

Julia Winston ([00:00](#)):

Take a look around. You'll notice them everywhere. Facilitators, people who guide other people, create connection, and make tough things easier. This is Facilitator Forum, where we meet a magical mix of people who offer us insights and inspiration through the stories of their work in the world. I'm your host, Julia Winston. Welcome.

Julia Winston ([00:28](#)):

Hello, my friends. Welcome back to Facilitator Forum. This is the third and final installment in our three part series about facilitating human connection. We've got a very special guest today. Joanna Miller is the Lead of Learning and Development at Asana, a tech company that design software to improve team collaboration and work management. She's a certified coach with the Conscious Leadership Group, an experienced designer, and Facilitator with the Scaling Intimacy School of Experience Design, Founder of Monday Sunrise Club, a Moth GrandSLAM story teller, and co-host of the podcast, Our Bodies Our Voices.

Julia Winston ([01:05](#)):

We're talking about a modern day renaissance woman. I met Joanna at a corporate communications training many years ago, and we've been allies on this journey called life ever since. I really admire Joanna. Her words are like precious gems. I hope you're enriched by the treasures ahead. Joanna Miller, I'm so happy that you're here with me right now. Welcome to Facilitator Forum.

Joanna Miller ([01:33](#)):

Julia, I'm so excited to be here. This is a conversation that I've been looking forward to. You are one of my people who is most inspiring to me.

Julia Winston ([01:42](#)):

Well, I feel the same way. I've been really looking forward to this conversation. And I was telling you this before we started recording. And I'm going to tell the world that I think you're just one of the top dogs out there. In my mind, you are one of the most talented people I know. I feel like you could do or create anything you want, and you are an incredible facilitator, an incredible leader, a beautiful human, and I'm excited to see where this conversation takes us.

Joanna Miller ([02:13](#)):

I hope that everyone listening can hear the blushing in my voice and the opening in my heart, because I feel the same way about you.

Julia Winston ([02:21](#)):

Oh thanks. Well, we should also to tell everyone maybe that we just did a little jig before we pressed record. We actually just did some dancing together just to get the juices flowing. So we're going to bring that energy into this conversation.

Joanna Miller ([02:34](#)):

Most definitely.

Julia Winston ([02:37](#)):

So Joanna, you are a facilitator, and you are also someone who has worked with facilitators. Give us a little bit of context here about your relationship to facilitation.

Joanna Miller ([02:51](#)):

I think that facilitation is something that a lot of people or your average person probably wouldn't be able to define, but they're able to describe the feeling of good facilitation. It's action and structure and care that allows people to connect more deeply and collaborate on a shared goal.

Julia Winston ([03:14](#)):

That's a great way of thinking about it. We can feel good facilitation. We know it when we feel it.

Joanna Miller ([03:20](#)):

Exactly.

Julia Winston ([03:21](#)):

If you had to boil it down, what are you here to facilitate in the world, Joanna?

Joanna Miller ([03:27](#)):

My greatest joy and purpose is around creating spaces that foster deeper connection. And using the momentum of that deep, meaningful connection to create something in the world, whether that be a business, whether that may be a relationship or a family, or maybe an opportunity or ritual to connect or process an event. And those events could be sentimental, they could be professional transitions. But I believe that the foundation of my facilitation is using strong, open, and honest connection as a vehicle to achieve great things.

Julia Winston ([04:06](#)):

I'm snapping over here. The first few episodes of this podcast are all about deepening human connection. And I can see that so much in the work that you do. So I'm curious about the journey that led you to care about this work.

Joanna Miller ([04:22](#)):

I would describe myself as a seeker, and someone who's always looking underneath things around the corner, digging deeper. And when I was in college looking for my first professional opportunity, what I was really looking for and not seeing at the career fairs was give me a sense of the people who work in this organization, how do people connect, how is the atmosphere of culture? I didn't have that language at the time, but that was what I was looking for, and that's what led me to choose a company that had a really robust training program for new hires. And for five weeks, we were all together in a cohort, learning together, and then we'd go on the job, meet our manager and our team. And this is a great choice for me. I felt, like I said earlier, the facilitation and the structure that allowed us to connect and learn.

