



Region IV Public Health Training Center  
A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING CENTER NETWORK

## Leading Public Health Podcast: Leadership Journey Series

Episode 6: Understanding Your Leadership Strengths Part 2 with Emily Saunders, Ed.D.

**Liz Kidwell (LK):** Welcome to Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. Through this podcast, we explore current leadership challenges, strategies, and ideas to help build the capacity of the current and future public health workforce. In this series, we will be meeting with public health professionals to discuss the journey of leadership. My name is Liz Kidwell, and I'll be your host as we explore topics relevant to public health leaders at any stage of their career.

**LK:** Welcome back for Part 2 of our discussion with Emily Saunders from the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute for Leadership Development. In case you missed it, be sure to listen to Part 1 of this discussion where Emily and I discuss personality assessments and how understanding your strengths can benefit you as a leader.

Emily, I know something we both have in common is that we both consider ourselves lifelong learners. For me this has helped me not only in my career, but in my personal life as well. I'd love to hear more from you about how the idea of being a lifelong learner has really benefited you.

**Emily Saunders (ES):** So, my undergraduate major was wildlife biology. I spent a summer surveying trees for hazardous conditions, followed by a job tracking endangered rodents at night before I switched gears and began working in student services. And so, a Bachelor of Science degree has many positive attributes. My education didn't quite prepare me for my professional roles. I had to learn nearly everything relevant to the job on the job. You know, what does a resume look like? What are the best approaches to interview questions? How do I tailor my communication to meet the needs and priorities of each new supervisor? And let me tell you, I wish somebody would have pointed that out to me when I was in my 20s because I didn't realize I needed to tailor my communication to each new supervisor. Later on in life, it was how do I maintain a career as a foster parent? Or how do I facilitate a session on conflict management when communities are increasingly polarized. In my opinion, learning is the only way forward because I wasn't born with all those answers. And even as I keep researching, things keep changing. So, we have to continually adapt and learn as we go. So, I know lifelong learning sounds cliché to some people, but really I mean, it's the way that we all approach life, whether we realize it or not.

**LK:** Yes, absolutely. And I definitely agree. I mean keeping an open mind is so important because really we're learning every day. It might be learning something that helps you in your personal life, and it might be learning something that helps you in your professional life. But we are always learning, so just kind of keeping that open mind and being open to learning is really, really important. So, thinking about resources for specifically professional development, where are some of the best places that you found for continual learning?

**ES:** Well, I know a lot of times people think about learning in a professional context as “I have to go to this class,” you know, and there are some amazing training resources out there which I know you can speak to a lot. But a lot of times I just kind of follow interests where it goes, and I find so much great information on LinkedIn. So, I know you might have heard LinkedIn Learning offers classes in virtual learning opportunities, but even just by connecting with people and seeing what others are learning and what they're doing in their professional roles or the ideas that they're sharing can lead to a lot of really helpful learning. So, LinkedIn is not just for job searching. You can follow thought leaders and organizations that post a lot of other resources, and sometimes those might be classes. Sometimes they might be articles. The Harvard Business Review posts so many articles on leadership and management that are relevant to a lot of different audiences. So, I use one of their articles on rethinking imposter syndrome all the time, because a lot of us have felt that way. And yet they offer a new way to think about it so we can post that as well in those show notes.

In addition to assessments, there are some great books out there. And my recommendations would be based on whatever your specific learning or leadership challenge would be, but one that I really like to highlight as it relates to leadership and communication and learning about ourselves is the book *Quiet* by Susan Cain. So, it's *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. So, some of the people I coach have really loved that book. And then I also like *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith and *How Women Rise* by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith. It has a little bit more of a gendered lens to it, but both of those books have very specific recommendations for some of the leadership behaviors that could be holding us back and offer some tips and potential ideas to work on those bad habits. And so those aren't books that you necessarily have to read cover to cover, it could be I'm working on this one thing. Like ruminating, for example, is a bad behavior that some of us might experience. You know where we just think about mistakes over and over and over. Get really upset, playing a conversation over in our mind. So, what can we do about that, if that's something that we're challenged by. So, you know, there's lots of different books out there. And then also just following some of the professionals in the field can be really helpful too.

