

## Transcript for: Message into the Community with Tom Howell

00:02 - Melody King (Announcement)

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.

00:24 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. Our guest today is a good friend, Tom Howell, and I love when I asked Tom, I said how should I use your title? He said I'm a brand mechanic. I love that, Tom. That is so cool. It's good to have you.

(Tom Howell) Thank you, thank you, I'm excited.

00:40 – Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, let me read. So Tom's a principal with Hundred Trees LLC. He has more than 40 years of experience in marketing communications, including five years in broadcast news. He has incredible voices you're going to hear, 11 years in the Kentucky State Capitol, 24 years working for public relations, advertising and marketing firms. Back from February 2002 to June 2013, he was principal of New West LLC that's actually when I met him and since selling New West, Tom has been a principal of 100 Trees LLC, a marketing communications consultancy company.

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Tom's strategic planning and counsel is sought by clients seeking to build or protect reputations, advance issues, build coalitions and communicate complex technical information, as well as by those wanting to introduce a new concept or product to targeted or mass audiences. His Pure Tap campaign for the Louisville Water Company received the National Creativity and Public Relations Award, While at New West, Tom and his team created what I got to know him for, the nationally recognized Unbridled Spirit branding effort and campaign for the state of Kentucky. Over the first four years of that campaign, the state reported tourism spending increased from \$7.6 billion a year to more than \$11 billion annually. He's also led the efforts to rebrand the regional hospice provider, now known as hospice health, which led to 30% first year increase in patients and families seeking care. Oh, that's incredible, Tom. Tom is there anything I left out that you want the audience to know about you?

**02:13 - Tom Howell (Guest)**

I'm a grandfather that's my new favorite title and I got to speak to my granddaughter last night and she's taking the pre-K test to see if she can test in the kindergarten, and so she was so excited. But instead of talking about the test, all she wanted to talk about was she got the right. She got to get on a school bus, so that's funny. And I have a two and a half month old grandson, so, he's, he's just a lot of fun. It's fun. They send a picture of him every day. Uh, so we get to, we get to follow along, and that's a lot of fun. It's fun. They send a picture of him every day. So we get to follow along, and that's a lot of fun.

**02:48 - Chris Comeaux (Host)**

That's so cool, Tom. Well, tom, thanks. You've been a little under the weather, but I appreciate you taking time and still prioritizing this, and so I've asked this question, as we kind of started this Anatomy of Leadership podcast and we left it off on a few shows and we got feedback off on a few shows and we got feedback said you need to keep asking your guests that.

**03:23 - Tom Howell (Guest)**

And I'm so glad I kind of restarted it and so because I just find that I get to get get such cool insight into people and sometimes people don't identify it as a superpower. I think listening that my wife may beg to differ, but I think you know I started off my career as a reporter and in that particular role I had to get used to walking up to people I'd never known. A lot of times they were in stressful situations and I had to ask them questions and I had to listen to them and do follow-ups and things like that.

**03:52 - Chris Comeaux (Host)**

So from a very early age in my professional career, asking questions and listening to people's answers is probably the most important thing and I learned a lot I could totally see that being your superpower now, which is so funny because I'm glad I keep asking this because it's not the answer you think, but then now I could. So you know, I've got. I've known you for a long time. You would think a marketing person. That would not be their answer, but yet that's probably what makes you such a dang good. I know you're, um, I would say that, like your ability, how you do focus groups and what you discover is it is incredible and now I actually get it, just because that's part of your superpower, right?

**04:31 - Tom Howell (Guest)**

Right and um, uh, it's funny when I look back on the focus groups that I've done.

04:37

Especially like that I was involved with, with with the hospice and palliative care world, was the, was the hospice rebranding and, uh, you know, the tagline for that ended up being because the end of life is part of living, and that actual tagline came out of the focus groups.

04:55

One of the people that was in the focus group and one of the focus groups I did was families who had just used their services and somebody came to the table and said you know, we don't think of that, but that's part of life, the end of life is part of life. And so, by listening to them, we rearranged the words a little bit and that became the tagline and it really helps explain what hospice and palliative care is and why it's so important, because this is a part of life, this is a part of and then and 80 of us are going to go through something like this you know some people are going to die through accident or or endemic or something like that, but most of us are going to have have some sort of end of life care that we're going to need, so we need to treat it as such. It's part of life.

