

Anatomy of Leadership Transcript / The Three Gifts with John Locke

Melody King: 0:01

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is fueled by living your cause and purpose. This podcast will equip you with the tools to do just that Live and lead with cause and purpose. And now author of the book the Anatomy of Leadership and our host Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux: 0:23

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. I'm excited. I'm excited because I have a good friend and also a great history with our guest today, John Locke. John's an executive coach with Forvis Mazars. Welcome, John.

John Locke: 0:36

Great to be here, Chris.

Chris Comeaux: 0:37

Really cool to be here. In fact, I'll talk about the nostalgia here after I do your bio and ask you one question. So, here's John's bio. John Locke is blessed to have co-created love that word. And implemented a vision for an internal executive coaching practice at Dixon Hughes Goodman in 2015. Now Forvis Mazars, which is a top 10 accounting firm. He and two other coaches serve over 500 partners throughout Forvis Mazars nationwide footprint.

Chris Comeaux: 1:03

John's a founder and current leader of the International Coaching Federation of Western Carolina subchapter. He's an ICF credential professional certified coach and a medical board credentialed health and wellness coach. His recent pursuits include a certification in actualized leadership, positive intelligence, ai and coaching and the Hogan Behavioral Assessment. John's married to his wife, Jenny, for 43 years and has one daughter, Lauren, who's also an executive coach. We were just talking about that. She lives in Wellington, New Zealand, and they have an Aussie doodle named Buddy. John's a distinguished Toastmaster. His presentation topics include communication, health and wellness and mental fitness, and John has recently developed a keynote presentation Three Gifts that Transform Lives and that's what we're going to talk about today's podcast. So, John, anything to leave out there? That'd be important.

John Locke: 1:51

I think you got it, Chris.

Chris Comeaux: 1:53

All right, John, well, I love this question. I think I may have asked it to you in the very first podcast, but what's your superpower?

John Locke: 2:01

Oh my gosh. Well, that's such a wonderful, thought-provoking question. As a coach, I love these types of questions because they really take you to a different place when it comes to just your processing about who you are. And, I would have to say, when I think about a superpower and defining that it's really what brings you to life, what creates energy for you every day. And so, as I think through that, to me it has to be people and connecting people, and I've always said or in the last 20 to 30 years anyway it's like if every day I could find great people and put them together to do outstanding things, then I'm always going to have a place on this planet.

Chris Comeaux: 2:48

Wow, and that's true, and I've been such a blessed person by you practicing that superpower. So many great connections, but even our connection, in fact I'm kind of alluding to the fact that so much nostalgia here. You were our very first Anatomy of Leadership podcast guest and we really talked about this kind of holistic care for yourself was really the gist of that podcast, but you're also our first Anatomy of Leadership podcast guest in studio. So those of you who just listened and don't realize, and I am actually sitting together. John and I, yesterday, him practicing his superpower introduced me to an amazing leader. We had this great lunch together and you reminded me of something that I'm like. Oh my God, that's so true. I have a podcast because of you, really, and so you had this amazing radio show. Which how many years ago was that, John?

John Locke: 3:35

Oh my gosh, we're probably looking close to 15 years now, oh my gosh, so it was called Lessons in Leadership.

Chris Comeaux: 3:40

It was on a radio station in Asheville, North Carolina. You had me as a guest, which was super cool, and whenever I left and you had been communicating and coordinating me being on that show with one of our team members who's now our chief operating officer of TCN, Tina Gentry, and so Tina called me and I was in the airport in Kansas City, Missouri, and I remember Tina called me and she goes you can't say no, but we have an idea and that you're going to do a radio show, and so on that same station we had a

radio show and I think I had you on my show and then all of that. Now you think about radio shows and now, really, podcast is the new version of that. So, I feel like we're doing the great work we're doing.

Chris Comeaux: 4:19

You've had such a great impact on my life. You've been a friend. You great impact on my life. You've been a friend. You've been a mentor. You've introduced me to incredible people. Meridith Elliott Powell has been a very frequent guest, and she's introduced me to other people, but you were the original kind of connector. So, it really is a superpower of yours.

John Locke: 4:33

Well, thank you. It's a privilege to spend time with you and to be a thought partner with you on this journey we're on.

Chris Comeaux: 4:39

Amen, all right. Well, John. Well, you gave a speech titled the Three Gifts that Transform Lives, and we were a test run for that. You had just shared with me the story of it. I think we're going to breakfast, and we have a one-year leadership certification with university and like, hey, John, could you do that for our class? And you did, and the cool thing is, you're actually going to do it for our class again this year, but that's really what I want to talk to you about.

