

## **Transcript: Part Two | From Zombies to Zealots: Cultivating Passion and Purpose in Healthcare Leadership**

### **Lead With Purpose Program Invite**

**Chris Comeaux** 0:00

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### **Pharmacy Benefits Sponsor Message**

**Sona Benefits Ad** 1:15

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### **From Zombies To Zealots Setup**

**Jeff Haffner** 1:57

Welcome to TCN talks, and Anatomy of Leadership. We continue the conversation with Tasha Walsh and Darelyn "DJ" Mitch in Part Two From Zombies to Zealots, Cultivating Passion and Purpose in Healthcare Leadership. And now, here's Chris Comeaux.

**Chris Comeaux** 2:17

So as we go to this next segment, DJ, I have a feeling you want to comment into that. I feel like you're kind of chomping at the bit, and we're just talking about how sometimes, how disempowering sometimes some of the regulations in healthcare. And yeah, Tasha's alluding to, but it's so surprising, what? That people are leaning into their energy. Take it from there. What is it that is so surprising and how easy, but yet how hard it might be for people to take your work and make a difference with it?

### [Three Levels Of Consciousness](#)

**DJ Mitsch** 2:45

You're really good at this, Chris. You're noticing everything. Something that Tasha reminded me of is something we teach regularly, which is work that came out of the three columns of consciousness from Dr. Carolyn Mace and Sacred Contracts, and that we live our lives in three levels of consciousness. And one of the things I would map here around staying in the zombie state or the zealot state is this. In the three columns, the first one is tribal consciousness. We are contagions, and we are paying attention to parental voices, whether they're from our past or whether they're from our collection, our communities, or whether they're from our organizations. So there's the tribal consciousness, and it simply is what other people want from me. I have to respond a certain way, so I keep my job. It keeps us rooted in fear. The middle consciousness, the second dairy consciousness, is that we move from what others want from me to what I want. We see that at two years old, we see that at 12 years old, we see that at 21, right? We see it throughout a lifetime. But organizations have life cycles. And so when people begin to individuate around us and they're not signing up for stupid stuff mandates that are being offered to them, um then it's like they begin to look at it's not this and it's not that. And then they begin to look into the bigger equation. One of the reasons coaching came online is we work in the spaces between these levels of consciousness. And the third level is symbolic. And symbolic consciousness is really what is calling me? What is it that I can no longer ignore? People who sign up to practice medicine spend 35 years in education and in internships and in residencies, and before they ever get out on their own and start practicing, that's a lifetime. People who I've met who work in hospice, including beautiful Tasha and many like her, um, this is a calling. It's something they could not not do. It's symbolic work. And so what happens when you bring them back into tribal consciousness is there's such a

disconnect between what wants me, what I want, and what they want. And it's hard to keep going back and bumping up against what others need and want from me is a thing I have to pay attention to, particularly when it's stupid stuff, when it doesn't make sense. So one of the first things to do if you're leading in a hospice organization or any healthcare system is to pay attention to what A is not being said, but is the undercurrent and the energy, give language to the energy, and B, look at why people don't do what they do. This is a calling. It's too hard not to be something that they commit to at a high level every day. And we're just we're destroying it, we're destroying their desire to do it based on how we're showing up with regulations and compliance. When compliance is the language, listen to the language. What are you asking people to do? Comply instead of create. So if we were if we were given this mandate and we created around it, what would we do that's better than what we've been given? Right? This epic system, some of the electronic management systems I've seen go in the hospital system, it brings things to a complete halt. It has a great intention, it has great ribs, but the body that happens around it is like really interesting to look at. So I think we've got to get better about how we integrate system stuff so that the system stuff doesn't lead the human. Otherwise, why?

