

**OPEN NINTH:  
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM  
THOUGHTFUL LEADERSHIP  
EPISODE 66  
JANUARY 22, 2019  
HOSTED BY: FREDERICK J. LAUTEN**

(Music)

**NARRATOR:** Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

Now here’s your host, Chief Judge Frederick J. Lauten.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I’m here to today with author and attorney J. Lenora Bresler. She’s the owner of Bresler Training, a corporate keynote and training business, a public professional speaker, and a certified human resources professional. She specializes in leadership, motivation, change, and conflict resolution.

Welcome to Open Ninth. Is it J. Lenora, Lenora? You tell me.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yeah, I always tell people I’m a southern girl so I got that double name thing, like Mary Ann, Billie Jean.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** J. Lenora.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** J. Lenora, yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. Well, great. Thanks for joining us. We’re thrilled that you’re here.

I think you can understand I normally start these interviews by asking our guest to give our listeners a little bit of background on themselves. But given your area of expertise, I’d like to go about this a little differently.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** All right.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And you probably know where I’m headed. Your newest book, *Instant Insight*, is subtitled, *15 Questions [sic] to Great Relationships*. And I’d like to use a few of your own little tricks and questions from the book to give our audience the opportunity to get to know you, and then at the same time get a strong feel for your work.

So let me start, of course, with the first and what you described as the most meaningful question. What three words would you most like people to use to describe you?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Dynamic, substantive, energetic.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. Well, great.

What is one misunderstanding people might have about you?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, I'm very funny. I believe humor is a wonderful way to teach and to get your points across.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And I suppose that occasionally, if I start off a relationship with a lot of humor, somebody might think, well, maybe she's a little silly, a little -- you know, doesn't take things seriously. So I always couch what I do to say, we're going to have fun today because it's serious issues and therefore we need to be sure that we can address them appropriately.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. I'm going to loop back to that in a little bit.

What has been your greatest learning experience, J. Lenora?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** The need to be flexible and adaptable. You can still do what you love to do and do it in the -- with the values, but kind of holding your future plans with an open palm so that things can be taken and put into your palm, I believe, is a very key lesson for all of us.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So where did you go to law school?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Stetson.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right. And when you went to law school, what concept did you have of what your professional life would be like when you were actually a law student?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, I come from a law family. My mother, my father, my stepfather, all lawyers and judges. My grandparents even worked at the law firm. So I had been a legal secretary since I was 12.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Wow.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And so I knew very much about, at least, what my family law firm did. We did wills, probates, estate planning. And that's what I actually was training for, but life changes. That flexibility was needed, and I actually, during law school, became much more interested in the trial work, and that's what I did at the beginning of my career. I was a -- when people think of lawyers, they often think of trial work, I think.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Correct.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And that's what I did. Mostly medical malpractice defense, as it turned out.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. So did you go to work for the family firm, or did you go --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** No.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You went to another medical malpractice insurance defense firm?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I actually started -- three-and-a-half years I was senior staff attorney at the Second District Court of Appeal under Judge Sheb -- John Sheb.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Gotcha. Gotcha. And then from there into practice?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Then into private practice with Anderson and Artigliere, a law firm, yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Ralph Artigliere's firm?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Judge Artigliere?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** He's a hero of mine, so we have that connection.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Wonderful. Yes. Great guy.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** He's recently retired, but he comes back and lectures. He's a dynamo and a powerhouse.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Um-hum.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Well, at some point I guess your career took a little bit of a turn in the sense that you moved into motivational speaking and corporate training and business training.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So tell us a little bit about that.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, I loved what I was doing. But I'll be very blunt; I had no private life.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I was working all the time. And as you well know, the docket rules your life.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Correct.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** If a trial is going, it doesn't matter that you had a vacation planned or whatever. And I just really thought, you know, I need to reconsider this because I do

want work-life balance. And also, to be honest, I get more satisfaction out of keeping people out of trouble than out of getting them out of trouble.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Gotcha.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** So I thought I could do more good teaching, consulting, and creating environments where lawsuits were less likely.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And I've just found that that's really my niche.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And how long have you been doing that?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, since 2000.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. So --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And then my own business since 2001.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Great. Well, coming up on 20 years. Not quite there, but we're getting pretty close.

