

Transcript

Is Your Ladder Leaning Against The Wrong Wall? Richard Mobley on Leadership and Calling

Melody King: 0:00

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is pupiled 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: 0:21

Hello and welcome. I'm excited. Our guest today is Richard Mobley. He's the founder and principal of the Seven Four Group and the Be Far More system. Hey Richard, so good to have you.

Richard Mobley: 0:31

Chris, what a pleasure to be here. Thank you, thank you, thank you for having me. I'm excited about uh getting to know you and your audience and uh honestly the the work that y'all do that I'm not able to do. So appreciate being here.

Chris Comeaux: 0:46

I'm excited to introduce you to our listeners. So let me do that. Let them let me let that them know a little bit more about you. So Richard Mobley is a seasoned corporate executive turn leadership transformation expert who believes great leadership can change everything. After experiencing both exceptional and poor leadership throughout his corporate career, he made it his mission to help others understand and implement the principles of effective leadership. Richard transforms leaders who want to maximize their impact and unlock their team's fullest potential. Drawing from his executive experience and a keen observation of both effective and ineffective leadership, Richard helps clients navigate the challenges of modern leadership with clarity and purpose. He's a certified John Maxwell leadership team coach, speaker, trainer. Richard guides emerging and established leaders through a unique three-filter approach that integrates practical knowledge, real world experience, and biblical wisdom. At the heart of his coaching philosophy is servant leadership, inspired by Philippians 2: 3-4 which encourages putting others' interest ahead of one's own. So, Richard, what did I leave out that you would want our audience to know about you?

Richard Mobley: 1:53

Um I'm trying to think, Chris, of some things that would make my mama proud. So um, so Jackie and I live in Birmingham, Alabama. We uh uh a gig brought us here in 01. She's a Texan, she says we're going home to Texas one of these days, but but not yet. We're we're we're still uh really involved here in our local community and likewise I no grandchildren, so uh it just Jackie and me doing the things that um that bring us joy and and serve others. Uh I guess the one fact that I'd like you to know is I am not really bald. I am just taller than my hair. So as you well know.

Chris Comeaux: 2:34

Well, and I did not know you didn't have grandkids until we were in the green room, and because you have this has got nothing to do with your age. You just have a grandfatherly wisdom. I was just I have never told you this. And so I met Richard at probably the most transformative conference I've ever been through in my life as the leadership summit. Um, Mike Harbour and I did a podcast about it last year, and I was just drawn to you. I mean, you just have this grandfatherly wise presence, and there's I've always been attracted to people like that. Dr. Lee Thayer was my mentor, he was Stephen Covey's mentor. And I just I've found myself kind of sitting next to you, and we just started talking. And I've I've told you before I want to call you Papa John because you have a little bit of that John Maxwell fatherly presence about you. So I hope you take all that as the compliments as very much intended.

Richard Mobley: 3:24

These are build-up thoughts, and I'm gonna take them. And by the way, all of that, Chris, would make my mama proud. So thank you.

Chris Comeaux: 3:30

So, well, I prepared you for this question, and I know you wrestle with it. What's your superpower?

Richard Mobley: 3:35

I did wrestle with this question. Um, and I've I've tried to distill it down, and I think the superpower turns out to be being a thinking partner with somebody who's facing a challenge. So you I could pick that apart in so many ways. I am the big brother, I'm the oldest of four. There are only two of us left. Um, and I was the big brother. Um we joked about this a minute ago. I happen to be a physically large man. I'm a very, very tall man, and so people look up to me. And you've heard me, I've given the joke before. God gave people at least one reason to look up to me. But very being very serious, that filters through my outlook on life. And so looking out for and attempting to take care of others, like the world is not my problem, but I feel compelled to try to work on some of those things. So um a lot of that has to do with uh living up to my name. My name. Long time ago, we did a study about what people's names mean. You know, words do mean things, and um the name Richard can be translated to mean keeper of others' welfare. And and when I learned that, this is a long time 50 years ago, um, something clicked inside, and I began working, sometimes successfully, some sometimes not, trying to live up to that name. So being a thinking partner with somebody who's facing a problem and having the wisdom to say, you know, I don't know. We perhaps we can go find an answer somewhere else.

