

## **Transcript / Mapping the Future via the Mission with John McBeth**

(transcribed with the help of Ai / not 100% accurate)

0:00:02 - Melody King

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.

0:00:24 - Chris Comeaux

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. Our guest today is a friend of mine. It is John McBeth. He's the former co-founder and CEO of Next Century Corporation. Welcome, John.

0:00:34 - John McBeth

Well, it's good to see you again, Chris.

0:00:37 - Chris Comeaux

Yeah, you as well, John. Well, I'm going to read from your bio. So, John McBeth has nearly 50 years of experience in the technology industry, starting as a software engineer and progressing into CEO roles. He's been a part of multiple start-ups, and he led the successful sale of two software companies Century Computing in 1998 and Next Century Corporation in 2019. Both of these companies developed and deployed mission-critical applications to the US government.

John's passion is creating and growing high-performance organizations. That's our mutual passion, and the subject of his presentation is the industry and universities. High-performance concepts employed by John are based on the writings and teachings of our mutual friend, dr Lee Thayer, who is an Arthur speaker and the founder of the Thayer Institute. John retired in 2021. He now serves as the treasurer and member of the executive committee of the Fort Meade Alliance, an independent community organization that serves the needs of the Fort Meade region. Outside of that work, Mr. Macbeth has founded Dream Builders of Maryland, an all-volunteer organization that assembles teams of teens and adults who travel across the country and the world to build houses for those in need. That's so awesome, John. His hobbies include construction, classic cars I got to see that firsthand when I visited his home years ago and outdoor activities. He lives in Howard County, Maryland, with his wife and he has two daughters and one grandson. So, John, what did I leave out that you want our audience to know about you?

0:02:06 - John McBeth

I think you covered it pretty well. I thought I would kind of tell my story a little bit.

0:02:16 - Chris Comeaux

Yeah, and I hope you weave in. And when I got to meet you I heard the story of how you envision next century and that was my Jerry Maguire moment of I fell in love with John McBeth when you told that story. So please, if you could weave that in too.

0:02:29 - John McBeth

Oh sure, I'm happy to do that. Well, like you mentioned from my bio, I started out as a software developer, computer programmer, great, great fun work, getting to build really important systems. For example, one of the first things I worked on out of college was building nuclear power plant trainers to train operators to run nuclear power plants safely. I transitioned from there to build working on satellite systems, primarily NASA satellite systems. I worked on many missions there, building software that processes imagery or data from satellites.

And then in this is going to date me, 1979, I was at the space division of GE when five of my colleagues announced that they were leaving GE and starting their own company called Century Computing. And I had enormous respect for these five individuals, technical as well as leadership and so they invited me to go. But at the time the deal was you had to go for a year without salary and put up \$10,000. Now for me in 1979, \$10,000 might as well have been a million, and so I couldn't do that and I thank them for inviting me and I stayed back at GE. Long story short, in early 1982, they came back and they said how about now? You don't have to go for a year without salary and you don't have to put up \$10,000 because we have paying customers.

So I was employee number nine at Century Computing and really had a wonderful experience going to work with people that I respected so much. Over the years I transitioned from software development to project management and then into business development, and somewhere along the I was asked to become the president of the company, and that was in the mid 80s. I said okay, but, chris, you can appreciate this. I had no idea what that meant. You know what does it mean to be the CEO of a company, and so I figured that I'd better go and learn about what that meant, what leadership meant. So I did two things. One, I went to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and got a master's degree in business, which, between us, was mostly a waste of time.

0:05:01 - Chris Comeaux

I'm thinking, Dr Thayer, that whole story about the Japanese guy, and they're like are you worried about the United States? And I said how many MBAs are you guys cranking out per year? No, we're not worried.

