The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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0:02:10 Jacob: Welcome everyone to the Future of Work show. I'm your host, Jacob Morgan. My guest today is somebody I've interviewed on the podcast, what was it, a year and a half ago? I think it was a year and a half ago. And it is David Marquet, he's a former nuclear submarine captain. And he's the author of a best-selling book I'm sure many of you have read called, Turn The Ship Around. And he actually has a brand new book, which I think is coming out at the beginning of February, and it's called Leadership is Language. And I love that title. So David... Oh, you got the book. There it is.

0:02:50 David: It just arrived.

0:02:51 Jacob: Did it arrive today?

0:02:53 David: Yesterday.

0:02:54 Jacob: That's a good-looking book. I like it.

0:02:58 David: You're right. [chuckle]

0:02:58 Jacob: Mine is coming out around the same time as yours. But I don't have a hard cover yet. So I can only imagine what mine will look like. But it's always nice when you get the hard cover.

0:03:06 David: There's a sense of completion that can't be beat.

0:03:09 Jacob: Yes, yes. And well, before we get started jumping into the book and some of the stuff that you've talked about in there, why don't you give people a bit of background information about you? Because I don't think many people have seen or have talked to or have heard a former nuclear submarine captain talk. [chuckle]

[overlapping conversation]

0:03:28 David: Well, we're very serious people, that's the first thing you need to know.

0:03:32 Jacob: Oh yeah. That's...

0:03:33 David: Yeah.

0:03:34 Jacob: So how did you get involved with that? And give us a little sense of what was your

life like when you were captaining this nuclear submarine?

0:03:42 David: Oh yeah, so I spent 28 years in the Navy. And seven years of my life, I spent underwater on submarines. So I grew up in the '70s, and the Cold War was this big thing. And I was a math geek. I was in math team, chess team, that kind of stuff. And so, if you were a geek...

0:04:04 Jacob: Did you say chess team?

0:04:05 David: Yeah. I know you're a big chess guy. I was like an amateur.

0:04:10 Jacob: I just played in a... Well, I'm in a tournament, but we play one game a week, and I played yesterday.

0:04:16 David: Nice.

0:04:17 Jacob: So I love that... Ah man, too bad you're not here, we could have been playing chess every day.

0:04:21 David: Yeah, I know. But it would be unsatisfying for you. Let me just... But I was... It was a place for geeks to hang out. And if you were a geek and you wanted to do your part, which I decided I did, because I believed in the Constitution and what it stood for, in terms of humanity, you go on the Submarine Force, because submarines are designed to hide from people. So if you are an introvert, it's perfect. And I went to the Submarine Force, and I was really good at telling people what to do. And I sort of jokingly but not jokingly, hold up our leadership book from the United States Naval Academy. And it says, "Leadership is directing the thoughts, plans, and actions of others... " Not plans and actions, not just plans and... Thoughts. And I was so good at this that the Navy kept promoting me. And pretty soon, they said, "Well, you're gonna be the captain of a nuclear submarine." At the very last minute, I get shifted to a different kind of ship. And so now, all of a sudden, I don't know the buttons, I don't know the gear. But as a captain, I'm expected to give orders, and it blew up right away. The very first day, we went to sea, I gave an order, it couldn't happen. And I got my guys together, and I said, "Look, we're in a bad streak. If I keep telling you what to do, you're gonna keep doing it, and eventually it's gonna be bad and we're gonna die."

0:05:47 Jacob: Can you share that story actually, because I love the story of, what was it, the Santa Fe? What was the name of the other vessel?

0:05:53 David: So I was supposed to go to a ship called The Olympia.

0:05:55 Jacob: The Olympia, that's right.

0:05:56 David: Yeah. Yeah.

0:05:56 Jacob: I love that story.

0:05:58 David: You could just see from the outside, they look different. And it was a big upgrade, when the Navy went to the Santa Fe, which was the latest, one of the newest class of submarines... The newest class of submarines. So we were gonna operate the ship on a backup electric motor. And the electric motor on the Santa Fe only has one gear, all my older submarines had two gears. And so, I'm like, "Hey, shift to second gear because it makes the problem harder." Because this is a

problem we're doing with the reactor shut down, and we're gonna drain more current, make the battery life shorter. It's like turning everything on your cell phone and then trying to get it fixed while it's on, and you're draining the battery, before the battery drains out. Because if it drains out, you don't have any juice, you can't start the reactor, so you're toast. So it's very tense. And the officer orders it, and then the sailors kinda look like this, "Huh?" And I'm like, "What's going on?" He says, "Captain, there is no second gear on the electric motor, it's just a one-speed motor, you dummy." Well, he didn't say that but, [chuckle] it was implied, and my head literally exploded because in the past, when I'd given bad orders, I always thought I have to give better orders, but since I didn't know... This was... I didn't know anything about this ship other than the physics and the theory, this was not a feasible solution.

0:07:25 David: And so I got my guys together and I was like, "What are we gonna do?" And I had this young officer, he said, "Well, rather than us having to fix your bad orders. Why don't we just skip the part?" And how's that gonna work? In other words, I had to not give orders, so I made a deal. I'm never gonna give an order as a captain of a submarine. And that was super hard. It was super scary. It's nothing physically hard. It was just psychologically very hard because I wanted to. But what happened was instead of the normal thing where we all lean in, I lean into the guys below me, I direct, they report, I call on my direct reports just to make sure we're all clear on the thing, I had to lean back. And so, this whole idea that leadership is about leaning in and telling people what to do is out-dated. Yeah, and that was my big learning, and so, it all happened. We just changed the words. I couldn't change the team, couldn't change the schedule, couldn't change... The only thing I could change was the words that we used inside the submarine, but that made a 10X difference.

0:08:33 Jacob: Can you give an example of how maybe you would give an order in the past versus what you had to change to without having to give any orders ever again?