So how did you develop the content and questions for *Instant Insight*?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Life experience.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** All right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Real life experience. And the thing about the -- my book, that you were kind enough to mention, is that it's -- yes, these are wonderful things for the professional world. Many people are using them as interview questions even. We use them in team building and strategic planning retreats. But also, they have application in your personal life as well. So I've even got marriage counselors and pastors using the questions. So life experience, honestly.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So life experience, you come up with these questions. Did you sort of test their usefulness in the field or --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** -- how did you decide that these are the 15 questions I should use?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Absolutely, I did test them. And also, we now are going on -- well, I've been doing a form of them for about 15 years.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Now, audiences just react and say, yes, yes. I mean, they start screaming. They say, yes, that's exactly what I'm going through right now.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And so it's -- yes. I suppose you might say that anecdotal but it's 100 percent relational, so it's -- it seems to be right.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So, I've gone through your book. The questions are fascinating. As I looked through it, one of the issues that arose was, what about generational differences? These questions in -- as they apply to different age groups and, really, different generational groups, millennials, seniors, what's your advice in that area?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, that happens to be another expertise of mine.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I speak a lot on generational differences. And these questions, do they have -- can they have a generational bent? Yes, absolutely. Because the generations basically -- your sense of normalcy, normal behavior, normal way of -- that people relate to one another is really established between the time you were 5 and 15. And absent a

trauma, frankly, the way you interact with others is probably about the way you interacted at age 14, which explains a lot of --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** -- yes -- a lot of the adolescent behavior we see in some people.

But --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You mean adults.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes. Yes, indeed.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Gotcha.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** But -- so, yes, the cultural influences that people grew up in, because different generations did grow up under such very diverse situations with music and movies and education and all of that, these questions can be impacted by that. However, I will say that sometimes less than you think, because these questions are very individual.

And a lot of people are what I call a hybrid, like for example me. I am very much a Generation X-er, so I have a lot of the characteristics of that generation. But because I was raised in my grandparents' home, I have a lot of the values and mindset and worldview of a much, much older generation. And I find that there are a lot of people like that, like me, hybrids, in the world, so you can't just say, oh, I know the Ys, I understand the Baby Boomers, and paint with too broad a brush, because every time you do that you find that you're the one dealing with the exception to the rule.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Gotcha. Let's go back to something you said a little earlier. So through seminar attendance, I've learned that 90 percent of your pathways in the

brain are formed between 0 and 5 years of age, so the children who experience trauma have lifelong effects, if it's certainly from 0 to 5.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** This is --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But then you're saying your personality sort of forms between 5 and 14, 15?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Your personality -- you're right. Your personality is very early created, as a toddler, really. But the way you interact with other people -- and particularly your view of like, how should people interact with each other; if something happens, what is the "normal response"; what is being reasonable in a situation -- that is what is created between the time you're 5 and 15.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And then sort of hardwired from that point forward, or not?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, it's default. I would say it's default.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** You can always change intentionally.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And you mentioned trauma or tragedy. Anything that is traumatic could inspire you to feel differently. And you may just -- you know, a lot of people decide, I'm going to fight against that; you know, I -- for whatever reason, this way that I was raised does not help me in my current situation, so I'm going to intentionally, willfully change. Nothing is stopping anybody from doing that. But if you put your life, your personality, your relationships on autopilot, then the likelihood is you'll always default to this.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** How much did Jungian philosophy or Myers-Briggs impact the development of your questions? And we're going to talk a little bit about Myers-Briggs in a moment, if we can.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But what overlay or what effect did that have on your work?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I think it really helped to confirm -- there are basically 4 of the 15 questions that I would say you can trace very closely -- they almost mirror Myers-Briggs. I am certified in that. I'm also certified in DISC.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I've also used True Colors and some of the others, so I'm very familiar with that.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I think there's a very great advantage to that. However, as you know, Myers-Briggs, True Colors, DISC, that has a very extensive questionnaire that sometimes people don't have the money or time for. And to be honest, I think we do know ourselves a little better, sometimes. I mean, when you really ask very direct questions, people kind of know. So this is -- shortcuts it a little bit.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Gotcha. How do your questions relate to people who have limited self-awareness? So if people don't really know themselves, what application do your questions have to that type of person?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes. Never underestimate the ingenuity of the human mind to justify anything. Right. I mean, you know -- the way I do that is I start off with that first

