

TRANSCRIPT / Leaders-First Leadership and the 9 Touchstones with Jes DeShields

Melody King: 0:01

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is fueled by living your cause and purpose. This podcast will equip you with the tools to do just that Live and lead with cause and purpose. And now author of the book the Anatomy of Leadership and our host, Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux: 0:23

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. I'm excited our guest today is a good friend and someone I've been working on for a while to get on this show, Jes DeShields. Welcome, Jes. She's the principal consultant and founder of Crescent Leadership. She's also an author of the 9 Leader Touchstones. Welcome, Jes, Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here Now. Let me read a little bit about you and I want you to add some stuff to it. So Jes is passionate I will affirm that and an engaging storyteller. She cultivates client relationships of transparency, trust and authentic connection. Her consulting approach focuses on the long game that's what makes her different applying the appropriate infusion of innovation and endurance-based strategies and conscientious culture mapping. We'll talk about what all that means.

Chris Comeaux: 1:08

Jes teaches at Cornell in executive leadership, women's leadership, change leadership and nonprofit management certificate program. She's also a lecturer at the Brooks School of Public Policy. She's a FASCINATE certified advisor and trainer, which I actually got the privilege of checking that out, and eight certified advisor and trainer, which I actually got the privilege of checking that out. And she also has certificates in leading remote teams, nonprofit leadership, diversity, equity, inclusion. She regularly speaks and writes on the topics of leadership, team dynamics, organizational systems and sustainable business growth. She founded Crescent Leadership, a business consulting executive coaching firm based on leader-first strategies, which again we're going to talk about, and her distinct methodology for organizational change and Jes's essential research was published in her book 9 Leader Touchstones. I have my copy right here. It is doggy-eared, it's got stickies on it, and so we're going to talk about that. It quickly became a hot new bestseller in 2023. So, Jes, what did I leave out that you want our audience to know about you?

Jes DeShields: 2:09

Well, you know, I think my bio covers a good high level overview of what moved me to my current path at Crescent Leadership. And certainly some of my earlier experiences working in the nonprofit industry throughout the Carolinas and working for a Fortune 250 company right out of college gave some shape to my background. But I think it's my stories right that throughout those experiences that really helped me find the path I was meant to travel my life's purpose. And to find that path, anybody, to find that purpose we have to be willing to work to interpret our stories without judgment, right against our current reality. And you know, Chris, I love what you said in your book Anatomy of Leadership. You said you cannot lead others if you are not on a journey to master yourself. And this is the very essence of our work at Crescent Leadership. Leaders must first look to self.

Jes DeShields: 3:09

I've always been on a personal journey to do better, you know, to be better for those around me, to be the best mom to Maddie, to be the best wife I can be, to Brian, to be the best sister, daughter, friend and, yes, to be the best leader I can be. But that takes a lot. That's taken a lot of self-reflection, introspection, but, most importantly, taking action. You know, on what I knew about myself that's really what got me to where I am, at Crescent Leadership and on the sure name currently on Well that, well then, that leads me always love asking our guests about what your superpower yeah, I think that's such a good question.

Jes DeShields: 3:43

I asked that of just about every leader I work with and certainly the teams we work with, because that's part of our work is helping them find that superpower.

Jes DeShields: 3:52

I think for many years I've been hovering around my path, so to speak, like kind of walking alongside it. But when I launched Crescent Leadership four years ago, that's when I finally stepped squarely onto it. And I think when you're on your path, when you're living your life's purpose, that's when you uncover your own unique potential. My work at Crescent and spending time over the past four years working with leaders across sector, different sizes of organizations around the country, that's when I really started to understand my superpower. It's helping leaders realize that they need to go to this place of introspection, especially if it's been a place they've been scared to travel in the past. And when I can get them to that point, helping them to find the courage to look to self, that's when we start to peel back the layers of those stories, examine those stories again without judgment, and then to help them move closer to their purpose so they can find the path they were meant to travel.

Chris Comeaux: 4:54

That's really good, Jes, and I didn't tell you I was going to ask you this, but I just get a sense it might be a good question. Why did you call your company Crescent? Is there a story there?

Jes DeShields: 5:03

Yes, so when I think about how, I believe we talk about something in the book you might remember this called the crescendo, where in this, ties to our work on authenticity. In fact, I'm doing a keynote in a couple of weeks and we're going to talk about the crescendo in this keynote, and we're going to talk about the crescendo in this keynote. A crescendo grows right like a crescent moon, to the point that it has such impact, and so the idea is that growth of any type to be sustainable, needs to grow slowly over time to crescendo Right, and so that's why we called it crescent leadership. That tie into that word crescendo Right.