Chris Comeaux: 5:23

That that all that resonates again. You know, a honor of getting to meet you last year, and then you've got you and I struck up a relationship. You've now done some work with our TCN network, bringing the wonderful Live to Lead. Um, so our listeners, if you know what Live to Lead is, Google it. It's an amazing John Maxwell conference. And so Richard and I work together. We've brought that to our network, and we had one one of the we broke it into three parts. December, we're gonna do another in January and then February. It's just you you've already blessed me just with

knowing you, and now we've paid that forward to many other people and now are via this podcast. So let's jump in. Are you ready?

Richard Mobley: 6:00

I'm ready.

Chris Comeaux: 6:01

There's so many different areas I want to go into, but I want to start with this one. Many leaders spend decades preparing for success, but very little time preparing for what comes next, what comes after. What do you wish more CEOs understood about the transition from achievement to meaning? And I want to provide a little bit more context. A lot of our listeners are hospice and palliative care leaders, Richard.

Richard Mobley: 6:22

Yep.

Chris Comeaux: 6:22

Um apparently I am the second generation. The first generation were the people that created hospice in our country. Um, we are in the tail end of a lot of that first generation retiring. I'm part of the second generation. I was uh 25 when I came into hospice. Some of my older peer second generation, they're getting ready to retire. So there's just a lot of volume of talent that is walking out of the door or getting ready to walk out of the door. And that's why I really want to start with this question.

Richard Mobley: 6:50

If I was gonna try to simplify that question for myself, I would ask it this way. So you've had this great career, so what? Now what? I am one who did not approach that question very well. In fact, I wasn't smart enough to ask that question uh for myself a long time ago when I retired pretty early. Pretty early. But as I think about how your audience and others can approach this in a better way, I'm thinking about the three stages of life that John Maxwell talks about. Number one is survival, and much of the world is in survival mode, meaning they're on the hunt for food and shelter and clothing. The the you and I are in success mode, and in fact, I would I would uh postulate that all of our listeners are in success mode, and that has nothing to do with the number of letters behind your name or how many zeros and commas are in your annual paycheck. It has to do with we did have food and shelter. We can go to the pantry right now, and we've probably got an automobile. We we have free we are in success mode. But John talks about moving from success to significance, and what is that? That's making a difference in somebody else's life. It's not really a destination thing. A lot of us have looked at success mode as if it were a destination. When I get this, when I do that, when I what whatever the criteria we put on it. But significance isn't like that, it's it's a daily thing. It's an inside out thing. It's not about someday, it's about today. And so I I would encourage your listeners to be thinking about oh yeah, what's next? So what now what? For me, it was not the golf course, the hunting, the fishing, the travel, the it was it was something different for me. And so I would encourage them

to be thinking about how to continue to make a difference. The thing that they're doing today, palliative and hospice care, makes a difference. I would question, like, how do you really walk away from that? I understand I understand life change. I like life change. Uh the pace might slow, but but then how would you go make a difference somewhere else and and be continue to contribute to all those great things? Move from success to significance. That's the short answer.

Chris Comeaux: 9:25

Wow. You know, it's interesting. I had uh Quent Studer, who's one of my key mentors in my life on my podcast. And uh Quent said something fascinating. He now owns half a downtown Pensacola triple A baseball team. He said, like, Quent, you you've let all these different businesses, which one, which one's kind of the easiest or your favorite? And he didn't miss a beat, he said healthcare. And he saw the look on my face. I'm like, boy, you know what? Um he goes, no, Chris, he goes, there's no purposeful business like I've not, I've got all these other businesses, the connections are purpose. I wonder. So here's what maybe my follow-up question. Listen to what you said, I love that actually. So survival, success, and then significance. Because hospice is so meaningful, such sacred ground, I wonder if it's harder than for them to find significance because it feels like the success and significance were merged together.

Richard Mobley: 10:15

Yeah.

