

## **Arch Insurance International Pursuing Better Together Podcast: Kate Richardson-Walsh**

### **Arch Insurance International:**

Today I am very pleased to be speaking to Kate Richardson Walsh, gold medal winning captain of the Great British women's hockey team and the most capped female hockey player in British history. She led the team undefeated to gold during the Rio Olympics in 2016, was awarded an MBE in 2015 and an OBE in 2017. Kate also holds the highest accolade available in her sporting profession, the England Hockey Member of Honour. Following her retirement from the sport, she now focuses much of her time on coaching, motivational speaking and ambassadorial roles. Kate, welcome to Arch Insurance's Pursuing Better Together podcast, it's an absolute pleasure to be speaking to you.

### **Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Thanks very much that very warm welcome, Nigel.

### **Arch Insurance International:**

Can I start by going straight to that gold medal success in Rio? Can you just give me a sense of how it felt to lead the Great British women's hockey team onto the top of that podium?

### **Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, goodness me, it seems a long time ago. Now time has absolutely flown. But if I can kind of close my eyes, I can take myself back there. And I think there was such a mixture of emotions, certainly relief, you know, having played in touch hockey for 18 years and, and really believed for 18 years that we had it within us to do that there was certainly a lot of relief, but an overwhelming amount of pride. And for the squad that was there for the players that we represented who weren't there for all our friends and family, you know, supported us on that journey. And of course, all the coaching staff in the backroom staff who we just wouldn't have been there without Absolutely, and all the all the public as well.

### **Arch Insurance International:**

And, of course, it wasn't just securing gold, but to do it without a single defeat along the way. That must have added an extra cherry on the top. It was a truly phenomenal team of players.

### **Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, it was. We said it was the most mindful I think we've ever been for a prolonged period of time. So, that's 14 days - eight games in 14 days – and it just felt like we were one. We were very much aligned in terms of our culture and our behaviours, and our habits and our processes. In everything and in every way, we knew what each other and we as a team needed to do to go out there and get each of those wins just one at a time.

### **Arch Insurance International:**

As you say it was a long period of time for that intense focus. In that context, did you have to change how you were leading the team during the Olympics as it progressed? And how also were you preparing the team for the final itself?

### **Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

No and that's one of the things we spoke about beforehand, and it was about actually not changing anything. Because under pressure, under stress we all react very differently. Fortunately, we'd been trained by our coaching staff, both within a hockey context and outside of that context, to understand how we all individually as a collective deal with pressure and actually to be able to manage our states in that environment and to maintain some equilibrium. Because if I suddenly start behaving erratically, you're absolutely not going to know what to do to play with me, to help me.

And in a team environment that can be very destructive. So actually, we had a well-honed set of behaviours and routines and habits that were built into our programme months in advance of those two weeks. So, effectively nothing had to change.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Yeah, so it was essentially just falling back on the training that had already gone into it. And, as you say, almost that sense of programming.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Nowadays, we see the magic and the sparkle of the Olympic games or the Paralympic Games or the Football World Cup and we think “wow, everything's perfect and they must have just had to have done something extra special to have gone to achieve whatever they've achieved”. And actually, it's much more boring to know about the same old, same old and actually doing nothing different. And you don't need to do anything magnificent and spectacular or that's never been done before. It is already within you.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Sure. You touched upon this already but there were so many other people critical to that success that, of course, didn't get to stand on the podium that day. I suppose that there must be a real sense of responsibility that you feel to the team in its entirety, when you're standing there, and you're having that moment in the spotlight.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Honestly, I think if I had to pick out one thing, I think it was that sense of responsibility and understanding, deep level of understanding of what it means to be a great, excellent teammate. And I think that set us apart from everybody else under pressure. And I think that came from having been empowered to build our culture. We owned and had responsibility for our vision, our values and our behaviours. They were ours, in our words, we were driving them and if it failed, or if it succeeded, that was absolutely down to us. And I think that sense of responsibility was in every single player, and as you said, whether they were standing on that podium or not, that sense of responsibility was very real.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Absolutely. I want to if I can just step back a little bit and go back to the initial stages, the fledgling stages of your career. Did you always have that drive to win that has clearly helped you achieve so much in your career? Was that always there even from an early age?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Well my parents were both sporty. My mum and dad were both PE teachers and both played lots of different sports so my sister and I couldn't really escape that kind of sporty competitive family environment. And whether that was boardgames at Christmas or playing one on one in the hallway with a hockey stick, that I suppose was always there. I swam and did gymnastics a lot as a youngster, which is obviously quite that individual focus. Hockey was the first team sport I'd ever played, so I think there was that sense of, for me, certainly winning was always something that I wanted but there's also just that sense of doing something with people that you are aligned to, aligned with socialising with. I think there was definitely those two aspects that were always woven in throughout my career.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Of course, as you said, that sort of that team mentality, but there was also that you became a leader very quickly. There was something that set you apart from others in the team, whether that was

