

Transcript: The Power of Generous Leadership with Joe Davis

Chris Comeaux: 0:00

I want you to speak to what is your superpower.

Joe Davis: 0:02

Collaboration and knowing well how to team with others to get the best out of them and the best out of me. Daniel Lurry, who clear currently is the mayor of San Francisco, and by all reports, it's actually making a difference. He's a very good guy. I was like, he was the head of the big committee. He did say, he said, what would BCG? How could you help us? What do you know about football? I said, Daniel, you're gonna get, I'll find five young people who will work their heart off, you know, work their career off, and love football. And like a month in, he said, holy moly, these kids are amazing.

Chris Comeaux: 0:33

Well, and I just think of you know, great leadership changes the trajectory of things, and it impacts people's lives in beautiful ways. My mentor would always use the metaphor, you drop the pebble in the pond in the ripples. I love that metaphor.

Joe Davis: 0:44

Sharing a bit of yourself, you don't have to cry, I'm saying, but sharing that it inspires and motivates people to, you know, open up themselves, um, follow you, etc. So, you really can't make your fear, your ego get in your way if you're really going to grow and develop others. And I think a lot of us do, especially in the early years, because we either we think, who the hell are we? So, it's an imposter syndrome, or I want them to like me, or you just scare. But the sooner a leader moves past themselves, and understand it's their role to unlock all the great human traits and capabilities of their team, the sooner they get to the greatest results. Which means, first off, most importantly, love them, love them, love them, and build confidence, build confidence. I actually think my job in life is to ensure they be at their best.

Jeff Haffner: 1:30

And now our host, Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux: 1:34

Hello, and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. I'm excited today. We have a guest with us, and we have, as we always do, but we have a special guest today. We have Joe Davis. Joe was a senior advisor to BCG Boston Consulting Group, former senior partner

and chair of BCG North America, and he's also an author of this incredible book. Those watching online, The Generous Leader. Welcome, Joe. It's good to have you.

Joe Davis: 1:55

It's great to be here, Chris. Thank you for the kind words about the book.

Chris Comeaux: 1:59

Yeah, absolutely. And I'm I'm really thankful for to Mike Harbor for connecting us. Let me read from your bio so our listeners will learn a little bit more about you. So, Joe spent 37 years with BCG, Boston Consulting Group. Uh so you might remember I was at KPMG. B BCG is like the bomb, man. That's like that is a great consulting group. So, BCG uh co-founded and Joe helped co-found their Washington, D.C. office. He led Office Systems. He started BCG's NA Public Sector Business, led BCG North America, founded and chaired BCG Center for Inclusion and Equity. Joe earned his BA from Whitman College and MBA from HBS, Harvard HBS. Harvard School. Harvard. Duh.

Joe Davis: 2:42

Oh, if you knew that were teasing me. Either way, it's fine.

Chris Comeaux: 2:46

Joe was currently, I'd never actually saw the abbreviation before. Once you said it, that's why I said duh. Joe is currently serving a second term as Whitman's board chair. He's been married to Sarah for over 40 years. He has four children and nine, nine great, no, I'm sorry, nine grandchildren now. Not great. I'm not that old, you know. Yeah, you're not that old at all. It'd be a real blessing, actually, wouldn't it? Well, Joe, um, just what incredible gift to get to meet you again. I'm thankful for Mike for connecting us. And I mean, seriously, you worked at Boston Consulting, and um, I want you to speak to what is your superpower. It's a question I always love to ask our guests, and I'm especially interested to see how you would answer that question.

Joe Davis: 3:28

Okay. Well, you know, I obviously as time goes on, you think about questions like that. I think for me, and I'll tell you a story about where I really learned this, my superpower is probably collaboration and knowing well how to team with others to get the best out of them and the best out of me. And also going along with that, the understanding of where I'm not that good or as good as I could, and surrounding myself with people who are very good at that. And I'll tell you a story was it's it once I had my mentor, a very good guy. He said, Joe, you know, if I put you in a white room, four walls, no windows, no doors, and another person, this other guy at BCG, and gave you a very, very tough problem you had to solve. And that's the only way you get out of the room. This other guy, Philip, will get

out of the room every time. He said, it's gonna be hard for you to get out of the room. Whoa, okay, well, that's a slap. He said, However, when you get out of the room and I ask you both to get it done, and all it takes to actually do something, he'll never get it done. And you'll get it done 100% of the time. So, you know, then now there was there was a little bit of a feedback in there. You know, push yourself as hard as you can when you're thinking and analytical. But there was also a very strong message, your superpower, we didn't use that word 25 years ago, but your strength is collaborating and teaming with others to actually drive output and outcomes. And that um that was a very good lesson for my mentor, which you know just helped me to focus on what I could leverage best to perform.

Chris Comeaux: 4:55

There's so many pearls just in that one story. It's interesting. So, I I wanted to do more research with about you. And so, of course, I listened to your podcast with Mike Harbour, which was great. Um, but I ended up listening to your TED talk, and you've got some great videos on your website. We're actually going to include those in the show notes for folks. It's just a great way to get to Joe know Joe more. I'm gonna try to stay away from the things he talks about in the video. But listening to your TED talk about how you got the Super Bowl to San Francisco, like I was watching that, and I was listening with leadership ears and thinking, what an incredible heavy lift. It's not your typical TED talk. Um, but you know, I was listening with leadership ears. I don't know if you want to say anything about that, but I just found that one pretty cool and pretty amazing.

