

She's Responsible for \$7 Billion! Her Immigrant Mentality Is A Key To her Success

Jacob Morgan 00:00

What if I told you that I had something that if you read it, you would never think about and approach leadership the same way ever again? Well, I'm excited to announce that my brand new book leading with vulnerability is now officially available for pre order. This was a book years in the making, I interviewed over 100 CEOs and organizations around the world. And I surveyed 14,000 employees to answer one question is vulnerability for leaders the same as it is for every buddy else? The answer to that question is no, I argue that you should not be vulnerable at work. But instead, you should lead with vulnerability. And there is a key and crucial difference there. But if you want to find out what that is, and how to do it, you will need to order your copy at leadwithvulnerability.com. And if you preorder a copy, you're gonna get access to some really cool bonuses, including some exclusive CEO interviews, including those with the CEOs of GE, American Airlines, Edward Jones, and a couple others, you're gonna get a sneak peek of the book before it comes out. And you will get a private invite to a webinar that I am hosting, where I will be sharing some of the concepts and ideas from the book before it actually comes out. So head over to leadwithvulnerability.com.

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Leadership is about being part of the team not just at the front of the room. I think sometimes that leader is the kid in the back of the room, not the kid in the front of the room, equally important to leadership, as fellowship in recent years feel like we've forgotten a lot about fellowship, if everyone's at the front of the room, there's nobody that would be part of your team.

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My guest today is Carol Stern, Executive Director at the Walton Family Foundation, former president and CEO UNICEF, USA, how do you deal with that and kind of get that courage to take the opportunity, even though it's one that might scare you a little bit

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when I became CEO of UNICEF, USA at the end of the day of celebrating when I found that I got the job, I looked in the mirror and said what did I just do? I hope I can do this. Because this is a much bigger organization. I know nothing about what I'm doing. I think number one, you have to be open to learning or don't take the leap. You have to be willing to learn and you have to be humble enough to say I don't know how to do this. And be honest and be honest with your board and be honest with your staff and surround yourself with the best people and

02:28

Hey, everyone, welcome to another episode of great leadership. My guest today is Carol Stern, Executive Director at the Walton Family Foundation, member of the Board of Directors at The Container Store former president and CEO UNICEF USA prior to that an executive at the anti Defamation League, Dean at the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering and also a PhD in philosophy. So Carol, quite an interesting background, which we'll get into a little bit. But thanks for joining me today.

02:59

Thanks for having me on.

03:00

So as I was reading through your background and some of the stuff that you've done, it's been pretty interesting. You have some pretty crazy stories and life experiences that probably most people never get a chance to go through. Why don't we start with some background information about you. You can take us back to your your PhD days and walk us through your career to becoming the executive director at the Walton Family Foundation and what you actually do there today.

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Sure, and just for clarity, I'm abd I did not finish writing my dissertation. I do have six honorary doctorates, but the real one, I passed my exams, but I never finished writing my dissertation. So which is a story unto itself for another day. So I did get my bachelor's degree in a very lucrative field of studio art. I have a painting degree, which is thus I went back to graduate school because painting was not getting me very far. And I got my master's in what was called College Student Personnel Administration, which is basically a higher ed degree. And then similarly did all my doctoral work in that and worked in higher ed, as you mentioned, I was a dean for many years. And I had always been a volunteer in civil rights and human rights. I am a Holocaust survivors child. And I grew up in a house where we were taught very early on that one person can make a difference. My mom's life was saved. And she attributed that to many factors, but selfless decision by her parents, but also to the woman who brought her across an ocean and to the orphanage that raised her so it wasn't surprising that I would end up in the nonprofit world and my volunteer work really is what brought me to the anti Defamation League. And I went there anticipating I would work there for a year to run something called the World of Difference campaign, which was the first of its kind of an anti bias curriculum. This is 1980s the words dei you know Letters didn't even exist in our language at that point. And we were doing a program with local television affiliates, where we were basically taking what was in the classroom and putting it at the dining room table by having TV programs, parents and kids could watch together that teachers could then talk about in schooling. So, I, over my years at ADL, I worked with 35 different television affiliates across the country, we produced about 60 hours of original programming that aired and we wrote curriculum that teachers used in their classrooms around those 60 hours, ultimately went from pre K through college, but it started as a K 12 program. And in the big middle of that, in order to get our materials had to go through a training program, we didn't sell them. So you had to, you know, look at your own biases, what am I bring to my classroom, and then you have to learn how to use the materials. And in the midst of doing that, I came up with this crazy idea that corporate America might actually want some of the same training. And if they did, they could pay for it. And that would pay for the program that we were doing in schools. And that's exactly what we did do. And so I ended up

staying at ADL for a number of years running that program, and ultimately moving up the food chain and was the Chief Operating Officer and the senior associate national director of the entire organization, but got further away from what I really wanted to do. And then it was like, there was no place else to go, a Foxman wasn't leaving. And UNICEF knocked at my door to make a lateral move. And I thought, well, I've never done humanitarian work. So this can be really fun. And I took the job. And literally three weeks later, the man who referred me to the job and he was really part of my decision came in until me that Bill Gates offered him a job. And he was leaving. And so I found myself running as the acting president, this group doing work I'd never done before in countries, some of which I couldn't even find on a map. And by the end of the year, I'd landed the job as president and CEO. So that's kind of that was my trajectory. And then I did that for 13 and a half years and was just ready for change. I believe in Seinfeld moments. You always go out when they want another episode. So I pulled my Seinfeld moment and I went to the Waltons.