05:45 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, that's well said, and even that 17% may still experience it through another family member or something along those lines. So that's brilliant. Well, tom, as you know, I'm using my book, the Anatomy of Leadership, as a framework for this podcast. Throughout the year I wrote the book almost like a table of contents, and so now I'm an accountant by trade, so I tried to organize the field of leadership, and so you Google the word, you get 7 billion hits, and so it's kind of a table of contents and of course, we started the show.

06:14

The first part of the book is what is leadership Like a definition, so self-mastery, caring for others, influence, intention, cause and Purpose. And the second part of the book is the seven M's of what do leaders do. So we've had a guest on mission, we've had a guest on margin, we've had a guest on meaning, management and lexicon, and when I got to message into the community, I could not think of a better person than you to talk about this with. So let me describe this for our listeners and then I think you're going to take it away. My mentor is Dr Lee Thayer.

06:46

He was Stephen Covey's mentor and I'd never heard the concept before about this concept of kind of he actually called it triangulation is the way he described it, and so I kind of coined it as message into the community, and basically what he said it was is gauging where the community was, your, your customer, and reconciling that with what's in your organization. And then how do you let the organ, let the community know that's what you do. Now some people go, oh, that sounds like marketing, but I'm afraid that then people lose the richness of that dynamic. And so I'm just curious do you describe what I'm trying to describe in maybe perhaps a different way?

07:24 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Well, communication, by definition, is two way. So you're sending out a message. A lot of people think that their job is done when they send out a message, but that's not the case. You have to make sure that the message got through the way that you wanted it to get through, to whoever you're speaking with, and that happens all the time in our regular conversations you're speaking with, and that happens all the time in our regular conversations. If you think about it, have you had a conversation with someone where you're explaining something to them and they kind of look like they're nodding, and when they give you feedback, it's like no, you missed the point altogether. And so that's what communication is, and that's why I think that research is so important and being able to ask people, whether it be through quantitative or qualitative research, you know, test and find out what people really think about your organization or what your services that you provide, or what the issue is.

08:19

And you know too many organizations they focus on here. Here's my product, and I'm so focused on this product or service and everybody's going to love it and I'm going to roll it out and people are just going to flock to my door, which isn't necessarily the case. The four tenets for marketing for me are do a good job, do a good job, do a good job, do a good job, do a good job and tell people about it. You know it's it. It doesn't do any good to market or to go out in the community with with a message uh, if you're not prepared to back that up with a good service or product. Yeah, and too many organizations, uh, we call it putting lipstick on a pig if you aren't prepared to provide a service.

09:05

This promise that you're making to someone and that's really what you're doing You're making a promise that I'm going to be able to help you in your particular case with hospice and palliative care. I'm making a promise that I'm going to be able to take care of you and to show you how you need to. You know, here's some options on what you can do at the end of life and how we're going to be able to help you. If you're not good at that, if you can't do a good job at that, then if I drive people to your door, they're just going to be upset and that's going to kill you. Yeah, and especially in today's world, I mean, people get on social media and they'll roast your company, and so that's why I'm big on making

sure that you are doing a good job. I think that's critical with any company, but anytime you're providing something about with health care, make sure that you're buttoned up.

09:53 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

It's why I love kind of framing this as message into the community, whereas the word marketing is that it's been there, got the T-shirt, is that it's been there, got the t-shirt. My mentor, Dr. Thayer, would call words that have deep, rich meaning would be lexicon. The opposite is cliché. And then I think the marketing has kind of become a little bit kind of clichéd. And so remember when I was getting my master's in leadership studying under him, ended up being a graduate assistant under him and I kept searching for a metaphor and I was actually watching the Hunt for Red October with my kids and I'm like there's the metaphor. And so you think about the submarine. It pings off of the ship, the ping comes back into the submarine. They have to calibrate where the torpedo is going to go and hopefully the torpedo is going to meet the ship and it's that dynamic three-dimensional.

