

**Mission Australia's Nada Nasser on the two types of boundaries  
you need to lead generous teams | [Transcript](#)**

**Clare:** How do you keep your team motivated when the work never ends? Welcome to Leading Generous Teams, a podcast dedicated to making leadership easier. We bring you insights from leaders who are having an impact, even when resources are stretched, resilience is constantly tested and the social issues and opportunities are never ending.

I'm your host Claire Desira from the Top Five Movement. We're a team of award-winning coaches with a vision to support generous leaders to have a bigger impact. Our expertise lies in the practical application of neuroscience for sustainable behavior change in the workplace, and we're so glad you're here.

Hello, hello and welcome to another series of the Leading Generous Teams podcast. Today, if you can actually believe me, we are kicking off the podcast with somebody whose name translates to "Generous", and that is Nada Nasser from Mission Australia. Nada tells us that in Arabic, her name actually means generous, so we could not kick off the season in any other way, and we're so pleased to be chatting with Nada today. Nada is Mission Australia's State Director for New South Wales, ACT and Victoria. Part of this work is all around leading homelessness, child, youth and family, employment, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, strengthening communities and other community services.

Prior to joining Mission Australia, Nada held senior roles in human services in the government and also not for profit sectors. Nada has led programs and partnerships, policy and strategy and system reform, and we meet Nada today in her role at Mission Australia, where she leads an enormous team. So let's kick off this conversation with our generous leader today.

Nada Nasser from Mission Australia, welcome to the podcast, Nada.

**Nada:** Hey Clare, great to be with you.

**Clare:** It's so terrific to have you, and I want to say a big thank you for joining us from your holidays and your adventures with slime and grandchildren.

**Nada:** Yeah, we had a lot of fun yesterday making slime!



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**Clare:** I'm sure you did, I wish I could have been there! I'm so glad you could join us and just pop your leadership hat on just for a moment, but I know these topics that we're chatting about today are really ones that are dear to you. So hopefully we can add to your holiday rather than take away from it.

Nada, I would love to dive in and hear a little bit about what you are most loving about leading your team there at Mission Australia at the moment, and also what you're finding most challenging?

**Nada:** Clare, what I really love about my work at Mission Australia, is leading such a diverse team and a team that's so dispersed throughout New South Wales, Victoria, and a small team in the ACT.

And I really love learning from their wonderful diversity. They all come from different communities, different cultural backgrounds and have such a depth of lived experience. So really, the highlight of my job is connecting with my teams in their spaces and hearing their perspectives, hearing about the work that they do and the difference that they make.

Whether it's finding a home for someone who's been homeless, or seeing a person who's transitioning out of supported housing to independent living, and seeing them flourishing. Or whether it's maybe a young person who's overcoming addiction, or supporting a woman escaping a violent relationship.

Hearing about these stories and seeing the reports and the data that shows the difference that my teams make and the difference our organization is making, is really the highlight of my job. But sometimes also, the thing that I find the most rewarding is also the thing that I find most challenging.

With all of the wonderful work our teams at Mission Australia do, I also hear of many stories about people, families and communities, where there is so much fracture and so much system failure, because there's not enough focus on prevention and early intervention. So when I hear about whether it's an eight year old who's already on the path to crime, or a 12 year old already involved in drug addiction or a person who's stuck in homelessness because there's not enough social housing for her; that's tough.

So I find that challenging because as a human service system, we should do better. So my job in leading my teams through these challenges is to really help us, as a team, to stay focused on what's in our control. How can we influence the system, how can we partner with others to harness our collective power, and what boundaries can we push and what can we change or innovate? So as a leader, my role is to help our teams to stay hopeful, that despite all of these system failures, there are some things within our control to contribute to making this a better system.



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**Clare:** Oh, thank you so much for sharing that. I can't imagine how that must feel on some days when it just simply feels like the work is never actually going to end. Tell me, you've talked about giving your team hope and that one of your roles is to be able to lead them with that lens of hope, even through the days where you just probably feel like you're banging your head up against the wall with system failure. And I'm just wondering right now, many teams are still shaking off that fatigue from the last couple of years and navigating changes as your team does every day. What do you do to help their mindset and resilience and to keep bringing that hope to them?