0:08:45 David: Yeah, so very simple. So let's say we're steaming on the surface and we're gonna go to a position where the water is deep enough and then submerge the ship. I would say, "Okay, here's the plan, drive to point A, then submerge the ship," and it would be an order. Or a little better than that would be the officer would say... I would write our intentions and then he would say, "Okay, I'm at point A, request permission to submerge the ship," and then I would still say, "Submerge the ship," and he would say, "Aye aye, submerge the ship." So even when they were executing these things where it was sort of known that's what we're going to do, they still requested permission. Because the Navy says submerging the ship is a momentous event and the captain shall direct it, and that's what it was. And so I said, "Just tell me what you intend to do," and if you use that word intend, I intend to submerge the ship, "Captain, I intend to drive to point A, we'll arrive there approximately noon time, and when there, I will notify you that I will intend to submerge the ship." What happens is they own it, and I can't tell you how many times we would drive, be driving to point A and I'd be like, "I need to tell them what to do," and they might not recognize that we needed to do the... We needed to load a torpedo or submerge the ship or something like that. These are big things, so.

0:10:16 Jacob: Yeah.

0:10:17 David: But the problem was I needed a team that was thinking, not just doing and reacting. And if you're not willing to shut up and see what they will do on their own, you'll never get out of this gerbil mill of, "I tell you and you react, and I tell you," because you're not building their thinking muscles. And so, long story short, it was amazing. We got the highest morale, highest scores on inspections, set all these records, won all these awards. But the cool thing was 10 years

later, 10 of the officers became submarine commanders because they were thinking, and they were thinking like submarine commanders, and so it was natural for the Navy to promote them to become submarine commanders. If you treat people like followers.

0:11:06 Jacob: Yeah.

0:11:07 David: Then you're not building leaders, like, "Oh, where are all the leaders? Oh, we gotta hire a CEO from somewhere else." Yeah.

0:11:13 Jacob: I remember reading in your book that wasn't the... Oh no, the Santa Fe, the crew, it was like they had high disengagement levels, it was like an old vessel, it was basically the exact opposite of the Olympia, and then that's, hence the title of the book, Turn the Ship Around, and then after you switched this kind of leadership style, it became the Best in Class, you won all these awards, engagement levels were high, and it was all just because you changed the way that you approached leadership.

0:11:45 David: Exactly and it wasn't an old, tired ship. It was one of the brand new ships. It was just that... People said there wasn't enough leadership, that was wrong, there was too much leadership, there was too much of the old kind of leadership. And we know from Google's project, Aristotle, that the most important determinant to team performance isn't who's on the team or what positions they're in, I couldn't control any of that. It was how the team interacts, and for us, it was how we talked to each other. And so, over and over and over again, we just took small words, and we just changed the way we asked questions, we changed the way we ran meetings, we changed the way we talked to each other. And there weren't a lot of speech, because when they changed management program, we just...

0:12:28 David: Here's another example, I was really frustrated because I was hearing this "they" all the time, different segments, so, "They ordered the wrong part," "Oh, they are making me do it," so we had "they" by rank and we had "they" by department, just like I see in every organization. And I said there's no more they on Santa Fe. [chuckle] It rhymes so that was convenient because people believe things that rhyme. And what happens is, in your brain, you come up and you say, "Well, they... I mean, we ordered the wrong part." So there's no blame, there's no recrimination. Now, initially, it sounds... It sends your brain a weird signal, it's like, "Yeah, it doesn't feel right." But if you persist in the practice of saying "we," what happens is your brain grows together in a way that says, "We, that's the code word for on my tribe, therefore this person must be on my tribe," and it's the thinking that follows, we act our way to new thinking.

0:13:24 Jacob: I like that simple technique, there's no more "they," everyone is a "we."

0:13:28 David: Yeah.

0:13:28 Jacob: That's a good approach. Well, that brings us to your new book and the title is Leadership is Language. So why don't we start off just with the title, what do you mean by leadership is language? What's that about?

0:13:46 David: Well, this is one of those things, well yeah, that's obvious once you say it. If you're a mason, you interact with your hands; if you're a machine operator, you interact with your hands; if you're a coder, you interact with your head and your hands; if you're a basketball player, it's your hands and your legs and your butt. There are a lot of professions and there are a lot of things in life

where you interact with the world or your profession with hands and that kind of thing, but when it comes to leadership, because leadership is always about other people, you interact through words. So it's spoken, it's written, it's email, it's company statement, it's annual reports, but it all happens through language and the magic of leadership is that by changing your words you will change the world around you because if you ask a question a different way, you'll get a different answer. People will say something differently, if you ask, "Is it safe?" They'll say, "Yeah." And you might not know that actually there was a danger, versus, "How safe is it?" "Well, it's about 60% safe." "Oh." But you learn different and maybe you don't do something.

0:15:11 David: And all the industrial accidents that you see, that we read about and studied for this, there is this, I call it, it's a cognitively convenient way to make the world black and white. Are there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Yes, no, maybe. But then even better to say, what's the likelihood, 65%? Okay, now let's talk about it but that's too complicated for our process.

0:15:41 Jacob: It changes the way that you approach the problem. Yeah, that kind of framing makes sense. And in the beginning of the book, before we talk about your six main plays, at the beginning of the book, you had this really interesting story where you talked about share of voice, and I think you actually had some numbers in there from a specific incident that you guys looked at. So can you talk a little bit about the importance of share of voice, just so that for leaders or even employees listening or watching this or listening to this, something that they can be aware of, just be cognizant of share of voice?

