

## **TRANSCRIPT: Part Two - The Secret to Great Leadership - From a Chick-fil-A Executive**

### **Jeff Haffner: 00:01**

Welcome to TCN Talks and Anatomy of Leadership. We continue our conversation with Mark Miller in part two, The Secret to Great Leadership from a Chick-fil-A executive. And now, here's Chris Comeaux.

### **Chris Comeaux: 00:22**

Well, as we go to this next segment, uh, Mark, one of the most powerful ideas in the book is that the leader's job to be is not to be served, but to serve the team. Why do you think that mindset is just difficult for leaders to make? And maybe as I hand it to you, as I asked a question, I'm just reminded, I was a young intern. I was getting my bachelor's in accounting at LSU. My internship was at an oil and gas company in Houston, Texas. And as an intern, they take you on this uh wonderful tour the first day. And you got a tour of the executive dining room. And do you know there were ice sculptures in the executive dining room? And providence of all providences that first week as an intern, they fired the CEO and this change agent came in. And the first thing he did was shut down the executive dining room. And it was such so I got to see in one little summer of an internship, this you know, leaders are privileged. You get the cool parking spot, the ice sculpture in the executive dining room. And so this question feels so core to what I've learned over the years, but I'd love to hear what you think.

### **Mark Miller: 01:28**

Yeah, I think, well, there are several reasons. Uh, and I have to be careful. I'm not a psychologist, so I'm gonna stay out of some of the reasons. Um, but one, it's not modeled. It's the role models, you got to look for. They're out there, but it's not the prevalent role model. Secondly, people aren't taught the skills of leadership, much less leader, the strategic um, the fundamentals, the strategic ways that leaders serve that we just talked about. Again, it's not just enough to know that you're supposed to engage and develop others, but how do you do that? So it's not model, it's not taught. And again, this is where I don't want to go too far, but I don't think it's in our human nature typically to think about others first. I think there's something in us that makes us default to me and mine as opposed to ours or yours. And I think I think there's several forces at play. Um, I think at the end of the day, though, the reason it will win out if a leader chooses to embrace this approach is you'll produce better results. Yeah. And at the end of the day, most leaders do really care about performance. And so I think that's why this book is still uh not only in print, but we're doing a fourth edition because it's still resonating with leaders around the world, not because of the quality of the book necessarily, but it's the quality of the ideas. It's built on truth.

### **Chris Comeaux: 03:05**

And yeah, I also was just reflecting as you were saying, uh I heard, I can't remember if it was a podcast or a speaker recently, but you know, we live with ourselves more than so that self-centered nature. And then you throw the hyper social media selfies all the time that we live, and it's making it even worse. Like, you know, the I forgot it may have been Jordan Peterson that statistically it was something like 1% of the population is narcissistic, but right now it's

something like five to eight percent. And he was basically making and a statistic I probably don't have perfect, but it was certainly like skewed because the time that we live, it's start it's creating this self-centered nature. So it feels like the timing of what you're talking about is maybe even more important just because of what's going on at a macro level.

**Mark Miller: 03:52**

Yeah, and we did a survey uh while we were working on a recent book project, and we ended up talking to 4,000, over 4,000 leaders in six countries. And over 60% of them said that the impediment that their boss is facing, their greatest impediment to their effectiveness is ego. Wow. Wow. So yeah, it's not that's back to my point. It's not model. You look around, you're not seeing leaders saying, I'm gonna help you win, I'm gonna help the team win. You got way too many leaders thinking I got to use these people to help me win.

**Chris Comeaux: 04:36**

Yeah. Well, you allude to this early when we were talking about some of maybe Truett superpowers, but how do people reconcile this being a servant leader but holding people accountable while still serving them? It feels paradoxical.