something that you saw, something that others saw and obviously when you joined the Great British squad in 1999, four years later you were appointed captain of the senior team. At that point, and obviously we're talking from about 2003, what was it that that they saw in you, the senior sort of figures saw in you? What did you see in yourself that enabled you to take on that level of responsibility and accept the mantle of leadership?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

I mean, I wish I thought about that more at the time. I think I was in so much shock. I obviously felt very proud and very humbled by being voted into that position, first and foremost, by my teammates. So, they had given me that kind of mandate to say, "We want you to lead us" which I think from the beginning felt like, "well, okay, they must have voted in for a reason" but I didn't necessarily put too much time and thought into it. Looking back, and having had conversations since, I think one of the major reasons they voted me in at that time was because of the standards that I set myself. What I held myself to account to, I was constantly driving and pushing to be better in every aspect. Also, I was a student of the game. I just loved every aspect of the game and I communicate that really clearly on the field. I think at that time, I think my players in that group, that's what they felt they needed from a captain. So that's kind of where I started, I suppose my captaincy. If I look back to 2003, to where I end up in 2016, and even where I'd like to think I am now, there's so much growth and difference over that period.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Well, that's it. I suppose a position like that, there is a responsibility on you to make it your own. It's kind of learning on the job, I suppose, you're learning how to be a leader, because you're given that mantle and then you have to learn how to fully take it on board. How did you go about doing that? How did you take ownership of it? I don't even know if that's the right word. Do you take ownership of leadership? I don't know. But how did you go about that?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

For me, it was about talking to lots of different people, embracing what I could at the time. If I think now how much breadth and depth of information there is through TED talks or books or podcasts - this for example -, there's lots of different ways you can consume and get curious about how different people lead. And then for me it was about what I could have, mostly through books at that time, and conversations and watching various documentaries and things. It was actually then turning it within to actually say "okay, what resonates with me? What sparked something in me? What sounds like things that I have? What are the qualities that I have, and how does it knit with the way I view the world, what I value in myself and other people in teams?". And then over time, just trying things and developing things over the years. One of the major influences pretty early on was two books that I read, one by Phil Jackson called 11 Rings about his time as the NBA coach at the Chicago Bulls and the LA Lakers, and then Bill Walsh's book, which is called Take Care of Itself and that's about a whole cultural transformation of an NFL team. And both of them, what they spoke about standards, leading from within, that connection with people and building of something greater, that bigger purpose, that really sparked something in me, and I think helped me develop my leadership quite early on.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Yes. And I suppose as well, as we've already touched upon, it is that constant learning and as I say, you're learning on the job, you're learning from the situations that you find yourself in, some very challenging situations. And often if you look at your career, there are so many highs, so many positives, so many medals, so many successes. But I suppose also as a leader, you've got to be able to lead through more challenging times when things aren't going as well and you're not perhaps

reaching the heights that you should be reaching, that the team should be reaching. I suppose one of those situations was in 2014, when the team finished 11<sup>th</sup> out of 12 in the Hockey World Cup. That must have been an incredibly difficult period for the team. Can you talk to that?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, it was an incredibly difficult time for everybody. I think partly because in the lead up to the London Olympic Games, there was a real understanding from that whole group – so from 2009 to 2012 - that everybody was a leader, whether you're an assigned leader or not, you were leading yourself first and foremost, and then you have the responsibility to also lead the people around you. And that fell away a little bit after London with any kind of change of culture. And we all kind of lost our way and it went from being quite a highly competitive and high-pressured environment, but also felt psychologically safe in that lead up to London to feeling uncertain and unsafe, and quite volatile. And I think in that environment people tend to retreat and whether that's going internal and becoming more introverted and not being vulnerable and prepared to share. Or they might gather in small groups, because that feels safer. As a leader in those times, it's really hard to manage your own state and your own mental health and how you're feeling and viewing things and be cognisant and aware of how everybody else is dealing with it in very different ways. Because although the team in a cultural sense, I felt was really struggling, there were some players absolutely in there who felt like things were going really well for them. And that's challenging.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Obviously, there had to be some very difficult conversations that needed to take place. You've got, I assume, many very strong personalities in that kind of environment, very different perspectives on what the issues are or were at that time. Can you give me a sense of what those conversations at that point were like?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