0:05:12 - John McBeth

Right. Right, I did learn how to read a financial statement there. But the other thing I did was join this international organization of CEOs called Vistage, which you know well, and that was really, really important to me. If your audience doesn't know what Vistage is, it's a for-profit organization based in, I think, San Diego, California, and they bring together groups of presidents of companies in a local region and form a group. I don't know if you knew this, Chris, but I was Vistage 130. So the groups are numbered sequentially from one to. I think they're in I don't know six or 7,000 now, but it was a very early group and we would meet once a month for a day, a full day, a significant commitment of time and the day was broken into two pieces In the morning you would have a speaker and in the afternoon you would have what's called an executive session where any member of the group could bring any issue that they were dealing with in their company to the group in confidence and get advice.

So in 1991 the speaker was Lee Thayer and I will never forget driving home that day saying to myself I sure hope this guy is wrong, Because if he's right, then all of the things that I've been doing as a leader at Century Computing are off base. So what did he say? And I'll never forget what he said. It was very clear. He said we have come to the pop psychology view in this country that if you make people feel good they will perform better, and there is no empirical evidence whatsoever that that's true. And he said instead, what you need to do is you need to make it necessary for people to accomplish great things. And that was a life-changing moment for me. You know, I kept thinking I hope he's wrong, because I'm well into the feel-good culture. You know, I would go walk around the office and make sure everybody's chair was comfortable and their coffee was warm and all that kind of stuff, and Lee would say, totally wrong, Stop doing that and all that kind of stuff. And Lee would say, totally wrong, stop doing that.

Make it necessary and the words that he used I think were so important, as you know, the language is really important make it necessary. Keyword for people to accomplish, keyword great things, key phrase. And really all of this stuff about high performance comes from that phrase making it necessary for people to accomplish great things. And so what does that mean? Well, what it means is all organizations must have a great and worthy purpose.

Now, this was 1991 that he said this in a Vistage group. This is long before authors like Daniel Pink and Simon Sinek wrote their books Drive and Start With why and all that stuff. So this whole concept of

purpose was really new and unheard of in 1991. So what did I do? I thought about it for a while and I went and bought one of Lee's books and I tried to read it and I tried practicing some of the ideas and concepts very, very poorly. And I had the great opportunity. A couple of years later we got Lee to come back to our group a second time and during a break I actually approached him and asked him if he'd be willing to work with me on a one-on-one basis and, much to my surprise, he said yes hmm, so at the time, century was, I don't know, maybe 50 people.

We had contracts with organizations like NASA doing doing spacecraft, ground systems and National Institutes of Health, things like that, and I started working with Lee and about a year later, our growth went from 5% to 7% a year, to 30%, to 50% to 100%. I mean, it was dramatic and it was all based on these concepts of high performance. One of the things that happens when you start to grow like we did is that other companies begin to take note, and so we started getting offers to buy us, most of which we turned down. In fact, I had a practiced answer which was thank you very much, we're honored that you're interested, we're not for sale. But then in 1998, a gentleman came along. When I gave that phrase to him thank you very much, we're honored, you're interested, we're not for sale, but we'd welcome the opportunity to partner with you he said to me okay, let's start working together, because I think, john, you'll find out that if we work together, we can do much bigger things than you know as separate companies. I came to really respect this individual His name is Ken as an incredible entrepreneur. This individual his name is ken uh as a incredible entrepreneur, and a year later I agreed to uh to merge with his company and we became part of a larger company. Uh, six months after that we went public. Uh, another six months later we did a secondary offering, very successful, and then two years later he sold the company that we now became part of for an incredible sum of \$2 billion. Wow, incredible number. So now this is year 2000,. At the end of year 2000. At the end of year 2000.

In the year 2001, Ken and I realized that this company that had acquired us was not the kind of place we wanted to be, and I won't go into any of the details there, but there were ethical issues and all kinds of issues there. So in June of 2001, ken and I both left the company and started talking about building a new company, and we opened the doors of that company on September 4th 2001. In that company my role was COO, and so my role was going to be to do the acquisitions, much like Ken had done when he created his company. His company had actually bought 12 companies, and so my role was to go find companies to buy, and my first opportunity to do so was a conference in San Diego that started on September 11, 2001. And so my executive assistant came to me the week before and proposed that I take American Flight 77. She actually had a list of four flights. Here are the four flights you can take. I recommend American Flight 77 because it leaves on the morning of September 11th and you can be in San Diego at the conference when it starts at noon West Coast time.

