

# How The CEO of 16,000 Person Quad, Creates Genuine Human Connections & Leads With Vulnerability

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You are about to listen to an exclusive conversation that I had with Joel Quadra Archie for my brand new book leading with vulnerability which is available now for pre order at [lead with vulnerability.com](https://leadwithvulnerability.com). It is officially coming out October 3. Joel is the chairman, president and CEO of quad, which is a \$3 billion global marketing experience company, they have over 15,000 employees. The conversation that I had with Joel is one of over 100 conversations that I had with CEOs at companies around the world CEOs, just like Joel, the whole point of having all these conversations was to look at the trends, the common patterns, how CEOs around the world are thinking about and talking about leadership and vulnerability inside of their organizations and inside of their lives. All the conversations are candid, all the conversations are unscripted and all the conversations are exclusive to the research that I have done for this book, the first half of the conversation, you're going to hear now, to get access to the second half of the conversation, when it becomes available, you're going to need to head over to [great leadership.substack.com](https://greatleadership.substack.com). That's a great [leadership.substack.com](https://greatleadership.substack.com). And I hope this will entice you to preorder a copy of the book, which you can do at [lead with vulnerability.com](https://leadwithvulnerability.com). And when you do that, you're gonna get access to some pretty cool bonuses, including additional CEO interviews, these are going to be full interviews, hour long conversations with the CEOs of GE American Airlines, Edward Jones, and a couple others. So again, that's [lead with vulnerability.com](https://leadwithvulnerability.com) to preorder. And now let's get right into this conversation with Joel.

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So very first question, just kind of information about the company. How many employees do you guys have actually,

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today we have about 15,000 employees with, you know, probably 90% of that in the United States. But then we're in Poland, we're in Mexico and South America as well. Wow. So you guys are pretty large size company? Yeah, we've, we've done a lot over the years. Ya know, it sounds like it. Well, when you hear the phrase, vulnerable leader, that you that can obviously mean a lot of different things to different people. What does that mean to you? What visuals or associations come to mind for that? Yeah, and I thought a lot about that, as I was looking at, think about the topic we're going to discuss today. And, you know, I actually equate the term vulnerable, as a leader more into being real, I think sometimes vulnerable, people have sort of a negative view of what that word means It means you're too soft, or your to this, or you're too that, when in fact, it's really kind of just saying be a real person. And that's really been my style. It's been what I grew up with. And, you know, I think our corporate culture is based on it just be real. You know? So when you say real, does that mean? Like,

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actually, me ask you what does being real mean?

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I think it means showing that you're just you're just another person, I think, you know, we're this company is was founded as an employee centric company in 1971, by my father. And it was always about just talking to people like they like to be talked to at home, you know, by friends and family. And you look, I'm wearing a blue uniform. Well, we grew up as a printing company originally, and I'm wearing the same uniform as the leaders, all the employees on the floor would wear. We've grown into much more today, we're very much agency, and none of that in a marketing experience company. But what my experience is that, you know, corporate America tends to put this sort of hierarchical perspective, you know, onto you know, different roles in a company. And the higher up you get, the more formal and scarier you're supposed to be. Yes. In fact, you know, I do a lot of the same things my employees do on weekends. You know, I have friends I have wants I have likes I have I get sad, depressed, you know, you have friends, what? Once in a while, yeah, I try and maintain them. But yeah, so it's being real, it's really just about showing people that you're more like them than not, as opposed to trying to put on this front in this sort of lens that you're supposed to be viewed as, as a corporate leader. And for people who are not familiar with the company, maybe you can give a little bit of context on what you guys do. You mentioned your father started the company in 1971. So what were you guys doing back in 1971? And how did you get to where you guys are today with the 10,000 employees? Yeah, well, it was it. We started as a printing company doing publications and then later into catalogs and all things print. So today, we print things like National Geographic or GQ magazine. Or if you go into some of the big retailer stores, the signage, you'll see is us. And we're even doing commercials today. So we've grown into a lot more than a printing company, but that's where we came from. And it was all Greenfield growth. It was about doing things a better way where

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Everyone's in it for the same thing. And so it was an employee owned company very early on in the 70s, being an employee owned was not normal. And so it was about, you know, with your employees have a piece of the pie. They act like an owner, they don't act like you're here for a paycheck. So everyone's involved and kind of solutioning things. And so the report that, you know, my dad always created with the employees, and the team was one of very much, you know, regular interaction, tell it like it is, even if they're not going to like the answer you're gonna give them. Yeah. And in fact, I think that being transparent and saying the tough stuff is so important, because your boys are really smart. They know what you're not. They know when you're hiding.

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Why do you think vulnerability is so important? And I guess you have a unique angle, you could talk about it from your dad's perspective and the impact that you saw that make when your dad was acting like this, and it made me just personally for you. Because you don't have to be like that, right? I mean, you could be command and control hierarchy, I tell you what to do you do it. You don't have to be authentic. So why why did your dad do it? First of all, and why did you decide to keep on leading that way? You know, because I saw that I saw him do it. He was a master at understanding people. And he could be the CEO when he had to be. But people all felt like they knew him personally, even when we

ended up with a lot of employees, he passed away in 22,002, I'm sorry, at a young age of 66. So I had to take on this role pretty early. But I grew up with watching that. And what I saw was it really, it sort of broke the ice for people. It allowed them to listen on a different plane. And to also I think they've always felt like they were learning something, as opposed to being told something that is scripted that is, you know, something that corporate put on because they don't want you to know the real story. And and what am I learned from my father, he said, Look, if you don't tell the real story, regardless, what you say they're going to make up what they think the real story is. And many times it will be worse than what the real story, actually. So why not just tell it in the first place? Yeah, yeah. Fair enough. Very, very straightforward.

