

Transcript: **Part Two | Leadership Starts With Presence—The Art of Showing Up** with David Sachsenmaier

Welcome And Part Two Setup

Jeff Haffner 0:00

Welcome to TCN talks, and Anatomy of Leadership. We continue our conversation in part two, Leadership Starts with Presence. The Art of Showing Up, with David Sachsenmaier. And now here's Chris Comeaux.

How Inner Wounds Become Company Culture

Chris Comeaux 0:22

You've said that leaders inevitably transfer their inner world into their organizations. I love that framing. Leaders inevitably transfer their inner world into their organizations. And we also just add it also into our families. How do a leader's unresolved issues influence organizational culture, team, trust, decision making?

David Sachsenmaier 0:45

Chris, wow, the examples are rampant. And if you and I are honest and practicing all this sense of true leadership, you and I would do this exact same thing, past corporate chapters, present times. It's human to get triggered, to get reactive, uh, whatever. But I will speak from an example in a past chapter where honestly, before I started my executive coaching company here in Colorado, um, my last supervisor boss was the president of this organization here out in Colorado. We did a lot of leadership retreats. Uh, corporate leaders, ministry leaders, nonprofit leaders would come. But this leader's leadership style was very much sort of like a bull in a china shop, and it was always his way or the highway, and very, very domineering and created constant chaos and drama, drama, drama all the time. And so many people on the team would come to me because I was the one who'd been on the team longest, and would say, David, how do you how do you deal with somebody like this? Even after I left the organization, right? People would call and say, how did you figure out how to adapt? And I often say in a way, how do you dance with a leader like that? And again, it takes us all back to our own interior work, right? Um, how do we become less reactive when leaders are like that? And we all have them, but that's an example when people haven't done their own interior work and

they're not aware of how they're limping or bringing their pain, then they're gonna unconsciously and unintendedly create a culture where people so often say to me, Chris, David, I can't quite put my finger on it, but with our executive or this person or that person, we just all walk on eggshells around this person at work. And that's where Chris is another longer conversation. It will be what my book is also about. And I say, that's because that leader is not leadership sober. That's what I call they are not actually sober in that moment. When they're triggered and reactive or a bull in a china shop, then it's as if that leader is coming to work totally intoxicated.

Tone At The Top And Listening

Chris Comeaux 3:19

You know, um, my very first mentor, my first job out of college was KPMG, the lord at the time, world's largest CPA consulting firm. And I had this amazing wise man as a mentor. And he said, Chris, you could sit in a room and tick and tie numbers all day. But he said, What you go do is spend time with that senior team. And he goes, What you're listening for is the tone at the top, because that tone trickles down into the organization, and you will see it in the numbers. And by golly, now that I'm old and gray, that man was so wise. Um, I've written a blog about that, about the tone at the top. But quite often, what I'm hearing you say, and I see this, that tone is set unintentionally. Like there is a tone there. I'm not sure it's the tone that if you are conscious about it or intentional about it, is it is it really the tone that you want to set, as opposed to the one that you are setting?

David Sachsenmaier 4:12

Absolutely. Absolutely. One of the things that kind of is the arc of my journey with leaders from beginning to end, if we have a year together or a few years together, Chris, and I love this simple place. There's wise, wise words. I think it may come all the way even back to a wise sage like Isaiah, right? And then uh even in the Old Testament, a simple statement that says, listen that your soul may live. And I think even in leadership, what does it look like for me to listen to what's happening inside of me? Like, what am I really reacting to? Why am I so angry and upset at this direct report? Listen to your team. Listen to it, just as you said, that guy. Listen to what is the noise in this corporate culture? Where are we? What is the noise that's holding us back? Where's their chaos? Where's their drama? Because people cannot show up at work and bring their best. And companies cannot get to the buried gold if everything like that mason jar is constantly shaken up every single day. There has to be this inner place and team place and corporate place of calm and groundedness. Um, and interesting, what follows right after that statement of

listen that your soul may live is this beautifully wise leadership question. Why do you spend your labor on what does not satisfy?

Chris Comeaux 5:45

Oh, wow.