And I'm only sitting here talking to you, Chris, because I was too lazy to get up from Howard County, Maryland, and drive to Dulles Airport Because, as you may recall, American Flight 77 is the flight that

went into the Pentagon, so I could have been on that flight. So I wake up on the morning of September 11th, I actually what I did was I said, instead take me out of the local airport BWI, and she said well, there are no direct flights on the morning of September 11th, you'll have to go the day before. So I flew out on the night of September 10th, woke up on the morning of September 10th, woke up on the morning of September 11th, turned on the TV and saw one of the towers burning and then watched, like many people did, the second plane fly into the second tower. The conference was canceled at noon and now I'm stranded 3,000 miles away from my family. So again, my executive assistants, Candy Krug I don't know if you remember Candy, but she's an amazing person she was working to get me home and eventually found me a rental car. You couldn't even get a rental car, you know, after the attack Finally got a rental car and I proceeded to drive home from San Diego, and it was on that drive Now.

I had been practicing this high performance concepts with Lee from 1995 through 2000 on a continuous basis. So I had really been getting into the whole concept of great and worthy purpose, competence, all of the things associated with high performance organizations. And driving home I was thinking about, because there's nothing to do but listen to the radio and drive. You know, first of all, no better place to be at that time than driving across this great country of ours, you know, driving through the Rocky Mountains, through the big cities, across the deserts and the plains and so forth.

And I'm thinking a couple of things. One, how in the world could we let this happen to us? There must have been information, there must have been some clues that something was going on. It's just not possible that somebody could pull off an attack like that without some leak happening. And then I'm thinking about my father and my father-in-law, both who fought in World War II in the Navy in the Pacific and made great sacrifice for us to make sure that we grew up in a safe country. And I thought and now it's my watch and look what's happened.

So I came home and I helped Ken get the company off the ground. But then I went to him one day and said, Ken, I need to go do something else. I need to make sure that this kind of attack doesn't happen again. I was too old to put on a uniform and go overseas and fight, but I did know something about technology and go overseas and fight, but I did know something about technology.

And so in early February of 2002, we created this company called Next Century that you mentioned, and the mission of the company was to protect the country and save lives by providing information to the people who actually protect the country and save lives, provide it to them in real time, wherever they are, and present it to them in a way that, at a glance, they know what to do. Wow, that was the mission, and what was really exciting about it was. It was definitely a great and worthy purpose and it was very, very focused. I mean, a lot of business people will say, oh, that's too focused. You know you need to diversify.

And our was very, very focused. I mean a lot of business people will say, oh, that's too focused. You know you need to diversify. And our view through the whole life of next century was this will be our mission and this will be the only thing we do until all the lives are saved and the country's fully protected, and I think we'll be busy for a long time. So that's the history of how we got started and I can tell you stories about you know getting going and all that kind of stuff. At the end, we were 160 people. We were supporting all of the intelligence agencies each one, as well as our military services, building systems that we called critical insight, which meant literally situational awareness, real-time data, very actionable kinds of information.

0:16:51 - Chris Comeaux

That's so good, John, I've heard you tell that story a couple of times, but I learn some little new nuance or nugget each time you actually tell it, and actually I did know kind of the beginning. So well, John, let me ask you and you never talk about yourself, but this is a great question that I've loved asking all of our guests on the anatomy of leadership what do you think is your superpower?

0:17:12 - John McBeth

Interesting question and my most honest answer to that is I don't have one. I don't have one. I am at best marginally competent at everything I do. But what I am doing is I'm trying to stay in learning mode so that I can improve every day.

0:17:33 - Chris Comeaux

That is a beautiful answer. So if I would paraphrase, your Superpower is, first off, you are probably one of the most humble human beings, considering the incredible things you've done. I think humility is part of your Superpower. But being in that Learning Mode, would you agree with that?

0:17:47 - John McBeth

Absolutely.

