

# Transcript / Caring for Others with David Levy, Every Interaction is an Opportunity

**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 Our guest today is David Levy. He's a professor of management at the United States Air Force Academy. Welcome, David, it's so good to have you.

**David Levy:** 0:34

Oh, it's great to be here, Chris. Thanks so much for the invite.

**Chris Comeaux:** 0:38

Yeah, I'm so excited. Then Cordt Kassner, our mutual friend, is who connected us and I'm so thankful to Cordt. Well, I'm going to read from your bio here, Dave. So Dave Levy is a professor of management, like I said, united States Air Force Academy. He's been teaching courses on leadership, power, organization development and change since his arrival in 2002. He is a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy. He's served as security forces officer in active duty. After leaving the military, he worked as an organizational change consultant for Grand Thornton and KPMG I kind of forgot that was our mutual. I'm a KPMG guy too, and so Dr Levy received his doctorate in organizational behavior from Cornell University and is the author of several books, including the 52nd Floor, thinking Deeply About Leadership, Attitudes Aren't Free.

**Chris Comeaux:** 1:30

Thinking Deeply About Diversity in the US Armed Forces and Echoes of Mind. Thinking Deeply About Humanship and then Evolution of Government Policy Towards Homosexuality in the US Military and the line. A very, very short story, short, short story. So, dave, again, it's so good to have you. What did I leave out that you want our audience to know about you?

**David Levy:** 1:52

So probably it's the unique situation I'm in at the Air Force Academy. So there's lots and lots of college professors out there but there aren't too many military academies where we're very, very purposeful and deliberate about the mission we have, about developing leaders of character. But even more so than that, it's the idea that I get to actually teach and work with our cadets in an environment that's actually a leadership laboratory, so they're actually practicing leadership in real time over their 47-month stay at the Air Force Academy before commissioning. So it offers us a unique opportunity to kind of co-create things with our cadets that we think would be relevant elsewhere.

**Chris Comeaux: 2:42**

Oh man, again. The first time I talked to you I just felt like there were so many synergies. But like we talk, quite often we get to work with. I'm the CEO of Tilly House Collaborative Network. It's a co-op of community-based nonprofit hospices. Quite often we talk about it is a learning laboratory, which is actually is so beautiful and just kind of approaching things and the learning mode in a day-to-day basis.

**Chris Comeaux: 3:03**

Well, whenever we first met, I told you so I use, I'm using my book as like a framework. The book is the anatomy of leadership. I'm trained as an accountant. That's why I work for KPMG, so you know us accountants, we try to make order out of things, and so if you Google the word leadership, you get over six, six billion hits, and so I kind of this is my offering to the world is this is a meta framework, and I knew it'd be maybe 10 miles wide and only two inches deep, and so we started in January of 24. We've cycled through all the concepts of the chapters and the cool thing is now I'm not beholden to the chapters and I've been thinking about just incredible thought leaders like yourself, and I know there's so many different directions that you and I can go. And so, before we jump into the concepts of leadership, I was sharing with you as we were doing show prep.

**Chris Comeaux: 3:53**

I've been getting more and more excited about this show because I've been doing two things the Masters of Air series, which is on Apple TV. If our listeners have never seen it, it's like Band of Brothers. And of course this was before there was the Air Force because it was during World War II. But it's so amazing. I've enjoyed it, actually watching it with my sons.

**Chris Comeaux: 4:13**

We kind of sit down each night and we watch an episode and then during that one of my sons gave me Malcolm Gladwell's book Christmastime, the Bomber Mafia and it goes through the history of like we all take the Air Force for granted and just the strategy of having

an Air Force and how that came out of World War II. And I was mentioning to you, Dave, that in the book Gladwell talked about even the chapel of the Air Force Academy. It was so different in its design and you started telling me about I didn't know about this that even the Academy itself has some just innovation in architectural design. That sounds like it's going back to the cause and purpose. Can you talk about that a little bit before we jump into leadership?