10:44

And then when I was doing the research for the book, I bumped into this fascinating article. There's a guy who took over as CEO for Procter and Gamble, AJ Loffler, and he grew up with him Procter and Gamble and the title of the uh of the of the article, I believe, was what, what, the, what is the role of the CEO. And what he said is the role of the CEO is to reconcile the internal with the external. And now I thought that's a beautiful framing. Now that almost feels like mission impossible today's day and age, because for one CEO to be able to do that, um, in fact, the metaphor that I used in my book, um, do you remember that movie with Michael Douglas, the Ghost in the Darkness? And they were on a safari and they remember the lion started hunting the people, and there's this beautiful scene in the movie where at night, they had to sleep shoulder to shoulder in a complete 360-degree circle. Looking out into the Serengeti. I think that's a beautiful metaphor that the organization has to be creating that circle.

11:41

Looking out into the community, what is the community, the customer, needing? Do we have that feedback loop? How does that reconcile with what we do? And oh, by the way, and this is the part where I feel like I've never been great and which is why I always need a great partner, like you is and then, how do we let the community know that this is what we actually do? That's the messaging back out into the community. So, and this is where, again, when I thought of someone to talk about with this concept. You've used focus groups in an amazing way, and then you also just spoke to something else, which might be another superpower of yours, of how you do the research. Can you just speak to, like how you've used focus groups, how you use kind of the research over the years to do the marketing work that you've done?

12:28 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Well, as I mentioned, my first work was as a reporter and that's the question and being able to listen to people. I also got into working in government and as a press secretary, and so anytime you're working in politics, I was lucky because politicians love polls and they love research. They want to know where they stand all the time. So I was introduced early on in my career to various research partners and how to value research, and so most of that was qualitative, where you want to know what people know. Quantitative is why people think the way they do. What's one of the underlying values that they hold when they think about a product or service or a company, and so that's really the qualitative portion of it, and that's what I enjoy doing. I do have partners that do the quantitative work. They're more statistically based and they need to have certain numbers to have value to their work, to put numbers to it. Mine is mostly listening to people and looking for words, just like I mentioned with the hospice example. You know it was somebody who said, who brought to my attention this is part of life, and so that led to our positioning as this being your partner for when it's time for the end of life. We're the folks that you need to call to do that, and that showed up time and time again while listening to people, listening to their words, listening to their experiences. The secret is making sure with focus groups, and I think that this is one of the things I do pretty well, and that is to make sure people stay involved in that discussion and they feel valued. I had a mentor that was very good at working a room and keeping people engaged, because I want to hear from everybody. If I'm going to take the time to recruit somebody and to recruit a group and I'm going to get 10 to 12 people in a room, I want to hear from all those people, and so I don't want somebody to dominate the conversation, and that's a skill that you have to have is to be able to politely cut people off so you can listen to other people. Uh, the other thing that that I do in my focus groups is it's not me just asking questions all the time. I like to get people involved in in some exercises to keep them engaged. Uh, two hours is two hours goes by pretty fast when you're doing focus groups, and that's about the time frame that I use for mine and I do multiple groups per each client.

15:11

But I will ask them to. For example, what are three things that come to mind when I mention this particular hospital? You know it's a hospital and say it's a health care organization. And I want to just them to mention this particular hospital. It's a hospital, say it's a healthcare organization, and I want them to write down the words. I want them to start giving me words that they may unlock something that leads me down another path.

15:32

And then also I test attributes of an organization Whether people value high tech, do they value compassion and here again I'm talking strictly about if I'm working with a palliative care and office

organization. Those are the type things that I want to know. Responsiveness, you know. So we test attributes that people, what they value in an organization. We ask people I call them brain rights, it's just off the top of their head. Give their head, give me some ideas of what you think about a particular organization, whether you like it or not, don't like it.