0:17:49 - Chris Comeaux

Awesome. Well, John, you know I'm using the framework of my book here, and the cool thing is so I'm an accountant. I've tried to write a book that's basically the meta framework of leadership, and so we've gone through all of the different concepts and kind of chapters, except for the last, which is mapping the

future. Truth be told, I could have chosen any of these chapters and you and I could have gone back and forth for two or three hours, and that's probably a good excuse for me to ask you to come back several times after this. But I thought, yeah, mapping the future would be a good place for where you and I would start and how you know.

I kind of went through this as like a definition of Leadership, trying to create a common lexicon, but one that you could build off on. And then the second part of the book, the seven M's of what leaders do. I did make it catchy Dr Thayer, probably take me behind the woodshed, because I wrote the seven M's and put the seven M's in that part of the book but the concept of mapping the future like any organization, if you don't have a concept of where you're going, it's really difficult. And so, of course, I listed a couple of tools and things like that, but in essence is mapping the future is using whatever plethora of tools are out there, but you're deploying the tools to map some aspect, almost using it as a guidance system for your organization. I'm curious how would you define mapping the future?

0:19:09 - John McBeth

Yeah well, it starts with a great and worthy purpose in the mission and I think that it served us so well in many respects. One is it helped us a great deal in our decision making. For example, our business development meetings, which would occur every two weeks, any opportunity that was brought to us. The first question we asked was will this protect the country or save lives? And if the answer was no, then we didn't do it, and it helped our business development people to focus where they were looking. So you're sort of envisioning the end state, which is all the information is delivered to the people who need it. They know what to do. It's very actionable. It allowed us to with that mission, with that great and worthy purpose. It allowed us to ask questions like who is the target audience, who are the people who are protecting our country and saving lives, and then allowed us to ask the question what information do they have and what information do they need and where are they and what kind of devices do they have? And so that's where we always started. You know it was a quick little story about the first project we won.

I was, you know, after we founded the company. There was four founders. We had no customers, we had done no business development before we opened our doors and we just started calling people with our mission in mind. And I called a lady at the National Institutes of Health who had been a very good client of ours at Century and her name was Marty. And I said hey, Marty, we're starting a new company called Next Century. And she said oh, I'm so glad to hear that. What do you guys do? And I gave him the story that I just told you. We protect the country by delivering information to end users who protect the country and save lives. And she says wow. She said that's really interesting. She said because we here at the National Library of Medicine, one of the 27 institutes of NIH, national Library of Medicine, one of the 27 institutes of NIH we have the world's most comprehensive database of chemical information in the world and we are dying to get it into the hands of first responders who are arriving at the scene of a

chemical spill. Do you think you could help? And I said, Marty, that's why we created the company to do that. And she said okay, I'll tell you what. I'm going to give you a little contract. I want you to go and build me a prototype. And so we went and found the head of Hazmat for two counties, two local counties, one in Maryland and one in Virginia and we asked them if they would be interested in working with us, to which, of course, they responded yes, if you're here to help.

And we built a prototype of what has now become known as wiser, the wireless information system for emergency responders. And, uh, you know, there's over two million copies worldwide, multiple languages. It's a household name amongst first responders and it's saving lives every day, because when they arrive at the scene of a chemical spill, they know what to do. There's a screen called the key information which says okay, if you're dealing with ammonia, here's what you do. And so, with that first opportunity under our belt, we then started asking okay, who else, who else should we support? And we identified warfighters and thought, okay, well, if we're going to work with warfighters, why not work with the best of the best? See, here's a key If you find really good end users, really competent end users, they know what they need and they just need somebody to help get that information to them, and they just need somebody to help get that information to them. So, long story short, we ended up building a system for US Special Forces. That was a real-time situational awareness system.

And another part of it, Chris, is that every person in the company knew what the mission was and knew how to articulate it. So, for example, we're chugging along, we're starting to get more and more customers, and one of our employees played softball on the local county softball team and after a game, one of his teammates came up to him and said hey, so what do you do for a living? Well, I'm a software engineer. Who do you work for? I work for this company called Next Century.