0:16:20 David: So share of voice is simply, how many words each person says in a meeting or in a two-person conversation. And a more even share of voice reflects better communication flow, it seems natural. But if you're in a meeting with three... Let's say you're in a meeting with four people or on a team with four people but one person is saying a lot fewer words because they're really quiet, the team is deprived of what they know and what they think. On the other hand, if one person is saying the majority of the words, which is typically the leader, then that person is dominating all the airwaves. Now, as a leader, you don't need to say a lot because you already know what you think and when you start talking, you're anchoring the group. Basically, the idea is you're bringing them to your way of thinking, which is what you think you wanna do but it's actually not. What you want to do is understand how they think and what they think, and at the end, you can decide what to do, whether you could do what they wanna do or what you wanna do, that's fine. But it's after uncovering what everybody thinks. So we analyzed...

0:17:28 David: So this is a ship called the El Faro in 2015, sailed into a hurricane and sank, 33 people's lives were lost, it was a tragedy. The government recovered the black box, we have a 500-page transcript, we know exactly what they said on the ship as they were sailing into it, and so, they were frequently... There was the captain, an officer and a sailor on the bridge. And every single time those three people were on the bridge, we counted the number of words, the captain always said the most, the officer the second most, and the sailor a distant third. And it was a highly skewed share of voice. And that's a symptom of a high... We call it a power gradient. And in a high power... And then later, when the... There's two cases where the officers are trying to tell the captain, "We gotta go behind the Bahamas to get away from the storm," and when you hear... When you read what they say, it's very hesitant, it's like, "Well, captain, we... Well, I think... Well... " And you just wanna just scream because you know it's a life and death situation.

0:18:42 David: But there's a link between that uneven share of voice, and the captain monopolizing the conversation, and the officers then having this uphill battle to convince the captain to change the

plan. The key is these are not bad people, they are not unprofessional mariners. Nothing in this transcript is anything I haven't heard while I was working at the Pentagon. It's exactly the way it works. The problem is good people trapped in the wrong playbook, they're trapped in an industrial-age playbook, which is designed to get people to do stuff, not get people to think.

0:19:20 Jacob: So as a leader, I guess, or let's start with leaders. If you're a leader of a team, it sounds like your first order of business is, "Listen first, talk later."

0:19:36 David: Yeah, good way to say it.

0:19:39 Jacob: Okay, that makes sense. Okay, so share of voice, I guess, is something to be aware of. And what do you do, for example, if you are a leader and you start to notice that maybe you're starting to monopolize the conversation or maybe somebody isn't saying anything? Do you just kinda call them out and say, "I'd love to hear what you think"?

0:19:56 David: Well, if that's where you get to, maybe. You could say, "Hey John, I noticed you haven't said much, how do you see it? Or, "How are you seeing it relative to the rest of us?" And make it easy for them to say that. Now, in a small group where it feels pretty safe, that's okay, you can do that. But structurally, the way most meetings are run are designed to actually suppress those outlying opinions. And the reason is because we run it by talking first and then voting. "Hey, let's talk about should we delay product launch? I'm hearing some rumors from the technology group that the product's not gonna be ready. How do you feel about... " And then so there's a conversation. All that does, it gets people anchored and gets people to coalesce around whatever the group or perceived leader's position is. So the person who's thinking, "Yeah, we definitely need a delay," gets, "Well... " and then maybe they don't even speak up. And you will never know is that they didn't speak up.

0:20:56 David: First, so what you wanna do is vote first, then discuss it, because the maximum variability, decision-making is thinking work, thinking work benefits from variability and diversity. Therefore, you want to capture maximum variability when you can, which is vote first before you contaminate the conversation with what the group thinks, or heaven forbid, what you think.

0:21:21 Jacob: Yeah. And I like the advice.

0:21:23 David: Yeah, then, by voting... And by the way, it's not a binary vote, it's like, "How strongly do you feel this way and that way?" Because you're trying to... Let the people who are the outliers identify themselves.

0:21:36 Jacob: I think that's a good practice. Basically, you kind of flip the meeting backwards and do the voting first and then discuss it, as opposed to discussing and then doing the voting afterwards, which is, I think, a pretty simple technique in practice that anybody can implement. One of the other things that you talked about in your book is this idea of blue workers versus red workers, or blue work versus red work. Can you give us a little bit of insight around the distinction between those?

0:22:04 David: Your workday in your life is divided between two different kinds of activities. Activity one, which is production, getting stuff done, doing stuff. Imagine the worker on the assembly line, simple, repetitive physical task, but it doesn't need to be that sort of mind-numbing, but it benefits from focus and it benefits from reducing variability. "I wanna follow the procedure. I

wanna wear my safety goggles." The other kind of work is cognitive. It's broad perspective, looking left and right, casting a wide net, that kind of work benefits from variability. There are variability as an enemy, variability as an ally. And we call this blue work, and we call this red work. Now, the key is an industrial age organization was designed to separate the blue work from the red work by class, or by leaders, followers, management, workers, salary people, hourly people. And then we wear different uniforms so I can go to a hospital, I can tell the doctors from the nurses, that kind of thing. The true key now, though, is we need to let the doers be the deciders. So, in other words, rather than these people just doing what they're told all the time by the blue workers, we need to let the people who are doing work then make decisions about the work that they're going to do. And that requires a whole different host of cultural norms than, "Okay, your job is just to comply with what we tell you to do."

0:23:46 Jacob: Yeah, I'm assuming a lot of leaders probably wouldn't be as comfortable with that aspect of letting the doers also be the deciders, because the traditional mentality is, "I'm the decider, and you're the doer."

0:24:00 David: Correct. Why?

0:24:01 Jacob: Gotta flip things over a little bit. So it seems like the... And you talk about the old playbook versus the new playbook. In the new playbook, we're gonna talk about six of the main plays. Anything that you can share about the old playbook? Any particular or your favorite aspects of the old playbook that you like to call-out?