Joanna Miller ([05:14](#)):

And in my next professional opportunity, I moved across the country out to California, and I started working at a job and I realized that not every organization had that structure, had that forum for learning. At first, I had a strong negative reaction, like, "I should have this." And then that transitioned

from entitlement to, "Okay, well, if it's not here, maybe I could create it." And that's when I started rallying my teammates and saying, "If we're not going to be offered any training, could we find this event and go to it?" People are dreading our annual planning offsite. What if we were to design it a little bit like you would design a party or an event and sure I can lead the exercises." And that actually led to me moving away from a business facing role into my first role in learning and development.

Joanna Miller ([06:06](#)):

After that first experience in learning and development, I intentionally started saying, "What are other areas of my life, where I could bring the craft or the art of bringing people together in an intentional way and seeing what happens when you mix those energies?"

Julia Winston ([06:22](#)):

What an empowering story of forging your own career path. I've heard you say that people are begging for connection. How have you seen that play out?

Joanna Miller ([06:32](#)):

I think that when we are frustrated or complaining for perhaps about a manager or a leader who is not supporting us, what we're really saying is, "Hey, I want you to see me and I want you to value me. And I'm not sure how to convey to you that that's something that I need and want, and you're not providing in the way that I want." And I also think it can be really vulnerable to express those needs.

Joanna Miller ([06:58](#)):

I think where we are in our society right now, is really prioritizing the individual and celebrating the idea or championing the idea that we should all be self-sufficient, and be able to bootstrap ourselves up by ourselves and support ourselves emotionally. I think those are considered maybe unconscious hallmarks of a successful adult. And you even see when people joke about #adulting or struggling in some way, it needs to be masked with a joke around, "I can't do this thing by myself, and that means that I'm not as successful or stable as I want to be."

Joanna Miller ([07:34](#)):

Whereas I actually think that's like, no, we are social beings. We need other people. Life is more enjoyable with other people, seeing things, common experience through the lens of other perspectives is part of the human experience. And maybe what we need is just a little bit more structure and help seeing that, and entering that doorway. And I think facilitators are the people reaching through with an open hand, and inviting people into that space that they're really craving to be.

Julia Winston ([08:05](#)):

And I think people are also craving joy.

Joanna Miller ([08:08](#)):

Yes.

Julia Winston ([08:09](#)):

And when I think of your spirit, which is very sparkly, you sometimes even actually have sparkles in your hair. I don't see them today, but when I look at you, I see these sparkles in general. And it's because you're a joyful person, and I think you do invite joy into spaces. So what does joy mean to you?

Joanna Miller ([08:30](#)):

I always smile inside when I hear people reflect that back to me, because, ironically, I think my joy comes from being able to hold the darkness and shadows of life. And what joy really means to me is being able to hold both the light and dark in a way that is sustainable for you. So that way, when the dark or the hard times or challenges enter life, you have a deep well of positive, celebratory, encouraging, supportive experiences to balance that. And to remind you that these states are temporary.

Joanna Miller ([09:08](#)):

I think I've also heard people say, in order to really enjoy or embrace the full expression of the good times, you have to have the counterweight. And I think knowing that some of these happy experiences can be fleeting, really makes you savor them. And my goal is really to help people see, and savor, and appreciate both the light and dark of the human experience.

Julia Winston ([09:37](#)):

I just keep thinking about the Prophet by Kahlil Gibran. And there's a chapter in that book on joy and sorrow. And the line is, your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And I see that come out all of the time, right? And they come from the same place of being alive. I think it's a rare person who can really invite us to be comfortable with both of those. How do you do that for yourself, what are some of the practices you've cultivated in your life to embrace both the light and the dark?

Joanna Miller ([10:13](#)):

I think the most transformative practice that I've adopted is not trying to push through the negative emotions or dark experiences, and really allowing myself to soak in them. If I'm feeling sad or frustrated, allowing myself to go fully into that emotion, versus pushing it down. The image that comes to mind is the volcano. If you keep shoving the darkness down, it will stay buried for some time, but it will build up and may erupt or come out in a time that is really challenging, or it seeps out, is what I actually see. And something that maybe is unrelated or very trivial will trigger an eruption of these emotions, which are just part of our experience.

Joanna Miller ([10:59](#)):

Another thing, I think, is something that I love about facilitation, and think that when you're in a more formal facilitated environment, like a workshop or a training, or maybe even those of you might have a therapy session or working with someone who's a counselor or coach, which can all be facilitated moments, the power of being witnessed. Having you share your human experience, having someone actively listen to you and just be there as a companion for you in life.

Joanna Miller ([11:35](#)):

One of my favorite quotes is from Ram Dass and he says, "We're all just walking each other home." That image to me is so evocative and true. We're all on this journey, and we have companions around us, and allowing people to actually companion or join you can be so supportive and nourishing.