Chris Comeaux: 5:45

And so that's why we called it Crescent Leadership. That tie into that word crescendo. Oh, that's really cool. I actually reached out to Jim Collins over the Christmas holiday and actually got a response and we corresponded a little bit and it just it started kind of going back to his stuff. But the concept of the flywheel that he talked about, that there's an inertia, but at some point, like it takes a lot of energy to do introspection right, to learn and grow, but at some point it's like that thing catches Gosh. It's the Atomic Habits guy. I'm forgetting his name off the top of my head. You probably remember he talks about the valley of latency and then all of a sudden it's like you get this exponential growth. Is that the same wisdom that you're kind of poking on with that name, this exponential?

Jes DeShields: 6:27

And I think, yes, I love Jim Collins, have all his books back here on my bookshelf and I've been studying him for years, but I think that it's that. But it's also the idea that growth should be steady and sustainable. Right that it we talk about this a bit in the book how we often opt for that quick win, right, and when you look at growth trajectories of companies, you will see, you know, lines like this, or you'll see a line like this, but sometimes, then, that line goes like straight down, right, Just plummets off the cliff. And the idea, though, is that a sustainable growth trajectory intentionally should be slow and methodical, and that's okay. Right To grow slowly over time. You learn as you go so that you can continue that growth trajectory. Does that make sense?

Chris Comeaux: 7:21

It makes really good sense. I'm so glad I asked you that question. You're making me be introspective, using your superpower right at this moment. I've actually been thinking I need to write a blog on this, and so this podcast will be coming out in February, but you and I are taping it still in the early part of the year. New Year's resolution right, new year, new me and one of the things this year that I've just observed about my own self I'm not going crazy, I'm making small, incremental and I feel like the changes are sticking and I'm building off of that and that feels profound and that feels the wisdom that you're actually poking on. As I said here and kind of introspectively think about my book, the Anatomy of Leadership, the whole learning journey. Being in the learning journey is the fact that it is a continual journey. I'm a bit of an idealist and like I want to lose 20 pounds tomorrow and I want to be at that perfect, but it's not reasonable and you actually set yourself up for failure. So I love that wisdom that you're poking on.

Jeff Haffner: 8:21

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Chris Comeaux: 9:04

Let's jump into the book, is that okay? But again, I'm glad to answer that question. So, just because we're gaining new listeners every week.

Chris Comeaux: 9:15

So I've been using my book, the Anatomy of Leadership, as kind of a framework for this podcast the very first year. We actually kind of themed it by the chapters and, as you probably figured out pretty quickly, Jes, yours is so well-researched I'm an accountant by trade. If you Google the word leadership you get six billion hits, and so my book was meant to be like a table of contents on leadership, like how do I dive into this broad body of knowledge? If you use those key themes, it's 10 miles wide, two inches deep, but you can spend the rest of your life putting more meat on the bone, going deeper, which is why then I seek out thought leaders like yourself, because I feel like incredible thought leaders. Then put more meat on the bone, then the book and the podcast are a great body of work that can pour into people and just help them to be on the learning journey.

Chris Comeaux: 10:02

So that's kind of the idea and why I love reaching out to you and I'm so appreciative of a couple of the CEOs in our TCN network that introduced me to you, although it was kind of cool that you and I actually met many, many moons ago, earlier part of your career, and so to get to reconnected. So let's jump into your book because I do think it puts a whole lot of meat on the bone. You did such great research. You're pretty transparent, maybe building off in your story about your challenging upbringing. You use that story. How did that journey shape who you are today and the work that you're doing?

Jes DeShields: 10:37

Let me talk a little bit about where I am now. I'm going to start a little later and I'm going to come back to that, if that's okay. I was thinking about when the crescendo happened to me. So I've identified those crescendos in my life and I've had four big ones, four major ones that have really changed my trajectory, got me closer to that path, and I think one of the big ones happened in 2020. And I think one of the big ones happened in, you know, in 2020. In my book I call that time the new great awakening, so to speak.

Jes DeShields: 11:09

The pandemic really changed me, as I know it changed many people. You know I watched people that I love get sick and die. I spent long hours at home trying to figure out how to teach my seven-year-old common core math. I know many friends that did the same thing and at that time I was working in an organization where we were doing consulting work for nonprofits around the country and overnight we were trying to figure out a way to keep over 100 nonprofits from going under because of the challenges of the pandemic. And I think throughout that timeframe I started feeling very overworked, as many people did, even sitting in this room. Right, my job was already always remote, but at that point it became a different kind of remote and I started feeling the weight of being overworked and undervalued. But then I balanced some of those experiences with good ones and I think that taught me a lot about where I needed to be as well. You know, I married my husband in a sunrise wedding at the top of a mountain because you weren't going inside of churches and any indoor spaces, so we really didn't think anybody would show up. Because you'd have to travel up the mountain. At 4 am, like 60 people came to this outdoor chapel, to pretty place, which I know, you know, and it was amazing, right. And we had this experience and it really opened my eyes the good and the bad that I lost a lot of time in my life, you know, doing work that was helpful in my growth but probably didn't get me closer to fulfilling that life's purpose, and so sometimes I was doing that work at the expense of my health, which we spend a lot of time talking about. The importance of energy powered resilience in the book, my relationships, right. So I started, I decided to start living.

