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YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 128. How to be a resilient strata manager

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Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer and this is Your Strata Property. Jasmine Sliger is the founder of JSA International Communications. She is a multilingual, cross-cultural, organizational psychologist with a Master's in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University in the U.S. with extensive post-graduate work in Organizational Psychology.

Jasmine was born in New York, grew up in Canada and the U.S.A., her family for generations being from Colombia, South America. She married an Australian and has made her home here since 1986. In her 30+ year career, she's worked in prisons, hospitals, schools. She's consulted to some of Australia's biggest companies, lectured and mentored health professionals, and provided counseling services to children, couples and families.

Now, Jasmine is currently the Director of People and Organisation Development at Netstrata, and is responsible for the establishment of a strategic human resources department for this strata management company which is growing substantially and has been so for the last 20 years. Today, I am delighted to welcome Jasmine Sliger. Welcome, Jasmine.

Jasmine Sliger: Thank you. I'm glad to be here and I want to say hello to all my strata managers, particularly my Asian strata managers. So hello, everybody.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. I know that we do have lots of loyal supporters, particularly from Netstrata, I have to say. So a special hello to the Netstrata managers. Now, Jasmine, as we've just heard, your extensive experience in Psychology and combining that with your recent experience working with Netstrata, I thought that you would be the perfect person to talk to about the mental health and well-being of strata managers. That's what we're here to have a chat about today. It's a topic that actually a couple of managers have asked me to address on the show, and I think it's an absolute privilege to have you and your expertise with us here today, so thanks for taking the time.

Jasmine Sliger: My pleasure. My pleasure.

Amanda Farmer: I want to start by asking you, Jasmine, why is it so critical for strata managers, in particular, to value and protect their mental health and their well-being?

Jasmine Sliger: I think one of the things that strata managers need to do is have balance in order to last. I always talk about people taking care of themselves exquisitely, and by that, I mean having really decent boundaries around their jobs. At Netstrata, we have so many challenges at the strata management level, regularly putting long hours, working intensely, meeting the demands of the business. Remember, Netstrata's a multi-stream company, so we all feed off each other. Undertaking certainly business related activities such as responding to business emails which could be up to a thousand a day, I'm sure it can be much more than that, particularly after hours. But also going to business functions.

So, you're stretched every which way and at some point, you have to be able to really focus on your, not only stress management, but focus on your emotional intelligence to make sure that you have, as I would say, both oars in the water. In the sense that you have a real clear self-awareness about yourself. Some people say, "Oh, yes. I'm very self-aware." But in actuality, self-awareness, the clarity of self-awareness comes with what you think about in your head.

I'll use the example of a strata manager who doesn't want to return a call and an email, and maybe a little of what I would call behaviour that is avoidant. They don't want to look at it because it's Thursday. Maybe I'll look at it at Monday. And before you know it, Monday is crisis built. So being able to be self-aware, being able to negotiate with yourself and say, "No, I'm going to answer this email and then I'm going to liaise with one of my buddies in terms of the stress of it and let me just talk through."



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Amanda Farmer: There is so much in what you just said there, Jasmine, and I want to dig into, you've identified the incredibly demanding role that strata managers have, and I've said it before on the podcast. Strata managers are my heroes really and I've got to tell you, I wouldn't be doing the job for quids. There is so much on a strata manager's plate and so much that they have thrown at them every day. You've mentioned there a thousand plus emails a day. That is just incredibly overwhelming. And the challenges that they come with that.

How do you think that impacts? You also said the word longevity. How do you think just the nature of the job impacts the longevity or otherwise of strata managers?

Jasmine Sliger: Look, I really think it depends on personality. Some people are able to not avoid, so they deal with it, move on, deal with it, move on. And before you know it, they don't allow things to build up. And so because they don't allow things to build up, Amanda, they're more resilient. They're more mindful of, if I avoid that, I'm going to be in big trouble.

And you know, it reminds me of a client I had, a banking client that I was coaching many years ago. Because I've done a lot of work across many industries, insurance, finance, IT. And I remember coaching a banking person who hadn't opened their mail in like 6 months, and all of a sudden the electricity was turned off. And they came to me and they were scared to death, Amanda, to open. And I said, "Put it all in a bag, bring it here, and we'll unpack it." And at the end of the session, because it was a 2 hour session, when we looked at all the stuff that she was afraid of, it was really not that bad. But her fear was bigger than the actual event.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. I find that avoidant behaviour really interesting and kind of a form of self-sabotage, if you like. It happens to me too. There's always that one task or more, that particular file, that particular client, and you think, "I must do it. I must do it." And there is no rational reason why you're not doing it. It's not that you haven't got around to it. It's just something inside you that says, "I just don't want to deal with this right now."