**LK:** I love these suggestions, and I think it's kind of funny. I'm looking, we're meeting on Zoom, so for our listeners, we're recording this on Zoom. And I'm looking at Emily's background and seeing her bookshelf and then my background is my bookshelf, so obviously we're both readers and you know these book recommendations that you have so, I'm putting them personally on my to-be-read list because they sound really great. And I also want to remind our listeners that we are a public health training center, so we are all about continual learning and workforce development. And we have numerous free trainings and resources for public health professionals and others. So, please check out our training catalogue. This is just me reminding you that the podcast is only one thing that we offer. We have lots of other webinars and workshops and things and these can be really beneficial to a lot of people, including myself. A lot of times I watch our webinars that we offer. I participate in our workshops, and I'm continuously learning about myself. So, I think that that's just really important to always be seeking that knowledge and understanding and learning about yourself. So, knowing that, Emily, you often seek out learning opportunities as well, I'd love to hear about a recent training or something that you participated in that you really felt like was influential to you and why that was so influential.

**ES:** So, the last quote training that I participated in wasn't exactly a training, but it made me fully realize the importance of our learning communities and that was my doctoral program. I received my acceptance letter in March 2020, and we started classes online in May of 2020. I had 3 kids at home and even without a pandemic it probably would have been one of the most stressful events in my lifetime. So as public health professionals, I'm sure many of your listeners can agree. As crazy as that time was, it provided the most fascinating time to learn about and study leadership. And again, a lot of that was in part of the community that I was gathered.

**LK** I can absolutely relate because I actually also started my master's program in public health around the same time. So, while it was definitely stressful because, you know, you're starting a new program and sometimes just being in that education space, especially if, if you were out of it for a few years like I was. It was really, also really interesting to hear from others in my program and really to have that community of support like you said. It's just kind of, even though I took my program all online, I had that community. I had that support from others who were also working in public health. So, in your experience, what did you find made that experience so helpful having that community?

**ES:** So, I think part of it was that we were all in it together. So that's huge. We had a group of people, many of which had not had to navigate professional or academic spaces in a virtual environment, and again we didn't know how to do it. So, that was part of it. It was like, how do we experiment? We figure this out? How do we come together regularly and learn and reflect on what's going on in the world, in our homes, in our workplace? And I'm so grateful to the community that we built during that time and the flexibility and the vulnerability that was expressed. You know, like we messed up sometimes things didn't go the way that we thought that they would, but it really cemented for me some of the fundamental principles of facilitation that influence my work today. And that's, that, you know, learning is so much better with each other. I think that's so important to give each other grace and to remember that we're not going to get it right the first time, sometimes even the second and third time, but hopefully we're going to get better and we're going to help each other. On the more technical side, I was learning to facilitate online, which was something that I had never had to do before. And so, while I don't like the reason that I was forced into that environment, as many of you all can probably agree. I have incredible skills that were built during that time that I would not have had the opportunity to experiment with and play with if it hadn't been for, you know, this massive world event forcing us to do something different. The developers of FourSight, the creative problem-solving framework and assessment I'd spoken about earlier, have an incredible community of facilitators that are certified in FourSight, and they had actually been gathering their facilitators prior to the pandemic online from all over the world, which was a really cool experience. But that was another community of learners, along with my classmates, where I could practice different facilitation techniques and play with new platforms like Jamboard, which I love. It's offered by Google and is going away, just showing how things change and now I have to learn new facilitation software and platforms. But we got to play with those things in the online environment, and I can't overstate how important that learning community can be. So, if you aren't plugged into a group of people who are interested in learning and growing, I suggest finding a way to do so, because, as a lifelong learner, you're just going to be exposed to so many new ideas and then have that support that can sometimes, you know, keep you going when things aren't going the way that you want to or you're not being as successful as you hope to be. And there's lots of ways to get plugged into different professional organizations, different committees or boards, volunteering.