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What do you think makes you most vulnerable. So when you think about situations that you're putting, or things that you share, or things that you have to do? What makes you most uncomfortable? What makes you feel most exposed and vulnerable or scared?

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You know, I think it's, look, I've been told more than once that I'm an unlikely CEO, I was a philosophy major, you know, I, but I grew up around the business. And, you know, I don't have a huge ego, we all have egos. But I don't have that sort of feeling, I have to be command and control. And, you know, be the CEO in the room that when I'm asked to, or when people treat me that way, it makes me a little bit uncomfortable. Because I feel like, okay, somehow you're treating me, like I'm that CEO, I don't want to be, which means that somehow,

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I'm not relating to you, I haven't impacted you so that you feel comfortable around me. And so I'd say when people are uncomfortable and sort of have that, you know, 15,000 employees, you'll have these big family picnics, people will come up and they'll be like, a little bit starstruck. And I don't know what to do with that, because I don't view myself that way. You know, I'm pretty self critical, or probably too self aware,

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to the point of sometimes maybe I'm overly self critical. But, you know, it's sort of being put into the formality of the role that sometimes makes me feel a little bit out of place. So that makes you feel more vulnerable, let's say then making a mistake, or asking for help or admitting to a personal struggle or challenge. It's that kind of identity of who you who you are, versus the kind of a CEO, who you're supposed to be. Or the stereotype of. When I'm sort of putting that CEO role, and someone's treating me like that traditional CEO. It's not that it makes me more vulnerable, it makes me feel like I have more work to do to break down that wall.

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So that you're not viewing me that way. So that we can have a real conversation and not have the typecasted in such a way. So puts pressure on me, I feel this pressure to say, Okay, let's, let's get you down from this sort of CEO sort of perception that you have. Yeah. And let's start to talk about real things. So if so, if that doesn't make you feel well, what makes you feel most vulnerable? Or is that

something totally different for you? Or is that kind of uncomfortable feeling the same? Or does nothing make you feel that? No, I think so. Of course, a lot of things make me feel vulnerable. You know, this is not a simple industry has been disrupted. We've had to, you know, do a lot of things differently on a regular basis to survive. We've had to reinvent the company. And you know, in those situations, when you know, the sort of the buck stops here, you do feel very vulnerable. You feel

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Like the weight of the world is on you that if you, you know, you charge this hill and it's the wrong Hill to charge you got not just 15,000 employees, but you got your their families that you're responsible to also, so you feel very vulnerable, but the way of the sort of the way around that feeling is to make sure that you are inclusive in your decisions, I have a very collaborative team. And that helps me deal with sort of that fear factor, because a CEO, half, I think, three quarters of the time you run in fear. And one quarter of the time, you're like, Okay, it's working. And, and, you know, it's sort of the position that comes with it, especially in this day and age where, you know, companies will lose faster than ever, and companies can win faster than ever. But it's, it's very difficult to navigate. And and I think that,

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you know, you're put in that vulnerable position, often. But the way again, to cope with it for me, is make sure that I have great people around me believing and challenging me when maybe Joel that's the right idea. But let's think about it a little bit differently to be more effective. And so I think you have to recognize you have to be open to that criticism. Yeah. Especially when you're feeling that vulnerable in that position where the weight weight of the world is on you. So what what makes that happen? Like, are there certain situations or moments where that feeling comes on? Or is it just like, ongoing? You always feel like that? Or is it specifically like a meeting or conversation? Like when do those feelings of Oh, my God, the weight of the world on my shoulders? When does that happen? Well, it's, it's it's sort of knowing, you know, there's it comes in all forms. But I mean, the pandemic is a good example, when we saw this thing happen early on, you know, right away, because we've come from a tough industry, we try and move very quickly.

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But it's that realization that, hey, I got to probably ask all set of 1000s of employees to take a pay cut, I need to, you know, tell the top executives to take a pay cut, I need to put the brakes on hard. And it's that realization, where are you? You know, I got my team together, literally around the table, and just said, Hey, what else do we have to do? Am I wrong here? Do we, you know, we don't know where this goes, the world hadn't been in a pandemic for a long time. And so you don't know how deep and how crazy it gets. And that's a scary feeling. But, you know, I think that by quickly pulling others into the loop to share your vulnerability that like, Guys, if we don't get on this, this could be really tough for us, then you get everyone sort of having that same, you know, epiphany, but then quickly, you get to business and you start coming up with okay, what's the right thing to do here? Because it's a complex structure. Yeah, decisions you have to make? Well, let's talk about maybe some specific moments or situations where you felt most vulnerable. So for example, you mentioned the pandemic, anything else come to mind where you just felt very, like, very vulnerable in front of your team or company? Are there any other situations or events?