When it was good, I think challenge and challenging conversations and hard conversations were not avoided. They were able to be had, because they were done in a sense of low risk, and it felt like it was done from a place of care and an understanding of what the challenge was against. It was against our culture that was created. In that environment when we were struggling, challenge was now my word against yours, and it wasn't necessarily backed up by that foundation, that culture that we had all agreed on. So, it became you making me vulnerable and that's just throwing someone under the bus frankly. We had some really - very memorable, unfortunately - very raw, hard, emotive conversations that were not positive I don't think in any sense. But it needed us to finish 11<sup>th</sup> out of 12<sup>th</sup> at the World Cup in that England team to have a line in the sand, to say "okay, let's actually get everything out on the table. Let's have an external facilitator come in and just leave nothing unsaid. No elephants in the room, no stone left unturned. Give everybody every opportunity to say whatever they feel they need to say and start recreating that safe space so that people can start to rebuild that trust that's been completely broken."

**Arch Insurance International:**

That's a really interesting point as well, you've raised there, that had you not finished 11<sup>th</sup>, had you managed to maybe finish mid-table, that those conversations that needed to happen might not have happened. You wouldn't have had that feeling of being exposed and knowing that fundamentally things were broken, or is that an unfair question?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

No, I don't think that's unfair at all. I think it's a really absolutely valid perspective and point of view, and I would say that if I look at the first 10 years of my career, I think that happened often actually. I

think we've finished maybe eighth or sixth and said, "that's not so bad, you know, where we are in world ranking, and everything else", but actually I think conversations that were being had at a high level and above our heads before that 11th place finish, I think would have ensured that a deeper level of introspection and review would have taken place anyway.

**Arch Insurance International:**

And how did that process then take shape? Because obviously, there is a period of rebuilding re-establishing of foundations, I suppose. And not just from a training perspective, but as you said, culturally, it wasn't working and that team perspective, that solidity, that oneness probably wasn't there. How do you go about creating then the foundations that then enable you to move forward from that?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

it starts with the bravery and courage frankly, of our old coaches who have taken us to bronze in London 2012. He came back and again, empowered the group, which if you think about where the group was at that time - it was quite a toxic environment, it wasn't a safe culture, there was no vulnerability - to come in and say "Okay, let's, together with us, with the management team, let's build our vision, values and behaviours. And this is about everybody". Now that's a real brave thing to do because at that time it would have been far easier and far more comfortable to say "okay, this is a sense of direction, get on board or get off". But he needed buy in. And he needed it to be about every single person and that's the only way we were going to go and do anything in Rio 18 months later. So that's where it all started. It was about that conversation and the building of our vision to be the difference, create history and inspire the future.

**Arch Insurance International:**

I suppose that gives you that solidity, that security, that safety, that you go "okay, now we can all move forward together, and we all have that clarity of vision and purpose."

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Absolutely, and then you have the richness of those conversations about, "okay, well, what values underpin that vision. This vision is beautiful, and it's meaningful, and it means something to all of us, but day to day, what are we going to build into our training, into our gym sessions, into our reviews? What are the values?". And ultimately, what were the behaviours, and there was that framework of behaviours that we are going to say, "this is tolerable, and this is fine in this environment and actually, these behaviours are intolerable and things that we absolutely cannot have". It was those real open conversations where there was absolutely challenge and disagreement, and healthy friction, where I think we really brought out the best of ourselves.

**Arch Insurance International:**

It's interesting as well, you describe it there as a healthy environment, and it is healthy to have those types of conversations, as long as you're in that safe, controlled space, so that people feel comfortable and feel that they can actually have those. You touched upon there, as well on the training aspects, because you've got the culture, but you've also got the training aspects that are designed, I suppose to, to facilitate that team mentality and obviously the skills and abilities, but also just that team mentality that really does support your ability to achieve that vision. You also had some rather unusual training techniques, I believe that were applied. Correct me if I'm wrong but was it Pressure Thursday?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Thinking Thursday, yeah.