Jes DeShields: 13:03

That's when I started Crescent Leadership, but of course there were so many inflection points on my journey that led me to Crescent Leadership and there was a point in my life where I started realizing that my early story had the ability to help people. Stories have this amazing ability to give people words that might be challenging to them right to say them out loud, to share their own experiences, and so sometimes hearing someone else's stories allow them to start unpacking their own. I remember sharing my story for the first time when I was a 24-year-old loaned executive at United Way. At first it was hard to talk about what it was like growing up in poverty, surrounded by drug and alcohol addiction. But saying my stories out loud for others, you know, for the sake of their experience actually had this unintended outcome of helping me start to peel back the layers of my own experience, and I've never really stopped doing that.

Jes DeShields: 14:05

So you know, this lifelong journey, as we talk about, has shaped me in some incredible ways and ultimately it's made me a more effective leadership coach and team coach. Now, the marriage of that with my professional and doctoral experience, my doctoral research on systems and organizational effectiveness, it kind of creates this unique view for me. So my research led me to write 9 Leader Touchstones, but it demonstrates this immutable link between the human behavioral element and sustained organizational growth. So if organizations solely focus on metrics, the bottom line technology, the next big innovation, they're constructing an unsustainable growth strategy. So I work with them to help them understand that immutable link.

Chris Comeaux: 14:51

We're going to go there next, but this might be a good segue. So the book was released. Was it 2023, Jes? Is that when it was released? Yes, I love that you start with Robert Frost's poem the Road Less Traveled. Why'd you start there? Makes a whole lot of sense to me. But why did you start there?

Jes DeShields: 15:07

You know, if anything, we wanted to give leaders a book built on integrity, which is one of the nine leader touchstones, and so that meant being really honest about how hard it can be to choose the challenging, you know. To choose challenging the status quo for opting for enduring, sustainable growth over those quick and easy wins, building on a foundation of the right human behaviors. Looking to self first, this can be a difficult and lonely road. When I was in high school, I competed in poetry interpretation and the Road Not Taken was one of the poems I presented and I go back to it anytime. I need to summon my own

courage to take a more challenging path. To do it, you know, to become a leader first. Leader equips leaders to build this foundation of dynamic, enduring organizations, but sometimes they courageously have to take that road less traveled. When they do, it makes all the difference. So that's why we started with that poem.

Chris Comeaux: 16:02

And then I love history. By the way, I'm a bit of a geek, although I feel like you're a cool geek. You're so thoughtful. I'm just self-professed geek. I love history. I love reading leadership books my guess is you and I have that in common but love Harry Truman. He's actually one of my favorite presidents. So literally I think it was on page one of your book the Harry Truman quote In periods where there is leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better. I think that was a brilliant quote. To start that and just launch into the impacts of negative leadership, which you have some incredible examples. Can you just talk about that a little bit?

Jes DeShields: 16:49

Sure, you know, some of it's funny. Some of my beta readers thought I made a mistake by kicking off the book with this visceral story about negative leadership and how it built this toxic internal culture. But this is the one piece of feedback I didn't take, and this probably came from years and years of being a professional fundraiser before I got into the world that I'm in now. I knew I had to convince leaders if I were going to convince them to take this journey to challenge the status quo, that they needed to understand the need. They needed to understand the need first. Why was it important? Now to your point billions of leadership and organizational change, resources that are fingertips daily. Why would I write another book on leadership? I knew I wanted to change the conversation. I had to change the conversation. If my contribution to that very saturated market would be valuable and functional in our current time.

Jes DeShields: 17:46

Okay, so the quote perfectly sums up what leaders have to do on their journey. When things have become so convoluted, so tangled, courageous leaders have to stand in the gap. You know when it comes up, even when it comes at a high cost to themselves. This goes back to the road not taken. Some leaders must courageously take the road less traveled. But when they do that it makes all the difference. That's when we start to see real progress.

Chris Comeaux: 18:13

There's also another. You say later that the moment you think you've arrived in leadership and it's so funny I have a paraphrased quote like this that about once a month pops up in my getting things done system. So that's again why I just jumped off of the page at me the moment you think you've arrived in leadership is the moment when you start to fail your organization. So here's a weird question. So how does a leader balance gaining confidence, that momentum building to that crescendo, but also not like questioning yourself am I where I need to be? But also having enough confidence where I'm looking through the rearview mirror, I do think I've come a ways. How does a leader just balance that where the scales don't get tipped in one extreme or the other? What was me? I suck. I'm not growing like I should. Or I'm the man or I'm the woman.