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Yeah, I mean, we've had a whole bunch of events, I mean, we, boy from, from when my father passed away unexpectedly, to then having to take on this role in 2006, in my 30s, you know, to then having to be faced with these big, momentous changes in the world to kind of,

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you know, have to make these big decisions at a young age, you know, there's, there's, I have a whole list of times where I felt vulnerable. And again, I think, I also sort of grew up as a kid with not a lot of confidence. And so you know, you you sort of always have that in the back of your head. Am I doing the right thing? Yeah. And, and I think it's just inherent in who I am that you're always sort of, in some way, shape, or form getting caught with all and really, maybe a height it better, and maybe you you learn how to manage it. So it's more effective, as opposed to, hey, this really scares me. It's how about this really scares me? And I've thought about a few things. What do you guys think? Because I think they also people, you have to have that balance, they want to know that you've thought about they want to know that you do have confidence, we're gonna get through it. So in some cases, you do have to kind of push that down a little bit. Yeah. Well, can we pick a moment and maybe kind of create a story around it? Because like I mentioned earlier, people love the stories.

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So you mentioned for example, COVID, you mentioned when you first got promoted? So when you think back over the course of your career, what one moment stands out for you is something that made you feel very vulnerable. And was there a particular day time like, the more specific you can get, the better.

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It was probably in the, I'd say the mid 90s might become a

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at the time of Vice President which there were probably 10 vice presidents and my

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My father, and he was he was in that smaller group, he was a little bit more command and control. And he was going down around sort of a conversation, and I thought he was wrong. And I spoke up, I said, I don't think you're right. And, you know, sometimes in that environment, you know, when he was in the smaller group, it was a little scarier, I think, to speak up like that. And so immediately, it was like, Okay, the first time I had sort of been sort of the snot nose brat, you know, son of the founder, suddenly saying something, you know, against what the founder was saying that he was very passionate about at the time. And everyone just kind of looked at me. I'm like, okay, okay, I haven't experienced this yet. How is this gonna go? Yeah, and he got angry. And all this. And at the end, one of my coping mechanisms in life is, you know, bring humor to it. And there was always a joke that, you know, with my father, you know, the higher up you got, the more times you got fired. And so, you know, he was sort of wasn't having my line of questioning, but then, you know, sort of gave the local like, I was going to be fired, quote, unquote, because you never really fired you. But then I said, Hey, I know this upsets you in front of everyone said, but can I still come home for Thanksgiving? And he couldn't help himself. He

just, he tried to keep the serious face. And then he just welled up and started laughing. And everyone started laughing. So that's, that's been a coping message mechanism I've used throughout my history, which is, in times of vulnerability, sometimes you gotta lighten the load. Sometimes you got to get people to just chill out a little bit. So why why was that a vulnerable moment? Or what about that made you feel vulnerable? Was it just kind of putting yourself out there?

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Well, it was putting yourself out there in a in a situation that you hadn't been in before, you know, I was newly an executive. And I, while I would, you know, debate with my father, this was the first time I debated with him sort of being, you know, aggressively on the other side of the argument in front of his team. Right, and as a new executive. And so I think, knowing that also, it was a new, a new interaction for the whole team to see the father and son kind of first time go at it.

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You know, that's, that's a different situation.

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If you ever think of vulnerability, kind of like on a scale of one to 10, or one to five, where on the five, that's something that makes you feel most vulnerable and most uncomfortable, and the one is something where it's like, you know, I feel a little bit vulnerable, but I'm cool with it. Like, it doesn't bother me, what would be on that five for you? What are those moments or situations or experiences that just make you feel super uncomfortable, super vulnerable, super out there.

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It's, it's those moments where you've got, you know, this sort of the big decision or the realization a decision has to be made. That is, you know, not easy nor easy to implement, and easy for people to understand. Because it's because it's one thing to know, you have to make the decision, then it's another step to kind of make the decision that you know, was hard. Yeah. But then you got to sell it to a lot of people. Yeah. And, and that can be kind of overwhelming, because they have to see the same passion that you see for why you're making that decision why you think it's the right way, because ultimately, they want to know that, you know, they want to follow you they still want that leader. And even though the leader is good, comfortable being vulnerable, they still want to know that it's the right decision. So you still have to you still have to sell people on those those things. So why? Oh, sorry, go ahead. No, I just say it because it also I take everything very personally, as a leader, probably more than I should, I can't compartmentalize, like a lot of CEOs. And so it puts a lot of internal pressure on me to get it right. And to make sure that they understand it as fully as I do, as opposed to just a knife knife to get them to say, you're going to do it. I want them to believe it. Yeah. So why why are those things most vulnerable? Like why is that on a five and not a one? Like what what is it about those things that makes them

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that makes emotional or emotional? You know, it's not it's not it's not a series of simple you know, charts to make decision trees to go down it's an I guess, because of my makeup a little bit where I do take everything very personal being that it's family company, but that's just who I am. It takes a lot of

emotional energy. When you're at a five I'm to the point where my wife will know when I get home that I've had one of those vulnerable days that have created a lot of emotionality in me because she could see I'm just drained. You know, it's just like she'll come home say do you need to go stare at the wall, don't you? I'm like, yeah, let me go stare at the wall and

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But but but but when you're at work, you still you can't go stare at the wall, you have to, you have to deal with emotional energy, which is exhausting. Yeah, yeah. Well, it also seems like it makes you kind of question yourself more in question you as a leader, yourself as your leadership style more like they're more deeper things that you need to think about, as opposed to kind of like superficial things that you need to focus on? Well, I think it puts the pressure on you to do I mean, everyone's got a different style. And my style is I you know, I want people to see the emotion and I'm comfortable with that. I want them to truly believe the story as opposed to just, hey, the boss told us to go do this, I actually want them to agree and and come to their conclusion appropriately, that this is the right way to go.