**David Levy: 4:57**

Yeah, yeah, absolutely, Chris. There's a book called Modernism at Mid-Century and it talks about. This was in the late 40s, when they were looking, you know, after you know, World War II, when they stood up the Air Force in 1947, they wanted to create an Air Force Academy, just like where there's Annapolis for the Navy and West Point for the Army, and so they had generals meeting with the architects to design it and they wanted something that really represented the Air Force, which is based on technology and was very future looking. And so they created all kinds of these things built in, like, for example, there's six floors at the Air Force Academy, in the dorms where the cadets live, and if you ask a cadet who lives on the second floor, you know they say, well, no one. It's like, well, why not? Right, and it's because we're elevated. You know, we're not on the ground, we're in the air. So little things like that, where there's plenty of room, they put offices and things on the first floor, but no one sleeps here because the cadets are elevated. Another thing, just, you know I'll share one more story.

**David Levy: 6:13**

If you were ever to visit and go for a tour of the facility, you start noticing things, right, and they're mostly unconscious, but when you start asking questions it starts arising. So a typical college campus. We have Colorado College locally and University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. You walk around campus. There's lots of meandering pathways, lots of ways to get there, and you're walking through nice gardens and things. But when you look at the academy, you're walking through nice gardens and things, but when you look at the Academy it's all right angles and so it's hard to get almost anywhere.

**David Levy: 6:51**

When I was a cadet, I used to live in the far end of the dormitory and I had to do this big rectangle, go all the way across one way and then make a left and go all the way the other way to our dining facility, and you ask the question it's like wait, why isn't there a diagonal? And the response that the engineers and the generals built in is yeah, cadets, don't cut corners right. So it sinks into our unconscious and there's just hundreds of examples like

that that are built in that you don't necessarily think about but are nevertheless there and it kind of gets into the fabric of your being if you're there for four years.

**Chris Comeaux: 7:32**

That's so cool and I love the intentionality of that. You share with me as well that I've never actually been to the Air Force Academy, but it's built up on a hill, so then people have. Can you just speak about that for a second?

**David Levy: 7:43**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So when they were looking at building this thing, the easy thing to do would be to build it in downtown Colorado Springs, which at the time there was almost nothing there, a very, very small town, and it was nice and flat. There's one area that's nice and flat and the engineers are saying, and the architects, well yeah, let's just build it there. And the generals, absolutely not. We are a necropolis in the sky. We want the local community to look up and see this acropolis in the sky. We stand between the wilderness right, the bears and the mountain lions of the rugged mountains and the citizens.

**David Levy: 8:29**

So it's so deliberate and so intentional. And even the design of the dormitories, their designs of the windows are north or south. And you know you ask the question well, why? Why did they design it this way? And they always wanted the cadets to have clarity of vision. So if you were to build it so that it was east or west facing, you know when the sun rises in the east, you'd be blinded by the sun. So they wanted absolute, you know, clarity. And if you look at the windows of the dorms a lot of windows. There could be curtains, but it's mostly window. These aren't small things. These are huge glass paintings, and it was about transparency.

**David Levy: 9:14**

We have nothing to hide, so it's just hundreds of these little things built in to the very fabric of the institution.

**Chris Comeaux: 9:23**

Well, Dave, I'd love for you to tell just a little bit more of your story, because whenever we first met, you were weaving concepts of belonging, agency and efficacy as just key words in your story. Can you kind of take that from there? I just was so impressed with that.

**David Levy: 9:41**

Yeah, yeah, my pleasure. So this brings me back to when, after I graduated, I was a security forces officer and then for Desert Shield and Desert Storm, I deployed with my 44 person security. I was with the F-117 stealth fighter. That's old now, but back in the day it had just come out of the top secret. You know black world, and so when we were deployed in this location in the Middle East, every general wanted to come see this. Right, it's like man, this is a weird, that F-117, it looks like an alien spacecraft and no one had really access to it unless you were a part of that program. So we were getting generals coming all the time and almost everyone. What we would do is we would all line up and it's a four star general and they would want to shake the troops hands, kind of like as a morale check. It was kind of nice. But whenever they got to me they would shake my hand. See, I was a lieutenant and it didn't matter whether it was Marine Corps, army, air Force we didn't get any Navy admirals but they would all say, lieutenant, take care of your people. You know, which is so obvious in one level, you know, very obvious. But then it stuck with me. This was in 1990. And in every person, take care of your people. And I know it's true that we ought to be taking care of your people. But now that I'm a very nerdy academic, I had the opportunity to say all right, what does that mean? To take care of your people? To take care of your people. And so we you know I have a team that that the wonderful thing about the academy is we just have such amazing people you know that I get to work with. And so I put a couple of teams together. We have multiple teams that are working on this thing that we ultimately call LensX. But you know what we said if you really want to take care of your people, what does that actually look like? And so we started digging into the literature and we found something called self-determination theory.