Joe Davis: 5:36

Well, it was well, of course it was fun. I mean, we um BCG helped the Super Bowl bid committee, then they got the bid for San Francisco for the 50th Super Bowl, so it was a big deal. Um, it was just really quickly, Daniel Lurie, who currently is the uh mayor of San Francisco, and by all reports, is actually making a difference. He's a very good guy, obviously. He was the head of the bid committee. I did he did say, he said, what would BCG, how could you help us? What do you know about football? And I said, Daniel, you're gonna get, I'll find five young people who will work their heart off, you know, work their career off, and love football. And like a month in, he said, holy moly, these kids are amazing. I said, I told you. You know, he didn't understand what BCG could be. But you know, to your point on the corrale, I mean, the one thing we had to think about is what could make San Francisco unique and different? Because the fact of the matter is it's all the owners' vote, you know, and they're billionaires and they and their spouses and maybe their families want to go somewhere. They want to go where it's warm. You don't see supposed in Minneapolis where you know New Orleans, Miami. It's also where there's a lot going on. I'll be polite and leave it that way. And so, you know, what were some of the, and that's what we really did have to, you know, obviously we said it's the most

technologic advanced because it's Silicon Valley, and we were building a new stadium. Daniel was leading this thing called Tipping Point, which is like Robin Hood in Sam in New York, a nonprofit that helps in the community. So, we made it one of the most philanthropic. So, we had four or five different angles that we had. And then, of course, to your point, everybody took a village, but we had to get the community. I mean, people had to donate money, etc., to back that up. It was quite an experience. I mean, you know, it was arguably a fun one, but a pretty cool fun one, you know.

Chris Comeaux: 7:20

Well, and I just think of you know, great leadership changes the trajectory of things and it impacts people's lives in beautiful ways. My mentor would always use the metaphor you drop the pebble in the pond in the ripples. I love that metaphor. Yeah. And I was just listening to it again. It's we're gonna include it in the show notes because I think in itself, it's interesting. This past year, um, UVA Darden School of Business did a case study um on actually Teleios, which is really cool for us and got some good recognition for our model. But you know, teaching in terms of cases, your little TED talk is like a cool little case. Because like in 10 minutes you listen and go, Well, where's the leadership lessons in this? Um, and then even I love how you like you know figured out what was the strengths of San Francisco, the selling points, getting the team behind the vision, but then you even alluded to all the details because the technology was the draw. So, then you had to make all this technology part of the game. I was thinking just sitting there thinking through all those details and how you covered that in 10 minutes. It was just it was a master class and communication in any case. So just high five on that. Oh, thank you. That's kind of you. Well, let's jump into some of the questions I want to ask you. So, your path to leadership really was unique and it was inspiring to me when I asked Mike Harbor, I'm like, who are some great people you met that maybe it'd be great I could do a podcast with? He didn't hesitate. You were at the top of the list, Joe. And so, once I got to meet you and just really appreciate our first conversation, so maybe share a bit of your background beyond the bio. But most importantly, what were the pivotal experiences that shaped your perspective on leadership?

Joe Davis: 8:49

When you say background, of course, one goes back to, you know, a child almost, but we don't have a whole hour. But it was interesting because thinking about that, and I it's funny, as a kid, I don't know like a six-year-old or eight-year-old, I used to say to my mom, Oh, I want to be the president of the United States. You know, some people say NBA, but I said something way beyond. And I also said I wanted to be on the cover of Time magazine. I had a mother who had some hard knocks, and she used to say, no, no, Joe, don't talk like that, or Joey. That can't happen. It's impossible. Which actually was, I mean, that was had some problems. I mean, I could I just drove myself to prove her wrong

for many, many years. So, there's some benefits, but the, you know, the drive and energy that came out of that. And then it, I just think I started looking for leadership roles. I had a paper out for six years. That's not leadership, but then I worked at restaurants once I could and was manager of the restaurant, etc. But if I think of experiences, I'm gonna name three if I may. You know, one is just the power of vulnerability or authenticity. And I know those are people don't like those words sometimes. I actually do. But there's a couple of stories, you know, when I was got married, I got married when I was 22, and I cried through my vows. And I was so embarrassed, you know, 22-year-old guy, he's supposed to be my wife was clear as bell and strong. But the number of people that came up to me afterwards, oh, that was so wonderful. The love in the room, you know, I didn't understand at the time. I was embarrassed, but I actually was, you know, spreading something. You know, it was actually a positive experience. And I got kudos for it, not dinged for it. And same thing happened. My mom died when I was 30. And of course, you can imagine when my brothers were up there speaking, and I cried the whole time. And um the minute the priest said, well, Joe, tears are the fountains of love, which I thought was a powerful message, as well as people came up again. Oh, to feel the love in the room. So, it was a powerful lesson to me that sharing a bit of yourself, you don't have to cry. I'm saying, but sharing that it inspires and motivates people to, you know, open up themselves, um, follow you, etc. That's one important experience. Um, can I tell you? Do you want two more or should I stop? I can't. Sure, I'm gonna go for it. Another one, I just think it's the importance of mentorship and really having someone's back. You know, it's cliché, but I said that a lot when I was running North America. But I had the same mentor that told me the White Room story. He and I were opening the Washington office, and we were on a flight, I think, up to our client in Toronto, and he said he was we're sitting next to you, he leans over and said, Joe, I got to tell you something. I had already moved my family to Washington from Boston. He said, I have got a job offer to be the president of one of our clients' companies. And of course, I thought old blank, like, what the hell? I moved my family. He said, but I decided not to take it. So, a lot of puts and takes, but you and Sarah have moved. I couldn't do that to you. We're gonna go ahead with yeah, I know. I mean, it inspires me to, it just kind of moves me to. So, talking about having your back, now he reminded me 30 years later, well, there's oh but there was more than just you, but that was what he told me, and it was one of his thought. So that really the mentorship and having one's back, you know, that was probably six years into the job for me. It meant a lot. And I'll tell you one other quick one or anything one. You know, the power of listening, I just well, two things. This one I probably learned later on, but you know, we all know we need to listen better. But I had one time there was a head of the general counsel at BCG. You know, like all of us, when you're talking to someone, you have an I once you feel you know where they're going, you like to cut in and you know, answer. And one time I did that to her, and she just she said, would you just shut up and let me finish? It's like it's like a slap in the face. And I she goes, you do this all the time. Let me finish. Then you

can answer. And even if I knew what she was saying, the point was you're disrespecting me, Joe. And that was you got me in a kind of a lecturing and emotional mode here, but that was, you know, what a lesson on just listen. Um, so those are three, you know, the uh authenticity and vulnerability I learned as pretty young, power of a mentor and really having someone's back and doing that for others. And just shut up and listen. You know, that's my new phrase. I said that the other day, just shut up and listen.