**Chris Comeaux** 6:33

So if so, if we bring to the surface what's not being said, I love that. Is it also as simple after that, DJ, of just if we can connect some dots and make some sense of it of this is why we need to comply yet create? I love the lexicon you're using. Is that how to navigate such a tough situation? Because I think there's Tasha and I could probably go through a litany of like 20 just right off the top of our head scenarios like this that are playing out. And I think the lit leaders are kind of leaning forward right now, going, oh my God, yeah, we've got this one going on right now. And so, so again, I heard you say, bring to the surface what's not being said. And what else can they then do with that?

**DJ Mitsch** 7:15

Well, let's just take a for example. Give me a for example, Chris. You said you could think of uh, you know, a dozen scenarios right now. Give me one scenario, you or Tasha, that is common to everybody that's really, that really kind of is in the way.

## [Audit Anxiety And Documentation Pressure](#)

**Chris Comeaux** 7:28

Yep. We're Tasha, or I have a correct top of my head. We have an audit that's coming in. They're basically saying making us feel bad about keeping this patient to live longer than they were supposed to. Now we're actually nitpicking all the documentation that paints the picture around that. And and there's all sorts of back and forth going on related to

that. And wringing of the hands, are we going to get paid now retrospectively on that patient? And um, so Tasha, I don't know if you'd add anything to that, but that's probably a very likely scenario. Many leaders are navigating in like five different, 10 different flavors of that.

**Tasha Walsh** 8:00

Yeah. And and then the impact on the direct care staff, because then it's like their documentation gets even more scrutinized. And um, and and sadly, they have to focus on all of the negative that's happening. So if they go in and someone's having a good day, they can't document that because that's going to make them seem ineligible for hospice. So yeah, it's a big problem.

**DJ Mitsch** 8:25

Yeah. So there are two domains of being. And you all, Tasha hears me teach this all the time. And I'll tell you, this came out of the Course in Miracles, is my language around it, my lexicon around it. But I will tell you that it's true from tribal consciousness to you name it, it's true. So I'm gonna ask the simple question as if I were coaching you, Chris, and Tasha, but what are you most afraid of in this scenario? What are you most afraid of?

**Chris Comeaux** 8:53

I think for most people, they're afraid they're gonna get a lot of money clawed back, and that's gonna create some financial issues, and they're probably afraid. Let's say this gap has been 18 months from the care occurred. Do we have a lot of other unearthed situations like that that are ugly Easter eggs that might be sitting in our documentation? Tasha, would you say it differently? What else are we afraid of?

**Tasha Walsh** 9:16

I think what I'm afraid of is that the scrutiny required on the um direct care workers is just gonna drive them further into burnout.

**DJ Mitsch** 9:27

So I'm gonna ask you to play for a minute. And as Einstein said, play is the highest form of research. So let's play with you standing in the space of uh, we'll say the container of love, right? In that dimension where you can create anything. How would you get ahead of all of that? What would you create that would be a container so big that that stuff becomes a non-issue?

**Chris Comeaux** 9:52

Our first reaction and Tasha, you I'll go, you go, um, is can we connect the dots in this situation of how do we turn this into a beautiful opportunity to learn so we could better care for our patients going forward?

**DJ Mitsch** 10:05

Yeah. Yeah. And not only care for them, but make sure that they feel the love you bring to the table. So it's not also pedestrian and all the effects of, you know, the impact of your systems on the systems and the families and all those you touch. I love that. Tasha, what would you add?

**Tasha Walsh** 10:27

I think I would want to create a system that takes away the focus from making sure that all of the boxes are ticked to um ticking the boxes while loving the patients.

**DJ Mitsch** 10:44

Yeah, good.

**Tasha Walsh** 10:45

So that it's a good thing.

**DJ Mitsch** 10:46

So the game becomes yeah, the game becomes we tick boxes first in the way we look at the patients, knowing that this patient is going to probably present this way, this patient could present this way. And when we have good days, we're gonna include them for everybody's sake so that they know the end of life is has this beautiful cycle and that grief holds every emotion, everything travels in and out of grief. So, what if we created a different container and we lead the way for all of health care and hospice?