**Arch Insurance International:**

What was that? Can you tell me talk me through that?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah. So, Thinking Thursday was, I mean it kind of hit everything, every aspect of our values, certainly. So, our values that underpin that vision were we are winners, we are one team, be alive. So, Thinking Thursday was small sided games. You'd be sent an email on Wednesday night about 10pm and you'd be put in a team, different team every week and you'd be given a set of rules. The rules were different every week, the size of the field would be different every week. How you scored points would be different every week. And you basically had between that point of getting that email and 8:30am the next morning to get yourselves ready to go and find a way to win as a team. And it was about winning as a team. But within that, of course, there was that sense of needing to perform, be at your best, be there, be present, be fully at your very best self, as best as you can be on that day, be alive to go and help your team win. So, there's a lot of managing state and the coach within the session would throw curveballs to kind of poke you a little bit, in a metaphorical sense. They might piss you off for no reason. He might make your team play with one less player, he might change the rules on you in the middle of the game, to force you to deal with the emotions that causes, because that's going to happen in Olympic Games, that's going to happen, that pressure and that stress will be there.

**Arch Insurance International:**

That's a great learning environment.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Oh, it was. It was brilliant. It was hard. This was one of our last physically hard sessions of the week. It would have been our fifth pitch session of the week. We would have had two heavy gym sessions at this point, we would have done our psychology and nutrition. At this point, we were fatigued mentally and emotionally and physically. So, it was about absolutely pushing yourself to the end and then finding something extra for your team and being able to think clearly. Sir Clive Woodward talks about with the England's men's rugby team in 2003, he talks a lot about teacup, thinking correctly under pressure. And this [Thinking Thursday] was kind of aligned to that, can you think clearly, in the madness and chaos of stress and pressure? Can you still think and behave in a way that your teammates are going to understand and be able to work with?

**Arch Insurance International:**

What did you learn about yourself during those? Obviously, you're absolutely out of your comfort zone, you're really being tested, you're being pushed to your limits, you must have found out some pretty interesting things about yourself during those sessions.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yes, I very much labelled myself anger management. I think he purposely put all the anger management players in one team quite regularly and we often had bright orange bibs as well, just to create that visual of the anger. It was how quickly I can be distracted by that emotive reaction to what I deem as a bad decision or something that's unfair or unjust, and what impact that was not only having on me, but also my teammates. How it affected my communication, my vision, my abilities to see things. So, it was the best training. It was the worst but also the best training environment we could have had.

**Arch Insurance International:**

To go back to one of the points that you made earlier when we were talking about the early stages of your leadership, and you said that obviously, it has changed, it has evolved. There are certain things you wish you had known then that you know now of course. But you were the captain of the team for 13 years, which is an incredible length of time to be in that position. How do you think your leadership changed during that 13-year period?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Oh, goodness, I think initially I was quite shy, introverted, and I suppose I lacked confidence, particularly in a leadership role in the beginning. I was constantly giving a lot of energy and thought to, 'what's everybody thinking of me?'. Not in a way of, you know, 'am I serving people?', which I think is a good thought. A good thought would be 'am I serving people that are needing in the appropriate way?'. But it was being too worried about judgement and spending too much energy and time on that. And actually, when I started to think about serving people, they voted me in for a reason, I'm here to serve them, how can I best serve them? What does kindness and care look like in this environment. And sometimes that was a really hard conversation and a hard word. More often than not it was an open embrace, and conversation and sharing of space with and building a relationship with all my teammates. And also, being aware as a leader that, and this was the hardest one, that I couldn't be all things to all people all the time. As much as my ego desperately wanted me to be, I absolutely can't, and I was nothing without my leadership group and also my non-assigned leaders outside of that group. I couldn't do everything and I couldn't build a relationship necessarily with every person in the same depth of way, and actually it was about using the strengths of the other people around me to say, 'okay, you've got this best connection, or you can lead on this far better than I, let's do this together', and not feeling that I am weakened or lesser by doing so, which I think is really common.