Chris Comeaux: 12:56

Mirror back, Joe, again, because it's you know, when you do the job that you do and you're talking and things like that, sometimes having someone to mirror something back to you is a gift. So, I hope this is a gift to you. A through line that just hits me from the first time I've met you, you first off, you have a natural humility. And the fact that you played at Boston Consulting Group in that, that is surprising. Not that I've met a lot of you know people from Boston Consulting Group, but you would kind of think that. But it's not only the humility, it's you're constantly in the learning mode. Uh I think the first time you told me a story, I'm gonna paraphrase you correct it, because I'm probably not gonna tell it right. But I think on your job interview or something, they said, um, we need someone who could communicate to the common people. That was my interpretation of what you were saying. Um, I may have misinterpreted,

Joe Davis: 13:41

but well, we have when the B I don't like to tell the story because it says, but the BCG guy said, Joe, you know, you talk at the level of all of our clients where we're up here in big fancy words. So, I don't want to disparage anybody, but you know, he admitted they are in big fancy words that nobody else understands.

Chris Comeaux: 14:00

Again, that was just so refreshing to me. And again, you're these wonderful, vulnerable quips that you have in stories. First off, it tells me that you know you're super humble, but you're also always in the learning mode. You take all of those into a learning mode. The fact that, you know, you said that um you cried in your wedding. I actually married my son and his now wife uh three weeks ago. I think I cried more than both of them, but they both were pretty teary-eyed, too.

Joe Davis: 14:23

Oh, it's so powerful when there's tears in those moments, you know.

Chris Comeaux: 14:26

Very much so. So, what maybe were some of your hardest lessons you learned early in your career that really kind of now feel like solid rock to you, maybe influence how you mentor others, lead yourself, etc. Okay.

Joe Davis: 14:41

You know, and there's as I think about that question, I'm gonna answer it in the context of the generous leadership thing, because I mean there's plenty of lessons about work hard. I mean, I learned that when I, you know, was a paper boy. I mean, those or you know, have a clear sense of where you're going and communicate over and over and over. I mean, I'm not good to I'm not skipping management lessons, but on the ideas of trying to lead in with generosity, which is really helping others grow. You know, I had a lesson, a weird, interesting lesson, it's very early on. You know, be careful who you might hurt with what you say, but direct, candid, honest feedback is very powerful. One time I was on when I was an assistant manager at a restaurant when I was 17, and um, I thought the owner called me who I was close to and said, well, how's it going there? And I started to disparage the manager, who, in my opinion, was to be a blunt dingbat. I mean, just wasn't up for the job. Well, I said, I went, Ron, blah, blah, blah. And the and the guy said, Joe, this is Ron. I was telling the manager himself. Thank God I was close to the owners of the company. And this, but you know, so there's two lessons. I mean, it was really embarrassing. So, you know, be more circumspect. But the other point, though, that I really did learn is, you know, direct and honest feedback. Because he, you know, after he was angry with me, he said, well, what are you saying about me? You know, their direct and honest feedback, that was a dumb way to do it. It was unintentional, is very, very powerful. And I, you know, learned many examples like that along the way where people, if you really want them to grow, you can't sit there and be afraid. You know, you can do what I just did. But you can't, you know, you can't be fearful of you know exposing yourself or looking like the bad guy. Um, that was one, you know, then linked to that is you know, really helping others really grow. And I was a Procter and Gamble. And I got promoted to two years, I was a sales guy, this is right out of college. So got promoted after two or three years to manager and had I had four reps, but three of them were career reps. That's all they did is sell all the time. They were 45 years old. I scared the death of them. And I'd ride with them every two weeks and say nothing because I was afraid, you know, shame on me. And then finally got to the year in review for one of the guys, I remember it, and I'd written down everything he should work on according to the manual, you know, what I saw. And I get like three minutes in, he cuts me and said, What the blank, Joe? You ride with me every two weeks, and you've never said any of this? What the and yeah, I was so, you know, and the truth was it was I was afraid. But the interesting lesson there is he wanted to feed, you know, he wanted feedback, and he even was willing and looking for from a 25-year-old snot-nosed kid. Now he can decide what's useful and not. So, you really can't make your fear, your ego get in your way if you're

really going to grow and develop others. And I think a lot of us do, especially in the early years, because we either we think who the hell are we? So, it's an imposter syndrome, or I want them to like me, or you're just scared. You're just a kid scared. So, you know, those are a couple of stories. Um I could tell, should I tell one more that thing that kind of influenced the way I lead? I think there's something about you really need to, as best you can, understand who is the other person, you know, not everything. Where are they coming from? What's their context in the business buyer? Maybe they're in the finance department. So, what does that mean if I'm in the sales department? And I gotta understand where they're coming from a little bit. Or it could be who are they? How many, you know, how many kids they have at home, you know, whatever is going on in their life. And I learned this really well in COVID when I was leading North America and we're trying to decide what to do for the you know, the team. And I'll say in North America, if you can believe it, 70% of my staff, my 5,000 people, were under 29. Wow. They're kids. You know, they are kids. Let's be blunt. Now, a 26-year-old may not think that, but when you're 60, you think that. And I remember one time, and I was trying to figure out, you know, we gave them all screens because that's what you need at home. But, you know, and we were trying to say, what else do we do? And one of my partners, colleagues, come out and said, Joe, you know, your senior partner, you live in a big seven-bedroom house. Actually, your kids are already out of the house. What the hell do you know about what they're going through? You better talk to some of them, you know, what and get their perspective. And I was very powerful. I talked to this one fellow. He was on his bed, and his laptop was in his lap, I could tell because it was moving and bobbling. And I said, what are you doing? What are you doing? You're on your bed. He said, Well, Joe, I'm in a little two-bedroom apartment. My bedroom, the living room, blends into the dining area, blends into the kitchen. One week I get the bed, and my wife gets the couch with the coffee table, and then we switch. And I'm sitting there changing bedrooms so I could feel like I'm moving around. So, what a powerful lesson on the importance of understanding as much context or the other person's perspective or lived experience, whatever words you want to use, as a leader to be able to make the best possible decisions, at least for them. You know, it's yeah. No, that's a lot of stories there, but you know