Apply for the Leadership institute or gather, you know, with a group within your organization and read a book together. Or bring it down a notch, read an article together. There's many ways to approach it, but the point is that you're processing your experiences and the new knowledge that you've gained with someone else and then being open to those other perspectives is equally important.

**LK:** Thank you so much for sharing that I can absolutely agree and relate that joining a group of like-minded individuals committed to learning and professional development can really just be so beneficial and can help energize you. I get really excited when I talk with other people about what are you reading right now? Are you learning? Talk to me about a training that you've done recently because it just kind of reenergizes you and makes you excited to learn something new or you might learn from that person. Maybe they took a training or participated in the workshop, and they can share just some quick bullet points and you're learning just from that conversation. So, that's really important. And we talk about some of this actually, in some of our earlier episodes in this leadership journey series podcast. So, for listeners, hopefully you've listened to some of our other episodes, but if you haven't, head on back and listen to some of our other episodes of this series, because I highly recommend them.

I think one barrier that I've heard from some people, you know, regarding continuing education and learning is the time restraint. So, what advice would you give to somebody who might be reluctant to seek out learning opportunities because they think it might have a big time commitment and they don't feel like they have that time to give?

**ES:** So first I would say it doesn't have to take a lot of time, but the flip side of that is that you need to take the time. So, part of your role as a professional is to continue learning to get better at the job that you're doing. But also, to develop those skills that are going to help you make an even greater impact potentially in a future job. So even if we consider that our job might not require a new skill set, like management, things are still going to change. Jobs that exist today didn't even exist 10 years ago. So, if we are not continually learning how to do our current roles better, or how to think of new ways to approach them, then by default we're falling behind. You know, so we do need to kind of change our mindset to understand that learning is part of our job. Continuing professional development is part of our job. And yes, some of us don't have supervisors who explicitly mention that or who might explicitly support that, but every professional listening should know that they have to continue learning in some way. So, maybe that doesn't mean that you have a whole week to go to a specific training or an institute every year. You can incorporate learning in so many ways and it might sound simple but personal reflection and group reflection is one of the most powerful ways to incorporate learning into your daily life. And this doesn't mean that you have to journal for half an hour every night about what went wrong during your day. Although some people find that really helpful and cathartic and powerful. So, to all of our journalers out there, I encourage you to share your practice with someone else. But just asking yourself, what am I learning from this experience, whatever it might be? Tough relationship with a coworker, a new financial management software program, or a new process. What are you learning from that experience? That can make a really big difference in how you continue to adapt in your environment. And that works at a group level too. What are we learning? So reflecting in groups can be a great practice to learn new policies, procedures, things that can make an impact on your team, especially when you're considering an event or a really tough and challenging aspect of your work. So, both of my parents were in the

Navy, so I'm very biased, but the Navy Seals use a practice called After Action Review. And it's really simple. Basically, you just explore together, you know, what were our goals? Did we meet them? What went wrong? What could have gone better? In the medical profession, they call them post-mortems, which might be a little morbid, but also could apply even better. But just thinking about that because so often we're so busy, and as soon as an event or a workshop or you know something's done, we want to tie a neat little bow on it and run off to the next thing. But we're missing out on an opportunity to talk with one another about was this as successful as it could have been? And if it was, it's even more important to explore why. Why was it successful and could we still do better next time? So, I just kind of encourage everyone not to run past the end so quickly that you're not thinking about, you know, how can I reflect on this experience? And if you take assessments, reflection is important part of that too. Take some time to think about does this show up for me? How are my weaknesses showing up? Are my strengths showing up? Celebrate. Celebrations can be an important way to reflect on things too. So, I think just incorporating that, you know, what am I learning from this is a really important reflective tool and it's kind of a different mindset. So, I know, Liz, you were talking about going for walks, and a really easy way to incorporate learning on your walks. What was, what was that?