question that you asked me about, how would you want to be perceived by others. And usually in my trainings we also have them go and talk to someone who knows them really well, and we ask them to describe what they think they want to be perceived. So in other words, not what the other person actually thinks of them, but what they believe the individual wants them to think about them.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And that is -- that gets to a lot of what you're talking about, the self-awareness, very, very quickly without the complication of saying, well, what do you think of me. Now, that can be a whole nother issue, and frankly we have ways of getting around -- of figuring that out. The question about the greatest misperception, can -- when we flesh that out, that can kind of bring out some of this without the awkwardness and the defensiveness that sometimes surrounds people's, you know, wanting to say, well, this is a weakness of mine. They may not be ready to take that step and say that because of self-awareness, but they know people have criticized them or complained about it. And so they'll say, well, some people misunderstand this about me. But it's really maybe not a misunderstanding. So that's how I get it out.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting. That's interesting.

What -- when you ask your first question, or when anyone applying your work asks the first question about the three words that they'd most like people to use to describe you, does that require -- do the participants who are asked that answer that question quickly or is there usually a long wait before you get that answer?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Usually, it's a very quick situation. Now, I have had a couple people that I was doing one-on-one coaching with that really wanted time to think about it.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** But most people are pretty quick about that. I will say, the more self-aware you are, the faster those responses would come, as you might expect. But even that can tell me where to go with this.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So it's not really an extrovert/introvert type of dichotomy in the -- how people -- how quickly they respond to this?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** No. I -- you know, that's an excellent question, though. I mean, I could see why you might think that.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** But it has not been.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And I don't really -- you know, I really haven't thought about it quite -- but I guess, you know, reflectors, or the introverts, they kind of know that that's how they like to live in the world.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And they're not ashamed to say that. So I haven't found that that has been too, too much.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Of your 15 questions, what do you find is the most difficult for people to answer?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** The most difficult. I would say, possibly, the very last one, simply because they have so many things they want to say. And that's, what is the greatest experience that's had the biggest learning impact on you. Most people have many things that come to their mind, and narrowing it down and deciding which one is more difficult for them.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Is there a -- you're going to have to help with the phrasing of this. But you have a question along the lines of, what could someone do to you that would break your -- or end your relationship or -- help me with how you say it.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes. Well, there are two questions that I call the bookends.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And it has to do with, if you want a deep relationship, something other than merely colleagues in the workplace, then this is -- kind of lets you know what is the red light and the green light in that relationship; kind of the no-bargain issues for someone.

So one question is, what could I do that would make you enthusiastically supportive of me.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And then the other one is, what could I do that would make you dislike and disrespect me to the point that you would terminate the relationship. Now, that may mean walking away in a big huff or, you know, it may be -- especially in the workplace you can't always do that.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** You've got to stay and function. But you know the difference between whether someone is emotionally available to you or not. And I think that that -- I love that question, that second question, because it tells you where something has to be addressed.

You know, a lot of things -- it is true, there are some things in life that time will heal. There are certain things that can be sort of swept under the rug and I'll get over it in, you know, a little bit; I'll see the perspective.

But, for example, for me, it's betrayal. If I perceive, rightly or wrongly, that someone that I've invested time and emotion in has betrayed me, I'm going to be done with them. I may be able to tell them that, or the circumstances may be that I just kind of fade away out of their lives without a big blow-up.

But if you and I had a personal relationship and something happened and you said, you know, I didn't betray her but she may perceive that, then you know in order to save that relationship you must come and be very transparent and say, now, J. Lenora, something's happened, I want to explain what's happened. Because you know that that is not something you can leave unaddressed.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Is betrayal the most common answer to that second bookend question?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I get that a lot. But I'll tell you, no. You would think so. I thought so. I expected it. But you get a wide variety.