Chris Comeaux: 10:15

Um, because I've seen, I've got a couple of horrible case studies. One CEO we worked with, and she was working so dang hard. She had almost pretty much was the founder of that hospice, only CEO for 30-something years. And her goal was this cabin in a beautiful place in the United States. And then she kind of got to that thing, and like, oh crap. It's like, wait a minute, you know, I was just trying to get to that vacation, so to speak, and I and I really saw like her health. You could see it was that lack of significance and just really wrestling. I think now she's kind of found some of that, um, grandkids and some things along those lines. But I don't know what if you could kind of take all that and kind of merge it into an answer. But I do think there's something about this healthcare work that we may be conflating that success and that significance.

Richard Mobley: 11:05

Chris, it may I bore you with a personal story, which is that that's a that's pretty much my story. Not on the clinical side of things, but the organizations I worked with were in healthcare. We we did administration, so we did software and systems and services, we served physicians and hospitals. At one time I had 80,000 physician clients. So I I always told my people, and my people were project managers and coders and sales per people and customer service folks, that was my team. But I told them all the time, we are in health care, we are helping healthcare. And the reason I said that is I knew that when we did our job well, that physician in hospital could do their job better. A way I illustrate it was saying, hey, if my little Mary Elizabeth gets sick, I'm taking her to one of my clients as a physician because I know that lady or that man is not worried about payroll this Friday. They're gonna be able to take care of Mary Elizabeth. I had a big why. We I I I

joked about the fact that we helped there be less blood on the OR floor. Like I was being very graphic, but but we were making a difference. And when I retired, that all went away. And so Jackie, my wife, says to me, Richard, you've got to go get a job. And because I was unfulfilled, frustrated, and ornery, honestly ornery. And who was I taking it out on? The person I love the most on the planet. Big on the outside, Chris, little on the inside. And it was because I didn't have a plan. What's next? And so I'm back to Mr. Maxwell who told me, Richard, do something that makes a difference. Now, okay, maybe it's not uh hospice and palliative care anymore, but do something that makes a difference with people who want to make a difference at a time that it makes a difference. That is stepping into significance. And not to bore you with too more too much detail, but that that's what I figured out what how to do that 15 years ago. Um and I would encourage your listeners to be thinking in the it i it doesn't have to be the 80-hour weeks anymore, but you can do something that makes a difference.

Chris Comeaux: 13:35

Does it feel like work anymore, Richard? Or does are there, I mean are there days that it is still a grind, or you're meddling now because I should have told you it was gonna do that.

Richard Mobley: 13:48

Yes. I know me and I also knew human nature. And entropy is a thing. Okay, and I'm 72 years old, I've got excuses. It creaks, it moans, it hurts. Okay. Am I gonna take an excuse or am I gonna push through? And and you've got people who are 62 who are having that very same challenge. It has nothing to do with the chronological number. It has to do with am I making a difference? Is that why big enough to get me up even when it does even when I don't feel like getting up? Most days it is play. Most days it's play. Serious play. Making a difference, but it's fun. It's does it give you energy or does it suck energy from you? And the things that I am able to do these days absolutely energize me. Did I answer your question there at all?

Chris Comeaux: 14:49

You did.

Richard Mobley: 14:50

Okay.

Chris Comeaux: 14:50

So what are some truths about leadership, success, or life that no one warns you about, but you had to learn the hard way?

Richard Mobley: 14:58

Yeah. You know, Will Rogers said um good judgment comes from experience. And a lot of that comes from bad judgment.

Chris Comeaux: 15:11

Love Will Rogers.

Richard Mobley: 15:13

He's so awesome, so direct, so real. I I I think some of the things that that that I didn't uh maybe I didn't listen to or that or that I didn't think I had learned well, I I did learn from my own bad judgment. And and so those self-inflicted lessons are the ones that really stuck. Um the ones that cost me and those around me, so family and team and business associates and customers. Yeah, sometimes some very um some very serious, life-altering screw-ups that came right out of this little brain. Um and I think perspective on those things is what I had not been prepared for. Be careful because I am a person who thinks I know more than I actually know. And I've continued to prove this decade after decade after decade, but over time it's sinking in the the fact that you know you're not really as smart as you think you are. It is okay to have a thing. There is wisdom in perspective. Um a way that I illustrate this this day these days is I let's just do it. Hey, Chris, what is two plus two? Four.