**Chris Comeaux** 11:17

What strikes me, DJ, I love this role playing. We didn't actually plan on this, but or at least you may have planned on it. Um and so this is cool. One of the things that occurs to me is that um, so it's how do you not be angry in a situation like this where it feels like people that don't really understand, they're they're not about this care and compassion that we're really providing. They're almost getting paid as mercenaries to come and make our life miserable. Yep. That's one interpretation of all that. Um, how do I bring love into a situation like that when in like if I met him in a dark alley, you know, I might take them back behind the woodshed, so to speak.

## Anger As Data And Fuel

**DJ Mitsch** 11:56

Well, you know, with your military background, I'd be I'd be scared of you. Um here's what I would say: all emotions have value. Be angry, be be in your rage about some of these things, because until you are, you cannot catalyze what needs to be catalyzed in the system. If you continue to be complicit with a system that is so dysfunctionally enabling something or someone who doesn't get it right, this is almost civil disobedience, right? If you cannot be in your anger and get smart, every time I've been angry in relationship with something or someone, I've gotten better, I've gotten smarter. So be angry and let it feed your smarts.

**Chris Comeaux** 12:41

So I was gonna ask you about that. Like, you know, is there a place for maybe what might be perceived as negative emotions? Is there a place for anger? Is there a place, well, anger's the one that's coming? Like, how do you take emotion like that and bring that into the wonderful coaching you provide?

**DJ Mitsch** 12:57

Yeah, I think, you know, there's there are a lot of ways, right? Um, one is that you honor that our emotions, our bodies sense and read the energy around us first. That is our first sensing of who people are and the experience we're living in. It's what we feel when we walk into a hospice, it's what we feel when we walk into a hospital system into an emergency room. We sense things before we can give them language, which is again a magic wand. We got to give language to what people's experiences are. The minute you are even in your primary relationships, your spousal relationships, the minute you say I'm angry and you claim it, what happens? You start a different dialogue. I would say you have to allow every emotion to be a beautiful part of this continuum. It's not stacked, rank stacked. It's just real. And people in in my book, there is a graph that I created based on Kugel Ross and a lot of other things, bridges um curve, change curve, all all that all coaching is about change. But until you see that when people start being resilient, resilience, and people ask for resilience in organizations, that is the slippery slope to total disconnection, disembodiment to zombie-ing out. The resilience is the piece. If you are trying so hard to keep your upper lip and to keep a positive attitude and just layer that, slather that on top of all the negative emotions, eventually it's a stink pie. You cannot handle that for very long. So I invite all of it, just as you do in hospice. One of the things that makes hospice so beautiful, it's it's a container. And I'm speaking almost with emotion from my experience of having my dad in that in the care of a hospice organization for four months. And to watch what happened, both with the insurance companies, all the things that you have to factor in that nobody knows about to the

sibling conversations, to the planning, to the church people and the music and everything that happens in it. You have to include it all. And in the end, grief becomes gratitude. We are grieving the loss and the sanity of healthcare as it was originally designed. We are grieving the loss of that. And we need to be very clear. And I mean, we, as in everybody who is not only hospice leaders, but everybody who's listening to this who leads anything, and we all do. Um, you we have to give language and make requests of people that we haven't been able to articulate yet. And in that, I think there's going to be some freedom.

## **Authenticity Pushback And Courage**

**Chris Comeaux** 15:43

I love that. You know, Tasha, it's making me reflect. The first time I met you, there's I love your energy, by the way. So major kudos, Tasha. There's something about your energy. So how do you take, like, how do you take what DJ teaches into your organization? Because when I think about what we do, right? There is the full range of emotions that we're walking into, and then our people are living their own lives. We're getting um now a younger workforce, millennials, and so they've got all the challenges that I now got 30 years in this industry, and I look back and go, how in the heck did I do this work with five kids and all the crazy stuff that we've done? And so how do you reconcile this full range of emotions and bringing it into the work and what we're working into and how you tie in what DJ teaches?