Jes DeShields: 19:03

I think I'm glad you use the word balance there, from a standpoint of making sure that leaders know this journey is not about perfectionism, right, it is a journey. I'll tell you a little story. A few months ago I was on a leader coaching call with a client and she said something that really brilliantly encapsulated this idea. She said I always had the insatiable desire to learn and grow, which I can relate to, right, this curiosity bug. But she said I think that what sets me apart? That's the thing that sets me apart as a leader for my team, but she also creates spaces for them to grow as well, for my team, but she also creates spaces for them to grow as well.

Jes DeShields: 19:48

And she said that it doesn't mean that we don't stop, celebrate the small and big wins and reflect on where we are, but we reflect intentionally. Right, it means that when we reflect, we always do it from a place of curiosity, asking good questions what have we learned about the things that didn't go well? Questions, you know, what have we learned about, you know the things that didn't go well, and how do we capitalize on what went well? And what makes that conversations context really interesting is that we were talking about how she is finally in a place where she feels like the pace is slowing to a manageable level. You see, her organization has been on the other side of digging out of a significant decline for something like seven, eight years now.

Jes DeShields: 20:29

And it's taken them this long to get to a place where they can say that they are sustainably growing. But she knows that to continue that trajectory, while they may rest, they also have to continue to move. They may rest, they also have to continue to move. So, now that they're now, now they're in the position, or they're positioning themselves, to anticipate and prepare for disruption right, the bad kind of disruption, disruptive external or even internal

threats, like if the pandemic, if the pandemic had hit them at the beginning of this journey, they likely would have closed their doors. That's the balance, right Rest but move, rest but move, celebrate but move, learn but move.

Chris Comeaux: 21:11

The adage that I use. I don't know if this resonates with you, Jes and again, I love that you're so thoughtful. I'm sitting here you're making me be introspective. I will say that at this point in my life 54 years that I have a healthy satisfaction with where I am and a healthy dissatisfaction with where I am, and that's kind of my way of saying what I feel like you're poking on. Would you say that differently or just push back on that phrase, because I also love the other thing you keep poking on. I'm a huge Shirzad Chamine fan.

Chris Comeaux: 21:42

Positive intelligence that term of going up on the balcony of your life is a great visual metaphor why storytelling works so well. Right, it paints pictures. And if you end up with great metaphors, it does the same thing just a little bit more succinctly. And so my mentor, Dr Lee Thayer, who mentored Stephen Covey, would use the term de-center yourself or project yourself to the ceiling. All those are great terms and what I feel like you're poking on a being introspective, but again, kind of bringing it back to full circle, my way of trying to encapsulate this journey is healthy satisfaction, healthy dissatisfaction. Is this good wisdom or would you push back on that?

Jes DeShields: 22:23

No, I actually. I love the way you describe that because I think that the satisfaction piece comes with our move toward becoming more authentic, which, as you know, is one of the nine leader touchstones, right? So as we get closer to authenticity, I think there is a time where we can get closer to arriving there, right, and that's where the satisfaction comes in. But when you start to kind of unpack the brain science behind how these touchstones interact with one another for instance, emotional intelligence I work with leaders that if you know anything about emotional intelligence, you know that it's a progression of really four states, right, you have self-awareness, which is focused on self and being aware of self. Then you have regulation of emotion, which is focused on self and regulating your emotion. Then you have social awareness, which is focused on others and understanding their emotions. Awareness, which is focused on others and understanding their emotions. And then relationship management, or facilitation of performance. That's really focused on how you use what you know about your emotions and emotions of others to facilitate a good outcome. And that's how we describe emotional intelligence in the book.

Jes DeShields: 23:41

I work with leaders all the time that believe they've arrived at emotional intelligence, and what I will tell you about emotional intelligence that some people don't understand is you may go take an assessment today and have off the chart you know scores on those four progressions. But if something major changes in your life okay, say, we get hit by a pandemic or you move to another state, or something changes in your family unit, something changes on your team, your company goes through a major organizational change All of those changes introduce new triggers into your life that you've not yet done the work on to contribute to your emotional intelligence. So that's one of those touchstones that we have to work our entire life. We never arrive in that one right. So that's what I mean by I love your concept of the balance right. Some of these we get closer to, but some we have to continue to work no matter what.

Chris Comeaux: 24:39

I'm working on my second book, jess, and I don't know if I'll do this on the front cover of this, but I always said I'm going to write a book one day. On the front cover is going to have this graph that is going to be like this wiggly line and it's like going up and down and backwards and like, and then you know, at least the trend line is to the good. But it's that kind of up and down and backwards and and hopefully those troughs and backslidings are not as deep as they've been in the past. But another way of kind of visually representing what I think you poke on. Does that feel pretty accurate to you?

Jes DeShields: 25:10

Absolutely yes. Yes, I think the design we have kind of this image in the book of these series of ladders where you're going, you know, kind of like a jungle gym kind of back and forth. But what I say in there when you're looking at this is that at any given point you may have to go all the way back down to the bottom and start. It doesn't mean you get to the top, you know, sometimes you go to step two and then you have to come back down and start again. Right, and that's okay, that's definitely okay. That's what makes it a journey.