**Nada:** Well, you know Clare, absolutely the last two years have really tested us all. What really helped us as an organization at Mission Australia is that we do have a strong commitment to wellbeing. We take our value of compassion really seriously and all of our leaders, from the CEO down, regularly remind our teams that compassion is really important, and that's a value that's really important to us. Whether that's caring for our clients, caring for our colleagues, caring for ourselves, one doesn't work without the other. So it's that sort of care balance that's really important.

In the last couple of years, through the pandemic, we implemented a number of measures to support our staff. Things like extra leave, more flexible work arrangements, and more active promotion of EAP and chaplaincy, so all of these, across the organisation have been really important strategies.

My leadership team and I have also invested a lot of time and energy in nurturing resilience. But recognise that resilience is a double edged sword. So I want my teams to be resilient so they can have a healthy work life balance, so they can adapt to change, deal with ambiguity and to stay hopeful. As I talked earlier, when supporting individuals, families and communities with significant trauma or fracture.

But, I also don't ever want anyone in my team to feel that being resilient means they can't show weakness, or say they can't cope or that they're overwhelmed. So I've done a fair bit of work with my team, my leadership team in particular, on the work of Brene Brown to reinforce the importance of vulnerability and that there is no courage without it.

And at a practical level, as soon as the covid restrictions lifted, I prioritised getting out to visit my teams. Face to face connection is really important, and I think the pandemic has really highlighted how important that is for us all. So that connection is really important, as is hearing firsthand about how teams coped, how they rallied together, how they supported each other, and it was really wonderful to hear how teams did that and continue to do that.

I've also carved out time for leadership development and reflection to share ideas, to discuss challenges and keep building our team's leadership toolkit. For example, we've had facilitated sessions through the Top Five Team, your team Clare, as well as other facilitators, to work on practical strategies for mindset resilience and wellbeing. As leaders, it's really important that we lead by example, so for me as a personal strategy, it's really important. You can't suggest to your teams that they take breaks when they never do take their own leave, or you can't be talking about work-life balance when you're as a leader, sending emails on weekends that are not absolutely urgent. So I think it's really important that I lead by example, that my own wellbeing is important and that I do care about the wellbeing of my team.



The other thing is over the past year, we've developed a regular program of facilitated workshops for our leaders, as I mentioned. These have really helped our teams to stay focused on workplace culture, mindset and resilience. And they keep the topic front of mind for our leaders and equip our leaders to support their teams, but also recognising that building mindset, resilience and mental health is not a one size fits all, that we recognise the diversity of our teams and their dispersed locations. You know, what works in Sydney may not necessarily work in Walgett or in Dandenong.

So we give our leaders the scope to develop local wellbeing strategies and strategies that work with them and strategies that they develop, in discussion, in consultation with their teams. So that they are deciding where they're at and what would help them to stay connected to build their resilience and their wellbeing. They've done things like team yoga or whether it's a regular team development day or enjoying coffee with a chaplain. There's various strategies that different teams in our sites use.

**Clare:** Thanks Nada, so brilliant. And I really love that point around, I just love so many of the points that you've made, but just that point around it's not a one size fits all. The other thing I wanted to touch on, was that idea that you've talked about resilience is a double edge sword, and we see this in our work too, and we see it also even around the word passion, you know, passion is a bit of a double edged sword. Because it's so important for people to be really passionate about the work that they're doing, but when that is overplayed, it can lead to really poor boundaries or people feeling like they need to say yes to everything.

If they're really passionate about things and they need to say yes to things rather than having the conversations they need to, and putting the boundaries in place as well. I think also, we see when people are really driven by that passion, they can put everything into their work, and leave nothing for what's outside, which really we want people's life outside of work to be filled with things that are going to be fuelling them for their own lives, but also so they can recharge and come back as well to their work.

Nada, the other thing I wanted to touch base on, was around the idea that it's not a one size fits all. And we see this of course through our work as well, when we're working with people around mindset, resilience and leadership.

