

Transcript for : Meaning Management With Kevin Pickhardt

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 Kevin Pickhardt. He is the executive chairman at Systems International and I just want to read a little bit of things from Kevin from his bio. So he's a lifelong student and leadership practitioner In fact I got to see that firsthand. I'll talk about that in just a little bit. He has been the CEO of Pharos Systems International, an enterprise class software provider, for the past 24 years until shifting into the role of executive chairman this past October.

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In his role as CEO, Kevin worked alongside Dr Lee Thayer, our fellow mentor, fellow Yoda, that we both shared for 15 years speaking at leadership conferences and sitting as a member of the advisory board for the Thayer Institute. So that involvement with Lee that Kevin and I actually got to know each other and our paths cross. And Kevin's also the lucky and happy husband of his wife Sarah for 30 years and the father of two daughters who they themselves are working in the world, finding their own unique purpose and direction in life. Outside of that role of Pharos care, Kevin is the chairman of the board of the Monroe Plan for Medical Care. It's a leader of health care for underserved populations throughout Western and Central New York State and in Kevin's free time he's an avid golfer trying to perfect imperfection. I love actually that you wrote that, Kevin. That's pretty cool Welcome.

01:43 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Kevin, it's good to have you. Any golfer will understand the imperfection of it. So yeah, for sure. And by the way, one correction on that, which is without getting myself into trouble we

just celebrated our 31st wedding anniversary yesterday. So if we go with 30, I'm in trouble, it's 31.

02:01 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Congratulations. That's super cool.

02:03 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Thank you Well, Kevin what did I leave out that maybe you would want the audience to know about you? I think that's. I think that's you've. You've pretty much covered it, Chris. I've been, I've been blessed to have a really good journey from my early days, starting at Xerox. I was a computer major that went into finance and spent 17 years at Xerox before joining up with Pharos Systems in the last 24 years here. So it really has been a blessing, as has my opportunity to work with Lee Thayer, which I got connected to early on in my tenure as a CEO. Good, deal.

02:43

Very happy to be here and I will add a congratulations on your book. I loved it. I know how much work has to have gone into that, and congrats.

02:52 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Thanks, Kevin. Well, before I get to my next question, I don't think I've ever asked you how did you meet Lee? What was the connection there?

02:59 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

So one of your earlier podcasters here, Bruce Peters. Bruce Peters and I crossed paths very early in my tenure as a CEO as I was looking at learning more about the role and through that one of the peer groups that Bruce had, he brought Lee into town. And the first time I met Lee, we were having lunch and he turned to me and he said so tell me, how did you come to be so miscast in your role? And first time that was my introduction to Lee the cage rattler. But he got me thinking, which is exactly what he does around. Okay, what does being cast in a role mean and how effective am I at it and what do I need to do to be

effectively cast in the role? And that started a 15-year relationship with Lee as a coach, mentor and friend.

03:58 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Oh man and it's so funny because mine was I was the opposite. I met Lee first and then I met Bruce through Lee, but very similar to you, I was the opposite. I met Lee first and I met Bruce through Lee, but very similar to you, he dismantled me with questions and then I just kept coming back for more. I'm curious what did you? As you look back, what was the learning lesson in that question? Because that's a fascinating question. What about being miscast in your role? What was your learning lesson in that?

04:19 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Well, I think one of the greatest lessons of being a CEO is that I picked up from Lee is it's a constant journey of evolution, learning and change, and if you're not committed to continually reinventing yourself and inventing yourself, then you're not playing the role well, and I really think that's where Lee was poking at. This is, if we all assume that we're miscast in our role and we all are working to recast ourselves, then I think we've got the right mindset going in.

04:54 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's going to be. We're going to pick up on that in just a little bit. But, Kevin, I have to ask this. I started asking in the early shows and then I forgot it, and then listeners are like I think that's a really cool question, you need to ask that, and it does make people uncomfortable, and I gave you a heads up. I was going to ask you this, but people's answers have just been fascinating. So my question is what is your superpower?