John Locke: 5:11

So, was there a person, place or event? How did this thing come to be? Well, I've, for years, had thought about what would it be like if I could come up with something that would be a little bit of a trademark presentation, that would showcase a lot of who I've become over the years and really some of the blessings that I've been able to experience as it relates to learning from people who are much wiser than me and who have been through a lot of difficult things. I said there's got to be something in my journey here that might be valuable to others. And so what was interesting then? This is probably about two years ago four of us Mazars's we have just a three-person internal coaching program and my boss his name is Bob Kunkel fantastic guy, just a real connector himself when it comes to really wanting to help people and he saw something kind of bubbling within me and he said I want you to put in your goals this year to do some kind of a major presentation that we could take out, potentially to help our partners. And I'm like, wow, what could that be? And I just I couldn't. I couldn't come up with it, I just it was one of those things.

John Locke: 6:22

So, but I was praying about it and thinking about it and talking to people and I actually had called you know, Meredith, and I had caught another good friend you may remember, Brian Byro, who's been a mentor of mine for speaking and gosh, I just said, you know, I want to do something.

John Locke: 6:39

And they both just challenged me and said think about you and your story because there's got to be something there. And I'm like okay. So literally it was maybe two or three months after I had had those conversations, I woke up about 4 o'clock in the morning and, unlike you, I am not just a wake up in the morning early guy and I start writing or anything like that. But boy was it evident that I was being pulled out of bed for a reason and I went and grabbed my I work with a full focus planner, and I grabbed it and I just sat down in a chair at the house and for two hours just started writing. And that's where it started. And it literally took shape in those two hours and it took me about a month to refine it, to get it to a point where I could practice it in front of a live group, but it was just so evident that it was an opportunity to share things with people that might be helpful to them at some point in their life.

Chris Comeaux: 7:36

Mm that's good, John, and I have a sense that there's something about this stage in your life, in your journey, that it's maybe more meaningful, maybe more profound to you at this point. Would that be true?

John Locke: 7:48

Yeah, I think that's an excellent observation.

Chris Comeaux: 7:51

What do you think that's about?

John Locke: 7:54

Well, let's just be very honest. I'm on the other side of my career. I'm not climbing a ladder at this point. I'm not looking to make a name for myself. I'm not going after the brass ring. Not that I did that for very long, but I probably had a stage in life where that was important but to me it's just been so important for me to have impact.

John Locke: 8:18

And it's like I talked to my boss a lot about value propositions, and I said what kind of value can we create? And so, when I think about something like this and the topic that we're going to explore today, it's truly about how can we, as humans, create value for others in the experience that we create for others. And to me, that's where I am in my life.

I love the coaching work that I do, and the main thing I love about it is the opportunity to create value-driven moments in people's lives, stopping them long enough to enable them to think differently about not only who they are, but who they want to become, and so this just kind of falls in line with a lot of that.

Jeff Haffner / Dragonfly Health Ad: 9:10

Thank you to our Anatomy of Leadership sponsor, Dragonfly Health, and so this just kind of falls in line with a lot of that. With a 20-year history, Dragonfly Health uses advanced technology and robust analytics to manage durable medical equipment and pharmaceutical services as part of a single, efficient solution for caregivers, patients and their families. The company serves millions of patients annually across all 50 states. Thank you, Dragonfly Health, for all the great work that you do.

Chris Comeaux: 9:51

That's so good, John. I'm sitting here reflecting. You know, in the beginning of my book I actually included the definition that Dr Thayer had sent about what is leadership, and it's an interesting several paragraph response. But the punchline is leadership by nature changes the trajectory of things, and I feel like it's another way of phrasing what you're talking about. The value proposition. If it's an incredibly value proposition, it's going to change the trajectory of things, and the other part of this punchline is it's for the better.

John Locke: 10:20

Yes absolutely.

Chris Comeaux: 10:20

And so well, let's kind of jump into what are the three gifts and how do they relate to fulfilling our purpose.

John Locke: 10:26

Well, this was a big part of my initial struggle is to get it down to three, because I think if you and I were honest and we had a two-hour podcast, we could probably identify 10 or 12 that are really important. And so I just really started thinking about what I have learned, about what it takes to really help people and engage people authentically and coming up with this. It was the first gift that hit me was the gift of presence. To be what does it mean? To be totally present with somebody? And then the second gift there's one thing to be totally present but then what I've learned is there's this opportunity really to create energy, not only within a relationship, but almost to energize others. And so, the second gift was and is the gift of energy and energy creation. How do you create it for yourself in order to give it to others?

John Locke: 11:27

And I've learned through some of my studies and my coaching, training and some of the amazing things associated with brain science, that there is a real impact that we have no clue that we're having on others, and if we could gain a higher level of mastery over who we are and how we show up, we can literally change somebody's life.