16:07

And so it's really an involved process. It takes a lot of planning, I guess, to back up the first thing I do whenever I you're a great example, I sat down with you and your team whenever I you're a great example. I sat down with you and your team. You know I always need to have a steering committee because I don't know your organization as well as you do. I mean, I don't know what you do as well as you do. It's my job to find out and in some cases, because I'm not so deeply involved in your organization, I'm going to ask some questions that you might not even think of. They may be they may they may sound simple to you, but it's it's the type of question that the general public or the people that you want to find out about, and so each client's different. Each client comes to me with a different need. The hospice one is is is an interesting one because I passed by their building every day going to my office and the name on their building was Alliance of Hospice and Palliative Care Services.

17:08 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

I remember that.

17:09 - Tom Howell (Guest)

And I'm going, and so I passed by it and A I didn't know what Palliative was, you know, and it looked like a trade organization. Yeah, because of the word alliance.

17:20

Yeah, yeah, uh, and it looked like a trade organization, yeah, because of the word alliance. Yeah, yeah, and so, uh, so anyway, and they were an example of an organization that they. They had a new ceo and I had known the ceo because I volunteered on another board. It was phil marshall and you know, you know, and, and so I volunteered on another board with him and I knew him and he came from the world of banking and so he was a finance guy and you know his superpower was coming in and helping them start making money because they, they, they, operationally, they needed some things to happen. And so they came to us once they started getting their operational house in order. Then they said, okay, now we're ready to go out and ask people to come and try us out.

18:03

And that's when we came up and we did the research and, uh, uh, that was, that was an eye-opener for me. Um, it was. It was some of the toughest focus groups I'd ever done, because we actually had family members of patients, uh, who had recently been in the organization. I had to have a counselor within the focus group with me because we were asking people to open up some grievances or some grief, and so that was tough, but it was very good and they put their money behind what we came up with on the outreach. They really took off, yeah.

18:40 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

It was groundbreaking, tom. Yeah, really, when I kind of look back and you know, now you've got Transcend and others that are doing some interesting innovative work, but at the time the color palettes, the framing, the pictures, the words, that was all very groundbreaking in the hospice and palliative care space. So, tom, here's what I'm kind of hearing. I want to mirror it back to you and cause I've always felt like you doing focus groups again is a bit of a superpower, and so I hear lots of good preparation, listening to the team, understanding the organization. So you're a prep when you go in. Probably part of that harvesting right is those attributes of that organization, cause then you're testing the attributes. I'm hearing that, um, you said their brain rights and so can you just talk about that a little bit more? I think I heard brain rights, is that what?

19:26 - Tom Howell (Guest)

you said that's, that's one of the things I do within the focus group itself and that's just off the top of their head. I'll just hand out a piece of paper and I say, for example, if I was doing your market, uh, and you know, the big player in your market at the time was Mission Healthcare. And so I would ask and I think I don't know what bad bits there I'm trying to think who all was there at the time, but I would just say, off the top of their head, who are the health, who are the big healthcare players when you think of healthcare in this particular area? So I kind of start broad and get people's and and see what they thought about those particular organizations, and then we'd start drilling down, uh, into the type of care that we really wanted to focus on. And, uh, so a brain right is just me asking somebody off the top of their head to give me three words when, when I ask you about mission health, what are the three words that come to your mind?

20:18 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Gotcha. And the cool thing is I got to watch you and watch you almost like in a fishbowl the last time when you did it, when Dave Cook was what later became Carolina Caring the work. Out of that, it feels like you are now watching and putting together what you're saying, like you have a gift of synthesizing, which now, thinking of your superpower, you listen, you ask great questions. But I got to,



I got to think at some level you're synthesizing real time to then improvisationally ask additional questions. Am I reading that right?

20:49 - Tom Howell (Guest)

That's. That's true. You know, when somebody, somebody may say something to me that takes me down a different path, and I really want to, I really want to poke and prod as to why they're giving me that answer. For example, let's take Carolina Caring. They were wanting to get into a major metropolitan area and they were going to have to start competing with some folks in a much bigger market, people with bigger names, more established names and so they really wanted to find out if their regional brand would translate into this new market and, as we discovered, no, it wouldn't. Plus, the other challenge is we don't want to lose what we have, and so that's part of the rollout.