05:16 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

One of the lessons I learned, even before joining up with with Pharos, is that most people's biggest strengths are unconscious competencies, which means the things that come naturally to us, so naturally that we don't know that we do them. So very often we learn about our superpowers from others more so than we do from ourselves.

05:40 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Well said.

05:54 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

But if I had to pick one, I would say and this will be somewhat of a theme, as we Well said finds of our own minds, our own vision, our own, oftentimes limiting beliefs of where we see our world and how we see ourselves playing in it.

06:09 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Oh, I totally agree with that, Kevin, because I got what you let me shadow in a leadership meeting and I watched you do that and I just remember sitting there going what is he doing? But trusting you because you're just, I just admire you as a leader I have for a long time and, like I know he's being purposeful, but the way you did it was brilliant. You were asking your team questions in a very interesting way, which I think we'll come back into a little bit. So I got to see that actually firsthand and I do believe it's a superpower of yours. And my own journey has been very similar. I never would have even put words to maybe what I thought my gifts were, and the beginning of me unwrapping that present was someone actually paying it forward to me. Hey, do you realize this? Like no, I didn't have a clue about it, and that was the beginning and more of a revelation. And now spending time and energy, effort and learning and trying to maximize that, but even the first identification came from somewhere else. So I think just the fact that the way you answered that, I think that's a trying to maximize that. But even the first identification came from somewhere else. So I think just the fact that the way you answered that, I think that's a gift to other people. So, Kevin, thanks for agreeing to do this.

07:11

So I'm using my book, the Anatomy of Leadership Thanks for giving me a shout out and the book is a meta framework. In fact, I could I often, when I first was writing it, could just picture Lee taking me behind the woodshed of you know what are you thinking you're doing, como, trying to create a meta framework for leadership. I am an accountant and so accountants they organize things right. So in some respects, maybe it was my attempt at organizing the broad world. I mean, if you Google leadership, you get like 7 billion hits. But Christmas time, which was right after the book was published, it occurred to me this being

a meta framework, I could just take the chapters of the book was published, it occurred to me, this being a meta framework, I could just take the chapters of the book and bring incredible guests like you, and I am so glad I've done this. We've gotten incredible feedback from others, but I've learned because we keep bringing people, because all this is a table of contents, but keep going deeper on these concepts. So far we've covered self-mastery, caring for others, influence, intention, cause and purpose, mission margin, and now meaning management. And again, each time I think about who would be perfect man, when I thought about meaning management, you were the first person that actually came to mind.

08:15

So meaning management, as I learned it from Dr Thayer, maybe the quick way to help listeners so we don't lose them. People will go oh, that's communication. But the problem is is that when words become cliché, they no longer have meaning. And my favorite example of this would be we'd go and see Dr Thayer hey, how are you this morning, dr Thayer? And he'd say I don't know, why don't you tell me? And it was a brilliant way of shaking the cobwebs, of going hey, are we going to have meaningful conversation here, or are we just going to do the typical thing that people would do? And we exchange words and we're not really doing anything. In fact, he was the first person I ever heard say one of the original true definitions of communication was intercourse, like, in other words, there's something that comes out of this that was different than what two people brought into it. So that's my attempt at meaning management. I think you'd do a much better job. So how would you define meaning management?

09:14 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

It's so tied up in so many different things. It's tied up in purpose, it's tied up in communication, it's tied up in mission. So meaning management is a. In my experience, it's very broad. I remember in one of the areas where Lee and you mentioned this in your book was absolutely brilliant, as he may have been one of the foremost thinkers on the mechanics of communication, what is it really? On the mechanics of communication, what is it really? And I remember reading a piece that he had written where he identified that people don't really live within themselves and meaning doesn't live within us. Meaning lives between us.

09:55

So when we start to think that we have meaning which is how we like to think that meaning is within us, we start down a bad path, because that starts us down the path of. What I really need to do is communicate my meaning to you and you need to communicate yours to me. And even in business, when we start looking at customers and channels and partners and employees, when we start looking at meaning as something that someone can own versus something that we share, I think you begin to unlock a lot of value as soon as you can get people to start getting to the point where they recognize that meaning is something that we share, which means it's something we create. It's not something we own and something that we have to tell somebody and get them to understand my meaning. That's a fruitless path.