John Locke: 11:47

In that moment we're standing in front of them. And then the third one, which I'd have to say is my favorite, because to me it's probably I don't know one of the most amazing things about the human experience. It's the gift of unselfish giving. And when we think about the power that we can have in giving of ourselves and the impact that that can have on others, but also what it does for ourselves, and I will be sharing a story with you later about that and how it literally changed every aspect of my life as it related to the concept of giving.

Chris Comeaux: 12:28

John I'm sitting here kind of processing, of going yeah, it is your story, because I think presence, energy and selfish giving that's every interaction I've ever had with you, and so it really is kind of it is like if we maybe dissected a bit of your superpower, but I could also see how just incredible they are.

Chris Comeaux: 12:48

Now you frame them as gifts, and so why did you classify them as gifts?

John Locke: 12:54

Well, a great question, because I could have come up with a lot of leadership-y type of words.

John Locke: 13:01

You know, there are so many things that we are exposed to around that.

John Locke: 13:07

I think part of it had to do with timing in that and I'll talk about this a little bit later I've been doing a lot of study on this whole concept of positive intelligence and we'll talk about this in a little more detail later, but one of their concepts and foundational elements is this concept and they happen to call it three gifts as well and it's knowing that, in any event or circumstances, we can find a gift or opportunity that comes as a result of that.

John Locke: 13:42

And that has really, it really struck me. And when I started thinking about that holistically, I started thinking about all the other things that we as humans possess that I believe are truly God's gifts for us, and that we just don't recognize them. And I think that it's an opportunity for us to capture them and to utilize them in a way that can have a powerful impact. And, if you do want to take this more from a spiritual standpoint, it's just simply what we're here to do. We are here to be his hands and his eyes and his feet and to touch other people. And that's not about me. I didn't have that innately.

Chris Comeaux: 14:23

I was given all this, the word that keeps coming to me listen to you is like we've been given those things to steward them.

Chris Comeaux: 14:31

I love that term.

Chris Comeaux: 14:32

And the other thing that occurs to me we have several team members that work with us and they work for the same hospice and I'd never seen a hospice do this before, but when they had service recovery issues or, you could say, problems, mistakes, the actual program that they would record them in was called GIFs, which was such a cool reframing, and I love Shiraz's framing in Positive Intelligence about who knows what is good and what is bad, and so I love the fact that you're framing this as a gift, Because we think about I mean, these are three very positive things presence, energy, unselfish giving.

Chris Comeaux: 15:09

But even some of the biggest challenges in our lives that we at first blush, oh, this is bad. Challenges in our lives that we at first blush, oh, this is bad. But yet they truly, if you embrace them in the right way, especially with these three gifts, they become a gift as opposed to, oh my God, it was such a horrible thing. In fact, our greatest learning lessons come from those challenges if we turn them into gifts, if we steward them well or stewards our gifts as we bring into those situations.

John Locke: 15:34

Yeah, and the one thing that I really admire about the whole philosophy that Shirzad and the positive intelligence folks have put together is it's not just the identification of those gifts that makes it an opportunity to think differently, but it's the pursuit of finding the gift.

John Locke: 15:52

Ooh, at time they can actually change who we are and how we think. That's another, that's probably another podcast, but anyway, it's a very cool concept. But going back to your original point is that I was going through a lot of that mind-altering thought process around gifts and it's like, well, what do I call these things? They aren't attributes, you know, they aren't elements. That was all so dry and then I just thought, well, I want to be a good steward of any gift that I have, and everything that I have truly is a gift. Why shouldn't I identify these as gifts?

Chris Comeaux: 16:29

Oh, that's so good. Now you wrap some interesting personal stories around the gifts and, really impacted by your story, you spent a week, and I actually remember I think you and I went to breakfast not long after that and you were with James Earl Jones in Alaska.

John Locke: 16:43

Absolutely yeah.

Chris Comeaux: 16:44

Can you just share the story and just the impact that it had on you?

John Locke: 16:47

Sure, and I utilized the interaction that I had with James in the context of learning really how to be present with people. James, in the context of learning really how to be present with people. And I would have to say that that has not been a real strength of mine over the years, because I've never been diagnosed as ADD, but I'm just one of these people that I'm going from thing to thing, and I know that I have not been good at being present over the years. And I spent a week with James, the company I was with at the time. We were doing all the music production for the SeaWorld parks all over the United States and back when it was popular and things have changed the tides have changed, unfortunately but the Shamu show was their landmark, marquee event at every park and so they had just put in a multimillion dollar jumbo screen and they said we want your company to help us produce this onscreen video with James being the host of the Shamu show. And we're like okay, let's go do this. And my role I was the lowly gopher; I was his valet. You know it's like well, what reason are you here? Well, I'm going to take care of James.