**David Levy: 11:52**

And so when I was a cadet in the early 1980s maybe it wasn't early, it was mid-1980s, you know, excuse my sound, so I'm not quite as old as I made myself out to be mid-80s, not early 80s and what we would do as a psychology major, it seemed that every chapter in some of our textbook were describing yet another need theory. You know, the need for power, the need for affiliation, just you know. One after another, and I became kind of cynical and saying, well, gee, you know what are they doing. After another, and I became kind of cynical and saying, well, gee, you know what are they doing, are they just? Everyone that wants tenure in an institution, you know, creates their own need theory. And so I was really jaded about needs, even though, you know, the idea of needs really resonated with me.

**David Levy: 12:38**

The idea of needs are, you know, just like you water a garden right A garden, you know, just like you water a garden right A garden, plants, vegetables, need certain nutriments in order

for them to thrive, right? And so the idea for humans was the same thing. Right, that humans have these certain, at least on the psychological side, certain psychological needs or nutriments that need to be fulfilled in order for us to experience subjective well-being. Be fulfilled in order for us to experience subjective well-being. But not everything. Right, I have a need to watch TV, right? No, not everything can be a need.

**David Levy: 13:14**

So sometime when I was in grad school, I came across some work by DC and Ryan called Self-Determination Theory and they set out, and it was really, I think, a wonderful contribution. What they looked at is said you know, there can't be a thousand needs. There's got to be some thread that connects everything together. So they conducted a meta-analysis and in the 1980s they concluded you know scientifically that you know there's really three needs it's autonomy, competence and relatedness. And if you experience those, if you have those needs fulfilled in sufficient quantities, you'll experience well-being. So we were playing around with autonomy, relatedness and competence, and what we learned were those terms just seem to be dated. And so we learned were you know those terms just, you know, seem to be dated.

**David Levy: 14:08**

And so we looked at, all right, what's kind of the more modern language that's here today? And those are efficacy, agency and belonging. And so the idea being right, so we translated them, we brought them into the workplace a little bit and we basically said you know, if you're a leader and you truly do believe in taking care of your people, you know focus on fulfilling those needs of belonging, agency and efficacy. This idea, you know, belonging so powerful, right? So the idea being that every one of us should be able to walk into an organization and kind of look around and say you know what I feel really comfortable here, I feel like I belong, it's kind of like family, right, they may kid and joke around with me, but it feels good to be here, right? And then the idea of agency Agency is, you know, kind of connected to autonomy and freedom, right? No one likes to be micromanaged, right? So we want to be able to show up at work and feel that we can kind of navigate somewhat as we please, as long as our individual goals are aligned with organizational goals.

**David Levy: 15:23**

And then, finally, efficacy, and that's kind of related to competence. But we kind of said you know what that doesn't really play out well in organizations, because I could be the best trained employee on the planet, you know, and just be able to, like, you know, have the knowledge and skills to do my job. But if I have a toxic leader, and every time this person walks by my cubicle, you know I start sweating and I have a panic attack. Right, the

competency isn't enough. The efficacy adds that component. Yet in this context, I could actually do what I need to do. So we try to whittle it down and say look on, any given day, if you want to take care of your people, you need to tend the garden of belonging. Agency and efficacy. Now there's other components, but I can pause there and then make sure I go into the other components of what we're calling our LensX model, if you want to go there.

**Chris Comeaux:** 16:26

Yeah, and say it one more time, it's your LensX Lens, so it's a lens through which we see the world.

**David Levy:** 16:34

So it's called LensX and it's because it looks like an X.

**Chris Comeaux:** 16:39

Gotcha, okay, we'll go there.

**David Levy:** 16:42

Do you want me to go there?