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And you know, that

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it's just a it's a different level of energy, I think that's required. And what's on the lower end for you like, what what are what would be on the one for that scale?

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I think when you got people marching forward and agree with things, and in the right minds around you, and you feel comfortable that enough people sort of believe in what you're doing, then when the moments where someone asks a question, a tough question in a town hall, where it's like, very direct, like, why would you do this? Why do you when I get to that point of knowing that have gone through a good process, and it's been criticized enough, then I don't feel so vulnerable? And answering the question directly. It's easier for me because I feel like I've been validated by smart people. You know, no, one's smart enough to know all the answers. Yeah. But I think when you've gone through a good process of discovery and inclusion of other people into the thought process, not, not, yes, people, you know, people are, but people are going to challenge you. And then finally, you get to the right answer where the whole team feels good about the decision. You know, that that makes it so much easier. What about things like asking for help admitting a mistake or sharing personal challenges or struggles? Would that be kind of like on the lower end for you a vulnerability that you just totally cool with it? Or? I'm totally cool with it. I'm very comfortable with it. I've never had someone say, boy, you are too honest with us. Yeah. I've never had someone say, Gee, Joel, you shouldn't share the fact that you're not sure that this is the right answer. Yeah, you know, I get people, you know, I had an response I got from one of my employees that I just had up here because I thought it was important. And it just, you know, it kind of says it all if it's been a crazy ride, and I always look forward to your vlogs these were video blogs that I do. I watched your latest one tonight. It says I want you didn't know you do a wonderful job. I know though this is this is tough on everyone. But so much for you and your family, are you You are believable. You are a good leader, you show understanding, you tell like it is you are honest. And it's

those factors why I wanted to share that because I think that's consistently what I get in terms of feedback. I do get people say I disagree with your answer. Yeah. But I appreciate that you gave it the way you did and that you're passionate about I'd never get anyone saying you're too vulnerable. I've never had anyone say you're too honest.

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I think people expect the opposite. How. So we talked about some like moments where vulnerability came out. But how does it manifest like on a day to day so as you're interacting with your employees, when your team members, other leaders at the company? Would you say that some you show vulnerability, like on a regular basis? And if so, how does? How does that become a part of your identity and your leadership style? Well, you know, I mean, the honest answer is I don't know. Right? Because it's it's I'm not in charge of how I can be perceived. Yeah. And you know, I could I can say all the right things here but but ultimately it's on over the course of time to people believe me because I'm willing to be vulnerable willing to tell like it is willing to kind of come out of my shell and share share my personal side with you. I think that's something that you'll pick up with, you know, comments like I just shared over time but on a day to day basis I'm not in charge of how I perceive

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but being making sure I'm self aware and that I do do those own personal checks to make sure I'm not losing people is very important. See you okay with for example on a regular basis, asking for help or talking about your family or sharing what's going on in your life like employees know kind of the personal side of Joel not just the work y'all Yeah, yeah, I'm actually sometimes I probably do personal lives. You know, my town halls like, used to do you know, in front of a lot of people are in video broadcast to everyone at once. First of all, they're not scripted. We use slides here and there just for things that we need to do but I literally winging it sometimes drives my team crazy, but it works. And then as we transition to doing it virtually, you know, more often than not, you know, I also answer all my own question

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Hold on with questions that come in, I don't have someone feeding them to me. But for instance, when the pandemic happened, it was from my home office, my office was a mess, I have a drum set in the background, not that I know how to play drums, but my daughter's like to play around with it. You know, like, I am, who I am, and I'll wear a baseball cap, I want to shade. You know, I don't get all dressed up for the town hall when everyone's at home, in the pandemic doing this, what's the same thing? I'm very comfortable just being me. And, you know, I think when people were feeling at their heightened concern at the early stage of the pandemic, you know, I said, let me get out of my, my, my home office, let's go out in the yard, I'm going to interview my 13 year old daughter, and have her

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introduce them to the 13 chickens that we had. And so we went out into the yard, and I'm running around with a camera showing the chickens and having a conversation with them. Just because you sort of recognize that at a point in time where there was so much concern on people's minds, to not just talk about the business being down to earth and casual, but actually just letting them in a little bit. And showing your own home. I had, you know, it was fun. My daughter was like, yeah, here's this chicken.



Here's that chicken. And now even when I do these town halls and different bathrooms, I'm in my main office today. But they'll recognize what's back there and start asking questions like, Hey, I see you have a, you know, a six pack of beer back there. Oh, boy, you're very perceptive. And so I'll answer that question as part of the stream. Because you do get those types of questions which mean people want to engage on a personal front, not immediate answers about the business. And the more you sort of pepper that in and have the balance between answering the questions that people need to hear the answers to about the business, allow them to ask questions about you even your office setting, and what does that mean to you? And what why were you at a cool drone in the background? Yeah, I got this great drone, I like to do it when I'm, you know, take photography of birds and things like that, you know, it's like, it's a little bit of you that you're sharing and the fact that I get more and more questions like that live? Because they know, I might answer them. I think it shows that people, they enjoy you being real, and enjoy hearing the other side. Has any of this ever backfired? As far as the vulnerability the being open and authentic and honest? Has anybody ever used that against you? Or has it ever? I don't know. Not necessarily. Not necessarily to my face, I'm sure that there's times when people say, well, cheese, he should stop doing that. And we'll get comments, because we asked for it. We asked surveys after town halls and things like that. And and you'll get some negative comments like, you know, boy, you were a little too, you know,