John Locke: 18:00

Earl Jones, how's that and it was life-changing. I mean it was. I didn't know what to expect because I had worked with celebrities before. We'd had an office on the West Coast, and I'd had some not-so-great interactions with celebrities. So, I can't say that I was really looking forward to it, but it was like the minute that I first saw him and interacted with him. There's something different about him. He just had this incredible aura about him

when it came to interacting with people. I mean, you could feel his eyes when his gaze hit you and you could tell that he was totally leaning in on every word that you said and there was nothing about him that indicated he was distracted at any level.

John Locke: 18:41

In fact, the story that I tell in the presentation is walking down the street of Juneau, Alaska, with him, which was a hoot, because one he was the only African American in Juneau, Alaska for the most part, even though they did have a lot of cruise ships come in. But we would just be down and running into locals and they would just stop and they would look at him and they wouldn't know his name and they would point at him, and they'd go you're the guy in that submarine movie, right? And Chris, these people were just making fools of themselves. And he would stop and no matter what we were doing, et cetera, and he would focus in and engage on that, and he would start asking them questions what did you like about the movie? And tell me about you? And we would have these conversations over and over again with these folks and I just was like what in the world? But these people felt like a million bucks and he and so kind of the short version of it.

John Locke: 19:50

There was another story that I probably won't have time to tell today, but when we closed up our week of taping with him, I was sitting next to him at dinner and I said, James, how do you do this? I mean I can't. How do you have the patience for these people who are I mean, they aren't stupid people, but they're acting stupid. And he said, john, he goes in his Darth Vader voice. I can't emulate that voice. He said, john, I've come to the conclusion that if it wasn't for every one of these people, I would not have the opportunity to do what I do today. I will never take any individual or opportunity like this for granted and I'm like, oh, wow, that was something and he just had made a decision that that was going to be as big a part of his life bringing joy into other people's life, connecting and being present with them to make them feel important.

Chris Comeaux: 20:46

Wow, I'm thinking of the intention behind that. I guess that's something recently I've just been thinking about. I mean, it's not earth-shattering on one level, but it is so rare for someone to be that intentional with the way they're living their lives. It's so refreshing, I know, and gosh. It's just so incredible for today's day and age, because, I say frequently it feels like we're terminally distracted. There's so many things vying for our attention. In the story you talk about energy a lot and you talk a lot about optimism. Have you developed this concept personally, maybe adopted it in your own life and maybe in your business and professional life?

John Locke: 21:25

Well, let me drop back and couch this in a little bit of a different way, because how I do it? I think the reason for that is because of why I do it, and you and I have had many discussions around cause and purpose, and part of what I like to frame up and I do attempt to do this in the presentation is to get people to thinking really about why they're getting up every day. What is it about their life that they want to be important? If you're sitting at your 90-year-old birthday party and you have the few friends who surround you, what would you want them to be saying about you as you listen to them describe the interactions that you've had with them, and so when I have thought through that, I thought how easy it is to lose sight of our purpose, and I talk about that in the presentation that we may think about it now and then, but do we really focus on it? And you and I both know we've been taught this. You know what we focus on is what we create, yet the most important thing in our lives our purpose we don't focus on. So what I'm hoping to do in this presentation is, first of all, to get people to think for just a few minutes we don't have a lot of time but to think really about their purpose and that to achieve this level of really living your purpose, if you can engage in these three gifts, it will be an accelerator for realizing and living your purpose. And so, the first one, obviously we talked about with presence energy is another great one.

John Locke: 23:12

You know what? There's some neuroscience here that I think is really fun. So when you and I we're sitting about what eight feet apart, right? Well, when a human being gets within 10 feet of another person, we don't know this, but we have literally tens of millions of neurons that start firing in our abdominal cavity and start going towards our brain. With this, they're carrying a lot of impulses and signals from the environment that we are sending into our brain through our eyes and ears. With this person who I'm seeing coming within 10 feet, and so what immediately happens because this is the default human condition is that we go into a negative concept of this individual. It's truly a fight or flight until we have some data that comes in, maybe a smile, maybe bright eyes, maybe somebody's opened their arms. Until that data starts getting processed, we're like this. I want to be protected from this person. So we start with, almost every experience with a human being is going to start potentially negative.

John Locke: 24:18

So one of the things that we can do and I think it's an easy thing to do is let's create some positive energy for this interaction, and if we do so, what we've learned is that people will actually reflect that there's a concept called mirror neurons and people are like right mirror neurons that's hocus, pocus kind of stuff. And I said well, you know what? You ever sat in a room with somebody and they yawn and you try not to. That's an example of human mirror neuron interaction, and so we are sending signals back and forth.

John Locke: 24:55

So why would we not want to send some positive energy and have people feel energy in an effort to create a better connection? And so, knowing that kind of from a neurophysiology standpoint, it's like let's think more intentionally about being well, let's talk about our own energy first, because let's just face it, there are days where we don't care, we're tired, we're beat up, we're you name it life has just overwhelmed us. So what I try to instill in myself is some philosophies around this to help with that, and in our first podcast we talked about a lot of energy creation techniques.

