

TRANSCRIPT - [Your Culture Isn't What You Say—It's What You Tolerate - Part Two](#)

[Lead With Purpose Invitation](#)

Chris Comeaux 0:00

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Sona Benefits Ad 1:15

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[Welcome Back With Tom Foster](#)

Jeff Haffner 1:56

Welcome to TCN Talks, and Anatomy of Leadership. We continue our conversation with Tom Foster in Part Two. Your Culture Isn't What You Say—It's What You Tolerate. And now, here's Chris Comeaux.

Culture Builds People Not Just Results

Chris Comeaux 2:17

Wow. Well, well, let's go to the next segment. I had no idea we were going to go there in our conversation, but I think that actually that's something I know I'm going to come back to in that segment because that's very profound. Well, one of the themes that I kept seeing in your book was that great cultures don't simply produce better results. I've always believed this, but you affirmed it in your book. They really produce better people. And Dr. Thayer used to say that leadership is fundamentally about people making. How does premeditated culture challenge leaders to think less about managing performance and results and more about developing people?

Tom Foster 2:54

When we look at performance, and especially, you know, how do we monitor performance? How do we measure performance? We come up with performance indicators, we call them milestones, we call them key performance indicators or KPIs, or there's all kinds of references to how we measure that productivity when in fact the game may be more likely that how do we measure the the growth of an individual? Productivity measures tell us certain types of things about the behavior, but the real change or the transformation happens inside a person. And those are much more difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Yet though those may be the most important considerations that we have to make.

Chris Comeaux 3:47

That feels profound. I just gotta let that settle. We're actually doing a presentation. I didn't tell you I was gonna ask you this. So we got a presentation for our team coming up in a couple of weeks, kind of stealing from a great game of business about this concept of know your number, that every department probably has a KPI of sorts that is a critical measure of success of their team. So they know a scoreboard of sort. Would you subscribe, would you ascribe to that or push back on that? And like I'd I could reconcile what you just said with that, but I'm wondering how you would reconcile, because I don't feel like they're one or the other.

When KPIs Miss The Point

Tom Foster 4:24

Well, instead of trying to make a value judgment one way or the other, I would say let's use that as a place to explore. Uh, for example, um, I know that um let's take a uh a home health caregiver nurse visiting a home, and let's say that in a good day they can make four visits, but the performance indicator says, well, let's make six visits a day. And let's see if we can do that by uh making the visit be only 15 minutes long. And so now we have a perfect productivity measure. Uh we can measure the length of the visit, and now we can measure the number of visits in a day. Uh but does that really underst does that really give us uh insight into our purpose? So if we say that the 15-minute visit and the six visits a day, what does that tell us about or inform us as to what we believe? And do we believe that we have to succumb to uh to productivity measures in terms of you know meeting budget requirements, or do we have to look at a different way of doing it? And so if if you look at you know, if I had 15 minutes to spend, how as a nurse, how would I spend that 15 minutes? And what is it that I believe about how I should spend that 15 minutes? Because it could be that I don't take any medical measurements at all. I only engage in in as deep a conversation as I can have with the patient or with the family. And so using it as an exploratory tool, what do the behaviors tell us about what we believe? And are those beliefs what we truly believe or what we intend to believe, or what our aspirations are for the behaviors that we drive?

Chris Comeaux 6:23

I feel like I need to do orientation to my podcast because I have to listen to my own podcast. When I say, hmm, that's I've done that more in your podcast than any other podcast because you're making me think. That's like Chris's little Brain Bookmark to go, that is very profound, what Tom just said. I'm gonna have to keep unpacking that. I hope you, as a listener, keep unpacking that. Um, it's gonna be hard to keep this in an hour, Tom. So suppose that a CEO finishes your book on Friday night. Interestingly, I did finish it on a Friday night, and then I was going back to work on that next Monday morning. So they're going back to work on Monday morning, and they're like, holy crap, this book's incredible. I want to go create a premeditated culture. What are the first three actions they should take during the next 90 days that would create momentum as opposed to just another flavor of the moth, who moved my cheese kind of book?

A 90-Day Plan For Momentum

Tom Foster 7:14

That's where I would go back to that, the culture cycle and the four elements. And so let's just bump through those four elements. And rather than starting with element number one, which is beliefs, start with element number two, which is behaviors, to examine the behaviors that we have in the work that we do, assembling an executive team in a conference room to talk about those behaviors and to document those behaviors, likely on some flip chart paper that we stick on the wall so we can take pictures of it and look at it. And then to talk about, you know, what are the circumstances of reality that test our behaviors? And then what are the customs and rituals that we have that it then inform our beliefs and our belief systems? To take this one more step towards complexity. While it's easy to talk about individual behaviors and individual beliefs, for an organization, we have to step this up to not just how do we behave, but what are our systems of behavior. And that creates more organizational complexity because the decisions that we make as we design our organizations are not just what is it that we want our people to do, but what are the systems that we have to create that support our beliefs and aspirations.