**Arch Insurance International:**

It's interesting, because there are so many elements that you've just brought up in that response there to what is leadership and what are those traits of leadership. You then bring that wealth of knowledge and understanding that you've gained in the sporting arena, you've now shifted focus somewhat, and are starting to bring those skills and those leadership abilities that you learned as a sports person into other arenas, and particularly in the context that we're talking about as Arch Insurance, into the business environment. How transferable are these skills into the business world and also how have you worked to make these skills more digestible or relevant to that business world?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

I think they're as transferable I suppose as you want them to be. For me, they are hugely transferable and I'm bias, because ultimately, they're about people and teams. And whether that's in a sporting environment, or if it's in an insurance environment, or any kind of business or organisation or corporation, there are people and there are teams within those companies. And it's about how you can get the best out of your people for the service of that team. And to enable people and the team to be as successful as they possibly can be. I think there's lots of elements in there, which I think are hugely transferable, and it's just finding inspiration and curiosity from lots of different sources. Some of it you will pick up and put down again, and some of it you'll take, absorb, turn it around and make it yours. And I think getting it from as many different arenas and different areas and environments as possible, I think that is the best thing I could suggest.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Of course. You've now spent a number of years in this new environment and speaking to

organisations, speaking to companies, speaking to individuals, and of course, you're learning about their view of leadership as well. I'm quite curious, actually, because what do you think are some of those areas of leadership that are perhaps overlooked in the corporate world?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

I suppose that's perhaps one of the biggest differences and that's the thing that sticks out for me, that in our environment there were either 28 or 31 players, and then 10 or so management surrounded us. You go into corporations and sometimes it's 1000s of people. If you're talking C-suite, if you're an executive, you're leading potentially 1000s of people, and it's, can you have that touch point with everybody? No, but okay, how can you follow through? And how can you set the example on cultural standards and behaviours, and really follow through on them? Because the number of times I've heard "I'm open, I'm here to talk, my door's always open", but is it? And can people talk to you? How reachable are you? How attainable are you? Do you fully understand and appreciate and have empathy and connection with every level of your business? In business, there's always hierarchy, whether it's natural hierarchy, or designated hierarchy, but I think it's about cutting through that and really thinking about building things for and with everybody in mind. And that can be at every point in every day. And I think if leaders are doing that and are constantly bringing people to the table and actively listening to those voices, then I think those are the organisations that are really thriving, people are thriving, they want to stay in the business, they're motivated to do more. They're the best salespeople as well because, they're going out saying "this company is brilliant", and I'm going buy that thing, my friends are.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Absolutely, one of your best marketing tools are your people, and if you can encourage them, through your involving, engaging leadership, to actually go out and demonstrate proactively to the rest of the business world that this is an amazing company that's behind me, then that's a fantastic achievement.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, care for your people, and they'll care for you. I think that still holds very true.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Just talking on that subject of leadership and having listened to some of the things that you said about leadership, one thing that particularly stuck out for me was you talk about how important it is for people to work out who they are as a person first. This personal journey that they need to take before they can really start to define themselves as a leader, but that's an incredibly challenging step for a lot of people to take, that inward looking component of it. And also, that takes time as well. You almost need to go to that safe space that we were talking about earlier, where you can actually spend that quality time getting to know who you are as a person. How challenging is that particularly in a workplace, in a business environment?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

It is incredibly challenging, it is absolutely challenging. But giving yourself that time, it will not only help you as a leader in a business sense, but it will help you outside of your business life. It will help you in your other teams that you are in whether that's sports teams, or a family unit or a friendship group. That kind of level of understanding of "what are my strengths? In this in this environment, what are my super strengths? What am I consistently good at? How can I consistently deliver my A game? What do I need to do mentally, physically and emotionally to prepare myself every day? Or before every meeting? Or before every call to be able to be that person? What am I like on a good day? What am I like on a bad day? What is it that can move me from a good day into a bad day? And



can I be mindful and conscious enough of those things to halt them in their path? Can I actually take control of my mental state?”. And I think it is incredibly hard, but it's about giving yourself the opportunity to have that self-reflection and also have fun with it. Do some fun things with your team. Send a piece of paper around the room with your name at the top and then pass it around, and people can write what they think your super strength is and pass it around. Everybody will have a sheet of paper with what everybody in their team thinks about them, what they value in them. That's like gold dust stuff that we never talk about but can really make a difference to someone's performance and energy and confidence. There are loads of little things that you can do like that, I think to really have that prompt thought. Listening to podcasts like this, for example, is a brilliant way for you to go away and think “I've not thought about that before. What am I like on a good day? What am I like on a bad day? And how does it affect how I perform and how I interact with my team. Maybe I could have a conversation about that over coffee or lunch with a few mates”. It's again, just digesting lots of different stuff, thinking about it, sitting with it, getting curious with it, thinking about it internally, and then share it with the people around you. Because leaders, great great leaders, are never done. It's never done, you're never the finished article. I wish there was this wonderful place that we could all reach but actually the joy is in all of that stuff, is in all of that growth, is in the learning from the losses and the wins.