Chris Comeaux: 25:36

I was actually thinking we need to link the first podcast.

John Locke: 25:38

Yeah, and so not to be redundant about that, but I will just share this book again, Eat, Move. Sleep is a great book that I've picked up a lot of hints relating to energy creation and how we can really be better versions of ourselves, and when you think about the opportunities that we have to do this, it's what we're eating, how we're moving during the day. I've become a huge advocate of sleep and what it's really. We're in a sleep-deprived culture right now, and so that's contributing to this lack of energy, therefore lack of ability to interact with people effectively, authentically and in a way, that's going to create something that could be incredibly positive, because that's really, I think, what we want for most of us.

John Locke: 26:29

So one of the other elements of this, other than just the physical nature of it and this is something that we talk a lot in our coaching world is what are we talking to ourselves about? What are we saying to each, not to each other, what are we saying to ourselves? That's not serving ourselves right, and the fact is is that, going back to the Positive Intelligence book and I happen to bring one of those too here is that we again operate in a negative mindset. Most of us, probably three quarters of the time, we're processing things just generally in a negative way, so they call that the saboteur mindset, and where we find the opportunity to thrive is in what's been defined as the sage mindset, which is the best version of ourselves, and I love this definition.

John Locke: 27:18

The sage mindset is who we were always created to be. I mean, I just love that, and so who wouldn't want to live in that space every day, knowing that you're living in a space where you were created to have the highest impact, feel the best about yourself, know that you can impact lives of others? I mean that, right, there is energy creation.

Chris Comeaux: 27:34

Yeah, absolutely.

John Locke: 27:40

Just you talking about it. It creates energy, yeah, so why would we not want that? But that's not an easy thing to do, so we have to be intentional. And the story that I relate in the keynote speech which is one of my probably worst moments in my professional life and personal life because I blew it. At the time here in the Asheville, North Carolina area, we had a big nonprofit hospital system at the time it was called Mission Hospital.

John Locke: 28:11

We were very familiar with and I was fundraising for a new cancer center and we had this amazing experience and we raised \$15 million. It was just an incredible community endeavor and I was so privileged to be a part of that and we were not long after we had opened it. I would go over there and spend hours taking tours and people on tours and, of course, continuing fundraising for our cancer program. Well, one day I'm walking out and I see this woman coming towards me with this big smile on her face and I'm thinking that's somebody that I know. Well, I also noticed that she had a bandana wrapped around her head and she comes to me. She gets within about 10 feet. I recognize her as a person I used to work with. Amazing young woman, very high energy and I had just heard through some friends that she had had six months to live with terminal brain cancer. So she comes to me with this big smile on her face. She goes John, I am so glad to see you because I heard you were involved in raising money for this facility. This is one of the most amazing places. I can't tell you how much I appreciate being able to come here. The care that I'm given and the treatment it's just I can't even put it into words. Thank you and your team for doing what you've done.

John Locke: 29:27

And I just kind of blew her off. I kind of went well, it's kind of good to see you came out, because I didn't really know what to say. I was a little awkward, you know, because I knew her condition and I just kind of withdrew in that moment and I said, well, I'm glad to hear you know things are going well and I appreciate you saying that and you know I wish you the best on your journey. And I just literally turned away and kind of walked off from that and I got about 20 feet outside into the parking lot and I just stopped and I said what in the world did I just do I mean you talk about dropping the ball?

John Locke: 30:08

And I just was so embarrassed, so ashamed, that I was so in myself because I'd had a long day. I've been there since 7 am. You know these doctors, they start early, you know them, and I was just exhausted, it's like. But yet I couldn't believe that I couldn't rise to that

moment, and it was at that moment that I decided that I was going to change every moment, that I would interact with somebody as much as possible and that when somebody asks me how I'm doing, so ask me how I'm doing. I'm fantastic, because I really am fantastic. On my absolute worst day it was going to be better than Kim's best day.

Chris Comeaux: 30:48

She took her journey and turned it into a gift to you is what I'm thinking. And I imagine probably at some level you were like because I'm raised and spent a lot of time in hospice and palliative care people having the words is probably the thing they struggle with the most, and my guess is you were struggling for the words, you were tired, but how cool that you've turned that into actually a gift. And she actually gave you a gift. Also, what a great kind of full circle on the cause and purpose you were involved in great kind of full circle on the cause and purpose you were involved in.

John Locke: 31:23

Absolutely, yeah, it was a defining moment and I just feel like I owe the best version of myself to everyone that is brought into my path, because I don't know why they're in my path Right, absolutely, but I have a feeling there's a reason. So why do I not want to be a good steward of the gift of energy and project that in an authentic manner to every human being I come in contact?