0:24:24 David: The key play from the industrial revolution is to obey the clock and we have words in our language. We have, like clockwork we're can do organizations, we pay people by the hour, these are all vestiges of the idea that the clock reigns supreme and I need to do X amount of work per Y unit of time. Now, for red work that's appropriate, that's focused production work. But the problem is for blue work, it's not appropriate because the pressure of the clock makes it hard for my pre-frontal cortex to work at optimal capacity, and what happens is I can't do cognitive decision-making, so I have to relieve the pressure of the clock by saying, "Time out. Okay, everyone hold... Put your head up. Are we chopping down the right trees?" "No, we're so busy chopping down trees, we can't think about that." "Okay, well, stop chopping for a minute, let's think about it." And so, over and over again, we see this need to let people and create a system by which people can exit and have this rhythm. Okay, let's do it for two weeks, now, let's think about it, now, let's do it.

0:25:34 David: The Andon Cord in the Toyota production system serves a purpose for the worker because if they're having trouble with the doing part of their job, they can push the button and supervisor comes over. Now it's a signal, "Hey, I gotta shift to thinking mode. I gotta relieve the pressure of the clock. I gotta control the clock so the new players control the clock." But the key is, in the industrial age, that the two groups did different things. The thinkers made the decisions and then they got... They coerced the doers to do what they decided. These people were not doing the work that they decided to do, these were people who were doing the work that these people decided for them to do.

0:26:12 Jacob: Yeah, I like the Andon Cord story. Although now, yeah, I guess it used to be a cord, now they use like a button.

0:26:19 David: It's a button.

0:26:19 Jacob: Yeah, and you could... Any worker can literally stop the assembly line if they find an issue or a defect, which is crazy that anybody on the factory floor can stop that, but I think it's a good story. So I guess that kind of goes to the first main play, which is control the clock, not obey the clock. So obey the clock, I think everybody understands what that means. You show up when the clock tells you to, you leave when the clock tells you to. So controlling the clock, what is... How do you explain or describe that approach? How do you control the clock instead of obey it?

0:26:55 David: Control the clock means that we're gonna let the clock work for us and that we're gonna decide, if I wanna pause the clock, as a leader, I can do it. And I need to create a system by which my team can do it. And in the absence of all that, it's probably good to pre-plan a pause. So this is one of the genius things about Agile Software Development, is that we're pre-planning because the sprint is gonna last two weeks, I've already pre-determined that I'm gonna do two weeks. How far off course can I get in two weeks? And then I'm gonna pause, think about it, and then re-adjust. One of the problems with El Faro was they thought about their trip from Florida all the way to Puerto Rico, even though there was a natural break in the middle where they could have made a decision to go down a different channel that takes them behind the Bahamas. But they didn't control the clock. They didn't say, "Okay, we're gonna have a meeting at midnight. We're all gonna talk about which way to go." They didn't view the work that way. It was just work, work. It's like once the assembly line gets going, keep it going.

0:28:03 Jacob: So as a leader of a team, is there something that you can do to, I guess, help your employees figure out how to control the clock? Do you just give them permission and say, "If you don't think we're gonna get something done on time, tell me. Is it about something like a flexible work program? Is that part of controlling the clock too?

0:28:28 David: I'm thinking of more in terms of you're in production and you need someone to be able to feel like they can say "Hey, we need to take a look at this." The 787 is gonna fly in two months. No way. 737 MAX software, yeah, keep it going. Send it out there." Over and over and over again that's the same problem because there are big cultural barriers that are standing up. It's not enough to just say, "Oh, everyone have permission to stop the clock." That will not get it done. You need to do two things: Number one, you have to actually give them a mechanism like... The Toyota, they don't say everyone can stop the line, what they do is they install a button. And so, on a construction site, for example, if you've got someone out there pouring concrete and they think there's a problem, how do they actually signal it? Is it a card? Is it a text on a phone? But what number? To what number? Is it a flare? So even though it seems simplistic, you need to actually give them or the words to say, "Time out, hands-off," whatever it happens to be. And then you have to practice it. Because if you just say, "Well, here's the mechanism," and no one ever does it, then it won't matter because when someone feels the need to control the clock, there'll be so much cultural pressure to keep production going. They're not gonna be wanting to be the person who stopped everything and said, "Oh, well, what's this again?"

0:29:56 Jacob: Yeah.

0:29:58 David: And so, you have to actually practice it and then everyone has to see, "Oh look, it's not a big deal. We did pause, we talked through it, we're back to work."

0:30:08 Jacob: Makes sense. The second play on there is collaborate and not coerce. So tell us a little bit about that one.

0:30:18 David: So, I love coerce because it accurately describes what most people think about leadership. Of course, it's an ugly word so we don't say that, we say inspire, motivate, whatever, but the idea is I gotta get you to do something that I decided you needed to do. And we use position, rhetoric, shouting louder, whatever it is, to get you to do it. And so, here's an example. I had an executive team, two tables of five, I gave them a quick problem, come up with a number, it was a number between 100 and 200, but even before I'm done, one person at the end of one table says 135, and then pretty soon that table says the 135 and then pretty soon, the other table says 135. I said, "Did you guys collaborate? Oh, yeah." Well, guess who said... Guess who spoke first? It was a CEO. That's not collaboration, that's coercion. You're just getting everyone to echo back what you think.

0:31:07 David: Collaboration is everybody write down what you think the number is before we contaminate you, and then having an equal share of voice, not the CEO speaking first and most. And this is... So if I've given them a written exam and said, "In a decision meeting should the CEO speak first or withhold?" They would all get the thing right, but the problem is in the moment, in the behavior, in the meeting, we fall back into what we've been programmed to do, which is to drive consensus, be compelling, not curious. And the reason is because that reduces variability. As soon as I speak, the variability of thought in the group starts to shrink, shrink, shrink, shrink, shrink. And in the industrial age, the teams that reduced variability fastest won because they were best at manufacturing.

0:32:12 Jacob: So I guess as a leader, you're not... You shouldn't be trying to reduce variability anymore, you should be trying to...