21:36

Before you let everybody know, you start letting small groups of people know. You start letting physicians you know who are your referral sources. You start letting them if you're going to go through a brand name change, you start listening to those people, you start reaching out to those people who have the most contact with you, who you count on to send customers. You know patients and families your way. So that's how you you know, once we have the brand and once we're ready to go and we have the operation in place, then you start saying how am I going to reach out? And are you going to reach out to everybody at once? No, you reach out to those people who are very important to your business model. Yeah, and so that's the positions of people who do referrals. You know, in your particular case, we talked with skilled nursing facilities. We talked with doctors, and I love it's great. It's tough to get physicians time, and so a lot of times when I'm doing interviews I do one-on-ones with physicians. I don't do big groups of physicians because their time is so tough to get, but they'd give me 20 minutes. You know, if they're going to eat lunch or something, I'd come in and spend some time with them. In your particular case, I was talking to a rural doctor. He referred patients your way, but he also said I send people to Elizabeth House when they need to be tweaked up, and what he meant was they needed to have some special care, some comfort medication, have some special medications that he wasn't comfortable administering and he knew that you could provide it. So that was one example of someone who had a relationship with you and, by virtue of them sending them to you, hopefully they started a relationship and then it's your job to keep that relationship going. I want to put a pin in that because I want to come back to it's your job to keep the relationship going.

23:27

But then I interviewed an oncologist in your particular area and that oncologist, when I said you know when, when do you start referring people to a hospice or college of care? And he says, don't. He says I'm going to do everything I can for that, you know. And so it was very, and at first it seemed strident,

or it seems like I'm going to protect my income. I hate to be that way, but, uh, they were afraid to turn a patient over. But you know, in reality, this, this doctor was saying I'm going to do everything I can, um, and is that the best thing for the patient? I guess that's the question that you have to ask Is that really the option that the patient wants? So those were two options Somebody who was ready to send them to you if they needed to be tweaked up and somebody who says that's not what I'm going to do.

24:19

You have to find out what could help them move that along. And in that particular case, that's where your positions have to come into play, because professionals like to speak to professionals and so they have to understand how your positions work with them, not against them or they keep you involved. But as far as putting a pin in that last statement, when the doctor, the rural doctor, would send them to you, that's great because basically they're introducing you to the organization. And I call that the last three feet. My job is marketing and advertising is really to get your audiences, to get that person to come to within three feet of you. And that comes back to my work with consumer goods companies like General Electric, and that three feet is when somebody reaches out and shakes their hand. At that point in time you're making contact and that's where you take over the marketing. So your, your marketing partner is to get, as I like to say, I'll get you within, I can get them within the last three feet, but you have to do the final safe Gotcha.

25:28 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Well, just to review then again, using kind of my metaphor, this is so good Like thinking about how you utilize the focus groups. That's almost like the pinging kind of coming back. But how do you help take everything that you learn because you do have a superpower there and take it back into the organization? So then it starts to kind of shape and mold. Is there any pearls there in that question?

25:52 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Yes, Well, as I mentioned, I always sit down with a group to begin with, and I like it to be a steering group. I like it to be people who are representative of the organization. It doesn't have to be unwieldy. But one reason is very selfish. I want people to understand the process and all the work that goes into this, so when we come out with recommendations, they become people who can be cheerleaders. They say we saw this all the way through. So that's one of the reasons that I do this. The other reason is I don't know your business as well as you do, and so I need to make sure that somebody is watching over my shoulder and making sure I'm asking the right questions. You know garbage in, garbage out If I'm not asking good questions, I'm not getting good responses. So I need to have that group, and so I take them along with me every step of the way and say here's where we are so far. I guess the superpower, the magic that happens after you do the focus groups is I end up with hours of

transcripts, and so my job then is to go through those transcripts and put together a story using the words of the people who I interviewed or who were in the focus groups. They're not my words, but all of a sudden I'll start to see patterns emerge, and it's patterns on the type of care people want. It's the way that they, you know. When do people want to be contacted? How do they want to be contacted? What do they think about various organizations? What do they like about organizations? I think you mentioned in your book the work that was just done for NPHI and they came.