Chris Comeaux: 25:37

My girls for Christmas, their parents gave him one of the old Atari games like we had. But it has, like all the games I don't know if you remember Pitfall when we were younger where you're like going along and there's a hole and you fall back down and you get to climb the ladder and get back up. That's kind of another visual that I get. Well, I feel like all this has been good prelude. So talk about the leader first leadership model. And I have to admit, because I've been so hardwired for leadership like even when I was like writing like the questions I wanted to ask you I kept wanting to type in leadership first leadership model.

But I feel like you very deliberately chose that title leader first leadership model and so please talk about it.

Jes DeShields: 26:17

So you know I've been working on this for a long time. I like I think at some point I maybe said this to you already, but I started this research really back when I was doing my dissertation research, so it's been a long time coming. But then again, when I started Crescent Leadership and was working with leaders, hearing those stories, getting the chance to work with them and put these concepts to work, so to speak, that's when I could really start to put on paper, you know, to really create something tangible that leaders could use as a tool. So when I started really getting serious about writing the book and getting this model out more broadly, beyond our customer base, my goal is to share a model that would quell the unique challenges right that we have in our current state of work, and that meant really kind of examining everything we knew about leadership, or as much as I possibly could, and what I found was that we have so many leadership disciplines and philosophies in the world and I didn't need to create something new in the world and I didn't need to create something new. What's new about leader? First, leadership is how I pull in three distinct philosophies of leadership as the combination of philosophies that are needed in our current state of work.

Jes DeShields: 27:37

Okay so, leader first. Leadership embodies the tenets of systems leadership, behavioral leadership and shared leadership, but it goes back to that fundamental premise that leaders first look to self. Now, I often get you were talking about the word leader. Why leader versus leadership?

Jes DeShields: 27:57

I often feel the need to dispel any misguided interpretations of the phrase leader first, leader first. Leadership is not about putting the leader first, it's about putting people first. But that can only happen when leaders are willing to first introspectively examine how their behaviors, profound influence shapes bottom line outcomes right, everybody cares about the bottom line. We can't get to the bottom line. The bottom line comes right. Everybody cares about the bottom line. We can't get to the bottom line. The bottom line comes way later. We have to first go all the way back to the behavioral influence and so, even though leaders must look first to themselves, it's not about leadership and isolation, isolation and action, achievement or celebration, and in fact it's the exact opposite. I've told many of the leaders that I work with over the years and I still fervently believe it that if leadership feels lonely at the top, you're probably doing it wrong.

Chris Comeaux: 28:52

That's so good.

Chris Comeaux: 28:55

You know, yeah it's, you will laugh. So I didn't have the best first leader in the hospice space and I had these wonderful group of ladies. They were all much older than me. I was 25 in my first senior leader job and so these ladies almost felt like moms and so they kind of looked at me as like their son. So they gave me all these really cool gifts as I was leaving to get my first CEO role.

Chris Comeaux: 29:20

And one of them because the CEO that we worked for was very fond of saying it's lonely at the top, and they gave me a little vanity mirror and they wrote on it we all know how lonely it is at the top. Maybe this is the only person you could talk to and it's kind of a funny way of the exact opposite of what you're poking on, but it's funny. I actually used to keep it on my desk, not because I'm some kind of vanity freak, but that John Maxwell leadership lesson that if you've been in the leadership role more than three years you probably should look in the mirror because there's a good chance you're looking at the person who's had a lot to do with the situation that you're currently in. But again, that whole thing it's lonely at the top and literally used to do it. It's just kind of a very funny way of sticking in my brain.

Chris Comeaux: 30:03

Well, I want to get to the 9 Touchstones, because it just the framing of that. So what are the 9 touchstones? And please do talk about the framing. I think it's brilliant what you're poking. I don't remember if it was, how far it was into the book, but I really got what you're after with the nine touchstones because at first I'm like you know, I looked the book and the cover and I'm like, oh, that's interesting. But it felt much more profound as I got into the detail and what you're poking on with this.

Jes DeShields: 30:33

Well, to clarify that, the first half of the book is all about the model right and how the model works, how we built sustainable culture, how culturing is a critical action inside an organization and a growth strategy. And then the entire second half of the book is that guide for leaders, right, where we really unpack all 9 Touchstones and then we go through the brain science behind those nine touchstones and then we actually talk about what we call touchstone Tai Chi. You know how to cultivate the touchstones, first in yourself, but then even some work, and how you start to cultivate that in your team members, right. So the more ripples we create inside the workplace, it has this again, this crescendoing effect

right, where it grows significantly faster when more people are infusing the behaviors into the organizational system. Ok, so the nine touchstones think of them as healthy or constructive leader behaviors and these are the fuel for the, for the dynamic, enduring organizational system. Organizational system Okay. The nine touchstones are curiosity, emotional intelligence, courage, integrity, authenticity, empathy, gratitude, inclusivity and resilience. Now, through my research, I've discovered that cultivating some touchstones are more challenging, if not impossible, without a foundation of what I call the big three. The big three are curiosity, emotional intelligence and courage. I would say that most people who pick up my book already have some foundation of those three. Okay, they're willing to look to self, they're emotionally intelligent enough to know that they have growth, there's still growth to be had, and they're curious about understanding more about themselves. When I say that they're foundational, I mean that they make all the other six touchstones possible, they reciprocally influence each other and they intensify the effect inside the organization. So then I independently explored the two concepts of integrity and authenticity.