[Go See The Work Yourself](#)

Chris Comeaux 8:40

That is so good. So good and so profound. Um, you're making me one of the things that I've tried to do, I'm sure you've heard the term gembu walk. And uh well, I'm now the CEO of a virtual organization, so it's harder to do a gimbab walk. But pretty much since the time I became a C-suite leader, every year I would go see the work myself. I would dedicate usually about a week, sometimes two or three days, and go see the work myself. It's a Japanese term, gembu means go see for yourself. It is so hard for leaders because it's just to get it on the schedule, there's it feels like that's not your job. But it feels like the more I keep listening to you, some kind of way where you go see for yourself. Like, how do I judge what the reality is? There may be interesting little like portholes, like if you're walking on the ship and you could see through these little portholes and see into a ballroom, what would be the core layer in your own organization and by meetings, etc.? But the more we could go see the work for ourselves, the better chance I have some type of frame of reference of, okay, these are the things we're aspiring to, but what is the reality? Any advice there?

[Parking Lots Reveal Hidden Values](#)

Tom Foster 9:49

Well, let's just let's take an illustrative example. I remember driving to a hospital for an appointment for some sort of a diagnostic test. And I remember arriving at the hospital in

my car and driving around and driving around and driving around some more looking for a parking place. And every time I thought I found a parking place, there was this big sign reserved for doctor parking. And I went, okay, I guess I probably shouldn't park there because I'm not a physician. And I ended up parking way, way away from the hospital building and had to walk probably a good 10, 12 minutes to get there because all of the preferred parking was reserved for physicians. So when we explore that as a systemic behavior, something as simple as how do we arrange the parking on our parking lot? Who has priority? And of course, this was some decades ago, and I think that there is now more sensitivity, because now I see many hospital organizations, when you drive up, you drive up to the front door, and they have complementary valet parking. So if we look at, okay, just something as systemic as that, what does that say about our belief, our focus, our assumption, our value system as to what we're here for in the first place?

Reality Always Wins

Chris Comeaux 11:24

That's good. So, Tom, if there's maybe this is an unfair question, but if there's one sentence that you hoped every reader would remember maybe five years after reading pred premeditated culture, what would you hope that they would carry with them every time that they walk into work?

Tom Foster 11:41

It's two sentences bolted together. One is that reality always wins. And the biggest challenge for the leader is simply to get in touch with it.

Chris Comeaux 11:55

Say it one more time, Tom. That was so good. I have a feeling that's gonna be the brain bookmark.

Tom Foster 12:00

Reality always wins. The biggest challenge for the leader is simply to get in touch with it.

Strategy And Culture Shape Each Other

Chris Comeaux 12:07

That's awesome. So is culture a competitive advantage of sorts, or is it just simply kind of like the inevitable outcome of leadership? In other words, if I want to change my

organization's results, should I focus on strategy or should I first change the behaviors that the strategy sits on? It's almost like a chicken or the egg kind of question.

Tom Foster 12:31

It is definitely chicken or the egg. That's why the culture cycle is a cycle. Uh, it is an iterative loop that continues to um to be explored, defined, uh, refined. And so when I look at strategy and culture, I don't see them as two separate things. I see that the strategy helps to define the culture, and the culture helps to define the strategy. When we look at, you know, what is it that an organization does, I would say that those are the behaviors. The strategy is more akin to the beliefs and assumptions that we have about the marketplace or our mission in the world. And so as we look at the the combination of those two, and you tried to link that in your question to competitive advantage, I think that you know the strategy of what is it about our organization that causes a customer or a patient to walk past our competitor to come and be with us for our products and our services. And so I think that all of those are are linked together and deserve more focus as to how we do what we say our intentions are.

Chris Comeaux 13:55

I didn't tell you, I was gonna ask you this, but it's something I was wrestling with. We've got our one-year leadership certification, Teleios University. We use a lot of Dr. Thayer's book, we use Anatomy of Leadership. I'm considering we need to figure out how to put premeditated culture as part of it. But then we have alumni and we pull our alumni together and we use Lee's book about communication. And there's something I've been wrestling with, which Lee was masterful about the challenges of communication. And because the challenge of communication is I don't realize that so much of my own dragons, saboteurs, how it colors even what I communicate. And it also colors what the person is receiving in their own communication. Therefore, we wonder why every organization has communication challenges. So it feels like this huge, intractable kind of problem. And what I was thinking about is Lee would say that I try to approach every day like it's my first day. And he would always like have the kind of romantic thing, like the first he comes down and sees his wife in the morning and try to approach it like it's the first time I'd ever meet her. And the ladies are always part of our course would be like, oh, that's so romantic. I'm like, that's not what he's teaching. He's almost teaching like you're starting every day with a blank slate. And so here's the question because so much of what you're poking on related to reality gets back to the behaviors are shaping the reality. So, how we change behaviors. And there's kind of a Christian adage of to be born again. So I was the question is this if I really could be born again, almost like if I erase the hard drive and would start from scratch today, would I actually take that approach? Or would I not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and more work with what I got and keep trying to shape it to get better and better behaviors, maybe create a better family, a

better marriage, and absolutely a better organization and partnership. I'm curious your thoughts about that. Because it's something that I feel like I always want to ask Lee to go, hey, when you say like approach every day, like the first day, I'm still bringing stuff into the day. And if I actually had a blank slate, I'm not sure I'd want that blank slate. I kind of like want the stuff, the bad stuff and the good, but then it's kind of what I do with it.