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you're being a little bit too playful with this topic or that topic. And it's like, I'm okay with that. But I wouldn't call that a backfire, I'd call just hate. It's a good sort of mechanism to understand where the vulnerabilities are. And, and I'll, I'll pull them out. I mean, I was doing one and we were talking about our employees in Poland, the other week, and talked about I made the comment about the Ukraine. And quickly one of the Ukrainians in Poland, sent me a message saying, you know, that's a Cold War term. It's Ukraine, not the Ukraine. Yeah. And so I apologized, and I answered it there. But I think as long as you create a feedback mechanism, to know where maybe you're skirting the limits, you know, you can try and avoid those pitfalls. But quite frankly, I, some of these may have backfired in the message I was trying to do, but no one shared them with me. And that's the part that scares me the most is when you don't know, what has been the greatest business mistake you've ever made.

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Oh, the greatest business mistake, you know, what, what do you want to list?

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Yeah, whichever ones come to mind, because, you know, maybe we can share a little story around that, like your or your greatest business failure.

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You know, we've, early on, we've done some acquisitions over time, especially as we had to consolidate the industry. But there was a few early on, it's like, one in particular, which felt like, you know, this was the right thing to do. Because, you know, I think the concept was correct, but the acquisition was wrong. And, you know, I've shared that with people. So this was the wrong, a wish we could have had to do over there. And this was years later.

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And, but But I also think that part of our culture, or at least our corporate culture has been that you got to be willing to make those mistakes. And when you do, you got to be willing to make sure you call it a mistake, and are timely and I'd say that some of the mistakes I wasn't as timely on correcting knew it was a mistake. I knew that I kept this person, you know, in a leadership position too long. And he didn't have the people skills for our culture, but, you know, was fearful of making the change. I've had, you know, a number of those cases. And I think that the biggest mistake I always make is on

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I sometimes will take too long to act on on something like that, because I'm also a very loyal person when it comes to our people. And so, you know, it's it, I think it's more about types of mistakes than specific ones. But I would say that, in my position, oftentimes, it's not moving fast enough on something. Can you think of a time when somebody was vulnerable with you, like any, any stories or examples come to mind where kind of their roles were reversed?

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Yeah, I mean, you know, again, I've grown up around this company. So I know a lot of people for a long time, and I've had been, you know, in manufacturing, I've had big tough people, I've always known and knew there were good people, but there have a tough outer shell come in and break down about family issues about, you know, I need some help, or, I've got a drinking problem. And, you know, the sometimes will be people that, you know, are multiple levels down, but they've had a relationship over time. And so part of it is you feel good, that they're coming to you. And part of it is you can't, you know, that the challenge is sometimes you can't help in the way you would like to because they're just your certain issues. But you know, I get a lot of that I get a lot of people will come in, I got, you know, my leadership team, I think is pretty comfortable. Opening up with where they're vulnerable, we talk about we've done a lot of coaching as a team, using an outside group that really, we like, you know, any of these things, you got a 360 degree sort of view, but you also have your sort of personality traits. And and in these, you fill out this survey, and it comes back and says what type of person are you are and at first, you don't believe it? You tell you, your wife says, oh, yeah, that's you.

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But we're we open up about that with each other. And the team, that leadership team knows the different personalities, they know that I have a very low need for structure.

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The good news is the rest of the team has a higher need for structure. So they balanced me out we sort of look at our team is a series of personalities, and do we have the right balances, but we've opened within that process, you're opening each other's vulnerabilities up to each other, not because you're trying to change yourself or whatever, it's so that people know where you're coming from. And they can adjust sort of their approach with how they talk to you and I can adjust my approach with that. And and we joke about it often, you know, will always say Well, yeah, that's my high need for order my my general counsel will say and I said, Well, I have no need for order. You know,

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my the joke I used to explain No need for order is I tell my assistant Mike, my calendar is merely a suggestion which drives or not,

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but that's where I come from. And so I think by being okay with people, seeing your, your strengths and your weaknesses, and in a process like that, is one of the most powerful things I think we've done as a team, in terms of being effective is really opening up you know, those traits to each other. Yeah. And when people are vulnerable with you, what impact does it have on you personally, when somebody shares Hey, I have a drinking problem or I'm struggling or I'm having a hard time with my family or I don't know if I'm in the right role, I'm struggling.

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What does that do to you?

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Well, you know, first and foremost, when when that does happen, you feel

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you feel proud that someone will come to you with that type of conversation. And it's one of those self checks that if no one came to you, that probably means you're not very approachable and able to talk about it.

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But then it also you know, it puts another layer then of you know, responsibility where you feel like okay, I this person is sharing a lot with me, you know, in their sharing because they need help or sometimes they just need a shoulder to cry on. And you know, I think it ends up strengthening those relationships when when you have it and sometimes it's a career path. It's a business issue, where you got to maintain you know, one type of conversation sometimes it spills over okay, I get it. This person is not talking to me as a boss right now, this person is talking to me because they just want to cry on someone's shoulder. And so you you can kind of you know, you learn to know when you can actually play a different role depending on which direction it comes from. Earlier you mentioned your like you said you're very self aware maybe even too self aware. Why so maybe you can share what do you mean by that? How can you be too self aware because I'm sure people are thinking maybe the appropriate thing is maybe too self critical? I think you know, I think sometimes I assume you know worst things about me then actually are there too much. I think it's one thing to be you know self critical sometimes though i i probably go too far and some of the stuff ends up just being in my mind.