I'll tell you, the big ones are honesty, which I suppose kind of goes with betrayal. But it's people just don't like even sugarcoating. They really don't even like the little white lies that you might tell someone to save their feelings. A lot of people, they just want authenticity. Another one is -- negativity comes up a lot. They just can't stand to be around somebody that is constantly negative. And so there's a rather wide variety, and it's always interesting.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** You fascinate me now about this honesty response. I have a friend, a big influence in my life in college, quoted from *Hamlet* about "the readiness is all." And that was really about being ready for a play and the ultimate confrontation about that book.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Um-hum. Right.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But her point was, people who say, well, at least I was honest with you, are disingenuous if the person isn't ready for honesty. And a lot of times people will justify bad behavior by saying, well, at least I was honest about it, and this is how I honestly feel, whether a person's receptive to the feedback at that moment or not.

So what's your thoughts about that area; about people saying, oh, you just have to be honest; if you're ever dishonest with me -- sometimes is dishonesty helpful in a work environment, or even in a personal relationship?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I don't think dishonesty is helpful. But I will say artfulness in the way you express the honesty is absolutely key.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's well put. Yeah, that's well put.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And it's -- you know, this is so critical, because in asking the first question, the one about how you want to be perceived, a lot of times people say, I want to be perceived as honest. And what I talk to them about is, anything you say, whether it's honest or enthusiastic or knowledgeable or whatever, it has a good side, it has a helpful side, but it also has the temptation to go wrong. And with honesty, I find that a lot of people -- they do use honesty as a mask to just being nasty sometimes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Or rude or --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Or rude or flip or inartful or unthoughtful.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yes, that's right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And so we talk about that, about how everything may be -- something may be a very good characteristic, but anything has to be tailored and managed.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So I'm going to give you a hypothetical. I have a good friend whose daughter is getting married next year, and she picked a venue, and she was excited

to tell her aunt, and she thought her aunt would be thrilled about it. And when she told her aunt, her aunt just started dumping all over her choice. And it shocked the person who was -- you know, disclosed it to her. And her justification for really kind of hurting her feeling was, well, at least I was honest with her.

And I see that every now and then at work. You know, it's like, that kind of justifies whether I've hurt your feelings or whether I've been rude or whether the timing was wrong because I've been honest. And yet I think a lot of people say, oh, I want honesty, or, I want to be perceived as honest. So that's an intriguing area to me that's sort of --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** It's like writing a brilliant paper where the content of what you've written is wonderful, but you have so many spelling errors and punctuation mistakes that you're obscuring the validity of what you're saying. It's the same thing.

And I would say to that aunt that the better way to do that is to have couched what she was saying, and say, I am so excited and I want this to be the very best day for you. And maybe even ask -- say, you know, I've had some experience at some of these things; may I share with you some things you might want to look into.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I mean, there's just a whole different way of doing it. I'm a big believer in that you can say anything you want to anybody at any time, it's just a matter of how you do it.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** That's great. That's -- I think that's so true.

I want to go back to the business setting for a moment. So I'm aware, as you mentioned in your book and I've read it elsewhere, that salary isn't the number one motivator for most employees.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** No.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** It's important.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Certainly is important. But it's not the --

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Gotta eat.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Gotta eat. Gotta pay your bills. But when you interview employees, it's not the number one value that they attach to their work. And that's usually recognition or feeling that they contribute to the organization's well-being; a sense of purpose.

And yet, today, it seems to me, particularly in America, we're driven by output. So many corporate environments are output driven, output driven, output driven. So the successful corporation, how do they balance the need for output with this demonstrated value that, just make me feel like I have a sense of purpose, that I belong, that I'm valued, more so even than my salary; how do you balance those two things in American business culture?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** It's actually easier than people think. Because every time a manager or leader speaks to an employee, he or she has an opportunity to tie those two things together. The output, the task, whatever it is that they're working on, needs to be tied back to the bigger picture; that value, that thing that -- how we're making the world a better place and that feeling that people want to have a part in that.