What do you do? Well, we protect the country and save lives by blah, blah, blah. And the individual said hmm, that's interesting, I work for the National Security Agency and I think we could use your help. So Doug was a programmer, he wasn't a business developer, he was playing softball and yet. So my point is you know, have a mission, have a place, you're going. We use the word destiny. The destiny for next century was to protect the country and save lives. Have a destiny, make sure that everybody in the organization is had by this destiny and can talk about it, and then just start talking about it and opportunities will present themselves.

0:24:22 - Chris Comeaux

Yeah, I got to witness that firsthand and that'd be a good segue, John. So you invited me. I was working with Dr Thayer and the Thayer Institute besides my day job of running a hospice program, and you took your team through Dr Thayer's book and I don't want to steal your thunder because I want to talk about that. But you asked me to kind of be part of the kind of end of the year culmination of that and got to go



to your house in West Virginia. But I got to hang out with these young, brilliant, kind of geeky but brilliant.

But what you just described I saw to a person and these kids were probably, you know my guess is, I mean they felt much younger than me, so probably in the 20s, and were probably, you know my guess. I mean they felt much younger than me, so probably in the twenties, and yet they were so bought into your cause and purpose and and it was also listening to like they're talking about like geeky things, like I had no clue, talking about some code in cobalt or something like that, but then, like tying it back to the purpose, and I was just watching them just in awe of going at some level. You know, auspice is such beautiful, sacred work and me kind of going. I wonder if our team talks about our work in this way compared to your team did. Can you take it from there a little bit and talk about that event?

And we got to go to Antietam Battlefield. It is one of the highlights of my life.

0:25:35 - John McBeth

Really. Oh good, yeah. So one point before that is another. So this whole concept of the mission focus permeates through the whole organization, including recruiting. And so in recruiting, we were very carefully designed the interviews and the questioning to see if people were aligned with our mission and the way that we. The final way that we would do that is, I would be the final interviewer and I would meet with each candidate. I met with every candidate we hired and I would, at some point in the conversation, say so, tell me what your destiny is. And then I would listen and take notes and if, if I heard the right kinds of things, which is, you know, my parents were in the military, uh, uh, you know, I think it's really important to protect the country and I want to help with that, that was the right kind of answer. So, even getting in the door, we had to have a pretty strong sense that they were going to have that attitude that you saw on our patio in West Virginia. You saw on our patio in West Virginia.

So what we did as time went on, we were trying to think of ways to continue to develop leaders around this whole concept of high performance organizations and we designed a course that was by invitation only, so I handpicked employees and I did a cross -section across the organization, so not just technical people or or leaders, but, you know, administrative people, even even receptionist, to participate in this course. It was nine sessions. It was based on the book the Competent Organization by Lee, and so the each each session, we would read a section of the book. The homework assignment was read the section of the book. There would be discussion groups about the section and ask questions, and then we used another of the Thayer Institute tools that you helped develop the the movie segments which Lee called leadership Navigator or something.

0:27:44 - Chris Comeaux

Yeah, Leadership Lessons Navigator. Which one did you use?

0:27:47 - John McBeth

We used, The Devil Wears Prada.

0:27:49 - Chris Comeaux

Okay.

0:27:50 - John McBeth

Which, when people first heard that, they thought what in the world are you talking about? But there are some really really great leadership lessons in that movie, in the segments. So we would do a movie segment each session, we would talk about it, and then three of the six sessions we would actually have a video teleconference with Lee where the students could ask questions. Lee required them to submit the questions in advance, sort of very much like his style. Anyway, the culmination was an overnight trip to the Antietam battlefield. We had, over the years, developed a relationship with the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and they had a number of really exceptional historians, including some Civil War historians. One was named Paul Jussel, and so we would meet at the house in the evening and I would summarize the things that we learned in the course and then I would tell them what we were going to learn that was relevant in the tour of the battlefield.