Chris Comeaux: 19:31

Yeah, the um the the Japanese call uh call it the gimbal walk, which is go see for yourself. Yeah. Um luckily, I got exposed to that. My second job after KPMG was with Cooper Industries, and that was all the time of Toyota production system and all of that. And the gimbal walk so stuck with me. And until COVID, every year I'd actually go out on patient visits um to go see because that way you go see for yourself what it really is like for the people doing the work. And interestingly, this January I now have on my calendar I'm gonna go out on a full week because it's been a while since COVID. And I'm like, I need to

get back to that. Um and it also it, you know, connecting with your people that way and seeing the work, it it breathes life back into your own connection with the purpose and of course with the people.

Joe Davis: 20:16

Yeah, I mean, we all heard the stories of it's so funny because you mentioned the Japanese, you know, the GM and Ford executives on the 60th floor, and they'd come to the basement and get into the car that was washed and cleaned for them, and I just had no clue what any of us were going through buying cars, what you just described.

Chris Comeaux: 20:33

Oh, you'll appreciate this. So, my mentor was Dr. Lee Thayer, he was Stephen Covey's mentor, uh, incredible guy. It was like sitting at the feet of Yoda for eight years. And one of the stories he told, he was doing a job for GM, and uh it was a bunch of consultants, and they actually were surprised that one of the key guys from Toyota actually agreed to come down, and this is when Toyota was kicking GM's butt for quality, all that stuff. And so, they had this big boardroom set up and all these like charts and graphs and all this stuff. This Japanese guy comes in and basically in Japanese says, What the hell is all this? And they're like, you know, looking at the charts and he goes, Where's the factory floor? Oh, and that that was such a powerful lesson.

Joe Davis: 21:09

That's a good story. That's a good story.

Chris Comeaux: 21:12

Your book, Joe, is titled The Generous Leader, which I I love the framing of that. And to be honest with you, it kind of threw me for a loop whenever Mike said, Here's this book. Um, what do you mean by generosity in the context of leadership? Because it is a bit of a head scratcher. Like, is he talking about giving them stuff? Yeah. And then and then how does this really differ from more traditional models of leading?

Joe Davis: 21:32

Yeah, okay. So, I mean, what I mean by a generous leader is one who gives of themselves freely, without expectation of direct personal benefit, to help others, you know, develop, grow, and thrive at their full potential. That's really what I mean. Now, and a couple of points. So that doesn't mean you know you hear head, heart, and hand. So, what I'm really saying is amplify the heart. You still have to have vision and strategy. It's I'm not saying all you can do is go around and be nice, but it's also important, it's not just about being nice, it's not just, you know, what you get unicorns and soft, fluffy clouds. And also, it's very clear, a leader has to get results. And Joaquin DeWato, CEO of J and J, I was talking to him

and his quote, at least I'll paraphrase it, you know, Joe, of course a leader has to get results. He said, But the sooner a leader moves past themselves, and understand it's their role to unlock all the great human traits and capabilities of their team, the sooner they get to the greatest results. Well, the fact of the matter is if your team is humming, you're going to benefit. Now, if they think you're doing it just for you, you know, then there's a problem. So, you know, that's um what I mean. I think when you say how does it differ, you know, the one thing is that I think you have to, when I say you have to care, I actually have to care about them actually growing. You have to really want them to grow. You know, it's not just about, well, if they're great, then I'm great and the business is great. That's fine, but it's not really gonna motivate, inspire, and move you to exceptional leader of letter level leadership. Um, so that's yeah, that's what I mean by it.

Dragonfly Health Ad: 23:07

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Chris Comeaux: 23:54

And just listening to you, I've had a busy week, a lot of travel, some presentations, etc. And something hit me this week. So, I grew up in corporate America. You know, I had some amazing why I why reason I think I just so connected with you. I had two managing partners at KPMG that I felt like were almost like fathers to me. They were incredible mentors. I was so blessed. Um, it was in the Houston office and just incredible mentors. But I grew up in that business world, which was very outcomes, results-oriented, focused, numbers. I'm a CPA by trade, et cetera. So, then I go into healthcare as a CFO within hospice. And just this week we stumbled into this in a presentation. And healthcare, it's we're all about the care and the connection of the people because it's a relationship-oriented business, it's a care business. But then we apologize that we need the outcomes. And it's interesting, I did a presentation with a guy this week, and we were talking about basically a metaphor that permaculture, which is a certain type of farming where you use the good ecosystem working together. So, he did the ecosystem, and I was kind of putting the leadership lessons into that. And right before we were walking on stage, I had this kind of epiphany of the farmer never apologizes that he has to get the harvest. That's the point. But in but in healthcare, we almost apologize that we have to look at the outcomes. So I find it paradoxical. I started my career, all results, maybe not so much care. Then it's all about the care. We forgot about the outcomes. And I hope maybe the next

part of my career is really what I think you're espousing, is the two together. And that to me, that is the almost gestalting gift of your book. Would you push back on that? Or do you feel is that on point?