You're absolutely right. In survey after survey, when they ask people, what are your top motivators in the workplace, usually the top two are job satisfaction and recognition. Of course, job satisfaction does not mean you like your job. That's gravy. That's extra.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Job satisfaction is, I understand the value of what I'm doing and the value is important to me. Theoretically, you could be bored out of your mind doing a mundane task but still have at least a measure of job satisfaction if you thought that the end product was something that made society better.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah. And your example in your book was someone working on an ambulance, for example, helping build it. Which kind of was a boring task, but understood that I'm doing something that's really going to help someone as opposed to something less meaningful.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Exactly. Now, the problem, though, is that leaders do not take those extra seconds -- and I'm talking literally seconds --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** -- to say to someone, this ABC report is going to be used in this way, and this is the decisions we're going to be making on it, which then leads to that overarching goal that is so meaningful.

The number one reason leaders don't do that, don't connect the dots, is because they assume that the employees already know that. But managers forget that they are going to different types of meetings, they're reading strategic plans. These, what they would think are obvious connections, are not necessarily obvious to everybody.

But even if they were obvious, it's like anything else; you want other people to express to you that they see the value of what you're doing. That they understand you are a critical part of this.

And then, of course, when you do recognize people, the recognition must be very specific. It can't just be general; oh, you're doing a great job. It needs to be, again, tied back to,

you're doing a good job in this particular way, and the reason that's important is -- and so you have another opportunity to bring back that connection to the satisfaction part, the value. We just overlook it. But I'll tell you, if you just start talking in that way, every conversation can reinforce that need for satisfaction.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** In your experience, are good managers especially intrinsically designed to be good managers and intrinsically good at their job, they just have an inherent skill set, or is this learned behavior?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I think it absolutely can be learned. However, do some people have an easier time? Yes. But not because of what people think. They think it's because of your personality. Like, if you're an extrovert, you're going to have an easier time. That's not necessarily so.

What it is, is do you like people. It comes down to that. And let's be honest; we've all met people that almost seem to just despise other people. I mean, the foibles, the weaknesses of other people, that seems to grate on them in a way that for other people, we kind of -- we like it. Oh, yeah, they got a wart, but who cares, you know, don't we all.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** You know, and I say this very bluntly, frankly, to leaders, especially new leaders who are still kind of working their way up so this may be their first supervisory position; I say very bluntly, if you do not genuinely like most of the people you meet, please don't even attempt to be a leader.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Because you will not be a good one, you will frustrate yourself, you will annoy everyone, you will be a disaster. And I tell them, you know, we always

need good workers, okay, who do not have supervisory responsibilities, so you'll always have a job, you'll probably get a lot of accolades and salary increases. But do not attempt to do it; we do not need people supervising others who do not have a bottom-line foundational love of the human race.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So, in your experience training people, is the Peter Principle still at work, so that if you're really a good worker, the corporation or the organization thinks you'd be a great manager? And that doesn't automatically equate, does it?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** It does not translate; no. And yes, it does happen. And I see that a lot of times. And, you know, it's difficult because you've got to sometimes go in there and just be very honest, but do it in an artful way, hopefully. But yes, it absolutely can happen.

I do think a lot organizations, however, are getting a little more savvy about that and recognizing that you don't necessarily have to lose someone's talent. Up -- straight up in an organizational structure, you know, the obvious promotion up, which is usually tied to managing more and more people, is not the only way.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** I'm seeing many more lateral transfers that are really much savvier in using the skills, maybe technical abilities of somebody who maybe doesn't have some of the love of the people.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** J. Lenora, I've heard that it is the rare employee, and in particular manager, who has the skill set to manage well upstream and manage well downstream. So that usually many managers, like, can deal with their supervisors very well but struggle when they are the supervisor, or vice versa. They're great at supervising the employees that they

supervise but struggle with reporting up. What's your experience in that arena? Is it the rare person who kind of can do both well?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** No. They're not rare, in that they have the ability -- if you can do it one way, in one direction, you clearly have the ability to do it in the other direction as well. The problem is, is that relationships are very intentional, they are very time consuming, they are very energy sapping. And what I have found is that a lot of people in that mid-management range, they have made a decision that management -- good management in one direction or another is more valuable for them professionally, so they spend all their energy, their time, their thought in managing that relationship and kind of let the other one just sort of go on default or autopilot.