**LK:** I'm always listening to some type of audio book all the time. Sometimes it is not a book where I'm necessarily learning. Sometimes it's just fun, but even, I almost think even sometimes fun fiction books, you can still learn. Sometimes you learn about a different culture. Sometimes you just learn social things. I mean, I think you can learn in so many different ways. But, I often listen to podcasts and other things that are just snapshots and tidbits and things like that. So, it doesn't always take a lot of time. Sometimes it's just a 15 minute, I listen to half a podcast, or sometimes the podcast is short. Another thing that I'm doing is I'm learning French, or at least trying to. That's my goal for this year is to try to learn French. So I'm doing that with 10 to 15 minutes a day. I'm using like an app on my phone, trying to listen and participate in that so that I can learn, listening to things in other languages, you know, just trying to kind of expand my horizons and, and knowledge in those small little ways so.

**ES:** Yeah, I love that. I, I've learned a lot about history from reading, probably more than I learned about history in school.

**LK:** Yes.

**ES:** I learned from, you know, some historical fiction books and even just regular books where it comes up and then also the podcasts. I really, I love podcasts, and we have a lot of language learning going on at our house right now in preparation of a trip to France. And you're right, it's 10 to 15 minutes. But so often, you know, we think like, oh, it's too late for me to learn a foreign language. But that's not necessarily true. So, just thinking about ways to incorporate that into your daily routine, it doesn't have to take too much time. So those are really great examples. Some of you might want to be a better cook, you know, or you want to experience healthy cooking. Just go for it. Follow your interests, and the more you're excited about learning, the more you're going to see ways to just incorporate it into those everyday opportunities. Another thing I think could be really helpful is thinking about how to do that with others. Know how to coach others into some learning experiences. So, you know, we talk about having those kind of trusted relationships where we can vent with one another about things that are going on in the world. But just asking like, well, what are

you learning from this situation? Or what are you taking away from this situation? What have you tried? And so, some of us have heard there are those fix it or feel it conversations. Sometimes people might just want to vent to you. But coming back with some kind of question. What is the takeaway from this conversation can be really helpful to encourage those around you to also have that kind of growth mindset or to take advantage of those learning opportunities can be really helpful. And finally, I think most of us really struggle somewhere. If we are truly honest with ourselves, there is something in our life that we just keep experiencing and keep trying and keep struggling and a lot of times we'll call those adaptive challenges cause there's not an easy fix to them. But when you find yourself in a scenario where, where there is struggle and things are not going well, just thinking about what is it that you need to learn? What can you take responsibility for? And sometimes those struggles might be external. Like it could be a lack of resources or funding. Or maybe you have a tough boss. But really thinking about how can you learn? How can you experiment? You know, what is your role in that situation can be so powerful. And it can open your eyes to a potential learning goal. Maybe you've been trying the same thing over and over with no results. So, who can you get to help you? What resources can you find? Um, but what do you need to learn to be your best self? And how can you use your strengths to encourage others around you to be the best versions of themselves that they can be as well?

**LK:** Yes, definitely. And I know for me that this conversation has really energized me and made me excited about learning, even though I've already been excited, but it just reenergized that mindset. So, I hope for our listeners that this conversation has just inspired you to try something new, try to figure out what you can learn in every single day, even if it's just a small 10, 15, 5-minute conversation, podcast. You are listening to this podcast, so you probably learned something here, hopefully.

**ES:** Check. Gold star for the day.

**LK:** So, I hope, um, you've learned something, and I hope you'll continue on with listening to our podcast and continue learning with us.

So, thank you so much for joining me today, Emily, and for sharing your insight on lifelong learning and really how it can help drive personal and professional growth. I really appreciate your insight and knowledge, and I know our listeners will take a lot away from this conversation, so thank you again.

**ES:** Thank you, Liz. And for any of your listeners, I am definitely on LinkedIn. So, look me up, Emily Saunders. And I'm happy to send you a podcast or an article or something to get you on your way.

**LK:** Love it. Thank you.

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. We value your feedback, so please take a minute to complete the evaluation located in the show notes. Thank you for joining us.

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