27:33

People tend to be mistrustful of institutions. You know, health care is an institution and so people. I don't trust my government, I don't trust an institution, but as you drill down, I don't trust. So in this particular case, I mistrust the health care institution but I really like my doctor. So in this particular case, I mistrust the health care institution but I really like my doctor. So as you drill down into the more personal relationship, you find out that, oh, they really do like this person, they do trust this person.

28:14

So you have to take that into consideration and that's really why I like to have focus groups is because I get to hear the language that people use and we play it back in our marketing materials. We play back the stories I mean I had, I had one lady early on. She said you know, one of the nice things about having the hospice folks come in is I got to be a daughter again, and that became an ad campaign, yeah, and we called it the lady in the flower shop. And so we, we actually showed somebody who and we took a real life story this lady was still able to go into her flower shop that her daughter had taken over and still see some customers every now and then. But she was, and so she was able, and that's the end of life, is part of living, you know. So all of that comes together and you, you hear these real-life stories and then you get to play them back to people and folks can say, oh, I see me in that story.

29:09 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, that's beautiful.

29:11 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Yeah, and so that's what asking questions and listening to people is all about.

29:16 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So, Tom, I imagine this almost feels like a duh question, but it feels like a good question as well. Doing this work, do you see it shape and change the organization, Like when you bring it back in the learning? Does it affect them? Because it's not just mirroring what they are. It feels like it's almost shaping them to be a better version of themselves or a truer version of what the customer wants. Is that accurate or would you reframe that?

29:43 - Tom Howell (Guest)

No, I think that's true. People feel better about where they work If their brand is recognized, if somebody says, oh, I know where you work, I see your name tag, I know them, and so that starts to build them up too, because they're part of an organization that they're proud of. So that's the sort of feedback that you want. They're part of an organization that they're proud of, so that's the sort of feedback that you want. In fact, in the case of Ospreys, we would have people who came up and you know, the brand's been out there since 2008. Of course it's grown. But people say, oh, my grandfather in Florida used Ospreys. Well, no, they didn't use Ospreys, but Ospreys became this name, name that they.

30:25

It's almost like kleenex you know, and so you don't want to become so ubiquitous that somebody can can usurp your name. But right, but it's, it's a unique name, but that's the case with any organization. You know, there was a study done years ago when um with sports teams and they they noticed that whenever sports teams uh spruced up their stadium or built new stadiums, the teams played better. So you know your surroundings and your brand resonates throughout your company, and so you want to have a brand that people can be proud of and say here's who I work with.

31:02 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

I'm just thinking of your unbridled spirit campaign and just that. Um, I don't I don't know if this is totally true, but I'm thinking my own perception of kentucky and then that campaign. Can you talk about that one for a second, because I think there's a cool lesson there too.

31:16 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Yeah, yeah, well, you know we don't. We went through the same process uh, it was just much bigger, and we had to go nationwide with focus groups. We talked with people who who cited, uh, who cited industries. You know, there's people around the country that do that sort of thing. We talked with. We talked with tourism writers, we talked with with economic development people, because our challenge was to direct we, we did the whole state and so every cabinet within the state. It was a big

project and so we did everything, from the state fair to bourbon as a product, as really an upscale product, which it really has become. You know, the horse racing.

31:59

What we found was Kentucky was getting all the fishermen and hunters that they needed coming into the state, and part of the challenge was we needed to up the income level of the folks who were coming in, and so we really had to change that perception of, yeah, it's the state that I travel through on my way someplace else, or I go there because they do have so many lakes and they have great fishing and that sort of thing, and so we had to, we had to start getting new experiences, and so that's that's really where the unbridled spirit came from.

32:34

Is this notion that we have lots more to offer, that it's there's a surprise there that you're going to find. And so it was a huge research project. It took us about four months to or better, four or five months just to get some input from people as to where we wanted to go. And then, as you said at the beginning, tourism actually tracks the dollars and we went from 7.6 billion to 11 billion in four years and they're right now at about 13 or so. So I mean, we took them. We really took on a big jump from that and, um, that was exciting and we kept that contract. I kept that contract through democratic and republican administration.