David Sachsenmaier 5:46

Why do you spend your leadership energy every day on things that do not cause your people to thrive?

Chris Comeaux 5:54

But yet we do every day. Well, so I feel you're I feel like you're on the edge of this. Let me ask

Vulnerability Without Losing Authority

Chris Comeaux 6:00

this question. One of the hardest things for leaders is vulnerability. Brene' Brown has been, I mean, she's almost made a whole lifetime about bringing this concept of vulnerability, especially in environments where people feel the pressure to project certainty and strength. I feel this pressure in healthcare right now because there's so much unknown. How do you coach leaders to become more authentic without, let's say, losing credibility or authority?

David Sachsenmaier 6:25

Absolutely. Again, Chris, what I help leaders realize, and it seems so upside down, and it's ironic, the buried gold, if we really want all of the employees at an organization to have their awakenings, to thrive, to show up at work every day in their prefrontal cortex. They're not back here in their limbic system thinking unconsciously, I don't feel safe here. We all got to walk on our eggshells around Bill or Elizabeth or Susie, whatever. There is a leadership illusion that has to be surfaced. And I hope leaders and executive teams work through this. And some people are more ready to look at this than others. But there's an illusion. I'll say to leaders, if we're talking about, you know, notice someone is super distant. They function more like a robot or a machine, you know. And I'll here's a great example, Chris. I'll ask corporate executives sometimes about their direct reports. And uh, let's say they're in the same city together, or many of them are in the same city. I know we're all remote and scattered all over these days, but I'll say, okay, so John is one of your direct reports. When's the last time you had breakfast with John? When's the last time you had coffee with John? You know, or when's the last time you said to your team, hey, next

Friday afternoon, we're all gonna hang out at my house, not just for a party. I'm gonna bring a flip chart, we're gonna sit in blue jeans and t-shirts, we're gonna talk about what's going on here. But we're also gonna get to know each other at a deeper level. There's an illusion there that especially, I think, baby boomers, corporate America, still even with millennial leadership today, there's an illusion. And I'll say to people, hold on a second. If you're not really leading from a place of vulnerability and transparency, then you're equating things. And I'll ask leaders, in your mind, unconsciously, vulnerability and transparency equals what? And they always stop and say, Well, uh, it's a sign of weakness. It's a sign that I'm not strong and that I don't know what I'm doing. And I say, it's the very opposite. When you humble yourself, when you make yourself vulnerable and transparent, and you're just human, when I say to leaders, go have coffee with them for your one-on-one check-in, you know, if you're in the same office in the same city, do something human with them. The buried gold is sit with them and they realize, oh wow, you know, my CEO is just like me. He spent 10 minutes telling me about what a chaotic weekend it was. And their 16-year-old daughter was NER from a car accident, right? And wow, I've got, he's got a story, I've got a story. And when people realize that leaders are human just like me, well, then they begin to relax and they start to feel safe and they begin to open up. And that fear of vulnerability transforms into creating a human culture, corporate culture, where people feel like, wow, it's okay for me to show up and just be me and be imperfect.

Chris Comeaux 9:46

So I didn't tell you I was gonna ask you this, but just listen to Dave. How do you like when I think back in some of the best coaches, professors, mentors that I've had? Yes, I felt safe, but there was a level in how they challenged me. It's like they saw something in me I didn't see in myself. So they also brought challenging and they made it necessary that I would perform at a higher level. So I think the way I'm trying to ask this question is how do you balance that level of vulnerability, but bring good challenge so you can call people up and they can be a better version of themselves? Because if I feel safe, maybe my safety allows me just to default myself and maybe default some of my bad habits.