Jes DeShields: 32:45

Independently explored the two concepts of integrity and authenticity. But those two touchstones have a unique connection. You have to read the book to understand a little bit more about how that works. Right, both are central to self-growth, but they have a synergistic relationship, meaning that we need both of them inside the organization because, for instance, integrity is a foundational modifier to, to, to often to authenticity. You can't achieve that authenticity right With having that foundation of integrity. Uh, that's the thing that helps us harness the ever elusive authenticity, so to speak. Elusive authenticity, so to speak.

Chris Comeaux: 33:22

That's interesting Before we get to four. Can I just back up on courage just for a second? And then I want to back up Just on page 190 on courage. You just had this incredible chart. What I love is that there's concepts that I've harvested along the way that have felt very true, just really good things to build your life on. I feel like you've got then the research to back it up and you also. The way you frame it just maybe makes it even that much more stickier in someone's brain. But you had this great chart around courage and it had, like the courage zone, the danger zone. Can you just talk about that for a second? Then I want to come right back to where you were.

Jes DeShields: 33:56

Yeah, yeah. So this chart shows how each zone kind of contributes to the progression of performance and how each relates to stress, anxiety and fear. So the purpose is to show how courage building sustains. Think of it as everyday courage building, either in a leader themselves you know leaders themselves or with members of the team team. And the idea is that if you take small steps just outside your comfort zone and I have to give my good friend Bill Treasurer a little bit of a plug for this, he was the first person to really push the concept of everyday courage building into my mind and that's his influence has really been integral and how I've expanded this concept of courage in the nine touchstones.

Jes DeShields: 34:45

So when you operate inside your comfort zone, you use a very limited set of skills and I will tell you that no growth happens inside your comfort zone. It's just nice and cozy there, like a warm blanket. But when you step just outside that comfort zone, into what we call the courage zone, anxiety does happen there, all right. Does happen there, all right, but that anxiety you've not gotten to the place of what we call the danger zone, where the anxiety is so intense that we're talking about negatively influencing health outcomes for, for members of teams, right for leaders themselves. So if you push too far beyond the courage zone, the health, the health outcomes, the wellness outcomes get impacted. That middle place, right of the courage zone, just outside the comfort zone, is where real growth happens and anxiety has a positive neurological and physiological impact on the body.

Chris Comeaux: 35:47

The term years ago that Quint Studer would use, that stuck with my brain, is that creative tension, like you have too much slack in the system You've got. You know if you ever worked out before you pull a muscle, that's what you would call the danger zone. But it's that sweet spot of creative tension, yes, kind of that Goldilocks zone, so that again I feel like you're putting good science behind that. Well, let's go to where you had it, because actually I kind of got it, but I feel like I really the dime dropped in the way you said it. It's almost like this, would it be accurate to say like a yin and yang relationship between integrity and authenticity, or would that not be a good visual?

Jes DeShields: 36:26

I don't know if I would go yin and yang, because you can have one without the other. And on the other side. You can't have the other one without the other one. Does that make sense? That was a little bit cyclical, right? Yeah, so you can live authentically who you are.

Jes DeShields: 36:47

Okay, and the example I use in the book is Hitler right which is an extreme example, but I wanted people to, you know, kind of go to that worst case scenario, to really think really deeply about this concept of authenticity. Hitler was authentic to his cause.

Chris Comeaux: 37:06

Would you think I love this? Because actually I use him quite often because it's a great litmus test to test the theory. In fact, my original, my book, the first five chapters, I had four and I was in a leadership training and someone said well, by your four definition wouldn't Hitler like oh, there's something missing, so keep going.

Jes DeShields: 37:26

Yeah, so you understand. I mean you can. You can have that authenticity, but often your actions may not have integrity and I think that's why we make sure that both are there and we discuss that modifier lot in there, because it really gets to the foundation of how do we live our values right, how do we understand what our values are, how do we put our values to work in our everyday life? I even give some really great tools that I use with our clients and with my students to help them establish their values and then make them actionable right To use them as filters for decision-making. You have to have some foundation of authenticity and desire to really live who you are, you know, to live the core of who you are, to really fully embrace that integrity baseline. So they modify each other, but they modify each other differently and I think it's important. The reason we included both in our behavioral model was because they're both necessary inside the enduring organization.