10:50 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That is so good, gosh, that is so good. Well, I got to shadow and I think I saw this in action. I alluded to it earlier. I got to shadow your leadership meeting. It was several, my gosh, that may have been well over 10 years ago now. And I just knew you were a great leader, an open leader, and so the gist of the conversation was your team was saying we have communication challenges. And I just felt like I was watching this ping pong match and you're like no, we don't. And and your team like yeah, well, you know, the survey says and no, no, we don't. And I'm thinking, okay, I am watching something. I'm not quite sure what I'm watching, but I have a feeling this is going to be so profound for my life. And so what was I watching, Kevin, because I don't think you were being in denial.

11:42 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

I remember it vividly and it was more than 10 years ago. We were I was a relatively new CEO and I was new in working with Lee Thayer. We had about half of our employees here in Western New York and another half of our employees in New Zealand. Now we both spoke mostly the same English, but we had functional differences between us and the. The core of it was there absolutely was a communication issue. So no question about it, and one of the challenges you talk about in your book and I think it's one of the great quotes of George Bernard Shaw the problem with communication is the illusion that it's happened. So to me, as soon as somebody tries to communicate something to somebody else, we have a communication problem. It's just a matter of what's the scope of the problem. So I brought this to Lee because we had a limited time between the two offices where both offices were open and if we weren't communicating effectively between the two organizations, we had a

problem. We had products being developed in one country and one location and we had sales and support and services and customers in another location. So I was really struggling with this as a young CEO. So I brought it I did bring it up to Lee, I said we're struggling with this and his response, in Lee fashion, was why do you choose to have that problem? And it got me stopped and thinking and saying well, yeah, it's an interesting question. Why do I choose to have that problem? If all organizations have problems, the best thing we can do is choose which problems we want, and the reality is by focusing on it, and this is something else that you that you highlight. How we define the world creates our world. So, as long as the organization could define the world as, yeah, we have communication issues between the office, that's where we were going to put our focus.

13:46

People loved to have me own the problem of the communications between the offices, which made me answer central, and all of a sudden I find myself answering all the questions, knowing I'm playing the wrong role. So the tool that I used was one that Lee had introduced me to. He said one of the most important tools you have as a leader is to choose what to understand, what to see and what not to understand, and what not to see and what's interesting and this was the great lesson in that is as soon as I refused to see that we had a communications issue or acknowledge that we had a communications issue. It went away.

14:25

The issue was not the communication. The issue was something more underlying around creating alignment and respect between the organizations and acceptance of different worlds and different space. So once communication went away and we started getting at the real issue, then all of a sudden we began to have some real breakthroughs. So, yes, I remember you being there and I remember myself saying I'm going out on a limb here by telling people we don't have a communications issue, when all communications is an issue. It's just Lee's brilliance of yeah, choose not to see it, don't choose that problem. Okay, let's choose a different one.

15:07 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That is so good, Kevin, and we have not circled back with each other on this, but I've actually used that. First off, it was a different one. That is so good, Kevin, and we have not

circled back with each other on this, but I've actually used that. First off, it was a brilliant performance and I say that very deliberately. You were performing your role in a very deliberate way. It was a brilliant performance.

15:21

And then I've paid it forward to so many organizations because I said typically how that conversation would have gone is oh, you're right, we've got communication issues. And conversation would have gone is oh, you're right, we've got communication issues. And next thing, you know, people are off. Let's do a company newsletter and they're like all these solutions they never really got to the core of the problem. And how often that occurs on a day-to-day basis, and still occurs on a day-to-day basis where I'm a part of, makes me cringe a little bit. But the fact that you performed your role in that way ended up in a much more efficacious place and I wanted to pay it forward to you that I've now paid that forward in many hospices just watching that whole circumstance.

