Sundström (36:55): That's a wonderful point to end on. I can't believe it, but we've come to the end of our conclusion. Thank you so much for taking the time.

William Spencer (37:07): Really appreciate it. It's been you've imparted some really great provocations, thoughts, questions to us that are gonna help us in our Future Leader journey. And it's been really interesting to kind of dive into your process and your thoughts from your beginnings all the way to the position you're in now.

Etta Murfitt (37:21): Thank you. I hope it has been informative. I know that I'm a rambler.

Kajsa Sundström (37:27): No, it's been amazing. Thank you. And to our audience, thank you for listening and watching Lenses on Leadership, a Stopgap podcast.

William Spencer (37:39): You can find out more about Etta through the links in the episode description. A quick reminder about Stopgap's work beyond the podcast. Lived Fiction will be at Sadlerswells East on the 29th and 30th of January 2027 with tickets on sale now. And Stopgap runs workshops, training, and youth dance companies throughout the term. You can join Stopgap's mailing list to keep up to date with performances, opportunities, and ways to get involved. And if you're interested in becoming a Future Leader at Stopgap, keep an eye out for cohort three, which will be recruiting in 2026, from September to November.

Kajsa Sundström (38:12): Join us next time for another conversation about leadership, creativity, access and change across the arts.

William Spencer (38:20): Bye bye for now.

Kajsa Sundström (38:21): Bye for now.

Etta Murfitt (38:23): Bye!

Kajsa Sundström (38:24): Bye.