35:00

And, and people say, Joey, when I say what I'm struggling with, they'll be like, Are you kidding me? Like, no, you came across and you actually, people believed the story you told? Because if they'll come when you open yourself up like I do, and when you're winging it all the time, which I do, because I don't like being scripted, sometimes you're worried that you go down a path, you show too much vulnerability. And afterwards, you say, I'll say to someone, Did I go too far there? Or did I lose them? And they'll come back and say, No, the fact that you did go too far, emotionally, or whatever, is what

sold it. And so, you know, that's that sort of constant. Trying to figure out, are you doing the right thing? Yeah. And I was a kid, I grew up as a kid with not a lot of confidence. You know, I'm much more self confident than I ever was. But, but but that route is still there that questioning? Have you ever cried at work?

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Yeah,

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yes, definitely.

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And for so?

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Well, we've, we've dealt with some situations, we had one executive who passed unexpectedly at a young age. And he was very well liked by everybody. And those are the obvious points where you cry. I've cried in, you know, very proud moments when people, you know, share something that about the company, like, supportive of what we're doing that, you know, this people say, for an example, this is a tough industry, we've had to make tough decisions.

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But I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. When I get a conversation like that.

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I've cried from that, because it's like, I'm always scared that people have choices. And gee, I, you know, I'm running this place, and it's got my last name on the door. That's why I'm here. Why are you following me through this craziness? Yeah. And when I when people say I'm falling through this craziness, because this company does the right thing.

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And it speaks to the core values, I get pretty teary when that happens. Because it's for me, sort of a verification, the ultimate verification that

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generally we're doing the right things. Some people might be listening or watching this and saying, Well, you know, it's easy for Joel to be vulnerable. He's a CEO, like he can do whatever he wants, He can say whatever he wants, nobody's gonna, you know, he's good. But a lot of people, entry level employees, mid level leaders, a lot of them are very scared to be vulnerable at work, because they don't want it to be seen as weakness, right? They don't want to ask questions, because they don't want to admit to a mistake, because they don't want to seem incompetent. They don't want to share something personal because they don't want to people to get the perception that maybe they're not ready for an opportunity, or, you know, so how do you? How do you do that? I mean, if people if it people at your company came to you and said, Hey, Joel, you know, I get it, you're vulnerable leader,

it's great. It's working for you. You're the CEO, but you know, I can't do that. How do you balance that weakness with the vulnerability piece? You know, I, I, I've seen a lot of people be too protective of themselves that way, where actually I could see them hurting themselves in the eyes of their co workers.

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And, and, and in leadership, because they're almost so careful to say the wrong thing, or to to speak out and ask the wrong question that you start to question. You know, can this person lead? So you see, you've seen that happen firsthand? Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And I've had to coach some people. Well, it's okay to say you don't know or it's okay to say that you were wrong. Yeah. Because if I get in, you know, I get a lot of people come to me, and sometimes it's you feel like the complaint department about other people, right? And it's like, Well, okay, so you hear some of this and you look at and you know, both sides of the story, you know, what this leader might be saying and struggling with me, but if people don't, and it hurts them, so I will actually share it with people I say, it's okay to speak up and say that you're uncomfortable speaking in front of a group or and that's why you're, you know, you're you're not so fluid in terms of how you speak, it's okay to kind of break down those walls. And so I try and encourage people to be more vulnerable in front of people, you know, when appropriate, but I actually I think it can hurt you because people are smart, too. You know, perception is one of these things that you pick up these nonverbals you pick up things very easily as a as a human. And when people it's putting that it's that reference put people put on a facade. You can see the facade easier than people, I think, think they can put it up. And it's hard to

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overstate.

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It's hard to hide. Yeah, yeah. You may think you're hiding but people are smart. What do you do if you're part of a team or company that doesn't support that? I mean, obviously, you're working really hard to create that kind of a culture as the CEO but as you know,

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So, there are a lot of teams in there a lot of companies out there where maybe being vulnerable can hurt you, because it's like swimming with sharks and people just, you know, they sense weakness, and they come after you. What do you do in that kind of environment, where it's just you don't feel supported? I mean, it's hard. I mean, I haven't grown up in that environment, because I joined here right after school. But I deal with a lot of companies and I know a lot of CEOs who have a different style. And in especially when we have big corporate relationships with a company that's so different, where people are sort of running scared within it, you feel it, you see it. And it's tricky, it probably makes the inter corporate relationship not as strong as it could be. Because you know, that us sometimes acting the way we do and being forthright and saying something to the wrong person on the other side, might get someone else in trouble. Yeah, because we typically have multiple layers within a customer that we deal with. And when you see those environments, it makes it really tough for people like us, because we're sometimes too honest. And say things without necessarily realizing that gi might have just gotten someone in trouble. And you don't want to do that either.