16:00 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, it's, it is a, it's a great. It was a great lesson for me and I've used it in different in different aspects around let's. Let's understand what problems we choose to accept and take on. The other thing is that people love to have the time of the CEO. They love to have their problems shared with the CEO, with the leader, whatever role it is. They love to have their problems shared, which is why kids want their problems shared with their parents and um, and students want their problems shared with with their, with their teachers, um, it's. It's important to understand that part of the role of the leader is uh, and part of the role of meaning is to is to define um. What do we choose to own, what do we choose to understand? Um, because where we focus is uh, where we focus our attention, uh, is is going to drive the meaning.

16:52 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's huge. And then I just what hits me as you say, that is, um, our most unreplenishable important resources, how we choose to invest our time and how often we cause. Lee would always say 50, . 50 to 70% of organizational costs are in communication or the lack thereof, and I remember sitting there as an accountant going is that really true? 50 to 70% of organizational costs are in communication or the lack thereof? And I remember sitting

there as an accountant going is that really true? 50 to 70%? And the more, the older I become and more gray I get, I'm like damn, he was right.

17:21 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, absolutely, and the when you think about how much of our time we spend in communication and that, no matter what we do, it's going to be imperfect. It's like golf, I guess. In that way it's going to be imperfect. Once we begin to accept that and say okay, let's not try to get to perfection here, let's try to get to effectiveness. Make it efficacious, as you highlight.

17:49 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So here's a good question, just to keep. I'm thinking of our listeners. And so how do you use this competency of meaning management as a CEO or, let's say, any leader? How did you do it? And then, how did your team then utilize that concept?

18:04 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, and I think it's a part of every leader, whether you're playing it intentionally or not intentionally. Part of the role of the leader is to help people understand the world around us and how we interpret it. And I'll give you an example. I remember we worked on a. We had a particularly very large deal a number of years ago that we were trying to close with a very large Fortune 100 organization. It was one of the largest banks in the world and we invested a lot to win this deal. We invested in product development, we invested in marketing, we invested in our services and, as a small organization, we were vested in winning this deal and we didn't. We didn't win it and it was a big letdown inside the organization. I found myself saying, okay, well, what's the story here? What's the meaning? Because people got scared. People felt like, okay, we've lost this deal. We've invested so much in it. We're so caught in owning this deal and being able to go out to the organization to say no deal defines us right. Let's talk about who we are. Did we want to win the deal? Sure, had we won the deal, would we have more money in the bank? Yes, does that make us a different, better organization? No, not necessarily.

19:36

What makes us a better organization is learning from what's happening in the world around us. So it's our learning from the experience that makes us stronger, not getting what we want in the world. And I see so many leaders that get caught up in what's acceptable and what's unacceptable and they talk about this is unacceptable. Well, it's already happened, it's done. So what are we gaining in defining meaning, as the world that we're in is unacceptable and it really it drives. It drives this, this, this fear, this, this anger, emotional response to the world isn't the way I want it to be.

20:24

The role I think of, the one of the biggest roles of the CEO, is the. The world is as it is. It's not going to be any other way. Right, everything that's happened has gotten us to this point. So the faster we can get to acceptance of what's happening in the world is the faster we can get to learning, change and growth. And so, to me, that defining and helping people to find meaning in, most especially, find meaning in those things that we don't like, that we don't want, that we're looking at, saying, well, what does this mean? What does this mean to us? What does it mean to me as an individual? What does it mean to us as an organization? What does it mean to us in the world? You don't have to look far to see people out in the world talking about what's acceptable and unacceptable, and yet we're going to go on.

21:18 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Now that you have the benefit of the rear-view mirror on that situation, Kevin, what were the the implications in your organization? As you manage the meaning in that way and it's so funny, you're when we're doing this podcast we just had an interesting thing occur and I'm sitting here reflecting and going how do I manage the meaning of that? Because sometimes you know, as high performers, right, we want to win and so there's a side to that circumstance you're talking about, like I'm sure your team wanted to win and so, looking through the rearview mirror, what were the implications in the learning lessons?