**Mark Miller: 04:50**

Yeah. But see, I think I think it's a false paradox. So let me tell you a little story. Um for a season, I were I mentioned this earlier. I think I worked in restaurant operations, and our teams worked with operators around the country. And about every five to seven years back in the day, we would do what we called a fruit basket turnover. And all the consultants got new operators. We thought the operators probably needed a fresh face and a fresh voice. And most of the consultants had learned some things, and they would take that to their new operators. And so about every five to seven years, we did the fruit basket turnover. So we had done one of those, and we had been about six months in, and we're meeting with the field staff, and one of the consultants raised his hand, and he's talking to the guy who would uh ultimately become the president of the company. At the time, he's head of all of operations. And he says, okay, I got a question for you. He said, for the last six months, all I've talked about are relations, our relationship. When should I start talking about results? And the leader in the front of the room said, you messed up six months ago. It's both. Yeah. You value both results and relationships. And you have to help people, you tell people you tell people, but you help them understand you actually do value results and relationships. And I would suggest that everybody can be successful, but not necessarily in every role, or maybe not even in every company. But if you really want to help people win, I mean, accountability needs a rebrand. This is probably another podcast altogether. Um, I I think we need to hire a PR agency. We decades ago started talking about the gift of accountability. Because most people, if you believe most people want to be successful, then accountability actually helps them be successful. So, we said, give the gift of accountability. It's like somebody asked me, uh, a kite. You may know this. I did not. They said, What's the most important part of a kite? And I'm thinking, a kite doesn't even have that many parts. And I said, the sail, and they said no. And I said, the little wooden sticks, and they said no. And I said the tail, and they said no. I said, Are there any other parts? They said, the most important part of a kite is the string. If it's not

tethered to the earth, if there's not tension there, it won't fly. If you don't believe me, get one up in there and cut the string. Oh, that's a reality.

**Chris Comeaux: 07:30**

Yep.

**Mark Miller: 07:31**

It's like accountability, it the kite needs accountability in order to soar. People need accountability to reach their full potential. And so we it's just now, will these be at odds from time to time? Sure, but you the best leaders find a way to embrace both. You value results and relationships. Now, let me give you one more story because this is hard for a lot of people. This is hard for a lot of people. And it was hard for me. I'm one of those guys; I mentioned it in the in the beginning. Most of us have a bias. I have a results bias. And I was actually asked to lead in restaurant operations by the president of the company and given responsibility for half the restaurants. And I had teams of people, but I was I was the guy who had half the chain. And he told me, I need you because you've got a strong results bias. And he said, we've become so relational, we're not good stewards. And he said but let me be clear. He said, if this is where your results uh bias and orientation is, and here's where we are on uh if you're here, I don't want you to raise the results in the field and lower the relationship. I want you to keep them both high. And I thought I understood what he meant. And so I hadn't been in the role long, and the retention rate for operators is over 96% year over year for 40 years. So it's a pretty big deal when you need to terminate one. And so I had gone to the president of the company and said, hey, I think we're gonna have to terminate this operator. And I kind of made my case, and he said, Okay, not now. And I'm thinking, I'm really confused because I'm confused. So, I kind of repeated myself and he said, I heard you the first time, and my answer's the same. Yes, we need to terminate and not now. And I said, I'm confused. And he said, It's a week before Thanksgiving. He said, this man has done nothing immoral, illegal, or unethical. He said, you're not gonna send him home to his family and tell them, have them be told he's lost his business. Said you can have this conversation with him in January. And I walked away going, okay, I think I've got a little better sense of what it means to value results and relationships. And yeah, there's tension there. And we may not have sold as much chicken for six weeks that we would have, but it was the right thing to do, right? But don't, don't assume that you can either be focused on results or either relationship, because if you allow your bias to lead, you will suboptimize performance. You suboptimize performance. It's counterintuitive, but if you focus only on results, you'll you won't have the kind of results you want sustained over time. And certainly, if you focus on relationships, you will not have the results you want over time. So, it is the way to honor people and honor the organization when you when you value both.

**Chris Comeaux: 10:38**

That's so good, Mark. Again, another masterclass. Well, with the time we have remaining, I want to make sure we at least get to the other book, which originally, I heard about it from Randy. Um, and so Lead Every Day. So, your newest book, besides the re-release of The Secret that's coming out, fourth edition, it explores the daily habits of effective leaders. So, if

someone listening wants to become a better leader starting tomorrow, what's one daily practice from the book that can make, let's say, an immediate difference?

**Mark Miller: 11:06**

Yeah.