**Chris Comeaux:** 16:43

In a second. I want to just back up up real quick on belonging agency and efficacy. And so you were using that example just now. Efficacy I want you to explain it just a little bit more. And so I was trained, as I shared with you, by Dr Lee Thayer, he happened to be Stephen Covey's mentor. One of his great books was the Competent Organization so high on competence. But it feels like there's another angle or another principle you're weaving into there by using the word efficacy.

**David Levy:** 17:31

Yeah, so competence is critical, right, that was DCN Ryan's original need, that they found that we all have this need to be competent and Memorize every single word of different chapters in the book. But they walk, you know, to take a final exam, panic attack. They're frozen level, you know, and it's how you parse it out, right. So on one level the training is there, the ability is no doubt there, but when it's in certain contexts it doesn't play out right. So it's just kind of linking the actual skills training, you know, being able to be implemented within the context. Because there could be other.

**David Levy:** 18:16

Hey, when I'm really relaxed I can really work and meet organizational goals, but in certain places I can't. So it's just being aware that people perform in different contexts differently and you can't just assume you send someone for training and they get 100% on the final exam for whatever training seminar they went to, that they're good to go, that if you're you really want to have competent and effective employees there, you know, it's about that context, right. And or you know, just another quick example if they, if it's kind of not a fantastic organization culture and someone wants to contribute in that meeting, they're not going to engage, they're not going to act as if they really are.

**Chris Comeaux:** 19:22

Was that helpful? Thank you, yeah, that's very helpful. And back up on belonging, this is so fascinating. So our team is actually working on the values of our own organization at Telios and I think we're actually adding this value and they hadn't had the benefit of listening to you. Can you just unpack belonging just a little bit more?

**David Levy:** 19:39

Yeah, so, and to me and our team, we're really cautious about trying to prioritize which is most important. But when I talk to everyone on the team, we are in agreement belonging is the most critical. When I talk to everyone on the team, we are in agreement belonging is the most critical. So if you're going to, I mean you want to have all the needs fulfilled, but belonging is the first. So I'm going to do it in a way that introduces the other part of the X. I think that's a good segue. So, on one side, you know this X, right, think of two lenses that are interlocking. You have the needs of belonging, agency and efficacy, and then, on the other side, it's our narratives. It's, you know, and there's different types of narratives, right? So we're given, you know, largely by society, a particular narrative, right? So if I'm a white heterosexual male in this society, you know there's a particular narrative, right? So if I'm a white heterosexual male in this society, you know there's a certain narrative about what it's like to be me, right, certain expectations. But if maybe you're you know, an underrepresented minority, you're new to the country, it's a different narrative. So there's a societal narrative, there's an organizational narrative that you know, talks about a whole bunch of different dynamics. So I'm in the Air Force. Well, if I'm a fighter pilot, that narrative is different than if I'm the guy arresting the fighter pilots, right. Different narratives and my experience within that organization. And then there's this individual narrative. That's the entirety of my life experiences in the moment. Right, it's that story I'm telling, based on those other two narratives. So you can have and this is a true story that I work in the management department at the Air Force Academy and we have an absolutely fantastic organizational culture and it's transcended. Bosses, I've had several department heads in



the 22 years I've been there and each of them rolls in saying, hey, I just don't want to screw up our culture, it's fantastic, so it's just thrilling to be a part of this culture.

**David Levy: 21:52**

But you know, maybe four or five years ago I was talking to one of our captains. So I'm a civilian, but we have a lot of military officers there and it's normally a three or four year rotation. So I was talking to one guy who was getting close to you know, ending his assignment to the academy. I said so what's next for you? He goes oh, I'm separating. I'm like, oh, you know, which is not unheard of, because these people, after they've been teaching at the Air Force Academy, have amazing opportunities. So they, you know, they could work for McKinsey or Baines or start businesses. Really, the sky's the limit. And I said so, what are you going to do? And he goes you know what? I don't know, I don't have a job yet. I'm like really, why, right, so why are you getting out if you don't have a job yet? And he says you know, dave, I just, you know, I've been here four years.