21:49 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Well, in this particular instance, we were so attached to the winning and our view of what this world was going to be that I think we had stopped really listening to what was going on with the customer. The customer was asking for something and we were giving it to them. In reality. If we sat back and said the customer is asking for something, but they're probably asking for something, and we were giving it to them In reality, if we sat back and said the

customer is asking for something, but they're probably asking for the wrong thing, if we went back to the customer and said let's talk more deeply about what you need. How do we understand and help you to see your world differently, together to make something better, then we begin to advance. We had gotten so caught up in just responding to this. Whatever the customer said was right, and we're going to head down that path, and the reality is, in doing that, we weren't delivering more value to the customer, we were just being responsive.

22:47

Several years later, we went back and won the customer Wow. So there's always a second pass at these things, but what we recognized was we did a whole bunch of things that we didn't think were the right answer for the customer, but it was what the customer said they needed or wanted, and we have to have the ability and the skills to go back and help the customer to define meaning, help the customer to and if and if we don't see a world in which we're better together, then we shouldn't have that customer and they shouldn't have us as a as a supplier. So there was a lot of learning that went into this for how we, how we treat the next opportunity.

23:25 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So let me try to attempt to interpret what you just said for our listeners, because this is profound and it's a perfect example of meaning management. If that typical transactional communication, which is not meaning management customer says X I think I hear X we're off in the direction and there's no true meaning management there. That's what you were caught up in. But is that accurate or would you restate that?

23:54 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, no, I think you're exactly right. When we look at our vision of the world, where do we see ourselves going? Where do we believe the world is going? We talk about the compass that's come up in some of your podcasts, staying on True North, understanding and working with the customers around what we see as True North, and is this a journey that's going to make them better and are they going to make us better? If so, then it's a journey we should be on. If not, then we probably shouldn't be on this journey together. If not, then we probably shouldn't be on this journey together. There is absolutely this sense of, as we go through the world, defining meaning with each other.

24:39

Because, as we say, meaning exists between us. It's not mine, it's not yours, it exists between us. The more we can look at what exists between us, I think, the more successful we'll be as a business, but also the better the service that we can be to the world.

24:56 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's so good. Kevin, I don't know if you have a comment to this, but sitting in healthcare, I see this gravitational pull and you have the advent of artificial intelligence that where the money is in the transactional, easy replication almost a robot can do it, whereas if there's any place you think it'd be different, would be in healthcare, because that's where you need that true, the true meaning management to truly listen to what a patient really needs, as opposed to oh sorry, this is how the chutes and ladders works, which is exactly what happens in a lot of healthcare today. I don't know if you have any comment to that, but it's just hitting me the weight of what you're saying and how antithetical that is to where I see the dollars are going the private equity dollars, the investment, what seems to be sexy, and healthcare seems to be the opposite of that, because what you're talking about is really hard.

25:52 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

It is. It's fantastically hard. You mentioned at the beginning I sit as the chair of a board of a healthcare company here in New York that focuses on most of the Medicaid population in many different ways and those in high need. This organization was started many years ago. Fascinating background.

26:14

It was started by a group of doctors and the doctors recognized, like 40 years ago, that if left up to the system, in particular the underserved are going to be transactional. They're going to get just a transactional experience in healthcare, which is not the best outcome. So this group said we need to create a different system for how we serve this population. Because if you have a lot of money, you're going to get more time from the medical professionals, You're going to get to the best doctors, You're going to have the ability to influence the healthcare, the insurance companies and so forth, but when you're in the underserved,

you're just the insurance companies and so forth, but when you're in the underserved you're just going to be in the system. And so these people stepped aside, created a nonprofit and said we're going to try to create a system that will bring some of that meaning to how we serve the underserved. And yeah, it's hard. It is hard to do.

27:14 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Well, let's give them a little bit of hope. So, given what we've been talking about and this is really great because I do think it's furthering people's understanding and it furthers what's in my book about meaning management as you look through the rear view mirror, and even today, because you're still working with your organization do you think your organization is more competent at communication than other organizations, and if you could even impact them? If yes, then why?

27:36 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

it's a good question and, um, I think our organization has built in a part of our vision of ourselves is about exploring and discovery.

27:51

So we've built a culture of together going to find the best solution that fundamentally shifts and changes our relationship with our customers and with our partners.