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So you just you have to adjust, you have to learn how to speak and recognize the cultural difference. And sort of adjust yourself to that and speak to it and be sensitive to, that's where you can, that's where your vulnerability or our style can get us into trouble is if we don't put a filter on it when we're dealing with a totally different culture. So if it's not support, let's say you're,

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you're you but you're not the CEO of a company, you're part of another company, and you're a mid level leader, and you're acting the way you are. And you're seeing that your leaders not supporting it. Would you quit that kind of an organization where you feel like your leaders weren't supporting you being your authentic self and being vulnerable and doing all the things that you're doing? I don't know that I would survive very well, on that type of organization. I really don't. I would certainly, you know, I've grown up with a strong work ethic, I've certainly try every way to kind of, including getting it to be that leaders idea if I thought the idea was it. But if the culture was so ingrained that way, I don't know that I could survive there. Yeah, to be honest. How do you know who to because I would feel like it's just, yeah, yeah. How do you know who to be vulnerable with because one of the other things that a lot of people are very concerned with, especially people who are going to read the book or see this interview is like, Okay, I was inspired by Joel, I want to be more of my authentic self at work. How do I know where to begin? How do I know who to share with who to not share with because some people will respond well, to it, some people won't? Like how do you read I think you got to throw that out the window of of worrying about our my being vulnerable to the right person. And I think that you just if you truly are someone who's comfortable being vulnerable, you just have to make that decision, that sometimes it's not going to play well with someone.

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But if you're if you're truly being vulnerable, but you're worried about who to be vulnerable with, you're not vulnerable, you're you're putting up that facade, you're putting up that protection level. And I think to truly have a style and develop a style that makes you comfortable being your true self. You can't care about that. Sometimes you it's not going to go over well with someone. So just don't wear any of it doesn't matter what I've never seen.

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I've never seen someone get themselves in trouble with a boss where they're too vulnerable. I mean, yeah, it may be like, Oh, God, I have to you know, the boss may roll his eyes and say, okay, here comes Joel is very dramatic, and he's wants to share something that's not going well. But, but again, I think that people are used to dealing with so many different styles anyway, if you're managing people, that you can't let that get in the way of your own bone or being your own vulnerable self. And I suppose if something doesn't go, Well, you can kind of just make a mental note of like, well, I'm not going to be sharing that with someone. So anymore, because it didn't like that they didn't respond well to that. So you can kind of, you know, I don't know, I think it depends, I mean, sometimes I'll find myself adjusting a little bit to kind of get the point across in a different way. But it doesn't change the fact that it came to the point because I was being vulnerable.

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You know, I think there's always going to be times where you think you're talking to a stone wall, and someone's never gonna get you. But that's pretty rare. And even people who won't say some people are less comfortable saying so a lot of times I find they surprise you that they are listening and and do take something away from your vulnerability or your willingness to be vulnerable, even when you think they're not reacting. Well.

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It may just because they're such a different personality type. Don't show it the same way. Well, you

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mentioned earlier that part of being vulnerable is being authentic. What if somebody says, hey, you know what, Joel, I am authentically not vulnerable. Like, that's just, that's just not me. I am authentically kind of a jerk. I'm authentically kind of a command and control person. So you know, that's, that's how I am? Well, I'd say, look, I think in that's, that's a big discussion point when we do these personality studies and sharing is that that's okay, to sort of be very different that way. But what's your version? Right? What are you being? Are you being honest? Are you being straightforward? Um, do you can do understand that, okay, you're sort of a jerk that maybe to sell your point, you have to check that a little bit. When you're doing it. I mean, because I, we all have things that we know our weaknesses that we know, we have to kind of make up for. I think, if you're unwilling to make up for especially if you're truly a jerk, right? You know, how I ask how well is that going for you over time. And if you're able to, I know a lot of people who have tough personalities, but are very effective, because they know how to manage around it. But But that means you have to be self aware. And so if you're not self aware that you could come off as a jerk, yeah, you won't know that you're not getting your message across, and people are just gonna stop listening to you, if you do know, you come across that way, and are willing to be vulnerable enough to manage around that to some degree, you know, you can still be very successful, but you got to be self aware. So speaking of self awareness, what do you think some of the factors are there an individual or the variables or attributes that an individual needs to have in order to make that vulnerability successful? So you mentioned, for example, self awareness is one important piece? Is there anything else that's important for someone to have for vulnerability to be able to have that full impact?

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Well, I think you got to care.

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You know, you got to care, you've got to have there's a bit of a, you know, emotional intelligence involved. Where, you know, you got to, you got to be comfortable, you got to have the confidence in yourself, to be vulnerable to show people that sometimes you're not confident, right.

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You know, I think, you know, it's, it's, it's hard, because every personality is so different.

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And some people will really do struggle with it. But I think I think you gotta be, you gotta care. And you got to you got to care for other people to be vulnerable to them. Yeah, you know, I think you have to have that inner sort of,

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you know, heart to really be truly vulnerable. Yeah, the emotional intelligence pieces has come up quite a bit. I think you also mentioned the role that competence plays, right? You still being good at your job?

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You like you still need to produce good quality work?

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Right. So there's no shortcut? Absolutely. Yeah, no, no shortcut to that.

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No, there isn't. And we're a meritocracy. We make that clear. And, and, and I think that

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it could be the most vulnerable, caring leader, but at some point, we are making a decision, and we're going this way. And I have to, I have to be willing to say, okay, the arguments done here. Yeah, I've heard all sides, let's go, I still have to be that CEO. Because we have a lot of people relying on performance. And the same holds true within, you know, our organization that, you know, for instance, the whole stay at home thing right now, we're being much more flexible than not, but I remind people, that but you're still part of a team in one way, shape, or form. And so if you're always home, and your team is together many times it's going to show on performance. And at the end of the day, we're here to perform for our customers, which means we're here to perform for our employees. And if your performance is your is getting in the way that it's not going to work, we're still liberals. Have you ever struggled with vulnerability? Or? Or did this just come naturally? Because of your dad? Or have you ever been more command and controlling? Is this something like you have to consciously work on? No, it's been sort of innate, it's, it's just sort of been who I am. It's part of my I'm condemned to

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be vulnerable. This is part of part of your nature probably thinks your way have always been for people who are watching and listening who are thinking of like maybe some concrete steps that they can take to bring vulnerability into their team or organization. Is there anything specific that you can recommend for people to start doing? Because obviously, you're not just going to show up tomorrow and say, hey, you know, this is the new me. I'm like the, you know, vulnerable Jayco credible? Yeah. So how do you begin? Well, I think you'd begin by truly understanding yourself and again, you know, whether it's one of these personality tests, there's different forms, or just going around and asking people can I sit down with you an hour and tell me what you think my strengths are my weaknesses, all variations of, you know, three C's.