Joe Davis: 25:28

I know I think it is the two together. I mean, you can be an excellent manager and a good leader with vision and strategy. And, you know, yeah, I care about my people and I pay them well and I, you know, congratulate them once in a while, and then good metrics and all that. But you know, I think it's a whole different level when you actually put the care or the that middle part in there and really how do I help you grow? Which takes some work on my part. I have to talk to you, I have to ask questions, I have to listen to you, I have to figure out what you're good at and what you're bad at. I have to be willing to help you grow and be harsh sometimes, but not be afraid that you're going to give me bad feedback, you know, et cetera. I think when the you get that package, you get truly exceptional leadership. Um now it does, yeah. Well, I'll stop right there. But yeah, I totally agree. And I actually also the other thing I will say is I actually think, you know, more and more it is required. And some people point out Elon Musk, and I can name other names, say, well, I don't get it. But, you know, sorry, you can name three or four people who somehow hit it with the industry they're in, and now they can do whatever they want to do. But, you know, most of us, ever since technology became so prevalent and then COVID, our work and life blurred that now we gotta kind of bring our human self to work a little bit. Otherwise, you just or you know, put another way, the days of you know um IBM, which is a great company, but remember it used to be white shirt, blue suit, everyone's the same, you're a cog at the wheel. Yeah, it was a great company, but those even for them, those days are over. You know, you have to recognize the person's a human and they want to see some humanity out of you if you want to be an exceptional leader. I'm not saying you can't do your job, you know, without this, but it really takes you to the next level, I think.

SONA Benefits Ad: 27:04

Good employers know that health benefits can make or break your business. But while employers are looking out for their employees' best interest, who is looking out for theirs? Sona Benefits is an independent pharmacy benefit manager who partners with employers to optimize their pharmacy benefits while supporting their business goals. By offering no-spread pricing, contract guaranteed rebates, and the Sonamax program, clients are regularly able to save 20% to 35% off their total drug spend. The result? Pharmacy benefits that improve employees' well-being and employers' bottom line.

Chris Comeaux: 27:43

We did a podcast with uh Daniel Pink earlier this year and on his book, A Whole New Mind. And um it's I had no idea the guy actually wrote it during the Bush administration. My bad. I love the book. I never actually went to the front and looked at the copyright date. It just blew my mind he wrote it when he wrote it. But his whole premise is exactly what you just said, Joe, is that, you know, like you know, I've grew up as an accountant, accountants, attorneys, all of those left-brain, very technical, knowledgeable jobs are going to be what's going to be severely impacted by AI. But the future superpowers are things like empathy, storytelling, the things that you're poking on. And that's he's kind of being that profit of point pushing us in that direction. So maybe this is a good segue for me to ask you this question. Again, just it's so phenomenal just who you are and just the spirit you carry yourself with. So, you spent a large portion of your life and career at Boston Consulting Group advising leaders of some of the world's largest organizations. How did that experience just shape your understanding of now what you're calling it generosity as a leadership principle? And maybe I'll put an add on. Is that something that you framed at the end, or were you using this phraseology throughout that whole kind of journey?

Joe Davis: 28:56

Well, that's a big question. No, I wasn't so clever as to be using it throughout the journey. You know, it's uh coming out of COVID, a lot of my friends said you should write about leadership. And I and so that, you know, I sat down. And as you know, you reflect a lot. So, I didn't think of that college when I write after college when I cried as an example of how to be vulnerable and the power of it. But if I reflected back, I thought, wow, think how that influenced the rest of my life. So, you know, if I think of your that leader, you know, like a lot of it's probably just the different people I observed. And I mean, I could go on forever, but a couple of things. I mean, one thing is we all just talked about it, but understanding where others are coming from, their lived experience, and some of the best leaders what goes to your, what'd you call it? Gimp Gimp Gimp what was Gimp

Chris Comeaux: 29:42

Gimbal Walk. Yeah, G-E-M-B-A, Gimbal Walk.

Joe Davis: 29:45

The best guys, some of the best guys, they didn't stay in the headquarters, they were out there. I mean, there was a fellow that took over Canadian Tire, uh, which is a dealership model. So, you could almost think of like a franchise, but it's more like a dealership. All the stores were open. And the first six months, people Office we're serving him complaining. Where's the CEO? Where's Steve? Well, he was out there with the dealers because that's where the action was. You know, and he was asking him questions. He was listening, he was learning, he was engaging, you know, he's showing those traits and I, you know, and

they shut up and listen, but he actually put himself out there. I mean, that was something I learned very early on, you know, the power and importance of touching those that you know matter in whatever role you've got, and actually asking questions and listening. And, you know, I can illustrate that. Well, it's actually interesting, the same guy. So Steve Bash, at one time, one of I was at a steering committee meeting for the client with them, and then one of the supply chain guy was doing a presentation in the steering committee. I had Steve Bash and other people in the room. And the CEO, Steve, raised his hand and asked the supply chain lead a question. And the presentation was going that direction. The question came in from the side. And you could see this guy, it's like you could see his brain say, Why the hell are you asking me that? I'm talking about this. And he looked over and he kind of said some lip service thing and went back to his presentation. And I watched the CEO's eyes, they glazed over. He did not listen to the rest of the thing. You know, and you could see, well, if you don't have enough respect for me, I am the CEO, but whomever I am as a human, to stop and say, well, why did you ask that, sir? I'm talking about A, and you asked about Z, what is the connection? And then maybe answer it or say you don't know. And you know, he just he said, I'm not gonna listen to you anymore. Oh, you know, it's just it's a different version of get out there and listen, but also, you know, make sure you really have the respect to listen and ask questions of others. Um one more story, or shall I stop? You know, one more story on this power of asking questions, which he told me, I didn't observe it, but he told me Scott Kirby is the CEO of United Airlines. And he said when he when people become vice presidents, he interviews all of them. I hope to God it's just to say, just to meet him. If he's approving all those people, that's too, but anyway, but it's another leadership lesson. Well, that's true. I think he's just meeting it. So, one time he was interviewing three vice presidents of operations, the guys that oversee the people on the tarmac, you know, they call we call them mechanics, they call them technicians. And he asked each one of them, what do the technicians need? And all three said, sir, they need more parts on hand. And you know, so it was like an epiphany for me because they want to do their job, they want to do it well. But you know, you've all been on a plane where the pilot comes, oh, sorry, we're yeah, we don't have a parts coming in from Dallas and you're in Denver or something, we're looking for another plane. Hang on. You know, it's like, really? Well, think about that mechanic. He actually, it's his job to get that in the air and he can't do it, or she. So, he thought, he said, this is nuts. And he said, I decided I will put more parts at the airport, not crazy anymore, but more than the finance people wanted to tie up the working capital. So, they can be motivated, inspired to do their job as best they can. But, you know, what a powerful, I thought it was a powerful story. A CEO asking a question about someone seven levels below him, learning something and taking action. So, these are just some examples from people I observed over the years, you know, actually probably the number one theme. And I think every executive I interviewed for my book said that. They all like to get out there, ask

questions, and listen. They walk the hall like that Japanese guy. What are we doing here? Why aren't we on the floor?