I think, for me at least, recognising that that feeling is there, being able to acknowledge it, say, "Hi, yes. Feeling, I know you're there. I know I feel this way. But this is not real." And this is something that once I start, if I just take that one step, like you said with your client who just opened that first piece of mail and suddenly you're running down the hill. You're on that downhill slope and you think, "Gosh, why did I leave this so long? This is easy. This is not a big problem."

Jasmine Sliger: Yes, and that's what I love about what you're saying, is that accurate self-awareness. Acknowledging that you have the feeling as opposed to pushing it down, because the further you push it down, the more it's going to come up. So it's really important to acknowledge the feeling and maybe make a negotiation with yourself. Okay, this is a difficult report. I'm going to work on this for another 15 minutes, then I'm going to go for a walk around the block.

For which we encourage our strata managers to walk around the block. Many of them go running, some go swimming, some go to early morning gym, and of course we know that people that do exercise first thing in the morning, by the way, it's not for everybody, but if you can do it first thing in the morning, it's a really good practice. Because you're in a way insulating yourself from the craziness that will happen during the day, from the dramas, from the chaos, from somebody in the room being with you in a bad mood. Insulate you from a lot of things.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I know. I do enjoy exercise first thing in the morning if I can manage to fit it in. What do you feel about the concept, if you like, of tackling those hard tasks first? First thing in the morning, that's something I've heard suggested.

Jasmine Sliger: I think that's really good and I think it's also ... At Netstrata, we also have a lot of mentally healthy workplace techniques. So we provide meditation at 12:30, we also have a very strong employee assistance program, we have coaching, we have training. I get people to actually encourage them to work on the hard bits in the morning, then have that little meditation break, or going for a walk around the block, or going to lunch with a buddy, but treating themselves. I really think that the more you avoid and you get into that pattern of behaviour, the more you are going to be worried.

Jasmine Sliger: Sometimes, when you're writing something like an email, I know for myself sometimes I can sound like Attila the

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Hun.

Amanda Farmer: Me, too. Don't worry.

Jasmine Sliger: I get people to have a little look at my emails to make sure they're user-friendly enough. You can do that all the time, but if you, as an Asian strata manager or anybody that has English as a second language, it's really important to kind of write down what you want to say, say it out loud, because as you say it out loud to your ears it'll sound either okay or horrible, and then kind of regroup and send the email.

Amanda Farmer: Nice tip.

Jasmine Sliger: That takes time. But I also think that in order to be, the word is facile in the English language, to have agility. Make sure you have a lot of good vocabulary words that you can put into your emails that are soothing. I never thought of this but this is a great idea if I could come up with 100 descriptor words that are really good for strata management clients to see, like our care for you, or our concern is, or it might be best to, have you thought about? Something that it really brings them in and really makes them feel like you're really listening.

Amanda Farmer: I love that. Well, I'll look out for that glossary that you're going to put together, Jasmine. Please do.

What I'm hearing from you is that strata managers who are equipped with things that don't necessarily sound too complex. We're not talking about really complex skills here, but being equipped with some very practical tools when it comes to writing emails when it comes to communicating with what are often difficult, frustrated, perhaps angry, maybe rude people. If you've got those tools in your kit, you're going to be able to step through your day more confidently, more smoothly, and overall more happily.

Jasmine Sliger: Yes. I think that also it's really important for you not to tolerate excessive abuse. So if you find, and certainly as a Psychologist, I've had many a father or concerned relative or partner call me up and say, "Why did you tell them this? And why did do this?" Really cranky. And then they start getting into abuse. I say things like, "I'm really sorry, but if you yell at me on the phone, I can't hear you." Or I'll say, "Look, I'm more than happy to talk to you. How about if I call you in 10 minutes to give each other a break. I'll call you back and maybe we can start again."

Amanda Farmer: Good tip.