0:32:18 David: Embrace.

0:32:19 Jacob: Yeah, embrace. I was gonna say increase but maybe increase isn't the right term, it's embrace the variability that you do have.

0:32:26 David: For blue work, but... So here's an example, on the submarine. The embraced variability part of the is, "Are we ready to start the reactor? Which team are we gonna use to start? Have we done all the re-tests? What time are we gonna do it?" Those are all decisions where we want to make sure that anyone who has an idea about that has a chance to speak. Once you make the decision, "Okay, now we're gonna start the reactor. There's a whole series of steps, at this point I don't want variability, I want reduced... Because I want the steps to go A, B, C, D, not A, B, D, C, that's bad. So I don't want... But the irony is teams that understand this difference between, "I'm in mode A versus mode B, are better both at tasks that require them to embrace variability. And tasks where they need to... They are also better at following safety regulations. That's the thing. Versus other teams like, "Oh well, we can sort of make decisions about stuff but I'm making a decision about whether to wear my hard hat or not." No, that's red work.

0:33:42 Jacob: Yeah. It kind of reminds me of following a recipe to make a dish where you can talk about with other chefs on your team what the courses are that you want the restaurant to have, what dishes you want, but once you agree on the dishes, there's a certain way they need to be made, because if you don't follow the recipe and you start just going out of order you're gonna create who knows what. So that's the first thing I thought of when you were going over that analogy. I'm thinking of those fancy kitchens where they decide what the prefix is gonna be, and then everybody knows that recipe and they follow it down to the tee.

0:34:19 David: Yeah. And then you serve it for three weeks, and then you... So that's the red work. We're doing it and we wanna follow the procedure, because if it's variability inside there, I'm not collecting true data. And then we collect data. What was the feedback? Everyone liked this. This part was too salty. Okay, but now I have 100 data points, not just my whipsaw reaction of what happened to this one customer, and after 100, now I got 100 data points, now I say, "Okay, how do we wanna change it?" And then I make an incremental change and then we go back into reduce variability.

0:34:56 Jacob: Can sometimes leaders though do the coercion but it's unintentional, like they don't know they're doing it, it's just that whatever they say has so much weight that people just follow what they say, but they're not... The leaders aren't doing it on purpose.

0:35:10 David: That's the whole... That's the poisonous thing about it, is that they don't think they're doing it. And they'll vehemently deny and they say'll, "No, we were collaborating but simply the fact that we discussed and then voted, the structure of the meeting results in that reduction of variability and making it harder for the outliers to speak. People say, "Oh, I'm not hearing a lot of new ideas or I'm not hearing creativity." All the creativity innovation happens out here. "Well, I ordered them to speak up." That doesn't do it. You make it easy, remove the speed bumps.

0:35:55 Jacob: Yeah, I guess that is the toxic part, is that leaders don't know that they're doing it. If they knew they were doing it, it'd be easy to fix. But when you don't know you're doing it, it's much harder.

0:36:03 David: Because they're programmed to run the play.

0:36:05 Jacob: Yeah. So do you have any advice or suggestions for leaders? How can you be aware of this? What do you do if you don't even know that you're doing it?

0:36:18 David: Well you have to think about it ahead of time. So you were gonna go into a meeting and you have to... And not give yourself an inoculation. So for example, so there's another psychological phenomenon called escalation of commitment. If you've made a decision, then your ability to evaluate that decision becomes tainted because you are emotionally invested in it. And so what happens is, when faced with evidence that this decision was a bad one, we are more likely to hang onto our own decisions because just because we made it. So knowing, you gotta think two or three steps out, so knowing that that's the case, let's say you gotta make a decision about launching a product or not. And if you're the guy that says, "Yeah, we should launch it." It's your decision, and then you brow beat the team into agreeing with you, and then it turns out that two days before launch you have evidence that that's probably not a good idea, you're contaminated, you can't impartially make that assessment. So if you wanna reserve your ability to do be judgment, to be an evaluator, you gotta remove yourself from the decision in the first place. And most people... The way to think about it is, do you have a gas pedal or a brake pedal or both? You want the senior-most person in the organization to only have a brake pedal.

0:37:46 Jacob: Interesting.

0:37:46 David: That means they only need to evaluate the decisions that are coming to them. But this requires a team that is so energetic and so proactive and so forward thinking that the leader's not, "Oh, we need to be doing... Oh, we need to be doing this. Oh, hey, Jacob, you're head of marketing, how about doing blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?" Because now, you become... You just

sucked yourself into becoming the decision maker, and then now there is no decision evaluator. And so, a lot of these corporate problems we see it's because the decision, the CEO is involved in the decision because he's not developed a team, he or she has not developed a team that is pushing strong enough for them. So they say, "Oh, I gotta push the gas pedal, because my guys aren't doing it on their own." And then they blame their people, but the problem is that the organization wasn't designed that way. Because of this, "If I keep telling you what to do, you're gonna never tell me what needs to be done. I have to shut up first."

0:38:48 Jacob: I really like that metaphor, leaders should only have a brake pedal. So I guess, one of the ways to do that... I mean, and then there have been entire books written just on that. I suppose it comes down to things like autonomy, just giving your employees the freedom, not punishing failure when it happens, it's a series of those types of things I would imagine, that creates a culture where employees are constantly coming to you wanting to step on the gas and you're kinda stepping on the break.

0:39:19 David: Yeah, it requires strong psychological safety, because what you're asking is for people to not only make judgments, but commit to action, and the big impediment is now they can't hide from the responsibility of their behavior. It's the pernicious thing about waiting to be told what to do, is I'm not responsible. Like the Volkswagen engineers, well, we were given signals that we needed to make this work no matter what. Yeah, I'm not a cheat, I'm not an unethical person. I was told to operate like this. The people at Wells Fargo making fake... Whatever it happens to be, it's always the same. It has to be a top-down hierarchical organization combined with a stretch, some kind of a goal which is not connected to the actual process. Same thing with the VA, with their problems, stem from the exact same symptoms, hierarchical organization, reduce waiting list, and pay bonuses based on that. But we're not gonna do the hard work of actually fixing the process.