Chris Comeaux: 33:10

Yeah, my mentor again, that guy, Dr. Lee Thayer, he'd always say that the learning mode is absolutely critical. And he'd say that if you were trying to assess if someone was in the learning mode, watch their question to statement ratio. And so that always taught me a great lesson about great leaders do lead with questions. And and it's hard because we live at a time, the information age, right? It's all about knowledge and what do you know. But questions are life-giving. Statements usually stultify, they kind of stop things.

Joe Davis: 33:40

Yeah. That's actually very good. No, and you know, your point about you know everything, but the fact of the matter is because of what you all this data that's out there, you don't know everything.

Chris Comeaux: 33:48

That's exactly right.

Joe Davis: 33:50

You learn to ask and learn something, you're gonna be a little bit ahead of the next guy because you just learned something they don't know.

Chris Comeaux: 33:56

Yeah, I love that you said that. I can't remember if it was in one of your videos or if it was with Mike that it was such a great point that you know, even if you think you're the most knowledgeable person, you just have a small fraction, and then now knowledge is doubling. What are they saying? Every 30 days, it used to be every 90 days, it used to be every hundred years before that. So now the velocity is your own mission impossible. I heard other day that you know, once we get to AGI, someone asked the actual AI, like, how would you what is the rate of learning? Currently, it's about um is it eight years in a 12-hour period? But with AGI, it's gonna be a hundred years in a 12-hour period. That's mind-blowing. That just doesn't even you can't even compute what that means. Like, what were what was I doing last week? What was the world like a hundred years ago? And the knowledge could move that quickly.

Joe Davis: 34:45

It goes back to your point earlier about um technology, it's there, but the empathy and all that, you know, I think Court Ferry did some study. I should have read about it yesterday,

where us people, you know, workers, employees are willing to team with AI, you know, they can be, but if the boss is AI, they're not very happy about that.

Chris Comeaux: 35:06

You know, that's not something that boss is AI.

Joe Davis: 35:09

Then that no, it's like 75% of them said I'll work with an AI agent. You know, that's fine. But if it's my boss, it's like very small percentage are actually willing to do that. Because it can't show any empathy, or maybe it can fake, you know, but it can't ask, hey, how was your son last night? I remember you told me he was sick yesterday. How did it go?

Chris Comeaux: 35:27

Yeah,

Joe Davis: 35:27

simple question like that, very powerful.

Chris Comeaux: 35:29

Well, let's take it in this direction, because again, this is where I think healthcare leaders probably struggle the most. Um, healthcare leaders, all leaders are under intense pressure to deliver results. How do they balance that drive for performance with the call to lead generously without sacrificing one or the other? It's almost like drive for results, oh lose on the empathy. You're high on the empathy, we're losing on results. How do you how do you how do you let the baby

Joe Davis: 35:54

well, yeah, but let's remember how I define this. I mean, I define being a generous leader as someone who helps others thrive at their full potential. So, by definition, you're gonna get better results if everyone's on. I mean, it's just I don't know what to argue about. It's just a fact. Now, you may say I don't have time to get there, but it's not about, oh no, no, I've got to trade it off. It's just, it's just not. Now, you know, there's a handful of things you need to do. You we've talked about trading, we talked or listening, we talked about you know development. So, I I don't I just but you know, the other thing here is if you want to retain your best people, and maybe the markets are a little soft right now, but you and I have been through many times where people just can quit. Actually, the best almost always can quit. Right now, the market might be a little the world might be a little tough, but you know, if they don't feel like you're helping me grow or I'm growing, and or I have to trust the values of your firm, different point, you know, they're gonna leave. And you aren't gonna you aren't gonna get your results. So, I think spending the time to, you

know, connecting with your people is not an anti-result thing. I mean, I'll tell another Joaquin Duato, you know, on the ports of connecting and communication, he told me another story. He's CEO of Una of J and J, 100,000 people. And you know, he's got to connect with 100,000 people somehow. And he said very powerfully he told me a story like if he's talking to his people, talking, he's gonna get a town hall or what the like, he'll actually sit down. Either at first, he'll meet one-on-one with somebody who he trusts and say, What are people saying I'm saying? That's what he, when he first got the job. He said, Well, sir, they all say you want to cut costs. So, I never said that. I'm saying I want to reduce reduce the complexity that we have in this matrix organization. He said, Yeah, I know, that's what you said. Cut costs. So, you know, so and Joaquin didn't, I mean, of course, he wants to be efficient and keep it tight, but he wasn't out, he wasn't the new CEO trying to slash a thing. He wanted it to move faster. Or the other thing he does, and the power of connecting, which helps. And but I mean, part of that story is if you're saying message A and they're hearing C, you're not driving the results. I'm sorry. You're just not so get the message right and spend the time to find your guy who tells you what your message actually is saying, or what else he'll do. If he's gonna give a town hall, he'll bring a team of people in, a group of people, and practice. And he'll say to them, what did I say to you? And you know, they might have said, well, he might have said glasses, and they said, oh, yeah, you talked about the spectacles. So, he'll change the word to spectacles because that's the word, that's a stupid example. Or then you'll say, well, what if you go home tonight and tell your family what Joaquin said today? The CD said, what did I say? And he'll see if it's even close to his message. And if it's not, he'll replay it. So, you know, that part of the important, part of the generous that it does is try to connect with you, so you hear me. Um, and that takes a little bit of time, but I think that's direct results oriented. You know, the other way has no results.