**Mark Miller: 11:06**

So, I'm gonna, I'm gonna probably cheat on your question. Um I I'm not sure I can give you one thing because you can start tomorrow, but you you can't become a great leader tomorrow. And so what I'm encouraging leaders to do, what I try to do myself, is start where you are. You're probably not where you want to be, but you can't start where you're not. So start where you are, use what you've got. I have talked to scores, hundreds, maybe thousands of leaders that don't think they have the right team or they don't think they've got the right facilities, or they think that something is just not right that's impeding their progress. Okay, use what you got. So start where you are, use what you got, and do what you can. That we're we're never be accountable. I mean, in my the way my brain works, we're we're we're not accountable for what we can't do, but we should be accountable for what we could do. And so I say start today. And your your boss may not be on board. People, I hear that all the time. It's like, well, bloom where you're planted and and and make what you've been entrusted with wildly successful. And maybe your boss will say, Hey, what are you doing? And you know, ultimately, we go back to where I started. Your superpower is you could fire your boss. Well, what's that look like? Well, you could go work somewhere else, right? But at the end of the day, I believe that there's something more important than being right, and its submission to authority. And so if I'm not being asked to do something illegal, immoral, or unethical, and the boss makes a call, then my job is to try and make that work. If it doesn't work, again, that's not my accountability at that point. So just you gotta start where you are. They're just I meet too many leaders that are that are waiting. They're frozen, they're hesitating. Um and there are no promises, they're no guarantees. You don't know that it's gonna work. Like that's the nature of of strategy. That's the nature of problem solving. When you try to solve a problem, you may or may not find the solution, but you gotta try.

**Chris Comeaux: 13:23**

You just have to start today. That's good, Mark. Mark, can you can you talk to us a little bit about Lead Every Day? Randy and I did talk about it a little bit, but it's this is like a leadership operating system or a leadership system.

**Mark Miller: 13:36**

It is a leadership operating system. Um, so my publisher came to us a few years back and asked if we were familiar with EOS. And I am and I'm a fan. And he said, you need to do the leadership version of EOS. And uh he said, I think you've got most of the content. And he he was right. Uh we went back and said, let's look at all the content we've created over the last 25 years. And we actually think that it naturally falls into three disciplines. And that's the the core idea behind the lead everyday operating system. So, we think every leader should be concerned about three things the rest of your life, at least as long as you want to be leading.

One, how do I become a better leader? Two, how do I improve team performance? And three, how do I strengthen the organization? And we literally went back and said, well, we've got work on culture and it goes here, and we've got work on engagement, and it goes here, we've got work on execution, it goes here, we've got work on leadership effectiveness, it goes here. Because that I mean, I didn't say this earlier. That first project that I did with Ken 25 years ago was the first domino to fall. And we got so much traction from that as an organization that we said, hey, what are some other things that we could do to serve our leaders? And we and we started this practice of looking three to five years out and saying, what do we think the emerging issues are or will be? And we would go to work and create a point of view, validate a point of view, and publish about that topic. And so there that's why there have been 13 books in 25 years because we were trying to get ahead of some of these things. And again, thanks to our publisher, he said, I think you the it may be stronger together. I mean, there'll always be people that use it like an encyclopedia, and they've got a Teams question and they go get the Teams book and somebody else has an engagement question and they'll get the engagement book. But they said, there are men and women who are wired to say, give me the whole system. And so this book is our uh effort to uh to codify that.

**Chris Comeaux: 15:53**

You know, we resonate on so many different levels. We actually teach something we call the leadership system within the hospices that we actually do. And it's a blend of EOS, our version of EOS, and a blend of, you know, until I met Randy, I didn't know anyone wrote a book about a leadership system. We even codified

**Chris Comeaux: 16:10**

it that way. Well, as we start to kind of land the plane, Mark, I like this question. If Truett Cathy were mentoring a young leader today, what do you think he would tell them about leadership?

**Mark Miller: 16:23**

I think he'd tell them a lot. I mean, so this is one of those I love QA and I hate QA kind of moments because I I don't want to give a 10-cent answer to a million-dollar question. Uh, and Truett taught me a lot over the years, but I'll tell you one specific instance. And I wasn't young, but I was younger than I am today. And I mentioned earlier that there was a season when I worked in restaurant operations, and I've also mentioned that the operator retention is really, really high. Well, once a year, you had the opportunity to brief Truett on what was going on because we were going to have an annual meeting and everybody was gonna show up, and he wanted to know the men and women that were on the hot seat. He wanted; he didn't want to be blindsided by that. So, I sat down, explained to him that there was one individual that that more than likely would not make it through the year. And he looked at me and he nodded, and he said, You know, you don't build a successful career by firing people. He said, You build a successful career by helping people be successful. And I said, yes, sir, we're gonna try everything humanly possible to make this man successful. But the message was received, and I understood his heart and his spirit. Unfortunately, we ended up having to terminate that operator. But I think, I think the big idea here for me, and uh maybe for our listeners, is what can you do to help people be wildly successful? And that's a whole lot more fun anyway. Again,

I've already said it may not be in their current role. It may not even be in your organization. But what would it take to help everybody on your team be wildly successful? I think that's what Truett would want you to figure out.