**Tasha Walsh** 16:28

Well, I think, you know, what one of the things that I um really try to encourage in in my organization is um for people to be be true to themselves and true to what and be authentic with what they are feeling. Um, and that, you know, the I mentioned earlier pushback. Pushback is okay. Pushback is an indication that somebody cares about something, at least enough to question, or at least enough to ask, or at least enough to say, wait a minute, did do I really have to do this? You know, and and so sometimes that that anger is because there's something that we care about, right? So what is what is at the core of that? What's behind the anger? And I I love the the um, you know, the origin of courage is rage of the heart, right? So if you can help someone identify, yes, I am angry about this, and this is super frustrating, and I can't believe my coworker forgot to do this or whatever, or you know, I can't believe the hospital is sending us another emergency referral for someone who's you know not even going to make it home. And and yeah, that is frustrating and that creates anger. And so, what's behind that? What's at the heart of that? And how can how can we transform that into courage, the courage to take some action, the courage to have a difficult conversation, the courage to allow space for someone else who is having a really bad day? Um, so really it's about how do we um, you



know, and I'm I'm kind of thinking back to my superpower of balancing on the cusp, right? It's kind of like how how do we take those, those negative emotions and those, and I'm not, I don't even want to call them negative emotions because that's a label, right? They're just emotions. And if we can take all of them and some of the ones that bring up our own fear and looking at, okay, well, this person is acting angry, this person is behaving in this way, this person is expressing this really strong emotion. What's being tapped in me that might be bringing up something for me that then I can do some work on myself, even in even in the moment of just saying, okay, let me let me breathe before I react, so that then I can respond and hold space and show up in the way that I really want to as a leader to help this person with what they're dealing with. So then ultimately we can be helping the people we're here to help.

**Chris Comeaux** 19:17

That's so good. And DJ, I didn't ask you this, but one of the ways that Dr. Thayer would talk about masterful communication, he would call it managing the meaning of things. And I'm listening to you and Tasha thinking, oh my God, that's what you're like masterful at is managing the meaning of things. That's not spin, it's almost like unearthing the real essence. And like listening to Tasha, never thought of it this before. I grew up in South Louisiana, and so you know, great food and lots of spices. Like the range of emotions is like all these different spices. And um, Tasha, there's something I was actually thinking of when our kids were young and I was working on my masters of leadership, and I was sitting on the couch and they were watching Kung Fu Panda, and there was this funny scene in Kung Fu Panda where they fire a cannonball at the panda, and he takes the cannonball and he redirects the energy and there's this masterful, and it's like the hero moment of the story. And I'm hearing you talk about it, it's almost like instead of taking that blunt uh hit on the emotion, how can you take it and help it in its potential? Like, where is this coming from? Validating it, but then maybe bring it in a better place. Again, I don't know if I'm managing the meaning well, if all of that resonates with you, but these were all the visuals coming to my mind as I'm listening to you two kind of bander back and forth. Is that on point, or would you push back or you would slightly um remanage the meaning in a different way?

**Tasha Walsh** 20:43

No, for me, it I think that hits really well. And um as you were talking, Chris, what I was thinking about is the magic of that energy redirection. Um for me, I believe, has to do with taking a breath and listening and really listening.

**DJ Mitsch** 21:02

And I would add, you know, in in martial arts, right, uh the master is the one that takes the object or the force or the blunt blow and just moves with it to transform it into something



else, right? And so it's almost like you're doing that with language. It's you're taking the emotions, you're taking the energy, you're taking what people cannot language and helping them find language and then move it, shift it so that it becomes something that they can see. And once they see it, particularly when they're in symbolic work, they will not give it power over them. The minute we language fear, it loses its power over us. The minute we language rage, it loses its power over us. So I think we need to begin to look at what needs to lose its power over us. And if I were you, I would have meetings around the things that are being pushed back into. The organization from government sources or oversight and begin to ask different questions and to look at what do we need to move with and transform and what is it that we need to articulate? And can we have a pity party around this for five minutes and then can it be over after we have some time creating how we're going to hold it? So the experiences that you have, you you need to honor all of them, including the angst and the you know, the feeling that you have of of anger and fear. Because it's real, but I love that what's underlying all of this is your commitment to a mission, to have people see the end of life as part of a life cycle that is worth reverence and honoring and beauty.