Chris Comeaux: 38:41

That's so good. I'm actually I'm gonna add that to my I love that. What are people saying I'm saying? Yeah, that is a that is an awesome rounding question.

Joe Davis: 38:48

Yeah, well, I had another boss who would never let anyone read the consulting guy with the team, say, okay, now what did I ask you to do? And he'd ask everyone to play it back. And in consulting, you recall the only thing you don't have is time. Because the clients don't change the deadline. No, we're paying you a lot of money. This is a deadline. So, someone's gonna be up all night if somebody else screws up. And so, he'd spend the extra five minutes and get it, make sure everyone had it right. You know, and even then, well, that's taking time. I don't have time. Okay, in the meantime, they go waste a day.

Chris Comeaux: 39:17

That's that's really good. Well, so maybe let's break it down a little bit more. So, if we break down, of course, I wrote my book, The Anatomy of Leadership, trying to create an anatomy of what is leadership. If we did the anatomy of a generous leader, mind, heart, hands, what are the key traits or practices that would define such a leader in your book?

Joe Davis: 39:35

Well, I mean, first off, there's many books. There's many books on the manager part, but of course, you know, the head, you gotta have a vision, a strategy, and some plans, you know, etc. I think I'll go to the hands next. You know, you gotta be able to set targets and metrics and process to get in there. And then and then with the heart, I mean, and also great communication. So, I'm gonna then the heart, I think you have to add to it, okay, I get it. My people actually matter, and I need them having too to make all this work. And then, you know, I yeah, I won't go through, you know, you're we've already talked about it, but in that context, you know, generous communication, which we just gave example Joaquin, being curious and important listening, you know, welcoming everybody. And by that I don't mean I'm an inclusive leader, and I don't mean necessarily the DEI. I actually personally do believe that's what I do, but also like if you have a team meeting, bring some people that aren't on your team from a different department, bring someone junior in the room, you get new inputs. Um, of course, we talked about recognition development and we talked about being a little bit vulnerable. The other thing I think on the heart side is, you know, I use small acts, big impact. And you know, we all know stories. You get an email from your boss and say, hey, job well done. You love that email, you know, you get a raise, you love it for a minute, but oh wow, I got a pat on the back. You know, and that's pretty easy, small act. It has huge impact on people.

Chris Comeaux: 40:56

Yeah. I've so seen that so many times, Joe. I usually will say the two things that fall off leaders' plates when they get really busy is communication and reward and recognition. What are the two of the most important things sometimes, especially when things are crazy, when you think people could go no further, is communication and reward and recognition. Yeah. So, Joe, I'm curious, what advice would you give emerging leaders, maybe particularly in those in these what I would call purpose-driven sectors like hospice, healthcare, about how to embed generosity in their leadership DNA from the beginning and maybe how to sustain it over the course of time.

Joe Davis: 41:34

Well, and you mean in their DNA, not their organizations.

Chris Comeaux: 41:37

Yeah. Well, you know, start with that, and then maybe if you want to take it to the organization, that's good.

Joe Davis: 41:41

Well, I think, okay. I mean, sorry, but I think first you have to decide in your heart, do you really truly want to grow your team? If you don't want to grow them, if you just want to do all the, you know, be an individual contributor, but if you want to inspire them, if you want to push them to perform at your best and build followership and get the results that come with that. I mean, you have to think about it, I said, that's the way I'm gonna get it done. I'm gonna have the best. Now, if you're a coach, you know you think that way, because the team's doing everything. You're just sitting on the sideline. But you know, in business, sometimes, especially when you're new, if you have to, you can do it all. You know, if you're two people that you have at the beginning, screw up, you can stay up all night and fix it. Once you have 20 people, you can't fix it. Um, so I would first, you know, make that commitment to yourself. Okay, I really need this team humming, and therefore they need to be growing in their performance, and that's my job as a leader. Then I think the advice I'd give is just, you know, I have seven traits. There's other people who have similar themes that have other traits, you know, similar, but they're all similar. I would just pick one or two traits that you start in your career to build into it and make a habit. And quite frankly, for me, I would start with this be curious and generous listening. And we've talked about it over and over, but and it's just every leader does it. They know to go talk to people they don't normally talk to ask questions. I have a phrase I used in consulting, engage a skeptics and uncover the nose. I tell our teams, because you know, someone in the client knows something you don't know that's making it not work. And our job is to make sure it works, or at least suggest it works, right? So, engage the skeptics and uncover the nose. And almost, and it's very rare the knowologist, quote unquote, is just a blocker. Maybe one out of a thousand is a pain in the neck. But usually they know something. Well, you don't understand the door opens the other way. You can't have what you want. It's you know, so you the littlest thing. So, I would pick one or two. The other thing you and I just touched on is this whole idea of small acts, big impact. I mean, make a commitment that you're gonna know your 10 people's birthday. Now, write it in the calendar. You can cheat, it's okay. And either text them, email them, or say happy birthday if you're live on their birthday. Very teeny act. They will never forget it. And you do it three years in a row, they're gonna think you're incredible. So, I think I would just pick a couple of these things, but you gotta make, don't say I'm gonna be incredible the first day. You don't have to do what Joaquin's doing and have you known panels set up to review you. But just ask questions and listen and um and and you know, maybe find a few small acts that you're gonna make a habit in your life that are gonna mean inspire people.