And there were four main things, and they were all about what goes wrong when you don't have good leadership. And so, for example, the first one was misalignment on mission. And there was significant misalignment on mission, particularly between President Lincoln and General McClellan, where Lincoln wanted to destroy the South's army and McClellan just wanted to hurt them and push them back into Virginia. And so again, that just comes back to the whole point of everybody in the organization has got to be aligned on mission right. You and I, as leaders of our organization, can't be in every interaction. Every interaction that an employee has with a customer, a supplier, a partner is a defining moment and they have to project this passion for the mission and make decisions which are consistent with the mission. So that was one example. Another one was confirmation bias. I don't know if you want me to go through all four.

0:30:02 - Chris Comeaux

Go through all four actually, and I want to tell you one of my greatest learning lessons from that trip.

0:30:05 - John McBeth

Okay. So the second one was what's called confirmation bias, where we're trying to figure out what's going on in the world so we know what to do, and so we come to a conclusion, oftentimes wrong, because we don't have enough data and we spend all the rest of our time looking for things that will confirm our bias. And so, for example, McClellan thought that the South's army was much, much bigger than it was, and he kept looking for little tidbits that would confirm that, and it caused the loss of many, many lives. And he kept looking for little tidbits that would confirm that, and it caused the loss of many, many lives. So that's the third one. The third one is one I really like, called task versus purpose, and so particularly the North, in this case McClellan, would task Burnside to go and take a bridge, go over there and take that bridge on the Antietam Creek, and so Burnside would do that after a very hard battle, and he'd get onto the other side of the creek and he'd stop because he had completed his task, and he didn't understand that.

We have a goal here, we have a mission. It's not just to take the bridge. That's a piece of what needs to be done. We need to win this battle we need to end the war. And then the last one is controlling the narrative, which in Lee's parlance would be managing meaning. As Lee would say, it's a more abstract concept, but it's basically as situations occur. Leaders need to understand what meaning to take from the events that occur and how that can help propel the organization towards this mission.

0:32:04 - Chris Comeaux

That's so good, John. To be honest with you, I was on that trip and I did not realize those were the four key lessons and I mean there are so many takeaways. And I got to. I positioned myself by the gentleman. What was his name? That was actually the guy from the professor Paul Jussel.

0:32:20 - John McBeth

Paul Jussel.

0:32:21 - Chris Comeaux

Paul Jussel, and so I positioned myself next to him and I'll kind of cut to the gist of the question is I asked him is it all about improvisation versus preparation? And you know what his answer was. But it was a beautiful answer. He says both. He said and this guy was, if I remember right, John Wright. Wasn't he in charge of teaching logistics at the Army War College, or wasn't that part of his role?

0:32:45 - John McBeth

Yes, and he also led an event that they did annually. It was a national security conference and he actually invited me to participate one year. So I got to spend a week up at the college and they brought in military leaders from around the world Wow, you know. So in the in the room with me, where you know the leaders of, I want to say I forget the countries I know Japan was there and several other countries, allies of ours, obviously to just talk about strategies, national security strategy.

0:33:19 - Chris Comeaux

It was an amazing it's it's amazing and I just his answer was you know, we bring more material to the battlefield and we go through more scenarios than anyone else, but yet when the battle hits, it is about improvisation, absolutely, but it's improvisation from that training and preparation, right?

0:33:38 - John McBeth

with the purpose in mind right.

0:33:41 - Chris Comeaux

Thank you for putting that in there Absolutely With that purpose in mind, because then you have a key, almost like a onboard compass, then to make those kinds of real time decisions and then obviously, that kind of framing the training and the scenarios and everything else that's. You're even taking me back to that why it was one of the highlights of my life. I love history and I love leadership and that was the two confluences of two of my favorite things. So till the, to this day, is still a highlight.

0:34:08 - John McBeth

And and it was. It was all very consistent with the concept of a high performance organization. You know Lee used to talk all the time about prepare for the unexpected.

0:34:17 - Chris Comeaux

Yeah.

0:34:17 - John McBeth

Yep, and so lots of what if, what if this happens, what if that happens, and and then, and, as you, as you point out, as soon as the battle starts, something happened that you didn't anticipate. Yep.