0:40:30 Jacob: Yeah, yeah. No, the things makes sense. I can't imagine anybody listening or watching this that's saying, "Yeah, I don't know about that." The principles, I think do make a lot of sense. The third one on there, I also really like, which is commit, not comply. And can you unpack that one a little bit?

0:40:51 David: So the idea is, in the industrial age, again, because the doers and the deciders were separated, the deciders coerced the doers what to do, and then the job of the doers was to comply with what they were told. And that if you were the person raising your hand, saying, "Well, this doesn't make any sense," if you were the one who stopped the assembly line, then that was frowned upon. Now, what happens with collaboration is we got a commitment because it comes from within, compliance is imposed on us. And the key is commitment gives you the final... Commitment give you... Opens up discretionary effort. Because we decided to do it this way, so I'm all in.

0:41:36 Jacob: How do you get that commitment? Because I suppose there's a fine line between commitment and compliance. I'm just thinking if I was an employee at an organization, and somebody tells me what to do, and I kinda comply with it, how do you split those two up, and make sure that you have the commitment aspect and not so much the comply aspect? I know it's probably pretty hard to...

0:42:04 David: Yeah.

0:42:04 Jacob: Distinguish those.

0:42:06 David: So it can get muddled. For example, on the submarine if we say we gotta pick up a SEAL team at a certain location at a certain time, we're gonna comply with that order. The engineer can't say, "Well, I really don't wanna do that." He's already in it, but he's pre-committed. Because when you take the job, you're committing to be available for what the team needs to happen. So the commitment happens there is, and you may... And then... Or here's another situation, we can go either north or south, there's two things happening that we wanna keep tabs on, but we can't do both of them. And we discuss and we make a decision to go south. Someone on the team wanted to go north. Once it happens, we... But because they've been listened to with honesty and integrity and respect, it's easier to say, "Okay, I got it." And here's the other thing, don't try and convince them they were wrong. So you may have been right, north may be the better place to go, we'll never gonna know, but we're gonna go south. Can you support that with your behavior? Yes. Okay, great, we're gonna go. The key is, or the mistake I see people making is, "Oh, well, let me... " Then they do the pat on the head, "Oh, let me try and explain why we're not gonna delay product launch, Bob." It's so annoying.

0:43:41 Jacob: Yeah.

0:43:41 David: Because A: You don't really know, and B: It just pisses everyone off. So say, just let them think, it's still wrong, but all I need is for you... Okay, you're the head of ops, I just need you to support the behavior. Can you do it? Yeah, I still think it's a dumb idea but I'll do it. Fine.

0:44:00 Jacob: Oh, okay, I see what you're saying. Yeah, because now that I think about it, inside of a lot of organizations, that's the exact approach we have, is that if you decide on something and other people don't wanna do it, instead of focusing and getting those people to just agree to commit to it, we spend a lot of time trying to convince them why our decision is right. Instead of just saying, "Look, I get that you don't agree with what I'm doing, I just need you to know if you can commit to supporting this direction." As opposed to like, "Let's have a whole meeting about why what I said is right and what you said is wrong." So it's...

0:44:34 David: Right. Because you actually don't know.

0:44:36 Jacob: Yeah.

0:44:37 David: They may be right. And I would grant them that. I'd say, "You may be right, maybe we should launch the product, but we're not."

0:44:41 Jacob: Okay.

0:44:41 David: Or the other way around.

0:44:41 Jacob: So as a leader, and I had this CEO of a... Barri Rafferty, the CEO of Ketchum, and they're a big marketing and PR firm, a couple of thousand people. And she was telling me that it's more important to be trusted than it is to be liked. And so this very much reminds me of that, of like, it's okay if people don't agree with you, you don't need them to necessarily like you, you don't need to convince everybody why you're right and they're wrong, you just need to know as a leader, that if a decision is reached, that they are comfortable exhibiting the right behaviors to go down that direction. So I think that's a very simple and practical piece of advice, that for any leader when they make a decision is, spend less time worrying about convincing others and just get the commitment from them.

0:44:41 David: Yeah, I... The way I thought about it was because I was on a submarine that I didn't know the buttons, I had to go from being a decision make... If you're a decision maker, you're an individual contributor. I had to go from being a decision maker to the architect of a decision-making factory where the output of this process, the way the department heads and the officers and the senior chiefs in the right, was that process designed in a way that whatever was spit out of that process was most likely optimized for the submarine, the navy and the nation. That was my challenge. And it was really a different way than how I thought before, which was I need to optimize it so that I can have... Be armed with the best information so I personally can make the best decision. Now it turns out I think those two things actually go hand in hand. By doing this, I also was very good at being able to evaluate the decisions because I wasn't making them and I was able to sit back and I had a broader perspective that I could see things that the team would miss because I wasn't down in the weeds. But that was the key difference for me.

0:46:56 Jacob: I also really like that analogy of go from being a decision maker to being somebody who's creating a decision-making factory.

0:47:02 David: Yes.

0:47:04 Jacob: That's a good visual to keep in mind for leaders as well.

0:47:07 David: Yeah, Jack Dorsey has a tweet he's put out that's almost exactly like it, that say, my job wasn't to make decisions but make sure good decisions were made.

0:47:16 Jacob: Yeah, yeah, it's very much, yeah, same thing, different words. The next playbook, so we've carded four so far... Oh no, no. We're on number four now, complete and not continue.