**Arch Insurance International:**

That's a really important thing to acknowledge as well, that this is a continuous process. Can I take you back because you talked there about openness and that with openness comes that sense of vulnerability. I think, perhaps in a business world as well, where that idea of showing your vulnerable side, showing almost your personality to a degree - and I mean that in a “this is who I am as a person”, I would have thought there would be a degree of reticence by doing that and nervousness and not wanting to show your flaws or your vulnerabilities or to be that open. How do you overcome that?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, I've thought about this a lot recently, because I think it is the key to everything. There's a thing called the vulnerability loop, that if I'm vulnerable with you, you're much more likely to be vulnerable with me and another person and then it keeps feeding itself. Through vulnerability, we can find our whole selves and we can actually accept all of ourselves and we have a greater ability to be empathetic and understanding of everybody else around us and enable them to thrive and be their best self as well. So, vulnerability is really key, but it is really hard. I've heard it many, many, many times and I've probably thought it myself at some point, and I've heard it from my own leaders, that there's a fear that vulnerability will make me appear weak. There's a fear that being vulnerable will be me showing that I'm not strong enough and it's a chink in my armour for somebody to attack. And it is brave and is hugely courageous and it's where the good stuff lives. So, if you want to go to that next level, if you want to embrace that next level of leadership and really develop yourself and people around you, vulnerability is where it lives. Somebody that for me sticks out in my mind is Brené Brown, who's a sociologist and researcher. If you've never heard of her, she has got some exceptional TED Talks, if you like TED Talks, she does podcasts, some books. How she brings vulnerability to life in a real meaningful way through storytelling, I think will reach out to a lot of people.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Excellent, that's a great suggestion. It's interesting as well that some of the words that you've been using in the context of leadership are probably words that in the business arena, they wouldn't associate these character traits or whatever with being a good and effective, a strong leader,

whatever that might be. You talk about kindness, you talk about empathy, you talk about mindfulness. Just how integral are these to leadership and how much does there need to be a sense of eye opening in the business arena to what it means to be a leader?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Certainly, goodness, when I was growing up, and for the longest time, all the leaders that I was led by were very autocratic, I say you do. It's one voice from the top, you get on board, or you get off. That was what I thought leadership was, which was terrifying to me. And there are times and there'll be contexts and there'll be environments and there'll be decision points where that is exactly what is required. So, it's important here to get the balance. I think it's important to acknowledge that at times, it will be "I'm making a decision, it isn't a conversation, and this is the reason why.", but being clear about where you're sitting on that decision making process, actually, this is totally your decision. Myself as the leader, I'm empowering you to make that decision and you go with it. I think if you take people with them on that journey, they might not always like it, but I think they will at least understand where you're coming from as a leader. And understand that when I say care, and being kind, sometimes that requires a really hard, challenging conversation. Care and kindness can of course be an arm around the shoulder, and what we think about nurturing in that sense. But it can also be "Look, I believe you've got more in you. And I want to help you get more out of you. Let's work together. What's your perspective? What's your point of view? Let's work together and let's really push." That's also kindness. I'm doing you a disservice if I don't challenge you and get the best out of you as well at the same time. I think it's just getting that balance.

**Arch Insurance International:**

I suppose making people aware that they have a role to play in this. Interestingly, you talked about how from some people's perspective, leadership is about power but in actual fact, as you said, leadership is actually about empowering. It's about spreading that power, it's about giving others power.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yeah, I think if there's a contextual framework, if there's a knowledge of and a total understanding from all parties, of what the direction of travel is, what the context is, that the capabilities are known and assured, then I think that's a great environment to empower. There will be other contexts were actually, as I said, it's not the time to empower people, actually, it's time for just one person to make a decision. And that's also really cool.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Absolutely, those situations happen and that is required of the leader. I want to come back, if I can, to this idea of pursuing better together. Today, I will learn something about leadership. I have been leading for a period of time, but today I will learn something else, I will learn something new, and it will change the way I approach how I am as a leader and how I look to lead others. How important is that recognition of that aspect of it?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