**Chris Comeaux: 18:12**

That's so cool. Well, then let me kind of mirror it

**Chris Comeaux: 18:14**

this way. If Mark Miller is mentoring a young leader today, what would you tell them about leadership?

**Mark Miller: 18:21**

All right. Uh, another quick story. This actually happened. I think it was the defining moment in my career, actually, and it was almost 50 years ago. Uh I started in the warehouse. We already talked about that. And I about six months later, I actually was asked to start corporate communications, which my story is full of stuff that you're saying, you got to be kidding me. No, that's what I was asked to do. And uh my boss came in one day, right after I had moved into this new role, and he said, hey, I want to explain to you how life works. And I'm just a kid. I mean, I'm 19 at the time. And I said, okay, like you know how life works. And he said, yes, I do. And I said, Okay, I'm all ears. And he said, if you want more influence, if you want more opportunity and you want more impact, he said, There's only one path. And I remember thinking, wait a minute, slow down. I think I should write this down. Say that again, because he kind of blindsided me with the whole conversation. He said, if you want more influence and you want more opportunity and you want more impact, he said, There's only one path. And I said, what is it? And he said, Lifelong learning. He said, you look at the men and women who add value throughout their lifetime and they're all learners.

**Chris Comeaux: 19:41**

Wow.

**Mark Miller: 19:42**

And I signed up that day. Now, my parents wish that I'd signed up a lot sooner because I was a lousy student. But I say that to those men and women out there who are thinking, yeah, well, I'm not a learner. Well, if you think about strength finder, some folks know about that. I think there are 34 strengths. Learner is not in my top five, it's not in my top 10. I don't think it's in my top 20. Somebody challenged me one day and said, well, you act like a learner. And I said, well, did you hear my story? I made a strategic decision over 40 years ago that I wanted more influence, I wanted more opportunity, and I wanted more impact. And so, I signed up for lifelong learning.

**Chris Comeaux: 20:19**

That's profound. Mark, final thoughts. As you get the floor and you've got a lot of listeners. I know they're leaning forward. I've been leaning forward, making notes this whole podcast.

**Mark Miller: 20:31**

Yeah, I it goes back to something I said just a few minutes ago. Don't wait. Don't wait on the title, don't wait on the role, don't wait on the position, don't wait on the circumstances to be perfect. They're never gonna be perfect. Don't wait till every member of your team is a rock star. I hope you get there. That that's a worthy goal. But you need to start today. Just one step at a time. Um just do the things that will help people win. And when they win, you'll win.

**Chris Comeaux: 21:09**

Wow. Well, Mark, thank you. I'm so glad that Randy connected us. Um, you're a treasure. The very first leadership book I actually read was Ken's book, The One Minute Manager. The second one was Stephen Covey, the third one was John Maxwell. And so, like, kind of my life purpose has been to meet those people. I've gotten one degree of separation in many cases, and I feel that with Ken through you. You just have such great leadership wisdom. I hope, hope you and Randy, are doing the great work that you'll be doing many, many, many more years to come. And let us know how we could ever magnify your work besides obviously magnifying it on this podcast.

**Mark Miller: 21:46**

Well, thanks for the opportunity.

**Chris Comeaux: 21:48**

Well, to our listeners, we want to thank you. At the end of each episode, we share a quote, a visual that we call our brain bookmark as a thought prodder about the podcast subject to further your learning and growth. And we're hoping that it sticks. Almost like a brain tattoo. Be sure to subscribe to our channel, the TCNtalks / Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode. We're going to include a link to all of Mark's books that he's alluded to. He's even giving his cell phone number. So, we're going to include that as well. You know, it's easy for us to rail against the world and be frustrated by things. Let's be the change that we wish to see in this world. So, thanks for listening to our podcast, TCNtalks / Anatomy of Leadership. And here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

**Jeff Haffner: 22:28**

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