Julia Winston ([12:01](#)):

Now, I'm still just sitting with that quote, because it's beautiful and it's true and it's real. And when you were talking about the volcano, I was thinking about how important it is for anyone who is facilitating anything to be with their negative feelings. Because if we are holding space for other people, then we've got to work through our own shit, because otherwise you could come out in that environment and make things not feel safe.

Joanna Miller ([12:28](#)):

Yes. And you're hitting on something I think is really important about skilled facilitation. It's recognizing and allowing anything that's coming into the space, because it's going to be there no matter what. We've all probably been at a party or a gathering, and you can tell someone who's in a bad mood. Even if there are 10 or 20 people laughing, having fun, you know there's one person who maybe feels a excluded. We can sense that.

Joanna Miller ([12:56](#)):

And a good facilitator will recognize that, and try to see, "What can I shift, invite, change, or speak to that will just acknowledge first that this is occurring." And then a really skilled person will find a way to invite or integrate that experience to that person who's part of the whole is having into the entire thing. I just think of the classic experience of being the only kid sitting by yourself in a crowded cafeteria, the person or the kid who says, "Hey, do you want to join our table?" That person is a facilitator. They are inviting connection and opening the door for that person to join in on what's happening.

Julia Winston ([13:41](#)):

Has there been a moment in your life where someone opened that door for you in a way that changed you?

Joanna Miller ([13:50](#)):

A few years ago, I was in a really low place. I wasn't happy at my job. I was not really happy. I was trying to find myself. I knew that I was on the precipice of a big change, but I wasn't quite sure where I was going. And I went on a trip to Africa. I went to Uganda with a bunch of strangers. And we had very long days, going through parks on safari cars.

Joanna Miller ([14:14](#)):

And one of those days, we all started talking about our career and where we were in life. People were sharing very deeply and vulnerably, and the group was supporting people and giving advice. I talked about how I wasn't happy in my job and was searching unsuccessfully for something else. And the response was a very tough love. People metaphorically shook me by my shoulders and was like, "You need to find another job right now. You need to quit the job that you have if you can, and just focus on getting out of this situation because you've already been in it too long."

Joanna Miller ([14:53](#)):

And it struck me because I was ready to be held. But the next day I got a message from an acquaintance and they reached out and said, "Hey, I don't know if you're looking for a new job, but there's a role opening up. It's probably going to be the first time that anyone's ever had this role. If you want to learn

more about it, let me know." And it was a friend who worked at Asana, who was talking about the first L&D role that they were going to have at the company.

Joanna Miller ([15:20](#)):

And I don't think that if I had supportive like soft coddling support, I think I would've felt like, "Oh, it's okay for me to be in this state." But that thoughtful and incisive, challenging energy helped jolt me into, yes, "Say yes to this opportunity, cut through the doubt. Don't second guess yourself, 'Are you qualified, is this direction you want to move?' Just try something." And that was very powerful. And the universe responded. This opportunity literally fell out of the sky, it felt like.

Julia Winston ([15:56](#)):

I mean, the experience of naming what's really there, and even if it's unpleasant, having people show that mirror so that you can see, "Oh, this is what's happening right now," that is a form of facilitation. It is a form of support. And I have seen you do that in your work. In fact, I think one of the reasons you're such an effective coach, which is one of the many amazing things you offer, is because you're not pulling any punches. I see you as someone who's comfortable being with what is.

Joanna Miller ([16:26](#)):

I appreciate that. And it's also something that I think requires a delicate or adept, I should say, touch. Because good facilitators can recognize maybe where people are in their journey or development or asking questions or creating circumstances that allow people to express that. One of my mentors is this guy named David. And he asked the question to all of his coaching clients in the first session. And it's, "On a scale from one to five, how honest with me do you want me to be, with you do you want me to be?" And I love that question because it is direct, but it allows the person to choose. And it signals, "This is what this relationship may look like, but you get to choose the level at which we're engaging."

Julia Winston ([17:22](#)):

That's pretty powerful. How honest do you want people to be with you?

Joanna Miller ([17:30](#)):

I want them to be a 10. And even though I want it to be a 10, that doesn't mean that I may not have a difficult reaction to that level 10 honesty, where I may ask, "Hey, today is not the day for 10, but I want to hear that, maybe later this week after I've done my self-care or I've integrated something else that I've heard." I like to think of myself as a personal trainer for discomfort. Going towards discomfort actually opens us up to so much more, even if it's just learning about ourselves.