0:34:28 - Chris Comeaux

And there's learning in that, and then and then how do you, if you anticipate it and his keyword was how do you obviate it? You make it such it never occurs, and then you choose the problems that you want to have, because problems are going to occur, but you choose the problems that you want to have and our listeners may be going what Like? Sometimes there may be problems that will be exactly the right problem, that will propel your team to the next level, and so it's not that you're setting people up, you're anticipating as much, but going okay, this is an area that might be the perfect problem Because of how we're going to learn and grow from that, and then prepares for this next level, where we need to go.

0:35:08 - John McBeth

I don't know if that makes you want to say anything. Yeah, no, that's exactly right, and we spent a lot of time thinking about that. You know what problems do we want to create? And secondly, and who do we want to give this problem to? You know who is going to benefit, learn the most by solving this problem. But you know which, by the way, lee can get very philosophical about the word problem. He said you know that's a human concept. There is no such thing as a problem in nature. Yeah, exactly.

0:35:35 - Chris Comeaux

It's all opportunity. Well, so, john, you've kind of been poking on this, but what role does cause and purpose play in an individual mapping their own future and then maybe, at the end, take it towards an organization as well?

0:35:49 - John McBeth

Yeah, well, I think it makes me think about the interview question that I asked you know what's your destiny? Had a lot of really interesting responses. One little story there I think I may have shared with you in the past is I said so, tell me what your destiny is? To a candidate. And he said well, my destiny is to be the captain of a fishing boat on the Chesapeake Bay. And I said well, that's an interesting answer, and two things come to mind.

The first thing that comes to mind is it's really good that you have a destiny in mind, because there's some very large percentage of our population that has no clue what they want to be when they grow up. They're just kind of plotting through life, making an income, oftentimes saying and when I retire, that's when I'm going to do what I really want to do, and when you ask them what that is, they don't know the answer to that either. So it's great that you have a destiny. But, number two, we do not have any fishing boats here. Why in the world are you talking to us? And he said well, I need to make a paycheck and I

have a family and a mortgage, and blah, blah, blah. And I said to him I said look, if that's your destiny, go be the best fishing captain on the Chesapeake Bay and I guarantee your money won't be a problem.

0:37:11 - Chris Comeaux

See if what you do is really, really important and you're really good at it, money is not going to be a problem. Yep, that's so right on, John. Well, John, what practical tips almost like tools, techniques that you have for leaders in regarding to mapping the future for the organization, and maybe you could also add an individual level.

0:37:25 - John McBeth

Yeah. So I'm just going to go back to talk about the mission. You know, we had all hands meetings. Every started out every month went to every two months. We talked about the mission, we gave examples of successes, mission successes when we could, and a lot of what we did was classified, but it was really important for every person in the organization to at least see how we were realizing our destiny. And one of the things that I one of my dreams was that our annual financial statement would articulate how many lives we saved last year. Wow.

Unfortunately, we found two problems with that. Number one oftentimes we didn't know how many lives. I mean, we knew it was a lot, but we didn't know how many. And secondly, oftentimes, even if we did know how many lives I mean we knew it was a lot, but we didn't know how many. And secondly, oftentimes, even if we did know how many, we couldn't say oh, wow. So I sort of iterated from that thought to well, as long as the people in the organization know, that's good enough. Yeah Right, that's pretty awesome. So I think's uh, it's, you know, to your question, telling stories about successes, uh, is an important part of of this journey. Uh, um, and you want tools and tips. You know lee was not a big person on the tools and tips, it was sort of improvised. Make it up as you go and, yeah, you'll see the opportunities and you'll you'll know what to say and do well, what?

0:39:08 - Chris Comeaux

something that just occurs to me right now is so dream builders and so yes, are you? Are you deploying these concepts in dream builders? Like what are you doing there?

0:39:18 - John McBeth

Yes, we are. Uh, just, uh. Just in the the third week of June, we took a team of 35 people to Hazard, Kentucky, and framed and enclosed three houses in a week, with 10 of them teenagers, because that's

another one of my passions is getting teens into this concept of dream big, do big things and showing them that they can. They can do big things. And so where we use the concept of bold and audacious goals, which is a high performance concept. You know, Lee used to constantly beat on me about the goals. Just, you know, that's nothing. Let's do something really big.