Jasmine Sliger: Yes, I think it's really important not to sustain. In Psychology, we sustain a lot of injury from people, people that are angry, and it's not necessarily toward us but angry at their situation, angry with their boss, or angry with the board, or angry with somebody. It's really important not to have that stick to you.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Do you find that women more so than men are more inclined to let that stick to them and to perhaps put up with or feel that they should put up with that kind of behaviour?

Jasmine Sliger: Yes, we do as women take it more because we're nurturers. And so as nurturers, and I know that sounds like a gross generalisation, but we do nurture. We're mothers, we're sisters, we're daughters. And how many Australian families have I dealt with where the boys in the family didn't have to take care of mom and dad. Taking care of mom and dad, even though the daughter was at home or the daughter was working, it didn't matter. She was to make space for that. And I think there is that impression that we tolerate a lot of crap. Don't think you necessarily call out the crap to the client. You really empathise but you really have, and I do have a set when I started, a set of statements that I would say when people were really rubbing me up the wrong way. Like, "I'm really sorry but I can't hear you if you're only yelling at me." Then I'll have a long pause.

I'm also a mediator. So we do that in meditation. We have those long pauses which really slows things right down, which is what happens because of course, when people are really agitated, they are what we call flooded. So they're not thinking, "Yes, but I paid you to levy and I this you and I that you," and they're not thinking. I think people presume, strata managers presume, the person on the other end of the mod actually knows what they're doing, because sometimes they're so flooded, they really are not in touch

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with how abuses they really are. And-

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I think pauses can be really, really powerful, as you say Jasmine, when somebody else is just so agitated. And even when you're agitated yourself and you can sort of feel your own blood pressure rising and your heart rate's going fast. Sometimes just stopping, taking that breath, and if you are uncomfortable with silence, say you're on the telephone and you think it's a bit weird to be quiet, something that I often say is, "I'm quiet because I'm thinking," or, "I'm quiet because I'm listening. I've heard you and I'm just quiet right now because I'm thinking about what you've said."

Jasmine Sliger: It's like culture, Amanda. In a strata management firm, the culture is really critical. To have a positive workplace culture where it's mentally healthy, where we're all chipping in, where so-and-so just had a bad phone call. Or certainly I've seen some strata managers, and by the way, we lose buildings very rarely, but when we do, it really touches my heart to see the strata manager get into a complete funk like he has let down the company or she's let down the company. And it's just something that happens. It can be completely out of your control. But it's important to really take care of yourself, and I often counsel or have a chat with people that have lost buildings. Because even our highest performers feel it, feel a sense of guilt and a sense of letting down the company or letting down them self because they're doing so well in the company.

Amanda Farmer: On that point about culture, Jasmine, you're having worked with Netstrata for I think almost 12 months now, and I think doing a lot of work there in terms of developing the human resources side and no doubt touching on the culture, getting involved, making some changes. How do strata management companies who want to improve in that area, where do they start? How do they take a look at their culture and start making those important changes?

Jasmine Sliger: Yes. Peter Drucker, who's a very famous management guru, said, "Culture eats strategy." So culture is the basis, is the most important thing in the business, because if you don't have a culture where you're taking care of your people and you're also challenging them at the same time, and you're also following through on behaviours that are not helpful for them, certainly not for the company, but really for them. So that culture in terms of the vision, the values. Values based cultures, whose behaviours are driven by values, are the companies that really make it and really excel as well as having good practices for if this happens then we do this.

Amanda Farmer: And what about a strata manager who finds himself in a company that just is not interested in investing in culture the way that Netstrata has? They don't feel like they are valued, that the company has the kind of values and mission and vision that they would see for themselves and for their clients. How can, or can I suppose is the question, a strata manager change a company from within or is it just time for them to accept that's how it is and move on?

Jasmine Sliger: I think excessive long-term stress for strata managers will assist your people to walk out the door. Now, what we do know is strata managers are like people that have their own businesses. And sometimes, they're really good at their own business and sometimes they need tweaking, but if you don't care for your people and you're not sincere and authentic, they will leave.

Amanda Farmer: We might have some managers listening, Jasmine, who have picked up this episode because they've seen it's about health and well-being and they're feeling a little bit like they're lacking in that area and it's time for a change. What would you suggest some action steps they can take today, some quick wins they can get on the board, to improve their mental health, in particular, and their well-being in the job?