Joanna Miller ([18:07](#)):

And one of the things I talk a lot about in my coaching and also facilitation, especially with groups, is that so much of what causes drama in relationships is being out of connection with the people that we are working with or collaborating with. And if you can directly go towards that discomfort or fear around expressing that, or whatever that person's reaction's going to be to what you say, you can get so much closer faster efficiently towards the meat and the heart, and just the understanding. And we all are craving connection.

Julia Winston ([18:44](#)):

It sounds like you're making a case for us all to get more comfortable with discomfort in order to be more connected.

Joanna Miller ([18:52](#)):

Yes. And the reason why above all, is you can feel it when you're out of connection. And ignoring it is typically not a sustainable solution.

Julia Winston ([19:06](#)):

This brings us back full circle to the beginning of the conversation, that you can feel good facilitation, you know it when you feel it. This is about authenticity at the end of the day. You can feel when the moment is real, you can feel when people are showing up and being really real. And that does also lead to more connection.

Joanna Miller ([19:23](#)):

Yes. And I think about peak experiences, they're peak experiences, because they feel real. You're tapping into your humanity and the human experience in those moments. The first thing that comes to mind when I think about a peak experience is a music festival. And the moment that I think about is that moment when you are totally immersed in the crowd, in the music, maybe you're hearing your favorite song or seeing your favorite artist, like in a moment of artistic ecstasy or expression. And it could literally be a moment, but you're like suspended in time connected to everything that's happening. And I think that's beautiful, and there are more opportunities to create that.

Joanna Miller ([20:07](#)):

This also reminds me of another quote of... I don't think I've ever talked about so many quotes I loved in one conversation. But I think this one is begging to be expressed. Joanna Macy, who's amazing facilitator in her own right, said this thing, "In this moment you're alive, you can dial up the magic of that at any moment." And that is just such a powerful exercise and intention. And I think depending on the goals in the circumstances of the event, facilitators, again, are dialing up the magic of insert the emotion, intention goal.

Julia Winston ([20:44](#)):

What is that magic that you're talking about? Because that's something that we know when we feel it, but what is that magic that happens when you are in connection?

Joanna Miller ([20:53](#)):

I think it's presence, particularly, collaborative presence. Another one of my coaching mentors, Jim Dethmer, from Conscious Leadership Group, describes presence as having all of your creative energy available to you in the now moment. And I think that there is an individual self-experience of that. I feel the magic of my own power and ability, but I also think that there's this collaborative presence where each individual person is bringing their creative energy and making it available in that moment, and you can feel that other people are doing it at the same time. And that creative energy is aligned towards a shared goal. That is magic, that is collaborative magic.

Joanna Miller ([21:44](#)):

And that is the, I think at least for me as a facilitator, the highest goal, the highest expression of that structured training and skills is to harness that collaborative magic and collaborative presence and to maximize it, raise the vibration of it. And that can be in service of your quarterly objectives. It could be in service of moving or navigating through a really challenging time as a team. It could even be in service of deepening your family unit in relationship or supporting a family member or loved one through a difficult time. And in the upcoming week or a month, how could you have 10% more of that? What it experiences or venues could you dial up the magic?

Julia Winston ([22:32](#)):

Where could you have more of that?

Joanna Miller ([22:34](#)):

Two venues come to mind. One is everyday interactions. We're in a time right now where I think that, at least, I've noticed there are more and more reports of people having meltdowns in public, or not treating people with care. And I think it's interesting that this is the circumstance after a period, globally, of such prolonged isolation, fear, sadness, and mourning. And the return is a little chaotic and just very disconnected.

Joanna Miller ([23:07](#)):

And so I think an invitation reminder to myself and to other people is... When someone asks you, how's your day, even just as a pleasantry, see if you can drop into that question for one or two beats more and just say, my day is..., however you're feeling and actually asking that person, maybe look them in the eye and say, "How is your day?" And wait for a moment.

Joanna Miller ([23:35](#)):

Normally, that interaction might take 10 seconds. Try to make it 30 seconds, try to recognize and affirm other people's humanity when you're interacting with them. It could be waving to your neighbor when you're bringing in your trash cans, or waiting on a Zoom call, and actually just asking the people who are gathered there waiting with you for the meeting to start what's happening in their lives.