**David Levy: 22:46**

I just never felt like I belonged and to me that was like an arrow. It was a dagger, an arrow whatever weaponry you want to say to the heart and I was crushed and it really put me in, you know, kind of a bit of a mental crisis. I wasn't a supervisor or anything, but I'm like I started thinking how in the world can we have such an amazing culture and this person feel like they not belong and this person feel like they not belong? And that's when we started to recognize that, you know, belonging is amazingly complex and it's not just enough to create a fantastic culture where everyone, in theory, should feel like they belong. Right, just be themselves, be the entirety of who they are and be accepted. For that, you have to actually work at the individual level. And so that's when we basically said hey look, if you're a supervisor and you want to take care of your people, of course, or you're a leader, of course you want to create that absolutely fantastic organizational culture. But you also have to individually tend that garden of belonging in agency and efficacy, because it's really about perceptions, and if someone tells you I don't feel like I belong here, the correct response isn't yes, you do, you're wrong, you know, and yell at the person. It's oh my God, what can we do? Right, you know I failed as a leader or as a colleague in helping you feel that sense of belonging. And the last part of our little LensX puzzle is that you tend that garden of belonging, agency and efficacy, realizing that every one of us have different narratives and those narratives will basically tell us how we're going to experience it belonging, agency and efficacy within that context.

**David Levy: 24:47**

But we can tend that garden through what we're calling micro exchanges, and micro exchanges are just those momentary interactions that we have throughout the day, you know, and it could be in person, it could be in writing. For example, I was talking to a retired army colonel, you know, earlier this week, and we were talking about this LensX paper and he said, you know, you know, I've got a great example of a micro exchange that may have saved my life. I'm like really. And he said, yeah, I was deployed in Afghanistan. It was like an incredibly stressful environment.

**David Levy: 25:27**

We were working for a Marine one-star general. You know, I was a colonel and you know, every one of us were just at odds and with what was going on. And this general sent out this kind of scathing email about what was going on and about three quarters of the way through, and he said, and I just want to say, you know, xxx, you're doing a fantastic job. And it was this guy's name. And he said, right, then I realized I'm going to be okay, he acknowledged me, it was a positive micro exchange and that's all I needed to get me through the day. And you know, similarly, they can ruin the day too, right? And so every single interaction that we have is an opportunity. It's an opportunity to tend that garden of belonging, agency and efficacy for others. But let me pause there.

**Chris Comeaux: 26:22**

Yeah, so. So make sure I have it right. So the lens X on one lens is belonging agency and efficacy, and the other leg of the X, if you will, is the narratives. Is that correct? Narratives of the X, if you will. Is the narratives, is that correct?

**David Levy: 26:34**

Narratives.

**Chris Comeaux: 26:35**

And so years ago, Covey said none of us see the world as it is. We see the world as we are. In fact, I still have the first edition Stephen Covey newsletter and he had a picture of a human being with a window strapped to their forehead and basically the gist of the article was every one of us has this window and on that window there's certain things innate to who we are our DNA, our temperament. There's lots of temperament personality assessment tools, but then the last part is our life experience, and those things color our window. And because your window is different than mine, dave, we could be looking at the same thing, but we're seeing it differently because we're seeing it through that window. Is that similar to this concept of narratives or is it taking in a slightly different direction?

**David Levy: 27:21**

Yeah, so very similar. But I would offer that what we're getting at is this window. These narratives really are the story that we tell ourselves, and so that story is subject to change, right, because you know our lives are so complex, we can reframe our story in any way we want, right? So when we have a really good experience, we're on the high end, say wow, I'm pretty impressive, right. And then something bad happens to us and all of a sudden it's like, wow, maybe I'm not cut out for this, so it doesn't really take that much to kind of change that story. And so just these simple and we're offering that not much are these simple exchanges that we have every single day, that kid that comes in and they're not experiencing belonging, and you just kind of walked into their office, you've walked by it a hundred times and say, hey, matt, I've just been super busy. You know, I see you here working your butt off every day. How are you doing Really, how are you doing?

**David Levy: 28:24**

Just a few interruptions like that can make a world of difference to that narrative. So I don't, I mean, we have to acknowledge that there's like a societal narrative. We acknowledge that there's like a societal narrative. We acknowledge that there's a big organizational narrative and that we have this individual narrative of our life, experience it. But we basically just use that as the idea that, hey, all of us are very unique and different and so I should never assume that anyone is seeing the world or shares the narrative that I have and that makes it my responsibility to meet each person where they are. And I don't need to dig in, tell me about your societal narrative, right, it's just out there. It's just a given that these narratives are different, and once we accept that they're different, then we can tend that garden. It doesn't work when we do that golden rule treat everyone the way you want to be treated. No, no, we ought to treat people the way they want to be treated, and you have to do some work to figure out what that actually looks like.