Leadership in particular because people, when they're moving into leadership roles, they're bringing so much different experience, so many different levels of experience and levels of training as well. And so to run a leadership course or to work with somebody on leadership, it's really different for every single person. And so we find that often we could be working with a group of leaders where one is working on speaking up and presenting and really getting clear on how to use their voice better while someone else is working on a goal around their boundaries. And somebody else might be working on goals around perhaps sharing their wisdom more, or courage, or difficult conversations. And what it is that everybody needs, even in a leadership program or when you're working with people, that level is certainly also not a one size fits all. So I love that you take that approach, and you provide space for tailoring.



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**Nada:** Yeah, thanks. And I know the workshops we've done with you, Clare, it provides a lot of space for individuals even within that workshop, what matters to them and to develop their own strategies as well. So, that's really important in providing that broad framework and a space for that development and thinking, but within that, allowing for individuals to come up with their own strategies and to build their own resilience. Yeah, absolutely.

**Clare:** Absolutely. We make sure we do that because what we talk about, you know, we talk about neuroscience and practical application of neuroscience in the workplace. And because we're talking about our brain, there's a lot of things that people have heard before. And so we always set that challenge at the start of our workshops. This is not about right or wrong, or a good job for us is not about sharing something that you may have never heard before.

It's actually about creating that space to slow down so you can go faster. So you can take the science and actually make it meaningful right now, because we know with behavior change, you can spark that motivation and interest, but if it's one way of loading people up on information and then leaving them with a DIY, then go away and think about how you apply it. We all know too well, especially working in roles like yours and for you and your team, that there's often going to be something that feels like a higher priority as well. So we love to create that space and practical application, as well.

Nada, I'd love to switch gears and ask you a little bit about your own coping strategies if you like, or practical tips that you do to fuel your own mindset and resilience and energy because you've had decades of working in social justice. You know, that particular focus around ending homelessness and partnering with many organisations for individual community and family outcomes, and I can't imagine the amount of energy that must have taken. The last couple of years, let alone all of the other years as well. So tell us, what do you do to keep going?

**Nada:** I mean, interesting we were talking about passion earlier, because, one of the top things for me in terms of keeping my energy and my resilience and staying focused on the work and what we do, is really staying true to my purpose, for me, my passion for social justice really energises me. You know, nothing zaps my energy more than being consumed in work that's not contributing to that purpose. One of my favorite quotes is from sociologist Margaret Mead, which is a well known quote that I know many people already know, "Never underestimate that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".

At the start of my career, I had that actually on my notice board, and it was one of those constant reminders about my purpose and my commitment to social justice. But also talking about that, can also be in itself a double edged sword, because also one of my biggest challenges has been containing and pacing that passion, and reminding myself that while I haven't changed the world, my contributions matter, those small contributions matter.

It's a bit like I'm constantly reminding myself to slow down to go faster actually. And that's something I learned from you, Clare, and that's really important that that passion to contribute to social justice is energising. But in the face of so many social justice challenges in the industry we're working in, it's really important that we do pace ourselves and focus on what's in our control, and to make sure that we do maintain those boundaries.



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The other really important one for me, is celebrating the small wins. Making time to hear about and read the client's stories. I mean, I get those client's stories coming through. And then also every time I meet with my teams, I hear about the work that they do, whether it's how they've supported a woman and her children escape domestic violence, or how they've helped a parents' next client complete her training and how they've supported her. Someone who's been living with a mental illness, to transition to living independently. Those sorts of stories are really important. They may be small wins for my team, but they are absolutely massive wins for the individuals and families, that they are life changing for them.

So that's a really important way of maintaining my level of energy and resilience, is just to remind myself and ourselves as a team of those wins. At a personal level, I also like to remind myself of my Top Five. You know, I learned that from you, too. It's a really important habit in terms of remembering the top wins, the Top Five that I'm grateful for every day. You know, definitely making slime yesterday was one of my top five, so that was a lot of fun!

And I think the other thing is my daily walks actually, they are really important and they're non-negotiable, because especially with working from home I find that I tend to do that at the end of the workday. It's really important for me to separate work and life, and to start my evening. Also it's a time that I reflect on my Top Five. I reflect on what I did in the day, but I tend not to spend too much of my walk doing that. I sort of do that at the beginning of the walk and then, okay, let's move on to what's going to be my plan for the rest of the evening. So that's really important as a strategy for me, that keeps me energised.