Chris Comeaux: 31:40

I don't know why this is coming to me at the moment, but I actually have used this in a meeting I was in the other day. My favorite story in the Bible because it just changes perspective is that the apostles were in the boat and they had nothing, nada, nothing in the net, and all Jesus told them was go to the other side of the boat. And they had nothing, nada, nothing in the net. And all Jesus told them was go to the other side of the boat. The nets were breaking the abundance beyond. And what did they do? They just changed their perspective. They didn't even get the same fishing hole. All they did was change their perspective.

Chris Comeaux: 32:09

And I tell myself that story and over again, because quite often and I think it's what Shiraz is after, who knows what is good and what is bad Every situation is the potential of a gift. Quite often it's probably how do we enter into it? How do we receive the actual gift? Well, John, I feel like you've kind of touched on presence, amazing, touching on energy. I want you to talk a little bit about your story that showcases the power of unselfish giving. In fact, I remember when you were sharing with me this whole story that now resulted in your talk and it was centered around giving. That's the thing that stuck with me, that I'm looking back going. I missed the presence part and missed the energy part, but how

does? Because it feels like you're really keying on this and it's probably the ending one for a reason. How does generosity impact us at maybe a personal level? Because I think we think, oh, it's impacting other people, but why did you ?

John Locke: 33:04

Well, was not intentional that I went in search of that. It was a part of some of the training that I was getting when I was taking on this new opportunity at Mission around major gift fundraising and a lot of philosophies around why people give. And I started hearing things like well, did you know that there are statistics that support the fact that people who give regularly are healthier, they are happier, they actually live longer, and I'm like, really I thought that was kind of cool, but I started hearing it more and more, you know, and I'm like this is pretty amazing. So what's behind all this? And I don't know that I ever truly figured it out, but I had a defining moment that truly opened my eyes. As part of some of the training that I was going through, we were out in California attending a very unique fundraising philanthropy conference and they kind of prepped us for it ahead of them. It was like the last day and they said, well, we're going to let you know ahead of time that what you're going to experience this last day is going to be something that you may not be prepared for, and we're like, what could that be? You know we're fundraisers. This is. You know what's the big deal here? And they said just hang on and be open-minded. That's all they told us.

John Locke: 34:25

And so we go into this room and on stage is a young woman. She appeared to be in her late twenties and she was sitting in a chair and she started telling the story and, just to paraphrase it very briefly, she had told the story about having been recently married, graduated from college, she and her new husband had bought a home, they were planning a family and she started not feeling well and she went to her doctor and they were running tests. They couldn't figure out what was wrong with her and about, I guess. After about six months they came to her and they said you know, we've got some unfortunate news to share with you. You know, even though you're I think at the time she was 24, maybe 25 years old you have an advanced form of MS and we're going to have to design some pretty special treatments for you to figure out how to give you a quality of life. And we can't tell you how long that quality of life is going to last. And she said to us she goes. I can just tell you I was devastated and I thought my life was over and I started calling family members to tell them.

John Locke: 35:28

And I got to a call with my grandmother and I don't know whether the grandmother had been tipped off ahead of time. She didn't tell about that. I kind of think she was. She told

the grandmother her prognosis for her disease and she said I just lost it. I just started crying.

John Locke: 35:48

And the grandmother said can you stop crying for a moment Because I want to talk to you? And she did. And she said all right, I'm going to ask you to do something that you're going to question why I'm asking you to do this, but before I even ask you to do it, I want you to commit to me that you will do it, knowing that I have your best interest. And she said she just was kind of appalled that her grandmother was so insensitive and wasn't really even giving her any empathy. She said I got something for you to do. And she says okay, whatever. And it goes.

John Locke: 36:20

And the grandmother said here's what I want you to do. I want you to, every day starting tomorrow, wake up. I want you to find someone in your world that you can give something to, that will not be attached to anything coming back to you in return. There is nothing in it for you and it can be anything. It can be your time, it can be your money, it can be whatever, but it's an authentic thing that's going to be a benefit to someone with nothing to be expected in return. And she just was like this is crazy, she goes, but I committed to doing it, I'll do it.

John Locke: 36:53

So she did it for a couple of weeks and she admitted it was just a chore, and she didn't really enjoy it. And she said she ended up keeping at it because her grandmother wanted her to do it for two months and towards the end of the second month, she said that she started actually looking forward to it. She goes. It was kind of weird, but she was having some fun interactions with people and, if nothing else, it got her mind off of her condition. So, she said so I feel a little bit better emotionally, I'm just going to keep doing it. Well, during this time they were designing her treatment protocol and they went back I guess it was about two and a half months later for additional tests and the doctor, after running the test multiple times, came back in and said and I think her name was Angela. He said, angela, we really have no explanation for this, but there is no trace of MS in your body.