**Chris Comeaux: 29:35**

You keep using the metaphor of tin your garden, and it's interesting. I often say a culture is like a garden and we've had gardens in the past. I'm not a great gardener, and especially right now we're getting a lot of rain in North Carolina, and you go, I'll get to those weeds next week. Well, and the next thing next week, the weeds are all over. You have to tend that garden proactively, consistently. So tell me more like why do you use the metaphor tend the garden?

**David Levy: 30:04**

So so we in my office we started out, you know, and we wrote a paper on thriving at the Air Force Academy. It was the leader, about a leader responsibility to create an environment, you know, based on belonging, agency and efficacy. And the original depiction of that was a

tree, you know it was. We called it the thriving tree and it had all these elements kind of built into it. But you know, so that was there, but then we threw it away there. But then we threw it away.

**David Levy:** 30:33

And then one of my colleagues, matt Orlowski, just you know, as we were having conversations about this, said, well, you have to tend the garden, and it just kind of stuck as something that very useful.

**David Levy:** 30:46

We've also tried, well, you've got to span the gap between the needs and narratives, and that kind of works too, right, so we can assume that there's this gap, right, so we all have these needs, and you can't just like check it off and say, hey, I filled your belonging needs, see you next year, right? No, it's constant effort. And so the tending the garden does imply, you know, the weeding and all of that, but the spanning the gap, it seemed a little more clinical and it didn't resonate as well, but maybe it did kind of say to people no, it's hard work, you have to go beyond this understanding that we have these needs that need to be fulfilled, that you, as the leader, have to actually span that gap. You've got to do it, you've got the power, and so maybe that was a little harsher when we worked with our students and in workshops. You know, the attending the garden seems to be what's been resonating.

**Chris Comeaux:** 31:51

Yeah, I could totally get that metaphor and now I'm really getting usage. I asked you a long time ago what do you think we should call this show in this episode, and you said every interaction is an opportunity. And I'm now really getting why you're framing it this way. So the micro exchanges what if I botched the micro exchange and I really create a bad interaction? What do you do with it then?

**David Levy:** 32:13

Yeah, I think that's a fantastic question, and so our team has discussed this a lot and, you know, in the workshops we discussed it too. And you know, here's the truth, here's what we learned. It's okay because, you know, I mean, this isn't, you know, a one-time shot, right, it's like, hey, I screwed up a micro exchange, I'm done, right. So the assumption is you're tending the garden and when you're doing that, you're spanning the gap, you're working with people. You know, through these micro exchanges on belonging, agency and efficacy, you're going to say something stupid. You're going to say something stupid, you're going to have a different idea. But over time, people are very intuitive and they can see the intent. So if it's genuine and it's sincere, I will say dumb things all the time. And you know, dave, you

didn't really mean that, did you? I'm like what do you think I meant? And it's like, well, you said this. I'm like, no, I did not mean that.

**David Levy: 33:19**

And sometimes I'll go in to you know the class I work with, 18 to 22 year olds, so every month they seem to get new jargon and so I'm in my old man. You know talk, and so I'll talk to cadets and all of a sudden you'll hear like giggling in the class and all of a sudden I'll just stop, I'm like what I say, and they'll say, sir, it sounds like you just said that. And I'm like, oh yeah, I did. You know, is that a problem now? Oh yeah, big time, right, you know, here's what it means. Oh my God, no, I did not mean to say that. And once they kind of know who you are and know that you know your intent is good, right, you're trying. Then, you know, I've never found a case where someone hasn't been forgiven for, you know, screwing up a micro exchange. So that gives us a lot of power to experiment. And because why in the world should I assume I'm going to get it right Right Every time? I mean, that would be a fallacy, I think.

**Chris Comeaux: 34:26**

Yeah, totally agree, and I was thinking like the term the lexicon micro exchange. Are you trying to bring them like very present in the moment with that type? The lexicon micro exchange? Are you trying to bring them like very present in the moment with that type of lexicon and framing?