Jasmine Sliger: Number one is self-care. Take care of yourself and everything else will flow. Number two, if you do have a mental health condition of some kind, whether you suffer from reactive depression or whatever it is, take care of that. Make sure you're honouring yourself by taking care of your stress levels. Making sure you have breaks. Making sure that you're really if you need to take medication, make sure that you're taking medication. I think that you have to really look at assessing whether the environment that you're in is really too much. Maybe you have to look at going to another related industry.

We've spent a lot of time with career development at Netstrata. Some of our guys want to be barristers in strata management and some are really interested in training. So we always get people to be really aware of what their career aspirations are, because if



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somebody wants to take a course, for example, in setting up apps. We have a guy who really loves IT and he'd really like to know how to put together an app, then we might send him on a course. But we see this as ourselves taking care of the employee and also being aware that the employee has a career. And with this, I have to say, remember, people have 2 to 3 careers in their lifetime.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and perhaps that comes back to that self-awareness and sitting down and checking in with yourself. And saying, "Okay, where am I at now? Where do I want to be? Where would I prefer to be?" And setting some goals and maybe a plan. If I still feel like this in 6 months' time, then I'm going to reassess. And I'm going to accept that maybe things aren't working out where I am and I'm going to move on to another option. But having the self-awareness to have that conversation with yourself, that's the real key, I think.

Jasmine Sliger: Yes, and I think once you have the conversation with yourself, you then sit with a professional and you allow that professional to give you ideas. I mean, I've had guys that come into me, as in a coaching situation, who were general practitioners. He said to me, "What I've always wanted to do is be CEO of an IT firm." And he knows everything about IT, and I say, "Okay, well let's see how you can transition into that. You're not going to be a CEO tomorrow. Even though you have degrees, it's irrelevant." It's really sitting with a professional that has you in mind.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, very good tip.

Jasmine Sliger: As opposed to a friend or a parent.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Now, Jasmine, we could talk about this all day. This is such a deep topic, and I would love to have you back to dig into this a little bit more. But I'm very mindful of our limited time together and I want to make sure I get in the book question. What books have had the greatest impact on you and why?

Jasmine Sliger: Okay, books. I think books where I can actually see a real human person change their life. Certainly, I could look at Viktor Frankl Man's Search for Meaning. Viktor Frankl was a Psychiatrist who survived the Nazi regime and he was the only one in his family and friends that survived. He asked himself the question, "Why did I survive?"

Jasmine Sliger: So these books I think are really important. Another one that I think is really important is Six Pillars of Self-Esteem by Nathaniel Branden. It looks at self-esteem and it looks at your purpose for living, how you get accurate self-awareness. A lot of my clients have given me feedback that that was also a good book. Another good book has been the Scott Peck book which is ... I can't remember the title, but you know what? I'm happy to send you some books.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, absolutely.

Jasmine Sliger: Some titles, because there's so many different books. I'm a big reader so I love reading.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, please.

Jasmine Sliger: If you're a strata manager and you have no time to read, download the audiobook, going for a walk around the block and see how inspired you will be. A lot of my Harvard Business Review podcasts on leadership, on particularly I deal a little bit with sales in terms of supporting people in a sales environment. How can I take care of them better? Take care of strata managers better? So these are the kind of interests that I have.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. I would love to have your book list, with strata managers particularly in mind, Jasmine. I'll make sure that there is a list of those in the show notes for this episode. That will be an absolute treat.

Amanda Farmer: Now, we do need to wrap up but before we do, let us know, Jasmine, how our listeners can find out more about you and if there's anything you'd like to add.

Jasmine Sliger: I guess you can find me on, my website is jsa-intl.com.au. A lot of people call me up and they want to pick my

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brain, and if you're a strata manager, and English is your second or third language, I'm absolutely happy to assist. I really have to say, I love strata managers and love how important they are to our community, and how unrecognized they go. So I really appreciate strata managers and really anybody attached with strata managers. Because I look at one person in admin at Netstrata who's so into quality, it's exciting. And she's so conscientious, and I have so much respect for her. She's an ex-strata manager. I really love strata managers. I'm happy to send you a list.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. Thank you. Thank you so much for your time today, Jasmine. We've been very lucky to be able to snap you up, and I do hope that we can chat together again soon.

Jasmine Sliger: Of course. Thank you very much. See you.

Amanda Farmer: Thank you.

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