28:04

And when we ask our best customers why they do business with us, part of the reason that they highlight is it's because of your people and it's because you help me see the world differently. Early on it was you help me change. I'm doing business with somebody because I want something to change, I want some outcome. So if all you're doing is giving me a product, you're not delivering the change. If you come in and help me understand the change I'm going through and see my world differently so that I can be successful, then I'll create a deeper relationship with you and I won't just be a customer, I'll be a committed partner in that, and that's really what we want to create. And how we move forward is collaborative. Innovation is one of the terms that we came up with early, and it's not strictly

about communication, it's not strictly about meaning management, but if you look at how do we invent something new and how do we do it together. It's all core to that.

29:08 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's so good, Kevin, and what occurs to me is listening to you, is the necessity, then, to stay curious, to stay in the learning mode to be able to live in, because I feel like you're casting a great vision for any organization. I mean, I think, especially the day that we're living, it feels like after COVID, there's no middle performers in business, or either high performing businesses or they're just really bad and just you know, as I know, our listeners, as they're listening, probably going oh my God, that just explains a lot of on a day to day basis. But someone who's aspiring in the experience of whatever the exchange between these two, the customer and the business, where you are better in change for it, and how it's necessary for the one who's providing such a service to be in that learning mode, to be curious, which is hard work, does that feel like it resonates or would you restate that in any way?

30:02 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

No, no, it does. In your business. Your purpose, your mission, your vision is very tied into when people need it most, and you're talking about people's last days being some of their best days and how you make that happen. That is just such a wonderful purpose built into the business. Most businesses don't have a core product that ties into that depth of purpose. If you're looking at cleaning companies, dry cleaning, and even with us, you know our focus is in printing and how people deal with the problems associated with printers, which are unfortunately still huge despite the fact we've been doing it for so long. So you have to search a little bit deeper for meaning and purpose. So the question of what value do you really give to humans? That, to me, becomes where the meaning is. If you're not changing somebody's life for the better somehow, which most of us want to do and do if we're changing somebody's life for the better in some small way, then I think we're on the right track.

31:14 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's so good, Kevin. So I'm curious, since your role has now morphed, and so how are you taking all these incredible learnings into your current role? Because I have a feeling there'll be. You know people there are a lot of people of your generation are like looking for that

next act. They've been very successful, and so I'm just curious what wisdom you have there.

31:39 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, that's a good one. Because, as you mentioned on a number of your podcasts, sometimes you've got Lee sitting in the back of your head and in this transition from me, from the operational role of running the company for so many years to a role of helping the company grow and thrive and expand, from not owning the operations, I've got Lee constantly sitting in my head. At the end of the day, all of us as leaders have the job of making our organizations thrive beyond our tenure. So that's really the focus for me. Lee would put it as making yourself dispensable in your role. It's build the organization that can thrive beyond you. So right now, my role is to use my contacts, to use my experience, to use whatever I've built up in my years at the company to help the organization grow and thrive. It's Lee sitting in the back of my head saying, okay, how do you make yourself dispensable in the role and be able to sit there and watch it happen? So, I see all the areas in which it's happening well and I see areas in which it's not happening well and have Lee sitting in the back of my head saying, yeah, you missed this one, you created a gap here. That's not transitioning or not thriving as you make your transition. So that's really my focus is I'm committed to our community of partners, customers and employees and how we help them thrive in the growth. I was thinking about this. You know I turned over the CEO role to the next generation.

33:15

My view of that leader role in the organization is it's a marriage. It's really got to be a relationship of growth and change on both sides. So, if a leader comes in and thinks I'm going to bend the organization to my will, then that's not going to end up to be a very good marriage. Similarly, if the organization says I'm going to end up to be a very good marriage. Similarly, if the organization says I'm going to force a leader to not allow us to change, that's not going to be a good relationship either. This thought of the leadership change being a new marriage and the building of a new relationship, and my job is really at this point to help and coach and stay out of the way as that new relationship grows and thrives.