0:47:28 David: Yeah. So remember the assembly line, the idea was run it. Any interruptions to running the assembly line, because we were obeying the clock, were frowned upon. Now we wanna think in terms of work in terms of chunks. Short chunks we're gonna complete, we're gonna make that recipe 100 times, we're gonna complete. Complete allows us, first of all, to celebrate, then pause, shift to blue work, thinking work, embrace variability work, what ideas do people have, make a step improvement, and then go back to the doing. Improvement is not continuous. Continuous improvement is not the right way to do it because that's... You're tweaking the process too often. It's incremental improvements, more like a stair step.

0:48:09 Jacob: So how... If you're thinking about an organization, for example, is there a particular example that comes to mind on the difference between complete versus continue?

0:48:22 David: Well, the ship, the El Faro, thinking our job is to go sail all the way to San Juan rather than I'm gonna complete to the halfway point where I can make a decision. When Henry Ford started building Model Ts back in 1904, they locked down the assembly line, essentially, and built the same model for almost 20 years. Meantime, the country has changed, the roaring 20s, there's a lot more wealth and people... And the Model T, by this time, was getting tired. Ford made more cars than everybody else combined at one point.

0:48:55 Jacob: Wow.

0:48:55 David: But he had to shut the line down for so long to re-tool the thing they were so far

behind. Alfred Sloan, who was running GM, they caught up with them and since then it's been neck and neck. It shouldn't have never even been close, but the idea is continue. Blockbuster continued renting DVDs, Kodak continued with print film, on and on and on. It's continue, continue, continue what we know as opposed to complete in a chunk. But those are at the highest level, but it also happens at very small, at very little levels. If you're on a hospital operating team, complete chunks of the procedure... Think about it in terms of chunks of the procedure where you're gonna have opportunities to make decisions.

0:49:39 Jacob: Got it.

0:49:39 David: And then make a deliberate decision to go on in the next part.

0:49:43 Jacob: Okay, so complete not continue is basically this idea of kind of like do something for a little bit, stop and assess before keep going.

0:49:51 David: Exactly.

0:49:51 Jacob: Instead of just having the blinders on and just going in that same direction for your entire life.

0:49:57 David: Yeah.

0:49:58 Jacob: Okay. And then do you any suggestions or recommendations on when to do that? Like, how do you know when you're in complete versus continue?

0:50:08 David: Yeah, this is a math problem. [chuckle] It's a math problem because... And I skip this in the book. A, because I'm not smart enough about it and B, because I wasn't smart enough about it. It's a math problem because the answer is based on statistical process control. You need enough data points. Let's go back to the making the menu. You need enough data points so that whatever changes you make are based on a stable system and not just based on some one-time events that happened yesterday. If you just... Let's just serve the menu for one night and we get a couple of people's reactions. We might have just had certain customers that night or it was cold or the temperature in the kitchen was... Who knows? But you probably don't wanna do it for 10 years.

0:51:02 Jacob: Yeah. [chuckle]

0:51:02 David: That's not enough. So it's an important problem and most people will have a pretty good sense when... Like, in Agile, it's two weeks of coding. Let's do two weeks, three or four. Here's the other thing. At the beginning of the problem, it's shorter. So let's say you have a project where you're gonna build a new piece of software. At the beginning, you might do two-week sprints because you wanna bias towards learning because there was a lot of variability in where you could go. Toward the end, a lot of those options have been closed down on you. Now you can bias more towards production. So you now, you can shift to four-week sprints, six-week sprints, eight-week sprints because there's not as much decision... The decision-making space has really, really, really shrunk down.

0:51:37 Jacob: Okay.

0:51:37 David: So it's biased toward learning early so there's shorter doing modes and it's biased

towards production later.

0:52:02 Jacob: Okay, so this is like being that life-long learner, being the perpetual learner. And the lesson here for leaders is, if you're committed to doing something, don't just have the blinders on. Stop, reassess, look at what's going on and decide if you should be going in that same direction for the next couple months or years or whatnot.

0:52:23 David: 20 years of your life, yeah, and I love that you brought that up because the way our lives are designed, the way the current system is basically designed, at least for me, was one chunk of blue work, learn, go to school and then the rest of your life is do. "Now, okay, now we've taught you how to be an engineer, now go be an engineer." And when life was changing slower than your working life, that was okay. A cobbler in the 1600s could learn to be a cobbler and then was a cobbler, and that was okay. But now things are changing faster than... One, the working life is extended and, two, things are changing faster. So now, it's reversed. So I was an engineer for 28 years on a nuclear submarine, but now I'm an author, a storyteller, semi-creative, [chuckle] struggling...

0:53:19 Jacob: Chess master.

0:53:20 David: Yeah, yeah, a chess pretender, but I think I have a sense that I'm getting to a point where I maybe need another pause and refresh and go do something different because life is so much more interesting. And it's so much more richer.

0:53:41 Jacob: People forget we have to reinvent ourselves now with the pace of change, and like you said, we're working longer. Most of us are gonna reinvent ourselves many times during our careers.

0:53:51 David: I hope so.

0:53:53 Jacob: You don't just pick marketing and stay in marketing for your whole life anymore, you change and pivot all the time. I met an attorney the other day who started a mobile dog grooming service. You pivot and change all the time. It's the new world that we live in. I know we only have a couple... Oh, what were you gonna say?

0:54:13 David: No, I was just saying, well, you hang out with... You're out there on the West Coast, and maybe it's remarkable. There are people who don't pivot and change all the time. I'm just telling you.

0:54:24 Jacob: There are.

0:54:24 David: Yeah, but I think we have richer, fuller lives if we reflect it and deliberately chose the path that we were on, rather than just, "Well, yesterday, I was an engineer, so tomorrow I'm gonna be an engineer, and my son's gonna be an engineer."

0:54:41 Jacob: Don't be a leaf blowing in the wind.

0:54:43 David: Correct.

0:54:45 Jacob: Yeah. So the last two points here that we can quickly cover before we wrap up,

improve, not prove.