John Locke: 37:44

And she said she just was flabbergasted. She had no response to that. She goes for other than that can't be true. And he said Well, how have you been feeling lately? She goes well. You know. Now that I'm thinking about it, I am feeling a little bit better. And he said, well.

John Locke: 38:01

And so, she gets up out of the chair and walks to the front of the stage and says I stand in front of you, a 27-year-old, healthy female with a full-time job and a child. Wow. And we were all like our jaws were just like dropped and she just turned and walked off the stage. And then here comes a guy up in a suit right behind her and he stands up there on the screen and he goes I can tell by looking at you right now what you're thinking. You think this is probably the craziest thing you've ever heard. And he said let me introduce myself. My name is I can't remember what his name was, but he was a neurosurgeon. So, he was the doctor. He was the doctor. He wasn't her doctor, but he was a neurosurgeon doctor, and he put this incredible diagram of the human brain up on the screen and he said let me show you something. He goes, I'm going to explain to you what happened.

John Locke: 38:57

I believe what happened. And he starts going through the brain talking about all these places, and he said do you see this point on the brain? He said that's where the body we think the brain helps the body heal. He said you see this other point; that's the point of which a lot of her disease emanated from, and they were like this, they were almost adjacent that she activated that to the point where it actually morphed into the other area of the brain and dissipated all the elements associated with her disease components. And I mean there was not. No one could even talk after that. We were so blown away by it.

John Locke: 39:41

Now, what's interesting? That's probably now been 15, 20 years ago. Nobody really talks about this today, but there is verifiable research that does indicate that people I have not heard another story like that but people you can go into any kind of medical journals and look at people who give consistently without an agenda, because that's who they are. They have lower blood pressure, they have less incidence of chronic disease, they live longer, and they are generally just more positive, happy people, and so that's good enough for me Whether or not this story would ever be replicated again. It had such an impact on me I'm like. I'm never going to forget that, because it does speak to the basic principles of what's in it for me. If I give, well, guess what? How about a healthy life, potentially, if you do it for the right reasons. But the other side of it is knowing that these kinds of gifts that you're giving people without an agenda, just because you want to be giving it, can change their life too. So, it's a double bonus.

Chris Comeaux: 40:53

That's so good, John. Well, it's interesting. A friend, same friend who originally recommended Imagine Heaven, which turned in an incredible podcast last year. So now I've gotten in the habit of going what are you reading? So, he was reading Attitudes of Gratitude. So, I bought that book recently which has got so many great, just good tactical ideas about how to have attitudes of gratitude. And one thing I've adopted is, before I go

to bed it's one of the last things I do is journal at least three things throughout the day that I'm grateful for, and there's something about that, and so I love that. You're poking on that, and I've heard before that they've proved now at a neuroscience level I've heard and maybe you could correct me it creates like brain lubricant. When you have an attitude of gratitude. It's like creating this lubricant within your brain, which I imagine could affect all sorts of things.

John Locke: 41:42

Absolutely. I mean they've done imaging of the brain and seen new neural pathways being formed, simply by doing consistent gratitude journaling.

Chris Comeaux: 41:50

Wow. Well, so you've got presence, energy and just this amazing unselfish giving and I'm sitting here going cause and purpose. Bring cause and purpose back into this. Are these the three or most components to create cause and purpose in a way, or would you say it differently?

John Locke: 42:07

So, I like to use the word accelerator, okay, because I think it's a little bit too much to say that if you do this, you're going to create a cause and purpose. I think that's a different swim lane for us to explore. I think we need to spend time with ourselves, truly doing the deep dive on who we want to be, why we want to do what we're doing, what brings us to life, and go do that, you know, and to think about what's involved in being the best version of myself and the impact that that can have. And so when I think about purpose, you know, in the other podcast we talked about that corporate athlete program.

John Locke: 42:52

They went through and it was incredible because of three days of training, we spent almost a whole day about our purpose before we even got into the tactical stuff. And it's not easy, I mean, and we don't spend time on it, but it's worth the time. And I finally came up with my purpose is to utilize my God-given skills, talents and experiences to impact the lives of the people in my life, and that's why I get up every day, and it's not easy to do that. So, the three gifts if we recognize how they can play into that they can be accelerators for us to be able to effectively live our cause and purpose more often and to do it better, and I think that's kind of where it all intertwines at the end.

Sona Benefits Ad: 43:48

And I think that's kind of where it all intertwines. At the end, 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. To optimize their pharmacy benefits while supporting their business goals. But 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.

John Locke: 44:25

The result Pharmacy benefits that improve employees' well-being and employers' bottom line. You know, when I finish my presentation and I look at the people and I see their reactions and I say to them I said I hope there was something today in this presentation that helps you think differently about your purpose and what you do every day to live that purpose and, if so, you have helped me live my purpose.