**Chris Comeaux** 22:46

Yeah, which is why this is so important. And then also what's occurring to me is some of the unfortunate stuff that's gotten the national press is some of the fraud and the profiteering, which is so other than what we're actually describing, um, shouldn't even be part of kind of this um movement, this field. And I I love Tasha's coaching earlier. I'm not going to call it an industry. Um, Mark Cohen, who used to be on this podcast, used to always kind of reinforce that. And I think we've kind of slipped into using that a little bit to describe this broad space. I like better movement or field. Field's probably best because movement sounds like we're still getting it together. There is this amazing body of science behind us. So it is probably more of a field today. Well, let me uh one final question for both of you that I'm gonna ask you both final thoughts.

## [Culture Leaders Tolerate Or Shape](#)

**Chris Comeaux** 23:32

One of my favorite leadership principles is culture is really not what the leaders say. It's what leaders repeat repeatedly tolerate, celebrate, talk about. So, what leadership behaviors either create zombie or zealots?

**DJ Mitsch** 23:49

First, there is there's such a rich platform here, and there's so many different angles that we can take with the industry and the profession of leadership. And what what you're

really talking about is is a big container. And so I want to honor that. I'm gonna go back to something that a friend of mine said on her deathbed after she had been given 90 days to live and live for four more years to be defiant and to give me insights on what it looked like in the afterlife as she stepped in and out of it. And she said to me, friend, focus, focus, focus. This is not pocus pocus. And in the invitation for that, you know, because we played with each other even on her way out. Um, what I got was I needed to really be clear and in the clarity of my contribution every day, I could see you know what needed to happen in the space between me and someone else. And it was just to really focus on to be present, to hold experiences for people. Um, so I want to just uh to give you that around it. And then there are obviously there are things to do. There are what can you do? I think all of us need to hold the space of change agent. We need to hold that that what we signed up for is to become, and we say agent, right? When we've been in chemistry classes, we know when we put an agent of something inside a formula, it changes the outcome, it changes the shape of things. I think we need to see what needs changing and to be the agent in the change, um, and to call ourselves change agents to some degree.

**Chris Comeaux** 25:38

That's so good. You know, Tasha, and I'm sure you're gonna react. Um, earlier in the conversation, I can't remember if it was the first segment or second, uh, when DJ was talking about uh Bruce Springsteen and kind of being a link in a chain, he was talking about different artists. What I just so respect you, and I feel like we're that maybe middle generation. There were the matriarchs before us, and we're in that next link of the chain. Um, and I do get a little worried about what is behind us. And um, I don't know, it's a thought that came to me when I was listening to DJ. I am very hopeful. I wouldn't be doing this work if I was not hopeful that we we are influencing that next generation. And and DJ, you probably haven't had a chance to see my book, The Anatomy of Leadership. But at the very beginning, my my mentor, Dr. Lee Thayer, because I'd never heard him define leadership, so I emailed him and the punchline in his email back to me, which I lead off of my book, is he said, leadership by definition will change the trajectory of things. I feel like you just said it, and then another beautiful meaning management. So I just want to call those out and and Tasha just kind of maybe set the table for you to answer that same question around culture.