**David Levy: 34:37**

Yeah, absolutely. And and just you know, here's an example of you know just real quickly, of how significant these very small exchanges. So I was doing, I do these workshops and I talk, you know, have people pair up and describe their most positive you know work experiences ongoing, and then they're negative. They do a pair and share and, without fail, those experiences that they deem positive. They are positive, you know, because they are experiencing levels of belonging, agency and efficacy, and those negative ones they're negative because they're not and they have tons of examples and then we have fun. It's like, hey, name a positive microexchange. You've seen Name a negative one. And this one happened probably a month ago.

**David Levy: 35:26**

I was in with an NCO and he decided to share a negative micro exchange that he had with, you know, with an officer maybe five or six years ago, and he said he was at a deployed location and they're working their butts off, they're undermanned at this deployed location. This, you know young NCO is, you know is working on something. And this lieutenant kind

of walked in and said, yeah, I sure wish someone would make a pot of coffee and kind of walked out and you know it was just such a negative, right it really was. It's like wait a second, so I'm your secretary to make you coffee? Yeah, I don't think so. We all have an important mission. I'm highly trained to do a particular job. Yeah, no right.

**David Levy: 36:14**

And you know he, I think he ended up making the coffee. But here he was like six or seven years and, and as he was describing this, you know very simple, I wish someone would make coffee. And the only other person in the room was this guy and he said I said so, this still pisses you off. Six, seven years later he goes. I think about it all the time. It just infuriates me. So very, very small things, you know, bring you into that moment and can have a tremendous impact.

**Chris Comeaux: 36:47**

So in the framing we were talking about earlier, about the, when I was using the Stephen Covey analogy, you can change what's on that window right, the interpretation of those narratives. You can rewrite your interpretation of the story. Um, give a quick. Uh, one of our prior guests, uh, Bruce Peters.

**Chris Comeaux: 37:04**

Um, he's, he works in the Rochester area, is very big in leadership, he takes people through really interesting exercise and I've used it now in some of the training I do is you put this timeline and at the top of the timeline some high points in your life and the bottom the lower points of your life, and I'm being very brief with this but then have them kind of go back and it would be a really great exercise, kind of out of that exercise, to go back in those low points and just ask yourself how has your interpretation of that story impacted your life and how might you rewrite that story? Going forward and I've actually done that personally it is very powerful and you start to realize that that past window had some things maybe that weren't as efficacious and then reinterpreting. So I'm curious if that would you clean that up and say any of that differently in your studies, in your work. Does that resonate?

**David Levy: 37:55**

So it's almost like how do you get my new paper? So I have a team now that, yeah. No, it's actually crazy that you said what you just did, because you know, and we just shared a draft yesterday, but we have a lot of work to do. But what we're realizing is we talked about micro exchanges, but now we've basically assembled I think there's 11 of them or so. We're calling them micro tools and so, like, for example, one of the tools, micro framing, another one, micro identity.

**David Levy: 38:28**

So something happens, right, and we frame it in a particular way, right, regardless of what happens, we can be more deliberate and conscious about how we're going to frame that experience. So someone goes in and, you know, a project doesn't go well. But, man, you know, one way of looking at it is yeah, that was failure, I'm really bad. And the other way of looking at it is yeah, I was chosen for this project, no one else wanted it, it was almost an impossibility. But, man, give me that project again and now I know what to do, right, so we can frame things in almost any way. So, as a coach or a leader, and you know. So we're looking at this through two lenses. On the one hand, you know, as a leader or supervisor, you can actually help another person frame.

**David Levy: 39:23**

You know, use these micro tools right. You can use these tools on someone else, but you could also use them on yourself. So when you're having a really, really bad day, you know we have this chart of 11, you know micro tools. Pick one of these tools and play with it and see it. You know you're kind of like spinning, right it's.

**David Levy: 39:44**

You know the political spinning that constantly goes on, but it's very real because our complexity is so overwhelming. We just create these little heuristics and a lot of these heuristics become our story and it's 100% open for modification. They're malleable stories and we can help others weave their own stories better and we can each weave our own story in a way. And so, again, you know, let me close the circle, close it to such that, you know, the intent of the micro tools is to help us experience deeper levels of belonging, agency and efficacy. Fulfillment, because that's what leads to subjective well-being, just to feel good about being a human, and to me that's what drives me. I want everyone to feel good about being alive, and we do that when these needs are being fulfilled.