33:16 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So uh, well, it's brilliant. I, I'm now a bourbon drinker and so I mean there's, I mean I just, you see that you're good, yeah, yeah, and so so you have you.

33:26 - Tom Howell (Guest)

You really promoted the more upscale experiences that are available. It's great to hunt and fish, but uh, you know, there's, there's some other.

33:33 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

There's some other things that the state has off well, the thing that occurs to me and then probably that's probably the experience, that's why that number went up is that rising tide raises all boats. It's not that the hunt, it's not that you were kind of shunning that part of it, but you were maximizing all of the assets, putting it under beautiful messaging that kind of draws everybody into it. I mean just

unbridled spirit. I think it calls something in almost like the hero within each person, and then you know what. So I just think that's brilliant Now that I kind of sit here and reflect on that.

34:03 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Well, we were also able to highlight some companies that started in the state the Humans of the world. You know people who started very small and ended up. You know big organizations, and so you know people. You think about the young brands. I mean, you got Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Taco Bell under one roof in Louisville, and so you're able to bring in lots of stories, not just the ones that people think about, and we also took advantage of the fact that Kentucky was well-known for bluegrass music. I mean, that's a whole group of people too. There's now a bluegrass museum. Bill Monroe started in the western part of the state, and so it surprises. And I think that.

34:49

that's part of what was so successful. Was we surprised a lot of people with what the state has to offer?

34:55 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, and that's the beauty of a brand that calls kind of everybody into it. It's like an overall umbrella and you think of the challenge right of a state, an organization. Theoretically would be somewhat easier, although that's probably a good segue to our next question. I think because of the complexity of what leaders are just getting. There's just so much stuff coming at us. Tom, you may have been the person who taught me this, but I heard at some point in time that why a lion tamer uses a chair to tame a lion is the four legs of the chair paralyze the lion and think about how mighty a beast a lion is. It paralyzes them and that's just four legs. I think there's thousands of things coming at leaders and it's so easy to lose touch with your customer and your organization. Do you see that risk in kind of playing out as well, and any advice to leaders from that perspective?

35:49 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Well, I did some research for a multinational company and they were trying to figure out why they weren't hitting their metrics, I mean, and it was globally. I mean people around. I mean this company operated in 13 countries around the world. And so I went around and we actually interviewed, we actually went to the, we went to the facilities, we went to the plants, we talked to the workers and the one thing that we found was none of the leadership ever walked through the plant, through the plant. No leadership ever saw anybody. They would see there would be somebody who'd say, oh, the president of the company is going to be here today, so we're going to clean up.

36:29

Well, nobody ever saw the president of the company. Uh, in fact, as it turned out, the leadership never left the 16th floor of their tower. I mean, they'd go to visit and and they'd check in with the general manager, but but the people never the people that worked for them didn't see them. And you know what did we learn back from IBM management, by walking around, I mean, and that's something that they lost sight of, and so they weren't sharing why it's important, why you're important to this organization to do your job. They really didn't like the report. That well, but you know, they, they paid me, they paid me for it, and so we. But uh, but it was something as simple as that. You know, you have to, you have to, you have to live and breathe it too I don't know if I ever told you this story.

37:22 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So when I graduated from LSU the summer before I interned at Tenneco Gas in Houston, Texas, and that organization they brought in a brand new CEO that summer while I was there and kind of the prior. It was kind of a stodgy, almost entitlastic hierarchy within the structure and I got to see that transformation within a short amount of time. And one thing which was legit, that those rumors started going around. Hey, the CEO may show up at your desk and ask you how does your job contribute to the mission of the organization? Well, when you're 19, 20 years old, that's almost like oh my gosh, but it made an indelible influence on me. And then, of course, years later I learned the term go to GIMBA, the GIMBA walk from the whole Toyota production system, which means go see it for yourself.