**Clare:** Incredible, thank you. I love, again, you've talked about hope earlier and that part of your role is around supporting your team to remember and anchor in, I guess, to that feeling of hope. And I love that you've shared around how you anchor into those stories that you hear as well, and place a lot of importance on those to fuel that passion.

So many practical tips there Nada, I'm really enjoying this and I wanted to shift now. You know, the work that we do, and you know this as well, there's so much around what we are doing to create change, but we place so much more importance actually in the work that we do around what people are thinking to drive that change. And the place that we really play there, is around equipping people with tools to really fuel a helpful, encouraging, and productive mindset or a HEP Mindset some of our clients like to say. And so I guess with this thinking perspective in mind or thinking hat on, what do you think a few helpful thoughts that young people, young leaders, or other leaders could really anchor into right now?



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**Nada:** I think what I guess I've learned over the years is, there's so many, I guess in response to this question. But the things that come top of mind, one is pick your battles is really important, like pace yourself and pick your battles because in our industry there is so much good work we can do and there is so much we can change, there's so much we can influence. But it's really important to stay focused on the most important things. Keep the main thing as the main thing, as one of my leaders actually reminds me, and that's really important.

The other thing is collaboration, whether it's internal within an organisation or externally with other partners. I think for me that is one of the most important things, because we're not in this alone. This industry is a people industry, and it's about how we work together, how we support each other, and how we celebrate our joint wins. It's not about a competition, it's actually about collaboration and how we work together to achieve those common outcomes for the people we are serving and supporting.

I think the last thing is, I know we talked about this already, is that work life balance, it's those boundaries. You are actually not good to anyone unless you are good to yourself. You've got to look after yourself, to maintain your energy, to nurture your mindset, to keep developing as a human being as a person. I know for myself, I'm constantly investing in my own development, whether it's attending courses, conferences, learning, listening to podcasts, reading.

It's really important that you continue to nurture your own development, but also maintain those boundaries around work and life and make time for life and family and fun.

**Clare:** Terrific, and I'd imagine that having that quote as a young professional, that Margaret Mead quote around has really given you that chance to practice that idea, practice that thought around a small group of citizens can change the world and change things.

Having that post-it note up, or having that quote up has given you a chance to really practice that over the years. So it's not surprising then that when you practice that you believe in it more, which is then also why you talk to and work with such a strength around collaboration now as well.

**Nada:** Yeah, absolutely.



**Clare:** I believe that we reach for those practiced thoughts, those things that we practice are the things that we really believe in, which actually behind the scenes drive our actions as well. So, it's really interesting to see how that shines through your work.

Nada looking over the last couple of years, what lessons will you take forward from this weird and wonderful time?

**Nada:** It certainly has been a weird and wonderful time, hasn't it, Clare? Look I think one of the biggest things that I take away from it, is really respecting our belief and in our ability as a sector. I really think as a community, as leaders, we've really adapted, pivoted, and collaborated in such an amazing way in the last couple of years. I mean, I've always believed in it, but I think the last couple of years have really highlighted how well we've worked together as a sector and how we really rose to that challenge.

There is such a great deal of innovation and collaboration in our organisation and our sector, as we sort of focussed on keeping our clients, our colleagues and our community safe. So there's just so many wonderful examples over the last couple of years that have been really inspiring to see. Overnight we deliver about 260 services in New South Wales and Victoria, about 460 across the country. But as a sector overall, I mean, we had to pivot the delivery model just overnight. And it's really inspiring how well as a sector we did that. So it's sort of a belief that hey, we are such an adaptable, resilient sector and a belief in that.

We're also now all teams and zooms experts and we've advanced so much in the use of technology. So that's been great and we need to continue to harness technology. So I think I also am a great believer in the use of technology and the capabilities in technology that are yet to be really fully realised, I think in our industry.

Seeing the value of technology and what more we can do with technology to deliver more practical, innovative, accessible services to the communities we support. But also realising what's possible and what's not possible virtually. So you can achieve connection virtually, but within limits. I've also really come to value even more the power of face to face interaction and connection and how much that matters.

So we need to make time for that and to make time to create those spaces. I know in community development terms they're referred to as bumping places. You know, those bumping places when you bump into people at the water cooler and have a conversation, or while making a cup of tea or in the boardroom. Or in the community as you're organising those community barbecues that give people an opportunity to come together.