Chris Comeaux: 44:14

Well, you know, I didn't tell you I was gonna ask you this one, but it just your life fascinates me how you spend a lot of time with your kids and your grandkids, um, kind of going from child and grandchildren's home from home. You're gonna walk out of that room, we're doing the podcast, and you're gonna interact with your family. How does Joe doing this, how is he different than when he starts interacting with his grandkids? And maybe this is my question behind my question. I I feel like I'm getting to know you well enough that you don't compartmentalize these incredible principles, they carry over to the rest of your life. How do you do that? Because I think there's some probably pretty cool pearls. Um, we just did a podcast with Randy Gravitt, who actually taught leadership at Chick-fil-A, and this was the whole punchline. He goes, he actually coached people, won the Super Bowl, and one of the guys he had horrible family life, and this was Randy's line. He said, you win the Super Bowl and you lose at home, I think you still lose. You gotta win at both. Yeah, and so I'd love to hear your answer to that question.

Joe Davis: 45:14

Well, of course, I don't think I changed much going from one to the other. Um, I mean, I do have actually maybe I'll make one point, but but I think with my grandchildren in particular and my children, I actually think my job in life is to ensure they be at their best. Which means, first off, most importantly, love them, love them, love them, and build confidence, build confidence, build confidence. That's my kids of feedback. Dad, we always believed we could do whatever we wanted because that's all you told us we could. Now it didn't always work, and but that's life. But and we knew you had our back every minute of the day. Um, so that part translates, and now it's I'm trying to translate to my grandchildren. I think another important thing, though, is um is the whole thing about listening. And you know, especially in a marriage, sorry you asked this question, but you know, and I like that shut up and listen was a reminder to me. Or another time I I learned at work, we give feedback, and it's gonna be harsh, annual feedback to the partners, and sometimes they call me up and someone would be in tears. I finally learned, or actually, I started answering with some ideas, and the person says, I don't want you to tell me what to do, I just want you to listen. You know, and that's I mean, I think our spouse, men, I will generalize, men tend to want to solve. And your spouse tends to want you just to listen and then shut up. And so that's what that's what I keep working on. I'm getting better now. I've actually 67 years and 44 years of marriage, but it took maybe 30 years. But, you know, so some of those principles, but that one in particular, I I will tell you, I'll show you this little thing during COVID. He just you can't say it says, be calm, carry on, don't uh be short with people, even if you're tired. Because the one thing I don't I know I can be short and work because it's just like you know, work is I don't think they even think I'm short, but my wife one day during COVID, because she heard me work every day, she came in and said, you are a jerk, buddy. You've got to walk down. You can't you're tight talk like

that. So, I think I think I tried to balance some of the nicest of home to the work. Although work, time's short, you gotta move. I do know that.

Chris Comeaux: 47:11

That's that's our biggest challenge, right? Is that that's a constant creative tension. Is I always say that is the it's a great leveler because we all have the same amount of hours in the day. The answer is you can't work 24 hours a day, but how you use time is so critical.

Joe Davis: 47:25

Yeah, yeah.

Chris Comeaux: 47:26

Well, final thoughts, Joe. I want to give you final thoughts.

Joe Davis: 47:30

Oh, well, this well, thank you for having me. This was really great. I um, you know, I do hope. Someone I I said to someone I was writing this book, it's hard to write a book. And Brene Brown sends millions, Adam Ground says millions sells millions, Daniel Pink. Who am I to write a book? And he said, Joe, if you move eight people to change their leadership just a bit, it's a good thing. And then you get your ripple that you talked about. So, I do hope that someone, eight people enjoyed this show and pick one little trait. If nothing else, ask questions and listen, or recognize someone's birthday, you know, but pick one trait to add into your leadership. It'll make a difference for you, and I won't know it, but I'll feel good too.

Chris Comeaux: 48:08

That's so good, Joe. Actually, and I I heard you say that. I can't again, I can't remember if it's a video or if it was with Mike, that even if even if you just sold eight books, and so that that spoke to me because I don't know what I thought when I wrote my first book. And they I said I think I heard that if you sell 500, you're actually doing pretty good. And so, I just got past a thousand, so it's like, hey, well, then it's like double. Um, and so, but thank you. That was actually a gift whenever you said that.

Joe Davis: 48:33

So, you feel good. 247 is the average business book sold.

Chris Comeaux: 48:37

247. Okay, great.

Joe Davis: 48:38

Well, then we're which means most people buy sell one or two because Adam Grant sells a million. You know what I mean?

Chris Comeaux: 48:43

Exactly. Exactly.

Joe Davis: 48:45

So, a thousand's damn good, Chris.

Chris Comeaux: 48:47

All right. Well, well, Joe, you're awesome. Thank you. You're really a treasure. In fact, I hope you could hang on because I have a couple of thoughts of maybe ways we could keep collaborating. Sure. Um, keep doing the great work you're doing. And imagine those can't wait to see those grandkids. There's a young lady that we bumped into. She actually was in the class that our case was presented at UVA, and she's gone to Boston consulting. Oh, cool. Well, good for her. Yeah, she's incredible. So, it just tells me a lot. Again, I've always had the greatest respect for BCG. You know, working at KPMG, we were kind of a little bit of competitors. What we were trying to be back in the day was to get up to that level of actually BCG. So, and now that I know I've met the man, I understand why you were the benchmark.

Joe Davis: 49:27

Oh, thank you. It's just great to be here.

Chris Comeaux: 49:30

Well, to our listeners, we appreciate you. At the end of each episode, we share a quote, a visual that possibly will create a Brain bookmark, a thought prodger about our podcast subject to further your learning and your growth and thereby your leadership. What we're going for is like a brain tattoo. We're wanting it to stick. Be sure to subscribe to our channel, The Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode. Um, we're going to give you the links to all of Joe's resources, that TED Talk, his book, his website, and also always you could get a link to our book, The Anatomy of Leadership. Tell your friends, your coworkers about this podcast. Pay it forward to them. We want you to subscribe, don't want you to miss an episode. So, thanks for listening to The Anatomy of Leadership. And here's our brain bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner / Brain Bookmark: 50:10

"You have to recognize the person is a human, and they want to see some humanity out of you. If you want to be an exceptional leader. So, ask questions and listen." by Joe Davis.