**Chris Comeaux: 40:42**

Here's my last question, Dave. I'm sitting there reflecting, going this lexicon of belonging agency efficacy and then the way you're describing it makes so much sense, especially in the realm of healthcare. But then I'm sitting there going, this guy teaches at the U S air force Academy where where are things like discipline and necessity? So Dr Thayer, my mentor, would say like necessity is the mother of invention and like you know well, I don't want to go do that PT drill right now. No, if you want to graduate, you't want to go do that PT drill right now. No, if you want to graduate, you're going to go do that PT drill. So I'm just curious, like where does discipline and necessity kind of fit into this? Like we need a whole lot more in

health care. What you're describing I would think in like you know the military aspect, you'd have a whole lot more kind of discipline, necessity.

**David Levy: 41:30**

So there's a lot of discipline. There's a lot of necessity. So there's a lot of discipline, there's a lot of necessity. But every one of us is a human being. We all have these same needs. So we have an all-volunteer force and they're being asked to put their lives in harm's way, and so can you imagine how much power there is for re-upping, to extend or re-enlist. If people don't feel like they belong, they're likely not going to re-enlist. So I think of this as a national security imperative to help every single person that's in the military to meet these needs.

**David Levy: 42:17**

Now we still have the UCMJ Universal Code of Military Justice. We have tons of rules right, lots of orders. People are going to carry those orders out, but you can get while you're carrying them out. You can do it through a compliance mindset and just do what you're told, or you can do it when you're feeling like man. I'm being all like. You know, truly living that army adage be all you can be. And I don't think you can be all you can be if these needs aren't being fulfilled.

**David Levy: 42:51**

But you know also, you know, before we started I was talking about my daughter. You know, about to be married. You know I made her read this LensX thing. I made her fiance read this thing. Hey, here's the way you treat each other as human beings, right, because you should each be tending each other's gardens of belonging agency. You should each be tending each other's gardens of belonging agency and efficacy. So I think it works in the realm of anyone being a human. I don't know if it works with animals, yet I think it does. I really do. When you pet a dog, I think it connects with them.

**Chris Comeaux: 43:29**

So I think it's very generalizable. Well, I love, I, definitely. I love what you're saying, Dave, and thank you for what the work that you're doing. I'd love where you start the conversation about taking care of people, and you know, I'm kind of sitting here reflecting, of course, the Air Force adage of aim high and I think that's still the kind of motto, right, and thinking back through that history and just how innovative, like you know, we could probably do a whole nother show of, like, the advent of technology and what the air force is doing. And it's interesting, you're working on the human element and they're deploying, like incredible mind blowing probably, technology and what they're doing. Um, but you took it, taking care of your people. That's just so basic. Um, it's. There's still going to be a whole lot of people.



Yeah, there might be some drones and things like that, but there's still people that are building, operating and flying those things and working on them and keeping them fueled and turned around, et cetera. So any final thoughts?

**David Levy:** 44:26

No, it's been a pleasure and it's my mantra every interaction is an opportunity.

**Chris Comeaux:** 44:33

Make yours count well, that's very well said and I love that you title it that way. I'm gonna probably put so like. That chapter very early in my book is about caring for others and the concept that to truly lead other people you have to, and it feels very um. Yours obviously goes much deeper and puts a lot more meat on the bone. So, Dave, thank you. Thank you for the work that you're doing. To our listeners,

**Chris Comeaux:** 44:56

at the end of each episode, we always share a quote and a visual. The idea is we want to create, like a visual bookmark, a Brain Bookmark, a thought prodger about our podcast subject. So it furthers your learning, and what we're going for is a brain tattoo, so hopefully it sticks. I want you to please be sure to subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership, so you don't miss an episode. If you're interested in the book, check it out on Amazon, the Anatomy of Leadership. We're going to actually put links to Dave's books as well. 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. So thanks for listening to Anatomy of Leadership, dave, thanks to you. And here's our brain bookmark to close today's show.

**Jeff Haffner:** 45:35

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