Chris Comeaux: 38:34

It's as interesting. I'm just again, you, you, you do have a superpower, because I'm being very introspective. We have integrity as one of our core values. And um back, one of the analogies we use is you know, John Wooden was such a great basketball coach. First thing he taught people was how to tie their shoes. And five-star athletes were like what are you going to teach me how to tie my shoes? But he was teaching them the foundations of excellence. And so we use that analogy in TCN.

Chris Comeaux: 38:59

And so, within TCN, intelli asked that a deadline is only one or two things could occur you meet the deadline or you renegotiate it, and that's the building blocks of modeling integrity within our organization. We have to be so true to our word, especially because of the nature of our work of supporting all these different hospices. But now I could look through the rear view mirror, because we've more than hammered it. It's one thing if you talk about it. It's a whole other thing if you live it and you have great storytelling around it. I find people are

discovering their authentic selves more in this culture than anywhere I've ever worked before. Now it's always a work in progress. Going back to the Integrity Foundation, is that what you're poking on, or am I kind of really messing up what you're teaching here?

Jes DeShields: 39:46

No, I don't think I think it is definitely on that right path. No, I know, I don't think I think it is definitely on that right path. I think the authenticity piece for this model, we teach about the modifier, the modifying relationship. For sure, because part of my goal in writing the book was not just to because I'm a big, brainy, brainy nerd, you know. You said earlier I was a cool geek. I really appreciate that. I've been a geek my whole life. I don't think I've ever been called a cool geek. So thank you for that.

Jes DeShields: 40:13

I am a big nerd and I have found that in my just annoying curiosity, which is the title of the curiosity chapter annoying curiosity I need to understand why something works. If I'm going to change my mental set, if I'm going to change my approach to something I believe to be true, right. And so, going back to these two touchstones, they have very unique functions inside the organization and how it makes the organization really rise to this high level where you're unleashing the potential of each you know, each unique person in the organization that ultimately gets you to that sustainable growth. But we have to understand how these touchstones modify each other, how they interact with each other, sometimes how, when, for instance, when I'm working on emotional intelligence and I've progressed to the phase of the progression of social awareness, I'm working on emotional intelligence and I've progressed to the phase of the progression of social awareness I'm also cultivating empathy, because empathy is the foundation of social awareness inside of emotional intelligence. So that's really why we did that.

Jes DeShields: 41:23

But authenticity as a touchstone is more about giving permission to people to bring their true and full selves to the workplace, because in that most authentic self, that's when they do their best work and at the lowest energy level possible. Does that make sense? So when you are, when you are living your authentic self, you're living your values, you are tapping into your superpowers, you actually exert less mental, emotional, spiritual energy, and so you're able to bring more of yourself to be more high-performing Right. But you also bring a unique aspect to the organization that maybe someone else doesn't Right, a unique aspect to the organization that maybe someone else doesn't Right, and that's where you have this really collection of talents and skills that can be put to good use in your organization to elevate it even higher.

Chris Comeaux: 42:17

Yeah, that's good. That's what I guess high-performance athletes will call that flow state yes, that where it's just like the world. I was thinking something you said earlier made me think about that where some incredibly high performers, virtuosic performers, will say it's almost like the world slows down, even though if you're watching the movie of it, it looks like it's fast-paced. It's incredible, but they're in that flow state. Just one final thing.

Chris Comeaux: 42:43

I love the Madeline Ridgway quote. Who were you before the world told you who you were? That one's going. Actually I have it now on a sticker in my office because it's just so profound. Can you talk just a little bit more, because maybe this is a good segue. I do want folks to go and get the book and thank you for sharing all nine. I didn't even intend for you to actually say out loud all nine. I think they've got to read the book because the more you keep talking me, having read the book, I'm seeing now how the symbiosis doesn't even sound like the right word, but the interplay between all of them together. But can you talk about the brain science behind empathy, inclusivity and gratitude?

Jes DeShields: 43:24

Oh sure, absolutely. So those are the team three. So those really focus on how a leader will influence their team inside the organization and the brain science really starts to look at the kind of the profound impact of social connections and personal growth when you take those three collectively. Empathy relies on an interplay of neural connections in the brain and neuroscience shows that inclusivity activates the reward connections in the brain and neuroscience shows that inclusivity activates the reward centers of the brain. So when you and then when you demonstrate inclusivity, the reward centers release neurotransmitters like dopamine, you know, promoting like a really positive emotional response and reinforcing belonging inside of organizations.

Jes DeShields: 44:07

Gratitude, which is the third one and frankly one of my favorites, gratitude also activates the brain's reward centers and it releases those feel-good neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin. So these all taken collectively, when you're talking about organizations that are lifting these three touchstones up, and especially leaders who are demonstrating them inside the workplace, it enhances the moods inside your organizations. It reduces stress, it improves overall mental health. It also nurtures, though, that social cohesion and it strengthens bonds inside of relationships. And it strengthens bonds inside of relationships. There's a lot of research behind how those specific neurotransmitters can drive trust-based relationships and how it drives strong performance inside of organizations.