0:54:52 David: Yeah, so the whole point is in a production mindset, I have this sense of, I need to prove, we need to get it done. We're a can do organization. We have a mindset of getting it done, and I call that the be good self. That's the self that wants to be good and project an image in the world of competence, value, and worth. The problem is the behaviors of the be good self, which tend to be allergic to feedback, not that excited about criticism, hold us back from actually getting better. So the other self that we have is the get better self. The get better self is the self that gets excited about going down a new trail, that's curious, that's seeking. It's exploratory. When someone walks up to you at the end of a keynote and says, "Hey, can I give you some feedback?" The be good self is like, "No! I've done 500. What's wrong with you?" The get better self is, "Yeah, tell me about that!" And so, we gotta tame the be good self and invoke the get better self because over time, the get better self is the more adaptive way to live your life, and it's the more adaptive... In other words, you'll live. By adaptive, I mean, it's more life. [chuckle] So your organization will survive. You won't go out of business, that kind of thing.

0:56:26 Jacob: Yeah, for me, this very much reminds me of having a growth mindset where you are... Okay, that's the first thing that I thought of when I was reading improve, not prove. I was like, "Yeah, it's very much you overcome obstacles, you are constantly learning new things, and you believe actually that you can do that." Because there are a lot of people who believe that what they know now, the skills that they have is very fixed, and there's no improving. It's just like you got it or you don't.

0:56:56 David: Yeah, and I love Carol Dweck's book Mindset, but there's a complexity and a nuance to it. A growth mindset is not always the best mindset. If you are in your final exam, you're taking a bar, say, for example. You wanna be in a produce mindset. You wanna be focused on doing the best job you can then, and not like an experimental, "Oh, let's just see how this comes out," mindset. Maybe. I don't think so. So when you're in the production focus mode, you're doing a triathlon. Okay, you want to be focused, producing, but it's wrapped within a growth mindset. And you know that when I'm exit this, when I'm done with the exam, when I'm done with the race, I'm gonna then reflect back and I'm gonna make a step improvement. But it's... We think that there are times for being focused, purpose-driven, "I'm gonna get this done."

0:57:56 Jacob: Yeah, yeah, totally agree. And I suppose for leaders, this also, this takes a little bit of vulnerability, this takes a little bit of not being that typical stoic leader, you gotta be a little bit humble, you gotta have some of that humility in there to just know that you can get that feedback to improve and not just assume that you always know everything.

0:58:29 David: Yeah, just not for you, but you're gonna need your whole team to be able to do it.

0:58:33 Jacob: Yeah. Yep. And the very last one right here is we have connect, not conform.

0:58:39 David: So when you read these transcripts of cockpit recordings or the ship recording where you just go to work in a hierarchy organization like I was, people conform to their roles and they act in this sort of sterile professional way and emotions get shunted off to the side. This is a tricky conversation because, number one, all decisions, basically they pass through emotional circuitry before they get made. And if you just think about it, like what house are we gonna buy? Who am I gonna marry? What job I'm gonna have? I could do all the spreadsheets in the world and at the end of the day, it's like I can just see our family living there. There's an emotional thing, and

we know from people who have had brain tumors that damaged the emotional part of their brains, they also were unable to make decisions. That's where the science comes from, and for me it intuitively feels right. So we need to have healthy emotions to make healthy decisions. I'm not suggesting that we make emotional decisions. That's the key. But the way to have healthy emotions is to have... Be connect as humans at work, not have this stuffed shirt artifice of, "Oh well, I'm the CEO, you're the peon," distance.

1:00:12 David: It's not a fake thing, it's actually caring about how their lives are going. Because you want a situation where they're gonna come up and tell you you're wrong, and that's only gonna happen if they feel that you've got their back, you don't have to agree with them all the time, from a content perspective. But at the end of the day, we're in this together.

1:00:37 Jacob: Yeah. I always say you have to view your employees as individuals and as human beings, not just as workers. And especially with this kind of blending of work and life. You can't be a successful leader and not connect with your people and not know anything about them. I can't imagine how you could possibly be successful as a leader and not have that connection with people. It's essential going forward.

1:01:04 David: But I think we're programmed to be the other way.

1:01:07 Jacob: Yeah.

1:01:09 David: And I've seen it over and over and over again. And you read in these transcripts and it's something we have to be aware of.

1:01:20 Jacob: Yeah, focus on creating more of a human organization, which I think is part of a leader's job actually. Well, I know we've gone just over an hour. So last final question for you is basically where can people go to learn more about the book or to grab the book? Anything that you wanna mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

1:01:43 David: So our program's called Intent Based Leadership. You can go to intentbasedleadership.com, I'm on social media L David Marquet and...

1:01:51 Jacob: How do you spell your last name in case people wanna look it up?

1:01:54 David: Stands for Lewis... So I'm like Twitter and Instagram and all that kind of stuff, L David Marquet. And one of the things we have is we have a channel on YouTube called Leadership Nudges and these are 60 to 90 second little blurbs, where I'm talking about one little tiny snippet of one of the things we talked about today and we put them out once a week. You can subscribe to the YouTube channel, you can get on our... You can enroll in our mailing list and we'll give them to you. We've got lots of teams where they'll get them on Wednesday, and then they'll talk about it. And these are simple, simple, simple, little tiny, little bite-sized reminders of how you probably already think you want, but the reminder and the perspective is always helpful.

1:02:36 Jacob: Very cool. Well, David, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to join me and thanks everyone who's been watching and listening live, and if you haven't, you're listening to the audio version of podcast of this. So David, thank you again, really appreciate it.

1:02:50 David: Cheers. Thanks Jacob.

1:02:52 Jacob: And thanks for tuning in everyone. Remember again, the book is called Leadership is Language, and my guest, again, has been David Marquet. I will see all of you very soon.