David Sachsenmaier 10:32

That's

Safety Plus Challenge Equals Growth

David Sachsenmaier 10:33

it's a great question. It's a great question. Um I think again, for people at the manager, director, executive level, they're called, they're they have closed the door and moved way

beyond the corporate chapters and vocational chapters of I just want to do my job well. They've also moved past, I just want to lead my team really, really well. I want my team to be successful in thriving. Executive leadership, and the highest sort of pinnacle of the mountain of leadership as we move towards our retirement days, is how do I build and run and manage and lead a whole entire culture where people can thrive? And uh people have to figure out okay, what does it look like? What do people really, really need? And so, yes, everybody constantly, we've got goals, you know, quarterly goals, annual goals, where the industry, where the company wants to go two or three years from now. And so what we hold together in sometimes is intention, is okay, what does it look like for you to become a more whole integrated leader and be more vulnerable and transparent? But absolutely, Chris, we're not letting go of the high performance and engagement and where you want to take your company to be two, three, five, 10 years down the road. So we hold those together. There is an illusion. Well, David, you're talking about more of this woo-woo soft interior stuff. If we just become a corporate culture like that, we're never gonna hit our targets. We're never gonna grow as a company. Everybody's just gonna think we come to work every day, it's supposed to be Disney World or just a picnic, and say, absolutely not, because leadership is always about integration. How do we hold on to the health of an individual, a team, but absolutely driving the company forward to where they need to go? So we don't let go of that side of it either. I will often call leaders out and say, hey, you kind of seem like you're stuck. You're kind of in this loop for this last year or two. What is that about? That you're actually not progressing up the mountain and your people are not following you. So then again, we have to look below the water line. But Chris, we're always holding to where they want to go and how they want to grow the company. And so it's both end.

Coaching Versus Therapy And The Swamp

Chris Comeaux 12:57

So you also remind me of something. So I think I'd share with you, David, my mentor was Dr. Lee Thayer, interestingly, he was Stephen Covey's mentor. And he once said something, and what I realized mentoring under him, he would go to the root of things. And he once said something that was very fascinating to me. And he said that the root of kind of modern day psychology, that there really were two potential branches. And Freud kind of won the day, which was much more of a deficit-based mentality, but he was more of the William James Marita school. And the example in Marita was a Japanese early, um, I think it was the same time as Freud. And Freud, again, was more deficit-based. And like, you know, I have all these issues and I focus on these issues. I go to a therapist and I talk to them about my issues. If you went to Marita and said, I'm depressed, Marita would say, go home and sweep your floor. It was much more of an appreciative inquiry

approach than a deficit approach. Then I'm just curious as you think about, because Thayer used to say, be careful that there is a swamp there, this kind of psychology swamp that you could get stuck in as a leader. He wasn't saying don't tend to people's, he called them dragons, actually. Um, and then, you know, Shirazh me now calls them saboteurs. I love the lexicon that you're using. So how do we go there as leaders, but maybe not get stuck in the swamp in this deficit focus? Well, I've got all these issues, and we never kind of get out of the swamp.

David Sachsenmaier 14:33

Yeah, it's it's a great question, Chris. Um, always in working with leaders, people ask me sometimes, you know, if I meet someone somewhere, sit beside someone on an airplane, and people might listen to me, ask me what I do, and say, Well, wait, are you a therapist really at heart? And I'll say, absolutely not. The presenting client for a therapist is someone that walks in the door who's underfunctioning in some part of their human experience, emotionally, maybe relationally, um, you know, some aspect, they're under functioning. So a therapist wants to take a therapy, a client, and help them just get back to a baseline of normal. The world of executive coaching and leadership coaching is taking high-functioning people and helping them figure out where they are stuck. Now, there are, I've had plenty of clients over the years where I start working with them and I start realizing wow, I'm bumping into some hardware. This person has more than an average amount of pain in their story, either growing up or even what people are speaking about more and more these days, Chris, corporate trauma, places of corporate trauma and corporate leadership abuse. And some people are stuck. And I have had I have said to some clients in the past, you know what, I don't think coaching is really what you need. I really think you do need some time in therapy, right? But most of my clients are not those people. And again, there is, it comes back to integration. Everybody walks with a limp, everybody has some degree of pain. And the most highly effective leaders are orienting and have great self-awareness of the places where they limp and their people limp, their teams, and even in their whole culture. And so, with all of that, we find the greatest sense of awakenings and high potential for people. But there are some where there's a bottomless dark, dark, dark pit. Uh, and some of those people actually do need uh something that coaching, the coaching world does not provide. I don't provide. That's not what I'm called to do. And so great coaches know how to how to flesh that out and speak to them.