It's massive. it is huge, because it's hard work. And there's going to be a lot of failure, and you're going to feel uncomfortable a lot. And you are going to have to sit with your feelings and your thoughts and work through them, and that's hard. Lots of us at various times want to avoid any of that but it is what really separates the excellence from good, from being just okay to being one of the best or the best. And I think it's "are you prepared to do that work are you prepared to work hard to really have that sense of responsibility to yourself and to your teammates", because life is going to throw you curveballs. As we've seen, there's no more perfect example than in the last two

years or so. You look at the high street, you look online, you can see who has been agile, who has been able to adapt and make decisions, and devolve power and leadership and actually be innovative and creative and think of lots of different ways to win given the newest scenario, the newest context. It's kind of like that Thinking Thursday, this is the scenario, go. You have to go and find a way to win. Our coach is a phenomenal coach, and he had lots of answers to all the questions that he was posing, but in the middle of a game at the Olympic finals with 15,000 people screaming we can't hear him. We have to be able to solve it ourselves in the moment, live. And I think it's that, it's giving people that sense of ownership and agility and power to make decisions and be creative without risk, so that when something happens like the last two years, we are able to adapt and shift and find that new way.

**Arch Insurance International:**

I suppose that ability to adapt and shift is because beneath all of that you've got those foundational principles. You've got those base values that are the foundations that give you that security that give you that platform that you can take risks from, you can push from, you can be responsive from, but fundamentally you know you're standing on solid ground.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Yes, and that's where all good culture, that's where all great teams start from is that sense of, we know this is serving our purpose or our vision and everything is of service to that. And you're constantly therefore a little bit reviewing it, and you're checking and challenging it. "Does this serve our vision or actually, does our purpose serve us anymore? Should we change it? Should we adapt it?" And it just gives you that healthy bit of, nice friction.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Yes, of course. When you speak to people about the concept of leadership, what are the things that you are hoping that people will take away? For example, on this podcast today, for those who are listening to the podcast, what are the things that you are hoping they will take away and add to their understanding of leadership?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

I think first and foremost, I'd say that you are a leader, whether you want to be or not. Whether you are an assigned leader or not, whether it's in your job title or not, you are a leader, because first and foremost you're leading yourself, and how you behave in a team environment, in your organisation's environment is having an impact on the eventual outcomes and goals and visions and mission statements and purposes, but also on the people around you and how they're able to thrive. Every leader leaves a trace. I think once you can get comfortable with that sense of responsibility that you have, I think then think about, one of my favourite quotes from John Amaechi that I've read recently, he talks about culture is defined by the worst behaviour tolerated. So think about in your environment, what behaviours as a team, are we tolerant of and are we not tolerant of and let's be challenging ourselves and each other against that regularly. We had in the lead up to London, our gold medal standards, and everybody knew in that team, they could lead themselves against those behaviours, those behavioural standards. You could then lead each other against them as well. And then the last thing I would say is just go within. What are your strengths as a person, as a character? What are your personality traits? What do people value in you? What lights you up? What sets your heart at pace? Tap into those things because they will help find what kind of leader you can be and develop your personal style of leadership.

**Arch Insurance International:**

I have one more question. It's just coming back to this pursuing better together idea again and of

course, that is about this always pushing to achieve more. For somebody who has achieved so much, what are the core lessons that you have learned that have always enabled you to set the bar a little bit higher?

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

First and foremost, the thing that stands out for me is that sense of responsibility. We spoke about it right at the start and all the way through, it's that sense of responsibility to yourself and to your teammates, and to the people that you're serving, so whether that might be customers, or consumers or for us that was spectators and supporters. Be the best version of yourself for all of those reasons and that will continually motivate you to do better, because there will always be that sense of wanting to hold account to yourself, to the people around you and everybody else. I think that that first and foremost, and then I think use failure as a fuel to fire you up. I experienced way more failure in my career than successes and it would have been really easy to let those failures push me down each time and actually, every time I had that initial period of grief, which is completely valid and natural and normal, and then it was turning that around and saying "okay, where are the learnings? How do we make sure that never happens again?". Using it as a springboard to bigger and better things and after every failure in my career, something amazing has happened.

**Arch Insurance International:**

Absolutely. Kate, it's been an absolute pleasure. I've thoroughly enjoyed our conversation. I think you've given us an absolute wealth of incredible insights from your career and also that idea of what it means to be a leader and that idea that it's very much a personal thing as well and that you've got to look within before you can step up and step out. All there is left for me to do is to thank you so much on behalf of Arch Insurance for your time today, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you very much.

**Kate Richardson-Walsh:**

Thank you so much and good luck with everything, everybody.