Joanna Miller ([23:59](#)):

The other thing that I think might be an area for me to dial it up is really around the truth, around what I want to create in the moment. So like many people right now, I'm going through professional transitions, thinking about what role do I want to play on my broader team, what role do I want to play within my company? And I think one of the things that allows people to help and support you is practicing greater candor, and saying, "Hey, I really love these types of meetings." Or, "When I get to work with these folks, it's harder for me or more challenging, or I don't feel as enthusiastic when we're doing these types of activities." Like what might I do with that information?

Joanna Miller ([24:42](#)):

And one last thing I'll say here is, often when I'm coaching managers or leading manager trainings, I say, "Your job as a manager is not to make the people that are on your team happy. Your job is actually to give them timely, accurate information, show care, and recognize their humanity, and enable them to make the best decisions for themselves. In an environment where they are respected, they can

communicate candidly and they have the information that can inform their decision making." And I actually think that that's guidance for anyone who has influence over folks.

Julia Winston ([25:22](#)):

Joanna, you've given us so many beautiful insight, and stories, and tools for deeper connection. And that is the mark of a great facilitator. So I have a question for you. What's something you would want someone else to facilitate for you to make your life easier or more connected?

Joanna Miller ([25:44](#)):

Because I'm often facilitating, I don't get to be a participant, or it's harder for me to step into the participant role. And so something that I would like people to facilitate for me is inviting me to fully immerse myself in the experience as a participant and as a viewer maybe, or follower, in releasing me from my spiritual and maybe otherwise obligation of holding the space.

Joanna Miller ([26:14](#)):

And the other thing too, I think is coming up for me, the first word that came up in my mind when you asked the question was sadness. And I had to ask myself what do I mean by facilitating sadness? I think folks have often laugh about it's really hard to accept a compliment. Our brain is going crazy it's like, "No, I can't be that great. Or I can't be this thing that this person is celebrating me for." I think that's also a similar experience we have when we express sadness or disappointment. The folks around us who care about us deeply want to facilitate our swift migration into happiness or a more elevated state. And something I think would be really helpful for me is just when I express sadness or a negative emotion, being held and accepted for that

Julia Winston ([27:04](#)):

Joanna, beautiful responses. And I just wish I could give you a hug right now.

Joanna Miller ([27:12](#)):

I wish the same thing.

Julia Winston ([27:13](#)):

Can we do a virtual?

Joanna Miller ([27:15](#)):

It's been such a pleasure. We sure can.

Julia Winston ([27:16](#)):

I'm opening my arms right now. Joanna is opening her arms. Okay, let's bring them around and wrap them around the computer screen.

Joanna Miller ([27:25](#)):

Yes.

Julia Winston ([27:25](#)):

Thank you. This is such a good virtual hug.

Joanna Miller ([27:28](#)):

It is. I think I see your beautiful smile.

Julia Winston ([27:30](#)):

When can you actually see someone's face while you're hugging them?

Joanna Miller ([27:33](#)):

I know, what a unique and beautiful experience.

Julia Winston ([27:39](#)):

Joanna, thank you so much for joining us.

Joanna Miller ([27:42](#)):

My pleasure. I am so excited to be able to talk about some of these things with you, and someone who's facilitated so many experiences for me, and someone who's really been holding my hand on the journey of life over the last decade. Thank you.

Julia Winston ([28:01](#)):

Joanna Miller, folks. What a sage, right. We covered a lot of ground in this episode. But I think one of the things she said that stands out the most to me, is that facilitators are the ones reaching through to make others feel part of what's happening. Like the kid in the cafeteria who invites you to come over and join the group. It's easy to wait for someone else to come along and make things happen in. But where could you be even more proactive and taking the lead in creating connection? We all crave it, and we all have the power to nourish it.

Julia Winston ([28:36](#)):

Okay, time for gratitude. Thanksgiving is coming up after all. I want to start by thinking all of you out there who supported us through our launch these past couple of weeks, and spread the word about our existence. You did such an awesome job, and please keep up the good work. Follow us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts. If you're loving what you're hearing, give us a rating or even a review. And if you want more, check out our blog at facilitatorforum.com, where you can also find the show notes for today's episode.

Julia Winston ([29:07](#)):

Thanks to Adam Rosendahl for the original artwork, and Gasoline Tequila for the original music. Massimo Lusardi on the guitar, and Caleb Spaulding on percussion. And of course thank you listeners so much for tuning in. We're here every other Monday, so see you in two weeks. And until then, may the turkey and wine be with you.