So it's not that people are rare because they lack the ability. It's rare because they lack the stamina, the energy and the realization that if you fail in one direction, it will have a negative impact on the other.

And you see that all time. When you do 360-degree feedback, you'll see, you know, oh, my superiors love me, but my team has a problem. Well, guess what? Now, your superiors have a problem with you too, because they realize that you're not a good manager.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yeah.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Do you think that corporate leadership in America has evolved from the '40s -- well, not the '40s -- the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s to the current, so that we went through an era where the strong dictatorial hierarchal management system was kind of the model, particularly in large corporate America, now we're more in a transformative leadership era? What do you think about that sort of historically in America?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Absolutely. And I talk about that all the time. You're absolutely right. But I don't dis the old management style. I know a lot of people do that, but you know what? It worked. It worked. It made America a superpower. It made us an economical giant. It worked.

But it worked because of the people who were in the workforce at the time. I mean, if you look back at the '50s, the '60s, '70s, even into the '80s, the primary breadwinners were men. Many of them had gone to military schools or ROTC or had served in the military. Of course they're going to be very comfortable with the environment of a hierarchical militaristic type of a command-and-obey leadership style.

But now, you know, I ask when I go into companies, and I'll say, how many of you have somebody with a military background working on your team. And it's just a handful. So they don't have that common experience. And what I find, honestly, is when I ask people -- and this is backed up not just with me but many, many studies -- employees say one word over and over. This is the kind of boss that they want -- supervisor; they want a coach.

So I always -- that's what I tell people. If you can think about, what does an athletic coach do and the approach --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Oh, I want to talk to you about that. Go ahead.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** -- then try to be that. And that's -- people find that helpful.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Yeah, let's talk a little bit about that. My son works in college sports, or in coaching, but there are so many different models of coaching, even.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Yes. Yes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** So he was fortunate to work with Coach K at Duke, the winningest coach in college basketball, who was militarily trained. So he went to West Point as

an undergraduate, he coached at West Point, and so he has a bit of a military style about him. He's very rigid, his practices are very organized and very controlled, and that's one model. And then we've seen other models of coaches who relate to the players like they're their equal and their peer. And -- but there is this sort of difference between Coach K -- there's a little bit of separation.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Um-hum.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** But it seems to me that all coaches have this in common, if they're successful. Their players understand, that even if you're hard on me, you care about me.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** That's the key. You've hit it.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** And I think that's probably true in corporate America. Even if you're tough on me, if I trust that you care about me as an employee -- Coach K, if you care about me as a player, then you can be tough on me, because ultimately at the end of the day, I realize you're trying to better me.

And also he has unbridled passion about what -- he's so passionate about what he does, and that gets contagious. Now, he has the benefit of a reputation now, too, where if you first get there and, you know, this is a little rough, this is a little tough, you realize, well, I am playing for the winningest coach in college basketball history, so maybe I should give it a shot.

But the other thing I've noticed about coaches, and I think this translates to corporate America, is they tell you what they expect from you, they have you practice that skill set, and they critique it so that you improve. And I think in the corporate setting, that's so important. Here's what I expect of you; I am observing you doing what you do. And then, I think -- and this is where we fall down a lot -- here is my critique -- my immediate critique of what you're doing so that you can improve upon it.

What are your thoughts about all of that?

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Well, I think you've really hit it. First of all, coaches can use different methods. And I think that we're wrong, as you've kind of alluded to, to say, oh, if you're going to be a coach, you have to do it one specific way. You have to adjust to your people.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And so you've got to -- here again, you better like them because you better know them. You have to know them pretty well in order to be able to adjust.

However, so many people do make the mistake of thinking, I can't do both, I can't genuinely care and know about my people and have very -- hold them accountable, have high standards. But actually, it goes hand in hand. Because if you truly care about someone and you're really trying to better them, then you'll do anything to help them grow, and that includes holding them accountable.