Belovedness And Nonreactive Leadership

Chris Comeaux 16:58

I'm so glad I asked you that question. So if you could challenge today's leaders with one fundamental shift in how they think about leadership and personal growth, what would it be?

David Sachsenmaier 17:09

You know, Chris, one of my own, honestly, I say this, it is a mantra when my clients are in my Zoom waiting room, getting ready to meet with me, at least on Zoom, and if teams can do the same thing, you're able in the Zoom world to write your own message. So when my clients are waiting on me in Zoom, which uh anyway, there's a statement there, and it says to everyone take a minute, slow down, breathe, think about what you want to focus on in our conversation today, and then it says, and remember that in your belovedness, there is nothing to prove, nothing to lose, nothing to fear, and nothing to gain. The most highly effective leaders in the world, and this is proved, has been proven by tons of organizational behavior, you know, psychologist, hardware business school, you name it across the Western world, is people that realize my worth and value and even my leadership soul is anchored to something so much bigger than work. And so, Chris, if I know or my clients realize finally, and their own sense of leadership belovedness, there's nothing that's going to happen at work today or in my industry or something that falls apart, my belovedness is not at risk, then I'm free to show up and give and respond with each challenge. And I'm so much less reactive, and I'm not bringing this constant place of leadership drama and chaos and turmoil that I'm perpetuating myself as a leader. So that is a huge mantra of mine. Um, also, we'll be writing about that. That we are free. We're then free to show up and walk the halls of an organization with bread and water to give away to people and not to get.

A Blessing For Work And Closing

Chris Comeaux 19:17

But that probably is almost a great place to end, but I want to give you final thoughts. What final thoughts do you have for our listeners?

David Sachsenmaier 19:23

Yeah, Chris, uh, I mentioned that I would love to conclude final words that are not mine. And one of my greatest literary mentors is a guy named John O'Donohue. Uh, some of your readers may know of John O'Donohue. He was an Irish Celtic poet who died very unexpectedly, probably, I don't know, 20 years ago, maybe 25 years ago. And in his latter years, he did a lot of writing and a lot of poetry. And after he died, a book was put together that is called To Bless the Space Between Us. And he has a number of, he, the uh those that put this book together for him, uh, he calls them Poems, Blessings, and

Benedictions. And I wanted to read one of them, Chris. It's very short. And I read this with a lot of my uh corporate clients and executive leadership teams, regardless, honestly, of whatever their spiritual background may be or not. But anyway, I want to read this. This was one of his poems that he wrote, and he entitled it for work. So let me just read this in part of our ending and slowing us down. May the light of your soul bless your work with love and warmth of heart. May you see in what you do the beauty of your soul, may the sacredness of your work bring light and renewal to those who work with you, and to those who see and receive your work. May your work never exhaust you. May it release well springs of refreshment, inspiration, and excitement. May you never become lost in bland absences. May the day never burden you. May dawn find hope in your heart, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities and promises. May evening find you gracious and fulfilled. May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected. May your soul calm, console, and renew you.

Chris Comeaux 21:51

That's beautiful. Well, David, thank you. You're a gift and a treasure. I'm so glad I asked you to do this. Um, any links you want to include, David, we're gonna include um in the show notes for folks to reach out to you. Our listeners, we want to thank you. At the end of each episode, we share a quote, a visual. The idea is to create a brain bookmark, a thought prodder about our podcast subject to further your learning and your growth, and thereby your leadership. We're hoping it sticks like a brain tattoo. We hope that you subscribe to our channel. Make sure you pay it forward to some of your friends and your coworkers. We don't want you to miss an episode of TCN Talks Anatomy of Leadership. We know it's easy for us to reel against the world and be frustrated by things. Must be the change we wish to see in the world. So thanks for listening to our podcast today. And here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner 22:38

"To be fully seen by somebody, then, and be loved anyhow, this is a human offering that can border on miraculous." by Elizabeth Gilbert.

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