38:12

One of my more favorite Dr Thayer stories is he was working I believe it was with GM and they were surprised because this is what Toyota started kicking their butt and one of the high levellevel executives agreed to come down and they were surprised. And so they had this boardroom set up and all these charts and things like that and the guy from Toyota showed up and he's like what's all this? And we've got stuff set up for you. He goes, uh-uh, bring me to the factory floor. And that's made such a great impression. Whenever I was a young CFO in hospice, I would require all of our back office services HR, it, finance before you got your evaluation. One of the checkboxes is do you go? Did you go out on a visit or an admission this year? So that way we always made sure that the patient and family was first, doesn't matter what your department was.

39:03 - Tom Howell (Guest)

Right and and, and I've worked for a time in the State Department of Education and one of the things that we did every year was actually go into the classroom and I would go into a high school classroom

that was doing journalism and I would have to share my story and I'd have to see what was going on in the classroom and I could see if somebody was interested.

39:24

They're sleeping in the back of the classroom and so I have to get their attention. But it's the same type thing. You need to don't lose touch with your customer and your audience, because they're going to guide you and they're going to be, you know, sell family and friends and that's kind of like the touchstone for this particular business is, you know that's the holy grail, because you want to get self-family and friend referrals, so when people start coming and you don't have to count on somebody else to be the messenger to tell your story at referral source or whatnot. So you want to make sure that you're reaching those people and you give them plenty of attention people and you give them plenty of attention Because those families remember. That's one of my big takeaways is if you're sitting with some family and somebody in their family is actively dying and they're at the end of life. They're going to remember you and how you treated them, and so they're going to be your best salespeople, moving forward.

40:22 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, that's profound Tom. Well Tom, any final thoughts?

40:26 - Tom Howell (Guest)

You know I shared with you one of my favorite client quotes is it's hard to be strategic when your hair's on fire, and this was somebody who was in a tough situation and it really struck me that when somebody and I just had a friend whose wife just got a diagnosis of she's stage 3B of colorectal cancer and so basically their hair's on fire and it's hard for them, you know as my role somebody who understands what palliative care can do is to help educate them as to what is some steps, because you know, anytime you're in a crisis, it's always good for somebody to come in and start giving you something to do that you can take control of, because in a crisis, you feel like your hair's on fire, and so I think we have to.

41:20

We have to keep that in mind as we're serving our clients in Hospice and Palliative Care. Especially in hospice, when somebody's got that diagnosis and it's a six-month window, their hair's on fire, and so we need to make sure that A we can give them comfort, but we also give them something tangible to work toward that they can do to be part of this. But I don't ever want to lose sight of that girl who said I got to be a daughter again, because I think that that's really the gift that you give to people when you



are serving them as an hospice or palliative care provider you let them be a son, a daughter, a spouse again and you take control of the things, of their care, their, their medications, their spiritual needs, all the things that that hospice and palliative care can do.

**42:10 - Chris Comeaux (Host)**

Yeah, well, tom, thank you. It's always, always a pleasure to be around you. I always learn, always think more deeply, and again I probably I would probably Tina laughs, Tina Gentry, in our team I feel like the area of marketing has always been my least competent area, and just doing this show with you is even helping me understand my chapter on message into the community more deeply, and I could see your superpower the more that you keep sharing throughout this. So thank you.

**42:39 - Tom Howell (Guest)**

Thank you very much for the opportunity. I really, I really enjoy it. It's just something I really enjoy doing.

**42:44 - Chris Comeaux (Host)**

It's obvious. Well, at the end of each episode we always share a quote, a visual that possibly might create a brain bookmark, a thought prodder about our podcast. So you could further as furthers our listeners learning and growth and hopefully thereby their leadership and idea, and also that it sticks in their brain. Want to be sure that you subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership, so you don't miss an episode. Be sure you check out the book, if you can, on Amazon, the Anatomy of Leadership. Tell your friends, families, co-workers about it, and it's easy for us to rail against the world and be frustrated by things, but let's be the change that we wish to see in the world. So thanks for listening to the Anatomy of Leadership.

**43:26 - Jeff Haffner (Ad)**

And here's our brain bookmark to close today's show "Ask questions and then listen. Like a submarine pinging a ship. You evaluate the data and then adjust accordingly.

**44:11**

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