And it's actually that connection when people may ask for help from somebody, or might make a collaboration connection or build a collaborative relationship. So, those bumping places are really important and yes, you can do those virtually, but the power of face to face connections is really important.

So they're probably my biggest takeaways from the last couple of years.



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**Clare:** Thank you, Nada, and I love the way you talk about the sector. You know, those reminders about the sector being more adaptable and resilient as well, and where you can take that moving forward in the future.

Nada, we love working with generous leaders like yourself, and your team and huge team of leaders. I was just wondering, when you reflect over your decades in this space, who have you really loved working with? Who springs to mind for you as a generous leader?

**Nada:** Look, Clare, honestly, I have been so lucky to have had so many generous leaders throughout my career. I've had many people, leaders, supervisors and managers who I have learned so much from, and I continue to learn so much from them.

Each has taught me something different, I've really cherished that and really value that. I also work really hard to pay it forward, to make sure that I'm also being a generous leader to the people that I'm leading and make sure I'm sharing the wisdom that others have shared with me over the years.

But look, honestly, I think one of my first jobs as a people leader was many, many years ago. I won't tell you how many years ago that was. I went to my manager and said, "Oh look I'm now actually managing." I had one person reporting to me and I was now a people leader, "can you give me any insights, any wisdom, what can you share with me?" And she gave me a book, her name was Paula, and she gave me a book called *Leading With Heart*. I honestly can't even remember the author of that book. It was a small book, but I remember thinking, what does that have to do with achieving organisational outcomes?

You know, really I couldn't really see that connection. But as I matured as a leader, I've realised that leadership is a constant dance between heart and mind. And that the two have to go hand in hand, and they have to be in tune with each other. So I've really cherished that learning from Paula. Because it's without that compassion for the people you work with and you lead and seeing them as human beings with their own lives, with their own challenges, with their own celebrations, that for me often comes first. And it's that, that leads to helping people to thrive in their workplace because you are starting from that heart connection.

I've really valued that lesson over the years, and I think I came to really appreciate it more and more as I became more mature as a leader.

I think the other leaders that come to mind are the 80 or so people leaders in my team actually, who have demonstrated so much courage, resilience, and growth mindset as we went through the toughest period our industry has ever seen, or globally we've seen as a community in the last couple of years. So, my team of leaders really inspire me. I mean, they inspire me every day, every time I talk to them about the wonderful things that they're doing to support their communities, to support their teams, to keep trying new things, to innovate, to try different partnerships, to collaborate.

So, yeah, they inspire me as well. So I hope that answers your question.



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**Clare:** Oh, absolutely, thank you. Beautiful words around leadership and being that constant dance between the heart and the mind. I will be keeping that in mind as I go about the rest of my day, Nada.

But look, you've talked a little bit about the opportunity that comes with that adaptability and resilience that the sector has, and we've seen firsthand how you unlock that with your team and support, nurture your team and only wish more and more people throughout their careers could cross paths and have the opportunity to work with a leader such as you, Nada. You are absolutely hands down the definition of a generous leader.

So thank you so much for your time and your wisdom and insights today.

**Nada:** Thank you so much, Clare. It's been great to be with you.

**Clare:** What an incredible force, Nada Nasser. As I mentioned earlier, her name actually means generous in Arabic, so absolutely generous by name, generous by nature. And, I'm sure after listening to this conversation, you can see why we really wanted to kick the series off with this episode. We're going to be dropping new episodes every week. We're chatting to some incredible leaders. Leaders from Greenpeace, The World Wildlife Fund, Australian Red Cross, B Corp, Bank Australia, and many, many more this season. So please stay tuned and we'll see you again next week.

As we wrap, if you are ready for a refreshing take on mindset, resilience, and leadership training, then sign up to our newsletter over at [topfivemovement.com/tools](https://topfivemovement.com/tools). When you join us, you'll get access to our free resources, episode summaries, and exclusive events where we bring generous leaders together.

We'll share the links in the show notes.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation from the country where this podcast is produced and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging. Thanks again for listening to the Leading Generous Teams podcast. We've loved having you here.

Have a cracking day.