34:01 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

As I'm listening to you, Kevin, that quote that Lee would always say it's not the leader who makes the organization successful, it's the organization that makes the leader successful. It's another way of that being dispensable, and I quote this one frequently and those that can see us on camera. He would talk about mission as mother, like we are here to serve mother and it's so interesting. In my own organization we were missing a value and our mission is basically to care, as it should be, and our team had kind of co-opted the value of care for care of one another and I got very adamant that mission is mother and if we start to kind of take that and all of a sudden it's about each other, there's a reason why mission is mother. It's like the broader cause and purpose creates this almost potential alignment that then we can work with one another, affect one another in such a good way. I don't know if that resonates with you, but that mission as mother, I don't think I got it when I was still working with him.

35:02 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Yeah, no, absolutely. And I think you've put it very well what he used to highlight we all are serving that, no matter what role we're in, the organization does not serve the leader, the leader and the organization serve the mission. They serve mother and ensure the success and thrive and benefit of where we're going. I remembered at one point talking to Lee about another situation. We were trying to make a decision about which direction to go and which investment to make, and I had my leadership team around the room and we went around the room and everybody gave their opinion and they were all different. Then we went back around and everybody gave their opinion a little louder. Right? That was the nature of trying to figure this out. Is everybody's opinion? You clearly don't understand my opinion, or you'd be where I was and I had my own opinion and, by virtue of my role, my opinion could trump everybody's.

36:02

My job was to pick one, and I remember talking to Lee saying well, my opinion is probably no more valuable, more correct, no more right than anybody else. And he said that's true. So I said so which one do you choose? And he said well, you choose the one that takes you where you want to go. And I said oh well, fair, point right. Where's mother going, which takes us in the direction we want to go, the best way? It's not a matter of being right, it's a matter of how do we serve that mission.

36:27 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Oh, that's so good, Kevin. There's so many pearls, and so what final thoughts do you have around meaning management?

36:33 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

What I would say, Chris, one of the things that you highlighted, and I really loved how you talked about this. You said at different stages in your life, your cause and purpose will be unveiled to you little by little. My sense is that that certainly has been my experience, and I think you could say the same thing about meaning. Meaning in an organization will unveil itself little by little in your transaction if you pay attention and if you're listening. So it's not about getting meaning right. It's about being on the journey of discovering what meaning serves us and takes us where we need to go.

37:16 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Wow, there are so many like Jeff. Our producer always asked me like where do you think makes really good? Like almost shorts. I'm thinking this whole podcast is just a bunch of incredible poignant pearls that each will make just perfect standalones, and I just want to thank you again. You've been a great mentor over the years and the great thing about you is, like other people, well, I am mentoring you, just interacting with you. Every exchange. I feel like I'm better for it, and so just thank you for that, and I imagine your team would probably say the same thing about you as well.

37:51 - Kevin Pickhardt (Guest)

Well, Chris, we've been blessed to be around good people who are committed to learning, and I put you on that list. I congratulate you on your book again. I really loved it. In the absence of Lee, it was really a breath of fresh air and enjoyable to read it and see the wisdom that you've taken from it and are putting into practice.

38:12 - Jeff Haffner (Ad)

Wow.

38:12 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your podcast and your series and uh and sharing your wisdom Well that man that gives me, that gives me goose pimples coming from you, for you to say that Well, at prior listeners, we really want to thank you.

38:25

At the end of each episode, we always share a quote or a visual. The idea is it might possibly create a brain bookmark, a thought prodder and in Kevin's case it's going to be so interesting the one that we come up with and so the idea is that it basically furthers your learning and growth, thereby your leadership, and the idea is hopefully it sticks in your brain. Make sure you, the listener, subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership, so you don't miss an episode. If you want to check out the book, it's on Amazon. Tell your friends and family coworkers about it. It's easy to rail against the world and be frustrated by things, but let's be the change that we really want to see in the world. So thanks for listening to Anatomy of Leadership, and here's our Brain Bookmark to close today's show.

39:03 - Jeff Haffner (Ad)

This Brain Bookmark by Kevin Pickhardt. As a leader, you have the job of making your organization thrive beyond your tenure.

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