[Fresh Eyes Break The Spiral](#)

Tom Foster 16:13

So getting back to the book, if if you look at the spiral that most of the characters, except for the protagonist, most of the characters are trapped in a spiral because they don't see every day as a new day. Uh they don't arrive at the context that they live inside of uh with a fresh set of eyes. They continue to work inside the context from the day before, that was informed by the context of the day before, and they remain in this spiral. I mean, if you recall the characters in the book, there's only one character that truly survives, and that's the protagonist whose name is Catherine. And the reason that Catherine survives is remember that everyone else went out and and got employment somewhere and stayed in that employment through the duration of the book, except for Catherine. Catherine never got a job. In fact, every job, every engagement she got, she ended up terminating, which meant that she had fresh starts all through the book and ultimately allowed her to be the only character who actually engaged in a transformation. And so if we look in culture works the same way, if we continue to stay wrapped in that spiral of context and never come back and look at it with fresh eyes, then we're destined to live in that for the rest of our lives. And it is only through a process of of transformation by looking at things in a new way. And if you even look at at Catherine's personality from the beginning of the book to the end of the book, uh in the beginning of the book, everything is always someone else's problem or someone else's fault. And she basically leaves the predicament and starts a new predicament somewhere else. And only at the end of the book where she assumes responsibility for a new organization that she is now the head of, um, and she's able to make that transformation that no one else in the book is able to make, which is why she's the hero.

Chris Comeaux 18:35

You know, we use this in some of the coaching we do. There's an old Clint Black song, Wherever you go, there you are. And it's kind of a funny way of going, Do you realize that?

Tom Foster 18:46

Yes.

Chris Comeaux 18:46

Wherever you go, there you are. Why do these problems keep following me? I used to actually have a quote on my bulletin board. It came from um the guy who wrote The Alchemist, Paulo, I think Coelho. I'm not sure if I say his last name correctly. But the leader rails, why does this problem keep presenting itself? And the problem says back, because you've never been beyond it. And I used to keep that on my bulletin board. I'm not sure if it ever sunk in until like maybe in the late 40s of, oh, that's what that means. That's why that thing keeps kind of following me wherever I go. Well, Tom, there's so many pearls. What final thoughts would you like to share with our listeners?

Tom Foster 19:26

Well, I just go back to the uh the process of exploration, um, which is why I wrote this as a fiction book, it not as a nonfiction or prescriptive book. It's all about exploring what is it, what is it in our mind, what is it that we believe, and is that belief something that we want to believe or truly believe, or that is our aspiration. Uh very rarely discovered by looking directly at the belief, but looking more at the behaviors that are driven by that belief, and then those behaviors that are tested by the consequences of reality.

Chris Comeaux 20:06

Wow. Are you gonna write more?

Tom Foster 20:09

Oh, yeah, I've got a couple of more ready to go.

Chris Comeaux 20:12

Good deal, man. This is uh well, then we're gonna keep doing this. And I'm uh if you need a test case, like try out the scripts. Um, you got a you got a raving fan here, and hopefully um, I I know for a fact because several people have come back and like, dude, I didn't know what you meant. Like, I saw the title and I wasn't sure what to do with it. I'm like, but I trusted you, and then I read it, I'm like, this is an incredible read. So, Tom, thank you for the work that you're doing. Thank you for the way that you're paying forward your superpower. Again, I totally get about like where you're harvesting the stories, but I do think your superpower is how you weave it in the form of a story. Like, I I always have this guilty pleasure of when I go on vacation, I will always read like some type of self-improvement book, et cetera. But then I'll read like maybe a Vince Flynn or something like that, or like the the I'm forgetting the new guy's escaping me, my son loves them. Kind of like a modern-day Tom Clancy. But I feel like it's mind candy. Like it's not really related to my job, but I like felt like yours. I was killing several birds with one stone because I was like

reading a great story, bettering myself as a leader and learning something and process. So I again can't say enough good things about it. So thank you.

Tom Foster 21:22

My pleasure. I enjoyed it.

Brain Bookmark And Closing Thanks

Chris Comeaux 21:24

Well, to our listeners, we want to thank you. At the end of each episode, we want to share a quote, a visual. The idea is to create a Brain Bookmark, a thought prouder about our podcast subject the further your learning and growth, and thereby your leadership. We're hoping it sticks like a brain tattoo. Be sure to subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership, TCN talks. We don't want you to miss an episode. We're gonna have a link to Tom's book, a link to my book, and just make sure that you get everything that you need to be able to put these credible principles in place in every aspect of your life. You know, it's easy for us to rail against the world, be frustrated by things. Let's be the change that we wish to see in the world. So thanks for listening to TCN talks, the Anatomy of Leadership. And here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner 22:09

"Reality always wins. The biggest challenge for the leader is simply to get in touch with it," by Tom Foster.