**Tasha Walsh** 26:48

I think that um, you know, for me, culture really is I don't I don't I'm I don't know how else to say it, honestly, other than that culture is the is the table that gets set, right? Um, it that container. And so really making sure that, I mean, as leaders, we have choices, right? I can be the the hostess that sets the table and has everything perfect and everybody's got an assigned seat. And, you know, if somebody uses the wrong salad fork or something, then you know, it's like, or I can I can I can open up my home as a host and I can invite people

in. I can say, here are the plates, let's all sh let's all set the table together and let's um who wants to sit where and let people choose what they can choose. They may not be able to choose the entire menu and you know, maybe my maybe my forks don't match, but I can um I can set the table in a way that allows people to bring their best self. Um, and whether their best self is really kind of in a bad mood because they didn't sleep very much last night, or whether their best self is that they're all primed up and dressed and ready to party. You know, um, I believe that as leaders, our job really is to allow for people to um to have opportunity to live into that, to live into their ability to be their best self. And to me, that's what um creating a culture that um encourages zealot behavior rather than zombie behavior is really all about.

**Chris Comeaux** 28:35

That's so well said, Tasha. And and I wonder, I love that metaphor. Again, you're both masterful with meaning management. And when I asked you the question about kind of like the founders before us, would you say that answer applies to the broader ecosystem we find ourselves in and this field as well? Because I bet what you just described is very indicative of the culture you create in your own organization. Do you feel like we have a responsibility kind of beyond that in that broader ecosystem, the field that we're a part of?

**Tasha Walsh** 29:03

I do. Yeah, for sure.

**Chris Comeaux** 29:05

Yeah, that's that's really cool. Well, I want to give you both the opportunity for final thoughts.

## [Final Thoughts And Brain Bookmark](#)

**Chris Comeaux** 29:10

And so, DJ, final thoughts. You've got the air and hospice and powder care leaders, um, almost kind of like your locker room talk with them, if you will.

**DJ Mitsch** 29:18

I would say just create an environment where people are excited to come to life fully every day.

**Tasha Walsh** 29:27

That's all I love that I think what what struck me um in this conversation that that I that I would really like to highlight and just leave is um I'm I'm a big fan of the four agreements, um a book by Don Miguel Ruiz. And the very first one is be impeccable with your word. Just be impeccable with your word.

**Chris Comeaux** 29:51

I love that you said that, Tasha. One of my favorite gifts of all time. Um, my wife had a first edition Daniel Webster dictionary, and my favorite word is integrity. Always joke and say, if they ever ask me what to put on my tombstone, hopefully one day it's that. But that definition of integrity was almost like the way you just described it, which is being true to yourself in every every sense of the word, even like the Hebrew word shalom is like holistic to be whole, which is a whole journey of this life and every day kind of living into that more and more. And so again, you you guys are just like making my mind come alive and just listening to both the way you use words. Um, it's so cool to have you. And so we could probably go on for a couple hours. Um, thank you for the work that you're doing, Tasha. I love that you're doing this with your organization. Also, just respect you so much for the work you're doing nationally. DJ, it's been a joy to meet you. I hope we get to stay in each other's world as we go forward, also.

**DJ Mitsch** 30:48

I am sure we will. It's been my privilege to be here. And at the end of the day, um, you know, if we look back and say what we're grateful for today, this was a day-maker. It made me come to life fully. So thanks.

**Chris Comeaux** 31:02

Well said. Well, to our listeners, we want to thank you. At the end of each episode, we share a quote, a visual. The idea is a Brain Bookmark. It's to be a thought prodder. Hopefully, this one's gonna create a whole bunch of thought prodders. But at the end, via this brain bookmark, we're just hoping to further your learning and your growth and thereby your leadership. We're hoping it sticks, kind of like a brain tattoo. Make sure you subscribe to our channel. We're gonna include a link to DJ's book as well. You know, tell your friends, your coworkers about the TCN talks / Anatomy of Leadership podcast. You know, it's easy for us to rail against the world, be frustrated by things. Let's be the change that we really wish to see in the world. So thanks for listening to today's podcast. And here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

**Jeff Haffner** 31:43

"Transforming a culture of burnout into a culture of purpose requires leaders to shift language from compliance and control to connection and meaning. It is one that takes a breath and really, really listens," by DJ Mitsch.