Chris Comeaux: 16:34

Oh now I am an accountant, so Okay.

Richard Mobley: 16:40

And we can get locked into the fact that it's data. Two plus two is four. Let me let me change the question just a little bit. What is four?

Chris Comeaux: 16:50

A number. An even number.

Richard Mobley: 16:52

Yep.

Chris Comeaux: 16:54

It's divisible by two.

Richard Mobley: 16:56

Six minus two.

Chris Comeaux: 16:58

Yeah. It's four.

Richard Mobley: 16:59

Um thirty-six divided by nine.

Chris Comeaux: 17:03

So it's much more complex than kind of what meets the eye.

Richard Mobley: 17:05

And in fact, there are an infinite number of answers to the what is four questions. Right. Minus a million plus whatever the right number. There's an infinite number, and so it's a perspective thing, and this is what I missed much of the time. I thought two and two is four. Data driven. Here's the answer. And in fact, what I've learned is I'm not arguing with the facts, and I'm not arguing with principles, and I'm not arguing with bedrock capital T truth. But many times there's way more than one way to get a thing done. And I missed that for a long, long time. And it uh I wonder what might have been different if I had been a little more open to what's for.

Chris Comeaux: 17:53

That's good. That's that feels like um the fruit of wisdom. What one of the quotes that I've carried it forward into my new year and my new journal is that only wisdom comes through reflection upon like a life lived is whatever, but reflected life, like in other words, reflecting back upon it is where wisdom comes from. You know, we could live day upon day upon day, but if you don't reflect back upon it, there's no wisdom to glean. But the more that you kind of glean, then the more wisdom there is. Does that feel true?

Richard Mobley: 18:25

Yes. Um, here's the way I say that. Uh, they people tell us experience is the best teacher, and I've proven that that's not correct. Okay. Evaluated experience is the best teacher. And so we must put aside time to sit and think what went right, what went wrong. D the the after action review, y'all do this in healthcare all the time. You you're you you've got systems for it. We often don't apply it to our own personal life.

Chris Comeaux: 18:55

Yep, that's well said.

Richard Mobley: 18:56

That gets a little close, doesn't it? Sometimes

Chris Comeaux: 18:58

very much so. In fact, we we led the year off with our um you usually we usually end the year with the one-word podcast. We started the year this year with the one-word podcast, and I shared a lot of tactics that I've just gleaned from amazing, wise people like you over the years that I've hardwired as part of my end-of-the-year practice, including kind of theming the new year. Well, let me ask you this question. Since you kind of talked about the what's next, but a lot of these CEOs that I know, they're approaching retirement. So, what does finishing well really look like in your view? And maybe that well is the last two or three years. And I know some that are in like a three, four, maybe even five year window.

Richard Mobley: 19:36

Do you find that people set and continue to work toward goals that they set?

Chris Comeaux: 19:43

It's a mixed bag. I mean, certainly it all depends, doesn't it? Yeah, it all depends. It's a do we talk more about it? Absolutely. Do people walk that walk? It's kind of a mixed bag, 50-50.

Richard Mobley: 19:54

Yeah, but there's that bell curve distribution of that population as well. We we all talk about goals, and some of us don't even like the word, and other people are so focused and driven for their goals. I I guess my answer to what you ask is I I think you gotta be sure that you're aiming for the right thing. Here's what I know. I climbed and climbed and climbed, climbed like crazy successfully, only to find I'd had my ladder leaned against the wrong wall. Okay, it didn't matter. The things the things that I was being successful and so I'm I I would encourage these folks to be successful at the right thing. Now, what is the right thing? I happen to be a person of faith who thinks that I was created for a purpose. I created on purpose for there's a thing in the in the universe that God created for me to do, not you, not these hundreds of people that are listening to us. No, Richard, you're you're my plan A. I I don't know if he had a plan B. I think he did. But but but I would say if you can get clear on what your plan A is during your work career life, in your after work career life, in your personal life, in your grandparent life, get clear on what that what that um that calling is, what really defines success. And then my experience is I I can't go at the same pace I used to go. The pace has changed. But I joke and say, but forward, moving forward is a pace. Sometimes it's slower, but it's that's okay. That's okay. But what matters is the intentionality. Am I gonna lay down and stop or am I gonna continue to pedal slowly? You know what happens to that bicycle when you stop pedaling and eventually you toast and soon you just fall over. And so forward is a face, and I would eng yeah, keep pedaling. Keep find the thing that energizes you now and that is making a difference in serving others and go do that thing.