But how do you do -- I mean, it's like the teacher in school who was hard but you still loved them. Why?

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Because, as you pointed out, they really cared, and also they had the passion. It is very hard to take any kind of -- well, recognition, even, doesn't seem to matter much. But certainly any criticism or constructive feedback, if you prefer calling it that, from someone who doesn't seem to give a rip about anything; not you, not the company or organization, not their passion -- there is no passion there. So that's key.

With regard to the feedback, you have also hit it on the head. There is a huge problem. Most feedback given in the American workplace today is ineffective. And it's ineffective

because it's not timely. I always tell people, the amount of time between the behavior and your feedback tells the person the importance you attach to it; good or bad. If I did something good, it took you two weeks to tell me, it must not have mattered that much. If I did something bad, took you two weeks -- must not have mattered. So it has to be timely. It has to be specific.

And when it comes to constructive feedback, most people, even managers and coaches who have been doing it a long time, say that's their least favorite part of their job --

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** -- and it's just human nature. What you don't like, you avoid, which makes you even less good at it, which makes you avoid it more. It's a vicious, downward cycle.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And so they don't do it or they say they don't have any time, which is wrong. I teach a very easy format where you can give feedback in ten seconds and write it in less than two, so that we get rid of that. But also, it's not specific. And specificity really is the key, as you've said, to feedback that you can actually take and work on, both good or bad. If you just tell me, you did a good job, well, okay, thanks, but what specifically -- because actually what you want me to do -- yeah, you want me to feel good, but you want me to do it again.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Right. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And the same with the negative. Now, on the negative one, on the constructive, I would just say this. The one mistake I do see even well-meaning genuinely caring coach/leaders do is, most of us have this idea that a good leader has a clear vision at all

times, is a wonderful communicator of that, and then inspires and gets you all pumped up. Right? Well, that's really a teacher; what I've described as a teacher, which has its place.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Okay. Right.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** But a coach is really better of pulling the right answers or the new behavior out of you. So you set -- as a good coach, you set expectations, you give that specific feedback, especially if it was not quite what you were looking for. And then I have them simply ask, what could you have done differently and what would have been the likely result.

If you can get that out of the participant, out of the employee, number one, you're going to get buy-in. Number two, you're going to get assurance within yourself, as the coach, that they really understand. You've developed their ability to think for themselves, and you've closed the door on excuses later if they do not live up to what they said they were going to do. They can hardly say, well, you know, boss, that was unreasonable, that was ridiculous. You say, well, then why did you come up with it.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Interesting.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** But this is where the best of us can get -- because of time and because of energy expended, we can get frustrated and we can just say, no, you fool, this is what you should have done; you know, no, that was a bad answer; now listen, here's -- and I see even the best of us, including, you know, yours truly, in dealing with, like, maybe a son, doing that.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Right. Sure.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** And even my son sometimes says, Mom, I know you know better than this; I know you know this is not the way to talk to me. And I say, yes, you're right, Son. You know, and that's when the ambulance comes.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** I think in modern society, one of the biggest challenges is managing other people, both personally and in the work environment, and that it is critical more so today than ever. I think managing so many -- and yet, we don't really educate people about it. You know, it's not part of a curriculum, unless you specifically go to management training, and some companies offer more of that than others. And more power to them.

But, you know, it's -- part of it is innate, but a lot of it is learned behavior, as you said earlier. I'm not sure we spend enough time and energy teaching ourselves how to deal with other human beings and interact the right way.

So thank you so much for your book, which is very helpful. Thanks for taking time out to share these insights. I could go on for hours, but we both have schedules we have to keep. I'm so grateful for you to be here. Thanks for your insight into how to deal with people. I learned things during this interview I'm going to try to incorporate immediately.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Great.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** Good luck to you with your business. And thanks so much for joining us on Open Ninth.

**J. LENORA BRESLER:** Thank you for having me. I enjoyed it very much.

**CHIEF JUDGE LAUTEN:** My pleasure.

**NARRATOR:** You've been listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Frederick J. Lauten and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. For more information about the Ninth Circuit Court, follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

(Music)