Chris Comeaux: 44:51

That's so good and I love how you frame that. They're like accelerants too. Yeah, I really do like that framing. What kind of feedback have you gotten as you've done this presentation, John?

John Locke: 45:01

Believe it or not, I haven't done it a lot. I've done it two or three times. Hopefully that will change after this podcast.

John Locke: 45:07

Yeah, well to me, it's a gift to me to be able to do it. I've had a few people who would come up to me afterwards and almost in tears say I need to really spend time on my purpose, and you've given me a pathway forward to do that. And if one or two people do that as a part of this experience that I hope to create for people because I have some fun things that I do that I don't want to spoil the whole thing, but I've got a pretty fun opening and a pretty fun close that bring it all together. And if I can create a moment for them to think differently about their priorities and who they want to be, then if one or two of those have that experience, then it's been well worth any kind of effort that I've made.

Chris Comeaux: 45:59

That's so good. And again, you're bringing back full circle to Dr Thayer's definition of leadership that he shared with me per my question, that leadership changes the trajectory of things for the better if it's good leadership, and I think that you interjecting in that way and bringing presence, energy, unselfish giving. I could see where, because we live at a time where people were you think about, um Covey in the early 90s talked about the whitewater Rapids of the times that we live, the 90s. Here we are in 2025.

Chris Comeaux: 46:31

If that was Whitewater Rapids, we're at what? Class six now. And so there's this hectic, crazy pace. You could literally not make one decision in your life and just let the Whitewater Rapids carry you wherever they may. And so I think what's so refreshing and what you're bringing here is it makes people think, it gives them an incredibly potent and powerful framework. I love how you weave stories in, because I think we learn best by stories, which is interesting. The Daniel Pink podcast actually that's one of the superpowers of the future that he predicts is actually storytelling but totally see how it's an accelerant to just cause and purpose. Well, what final thoughts, John? This has been just so profound.

John Locke: 47:09

Well, first of all, I would challenge everybody listening or watching today to think about your purpose. Spend some time on it, because, truly, what we focus on is what we create. If we focus on our purpose, we may not find it easy to fulfill our purpose every day and we may need help, and that's why I'm such a proponent of reaching out and asking for help whenever you need it. It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength and learning to be able to learn from other great leaders like yourself. So just realize that it takes a little work now and then to stay motivated to be on track with your purpose. One of the last things maybe might be helpful for the audience is something that I use pretty regularly to keep me on track and something I discovered about 25 years ago, which is the Optimist Creed, and I thought maybe we could end with this, if you're okay.

Chris Comeaux: 48:00

That's really good, John.

John Locke: 48:01

And if you would help me with it, that would be even fantastic. So, I will start off. And this is by Optimist International, so anybody can look this up online, but I like to have this, and I hand this out in the sessions as well, so I'm going to start it off and then we'll just alternate, Chris, so promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.

Chris Comeaux: 48:21

To take health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.

John Locke: 48:26

To make all your friends feel that there is something in them. To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true, To think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best.

Chris Comeaux: 48:39

To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.

John Locke: 48:44

To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. To wear cheerful countenances at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile, to give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.

Chris Comeaux: 48:59

To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

John Locke: 49:07

So recite that once a day and get your day on track to fulfill your purpose.

Chris Comeaux: 49:11

That's going on my desk man. Well, John, thank you. You've always been just a gift and a blessing in my life, just the profoundness of what you developed in this. I pray that you get many opportunities to go share this with others. It's so simple but yet so and, I think, so impactful, and I look forward to you actually going to be sharing this with our TLAF University class coming up.

John Locke: 49:34

Well, and thank you for the opportunities that you've provided for me, and that early opportunity was a great training ground for me to get this up and running, and so I'm extremely grateful, not only for all that you've taught me and opportunities you've provided, but for our friendship.

Chris Comeaux: 49:49

Amen, all right Well to our listeners. At the end of each episode, we always share a quote, a visual. The idea is to create a brain bookmark. It's going to be hard to top the Optimist Creed, but we'll give it a shot. A thought prodger about our podcast subject the further you're learning and thereby your leadership. What we're going for is like a brain tattoo. We want it to stick. Make sure to subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode. We're going to have John's email. John, any other

links you want us to include, we'll make sure we include that as well. And please subscribe to our channel. Pay it forward to families and friends. You know it's easy for us to rail against the world and be frustrated by things. Let's be the change we wish to see in the world.

Chris Comeaux: 50:26

So, thanks for listening to the Anatomy of Leadership, and here's our brain bookmark to close today's show.

Jeff Haffner / Brain Bookmark: 50:32

The three gifts that transform lives the gift of presence, the gift of energy and the gift of unselfish giving.