Chris Comeaux: 22:13

Yeah, there's two things you remind me of. That guy, Dr. Thayer, who was my um my mentor, he prided himself on rattling people's cages because he was really trying to get you to think. And we were a lot of hospice leaders in the class I was a part of, and he used to say that um one of the diagnosis of someone who should be hospice appropriate, means which means you got six months left to live, is you're no longer learning. And he'd do that, but he'd do that to kind of get get us riled up and like, well, that's not what the regs say, but he was teaching us a great lesson. Like, if you're no longer, as you were saying, moving forward,

Richard Mobley: 22:45

yeah,

Chris Comeaux: 22:45

then you're you literally just gonna fall over.

Richard Mobley: 22:48

Um just a matter of time, isn't it?

Chris Comeaux: 22:50

Yeah.

Richard Mobley: 22:50

You're you're yeah.

Chris Comeaux: 22:51

The other thing we when you said it, I'm gonna push on it, and you tell me if I'm misinterpreting. You said, you know, God's created for a purpose. Would it be more accurate to say purposes? Because there might be a core kernel there, right? But the application of it morphs over time if you keep wrestling with it. Um, like I feel this is probably the best niche as far as to my purpose of what I'm doing now. But I always each year, as I keep trying to do that reflective practice, I see it morphing. It's more true today than it was a year ago, and I hope it's gonna be more true two years from now. And then, you know, I I don't plan on retiring. I hope I work forever. It just looks like a different version and certainly is gonna have to be a different speed. But I kind of see that purpose continually morphing. So I would say purpose is. Would you push back on that characterization?

Richard Mobley: 23:41

Absolutely not. Like, like which of us is a one-trick pony? Some you know, we're we're we're good at lots of things. Um most of us are good at lots of things. Sometimes I think it's fear that keeps us from stepping over into that. Or it's what society labels us. Oh, you're the CEO of a the of uh TCN. You you you can't go serve the boys' club or the YWC. You know, you can't do who are you? And so and so the crabs in the basket keep pulling us back down, although there are other things purpose says that we're good at. That that's one thing that strikes me. And the second thing that strikes me is the method might change. And so Andy Stanley said, Marry the mission, date the method. I like that. It's so good. I'm gonna do this thing, but technology changes. Like this this right here. Who who could have imagined 20 years ago? But here we are. Okay, so mission the same, method has changed. And so I think we can be flexible about the method. I've had healthcare people go very wiggy when I say something like that. I am not talking about bending the rules or or inventing your own tech no, I'm talking about following protocol, but learning and adapting and adjusting and finding a new way to

Chris Comeaux: 25:13

Love that you poked on first of all, love this this is brilliant. Um, but I love where you just took it about healthcare people because I think there's uh there's a shadow side to everything in life. This whole concept of evidence-based medicine, I think, has become a little bit of a a limiter. But yes, you don't want people inventing stuff on the fly, starting a new IV on you or something along those lines. But to be in that continual learning mode, there be may there may be new ways to do this even better. So it's not an either or I think it's a bit of a both end, but I'm with you. Help people, healthcare people get really tweaky when you say stuff like that because there's only one way. Well, you know, there wasn't one way back in the day. I mean, all these things we've inherited today in modern day medicine was because someone was in the learning mode that

why the hell do we keep killing? Why do these people keep dying? Well, we weren't washing our hands, and yes, we we haven't discovered all there is to discover. That's what you were saying earlier. That, you know, just we're say again. Yeah, what is four?

Richard Mobley: 26:10

Yeah, there's lots of ways to get to four. Some of them are legal, moral, and ethical. Okay, those are the ones we want to stick with. Yeah, your point is exactly right, Chris.

Jeff Haffner: 26:20

That is Part One of our conversation with Richard Mobley. Part Two drops this Friday.