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To the degree things, you have to start by understanding what your makeup really is, like, you know, there, you know, like I said, I have a low need for order, I have a high need for change. Right? So which makes me a little bit like chasing butterflies sometimes. But I think it's been a good thing in my role, because in an industry that's been disrupted, we have to be willing to move and shake and go fast.

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And I think that people have to understand those little idiosyncrasies about yourself that you can't just necessarily come up with on your own because you're not going to recognize them. Yeah. You know, when you do these at first you look at it, and you say, Oh, I agree with that. But that's complete BS. That's not me. And then you show it to someone to say, yeah, it's more you than you think you need someone you need to process to get that makeup out of you to march forward, because it's, it's not a it's not a sprint, it'll be a marathon, you can't just one day say, I'm the vulnerable leader, when you weren't yesterday, it will be measured over quite a bit of time. Yeah. And then so once you get that, let's say you do that step, how do you start to then exhibit or show that vulnerability? Where do you begin with that piece? After you go through that? I think if you're managing, I think if you're managing people, you when you're sitting down and having conversations with them, like in an order review, you're willing to talk about some of that and talk about them in terms of their makeup, but also explain hey, look, here's where I'm coming from now. Like, I need a huge amount of structure. And, you know, so when you hear me asking for X, Y, and Z, it's because I have this high need.

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Or the opposite. It's okay to explain the reasons why you might be hitting an employee the way you are asking the way you are. But it helps them understand where you're coming from, and makes them feel like a little bit more like you're not being attacked when you're being asked something point blank. Yeah. And it seems like a very practical and actionable thing that you can do. It's small, and then if it gets, you know, and then you can kind of build on that in the future with some other stuff. One of the things that we've done to help have more vulnerable conversations as a team where you're throwing something out there, and you're not comfortable saying it because it might be controversial. In a group of people, we have a saying called black ice, it's black ice is that ice, you can't necessarily see that you'll slip on. So we started years ago, we were in executive group sessions, and others use it now to Kate guys. I'm about to go on black ice. And so we'll verbalize that. Because then everyone goes, Okay, I get it. He's about to piss someone off at this table. But he's telling us we're gonna piss them off. Therefore, I don't have to be worried about it, as opposed to just going out, you know, just start going out.

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Because then everyone's trying to say, Well, is he trying to make a point against me? It's like, No, how about I'm going out on black ice. I'm about to piss someone off at this table. But I know I'm doing it. So let's this all chill out and talk about it. Yeah, it's amazing how a little clue like that works. A little bit of a disclaimer, huh? It's an icebreaker. Literally, it's like, Hey, I know, I'm about to say something that someone's not going to agree with. Yeah, but I'm letting you know upfront, because I want to understand it. And I want to come to a conclusion on it. I like that.

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Well, we're pretty much near the end of our time together, maybe one or two more questions for you. Is there anything else that I should have asked you about vulnerability, vulnerability, but didn't or any other thoughts that come to mind about this?

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No, I think I liked how you asked about, you know, others, and how you know how organizations respond to it. Because I think that's really important. And I do, I do understand the point that not every organization is receptive to different styles. And and I think that's an important thing to remember. Because you have to be successful with within the realm of your own culture. But again, we spend

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a significant part of our life at our jobs. And to me, it's also about finding the right environment for you, where you're truly comfortable with whatever your style is, and any other last vulnerability stories or situations that come to mind.

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I think I think I've covered quite a few. Yeah. Our very last question for you. Do you think you have to be vulnerable to be a leader or a great leader?

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Do I personally for me? Yes. Just for people out there in general, who are thinking, do I even need to do this?

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Or you don't need to do anything, right? You're the CEO, but

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you're not the CEO. You're an entry level employee. You want to be more successful?

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Look, I always try and put myself in the receiving end of interaction. And like, like, like, the reason I don't like to screw up myself in town halls is because I find it incredibly boring when someone puts up a 20 slide presentation

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Question and read through it. Yeah, it doesn't seem real to me it seems too scripted. And I think that the, just ask yourself, how would How would you like to be interacted with if, with whoever it is you're interacting with, that makes it more real. And I think nine times out of 10 There's going to be a, an element of vulnerability that comes into play of being able to share that. You know, it's again, it's a little bit of psychology about how do people think and how do they feel they're emotional beings. And I think I think you'll always be better off showing some vulnerability than not. It's hard to be unemotional with emotional beings to correct it doesn't fit. It's not believable when you're not being unemotional. Yeah. Yeah. Well, Joel, thank you so much for taking time editing. I really appreciate it. I love your stories and

your insights. So thank you very much. No, thank you, Jacob. This was a fun conversation. Yeah, I enjoyed it quite a bit.