Chris Comeaux: 45:00

That is so good. Just one final thing. I'd love to get your final thoughts. I could do easily a three or four-hour show with you. I'm not a huge fan of long form podcasting because very few people will listen to the whole thing, but you're just such a treasure of information. But one thing that nailed me, Jes, is in your chapter on resilience. So kind of truth here. Multitasking could damage your brain. This one just nailed me. Can you speak about that a little bit more?

Jes DeShields: 45:29

I always use that as a little bit of a shock factor inside my workshop you know, if they haven't read the book, because we all do it and I do it still right.

Jes DeShields: 45:38

But when I read the research on it, it was actually a Stanford University study. When I found this, it started making a lot more sense, especially so that let me take a step back and I want to share one thing about resilience and why this is so important. You may be asking, like, why is the touchstone resilience? Like, if you think about the concept of resilience, the textbook definition of resilience is the ability to overcome adversity, but I wanted to challenge the notion that we should end at the period at the end of that sentence. But I wanted to challenge the notion that we should end at the period at the end of that sentence.

Jes DeShields: 46:12

I am a very resilient person by virtue of the experiences I've had across my lifetime, but sometimes I've done that to the point of exhaustion, right At the expense of my body, my mind, my relationships, my health, and so I wanted to change the conversation around the concept of resilience, which is necessary, critical, inside of organizations.

Jes DeShields: 46:35

So we call our resilience what we call energy powered resilience. So we look at how, instead of managing time, we manage energy inside of organizations, and one of the ways we do this is by looking at this concept that that multitasking causes brain damage when we're putting too many things on too many people with no appropriate prioritization. Yes, it causes detrimental impacts to their brain, but it also makes them significantly less productive and causes the space where error they error prone right. And so by doing good prioritization and allowing people to complete an important task, rest and recuperate as needed before they hit that point of exhaustion, you're actually eventually going to get to the surge where you have higher performance inside the workplace, instead of working

people to the point of exhaustion, which is our go-to right. So that's really where that tie into the shocking brain damage concept comes in.

Chris Comeaux: 47:38

And thank you for going back because, given that context within the definition, it makes a whole lot more sense. And I love that about managing your energy as opposed to managing your time, because you will be most effective with your time. If you are managing your energy, that's great. Jes, final thoughts.

Jes DeShields: 47:56

You know I was thinking about, first of all, your great work.

Jes DeShields: 47:59

Thank you for the work that you're doing, Chris and elevating leadership. I loved how you described using your framework and the podcast as a way to really flesh this out more, bring more awareness to these important concepts. You know, I think, more than anything, we're at such I said it before such an inflection point right in the workplace and I really want to the readers of 9 Leader Touchstones and, you know, the people that embrace the leader first model to feel inspired and motivated to take action. I want them to translate the knowledge and the insights from my stories and the stories I've shared of others really to help them peel back the layers of their stories as well so that they understand, you know, are they on the right path for themselves as well. And I think that when we do this collectively, you know, when more and more people start to look to self, that surge will come right and we'll see that progress. Going back to that opening quote, you know we'll see that progress really start to happen.

Chris Comeaux: 49:05

That's so good, Jes. Well, we're going to include a link to your book, a link to your website and then anything else you want to give us. We'll include links within the show notes so that way, people could reach out to you and I really do hope that they get the book. In fact, there are several chapters I want to go back to, just based upon this podcast. Thank you for the great work that you're doing and leaders across multiple segments, multiple industries. I believe what John Maxwell says everything rises and falls in leadership and, Jes, I know you'll experience this where actually you are because you have older and younger kids. But now my kids are entering the workplace, and a great place for people to work is more the exception and not the rule. And when you have your own kids going in the workplace, you want them to work in an organization where they're going to learn and grow and become a better version of themselves, and you don't want that to be the search for the unicorn

organization you would hope. There are many organizations out there and because of people like you, I do believe that's becoming hopefully more the future that we're going into. We'll see. That's what this is all about. I love it. Yeah, thank you To our listeners.

Chris Comeaux: 50:10

In each episode I always share a quote, a visual. The idea is we want to create a brain bookmark. This is going to be really hard for Jes's because there's so many great prodders, but a good thought prodder about the podcast subject, just to further your learning and growth and thereby your leadership, and hopefully it sticks. Again, we call it a brain bookmark. Be sure to subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode. Check out Jes's book. Check out the Anatomy of Leadership. Share it with your friends and coworkers. Share the podcast, especially this podcast, because there's a lot that they're going to get out of it. Thanks for listening to the Anatomy of Leadership, and here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner: 50:55

"Growth of any type to be sustainable over time, needs to grow slowly, to Crescendo" by Jes DeShields.