I mean the idea of actually saving a life with technology. That's pretty bold and audacious. That's very bold and audacious. And, and we saved thousands of them. I mean and, and, and, and. Just to watch the customers used to bring us, you know, call us in and say, hey, come on into the skiff a secure, compartmented information facility. And let me tell you about the mission success as a result of the system you built us and the employees would just walk out on air, you know, two feet above the ground.

0:40:32 - Chris Comeaux

So your customers were coming back to you sharing those stories. Yes, you weren't having to fish for them. They were coming back and telling you that, right right, that's beautiful, that's totally beautiful. Well, John, you're a treasure. Any final thoughts?

0:40:47 - John McBeth

I really appreciate this and the thought that we can continue this conversation. There's so many topics, right, there's the topic of competence and choice, and just so many. It's the lexicon that I learned and you learned from Lee, that you could pick any one of those words and you could really drill down and have a good conversation about it and it just changes your thinking so dramatically from. You know what are your revenue goals for next year and what are your profit margins and you know what's your utilization. It's just a different conversation and more exciting.

0:41:24 - Chris Comeaux

Absolutely Well, we're definitely going to have you back and you and I could explore those. And you know, gosh, the number of times that I pull from his wisdom in a week. Finally, my team said you know, at this point you don't have to re-quote that, it's from Lee, you can just kind of like it's kind of yours, but, like you know, just his book Leadership, thinking, being, doing.

As we think, so we are, and as we are, so we do. You could just unpack that and, just like you know, pull the thread, because quite often we're just like reshuffling the chairs on the deck of the Titanic, of just focusing on the doing but going back and then shifting that thinking.

0:42:09 - John McBeth

And just that's why the lexicon is so important, because that then frames the potency where those thoughts can actually take you and ultimately, resulting in the actual doing, and so, in fact, I had a debate with one of our leaders about that that thinking, being doing is the right order. The most important thing you do is thinking about things that need to be thought about, and then being them and then doing them. So just that one phrase. It's very rich.

0:42:35 - Chris Comeaux

Well, what I love too, and just thinking about just the wisdom like and I know I want the show to be mapping the future, but my biggest takeaway is how you kept taking it back to mission and how that is just so essential to really mapping the future and so that that to me is just kind of just that's just very profound, that's incredibly profound, making me reflect in my own organization Like we could get so enamored in the kind of the tools and the tactics, but if you just go back to that, people will invent the right tools on a day-to-day basis because it's almost like all that they really need. You can map your future if you've got kind of that core and the power of storytelling and how it keeps unpacking that and reintroducing it. So that's just great wisdom. I really appreciate you taking us back to that today, John.

0:43:22 - John McBeth

Sure, Lee would say we become slaves to our tools. If you're really focused on the mission, it's the other way around the tools. You only select and use the tools that will help further your mission. You just don't have time for anything else. It's too important.

0:43:40 - Chris Comeaux

That is well said and maybe the way we've probably tried to bring a lot of tools, because sometimes people are just stuck Like I have no tool, but don't become enamored with your tool. Quite often I'll say these are the training wheels, and hopefully we want you very quickly to be. You don't need the training wheels and you're off on your own. You're reinventing what you need in the future. Sometimes people need that tool, though, to get them off the dime inventing what you need in the future. Sometimes people need that tool, though, to get them off the dime. But I think in the long run, lee's approach capacitated people for the rest of their lives, because people can stuck and then the tool becomes the idol. Well, well, john, thank you again. And at the end of each episode, we always share a quote and a visual. The idea is it creates a brain bookmark, a thought prodder about our podcast subject to further you, the listener, your learning and growth and thereby your leadership, and what we're going for is that it sticks. It's like a brain tattoo and you keep coming back to it, just like John and I come back to so many of Lee's concepts that were so potent.



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0:44:57 – (Brain Bookmark) Jeff Haffner

Mission is essential to mapping the organization. Make sure you have one.

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