07:24

Very cool. I actually wanted to touch on something that you skipped over. This was this, this holocaust moment, and I was wondering if you could share that story. So I have, well, not my parents, but my my grandparents, similar story, you know, Holocaust survivors. And there's oftentimes a lot of stories that get shared at the dinner table. When family gets together and lessons learned and things of that nature. Are you able to share a little bit about what that story was? Because you kind of touched on it across the river orphanage. And I was like, Whoa, that it sounds like there's a very fascinating story there. Can you share a little bit more about what what happened?

08:02

My mother was in Vienna as a child, she was six years old. Her brother was four, she was there for Kristallnacht. The Nazis marching in. And as she said, One day, she could go to school the next day, she wasn't allowed to one day she could play with every child on the street. And the next day, little girls didn't want to play with her anymore. She was a Jewish girl, you know. And it became apparent that many family members were taken many family members died in the camps, and her parents in an effort to save her life and her brother's life sent them to the United States. And they came at the ages of six and four with neither of their parents, but with a family friend. And everyone thought it would just be a matter of weeks. But it wasn't it was a matter of years. And my mother told that story. And as a kid, I always wondered about the woman who took them across the ocean, like someone said to me, where you take my two children and save their lives, and take them across an ocean and I believe I would, but you know, that's a really big responsibility. You don't know what you're doing here. Um, in the meantime, my grandfather was on the boat, the SS St. Louis, which wasn't allowed to dock anywhere. It's called The Voyage of the Damned. He paid dearly to go to Cuba, and was going to send for his wife who was hiding in Vienna as children who were in the orphanage and the United States and they were going to start life again. And when they got to Cuba, they found out that all the documents were fraudulent, and Cuba wouldn't let them in. And they sat in a harbor for 40 days, while the world debated their fate and even the United States wouldn't take them. The boat was sent back to Europe, most of them perished at the hands of the Nazis. My grandfather was one of very few who survived and I knew him so I got my mother talking about this unbelievably selfless act. Her mother made this unbelievably amazing woman who took her here, these wonderful people at the orphanage who always reminded her she was loved, deposed against my grandfather's story of what happens when nobody gives a

damn. Then you're on a ship, and you're stateless. And so my mother heard my mother coming out of this. It's pretty remarkable woman, she's still alive. She's 90 years old this year, wow. together and, and, and she believes that she was blessed because she survived. blessed because she grew up in America, the country where she could be a Jew publicly. And as a result, always, like, honored to vote. honored to be part of making this country the best it could be. And we always tease her that as soon as she could hold the sign, she put one in your hand, and you marched with her on everything that mattered?

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Did you or when? Because it's it's a fascinating story. Did your mom ever see her mom again after she was put on that boat and sent? Yes,

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was 10 years till they saw each other? Yeah. Her father ended up in London, survived the war came over her mother. Nobody even knew where she was for a while. She worked throughout the the war in a hospital in Vienna, that cared for half breeds, people who had some Jewish blood in them. And she was a very, very beautiful woman. And she was a very highly skilled nurse. And she survived the war in Vienna working in this hospital. metaphoric my mother and her brother, her name was mignon, which is my middle name. My grandmother's name was mignon. My mother and her brother wrote a book called Mignon in it was published in Vienna. And it was also translated and published in Hebrew in Israel about a year and a half, two years ago. But there was a park named after my grandmother because she had saved so many lives during the time she was in Indiana, but, um, and it just, you know, it just is, was horrible, because the war ended and she ended up in a DP camp, and it was literally 10 years when she got to this country. And she died shortly after she got here. So my mother didn't see her from the time she was six until the time she was, you know, 16. I mean, it was. That's a lifetime.

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What about the the lady who brought brought them over? Do you know what happened to her?

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I don't know what happened to her. I don't I actually don't know her name, which is pretty remarkable.

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woman out there helped save your was it your your mom's life? Right, right. And what tomorrow? Yeah, and you have no idea who she is or what her name was, or anything like that?

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Yeah, my mother knows. I mean, I know at one time, I probably didn't know her name. But if you want to hear, I'll tell you a remarkable Holocaust related story on my grandmother was working in the hospital. And one night, they brought in a child from Hungary, who didn't speak any German, and no one in the hospital spoke Hungarian. So nobody could communicate with this child. But he had a communicable disease. And it was fairly serious. And so you had to be isolated from the other children. And at night, my grandmother had no family anymore. Her husband was in London, her kids were in the US, she couldn't communicate with them opposite sides of the war. So she used to go and sing to him

at night. And they couldn't communicate. They didn't speak the same language, but she would go and sing him songs at night. And evidently, one night, the hospital was there was a bombing and everybody had to go into the shelters. And they wouldn't let this child go into the shelters because he was contagious. So she stayed with him through the bombing. So in my book, my mother and her aunt, and my uncle, her brother wrote about my grandmother. This is maybe two or three pages in a 500 page book. Yeah. Some man read their book. And then he read another book that was written in Hebrew, called searching for mignon. And that little boy wrote a book when he grew up. And this man connected my mother back to that the descendants of that child

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wasn't amazing. That's crazy. Wait, Sookie, he was a how was that connection? Maybe you're so book was written and he read the book.

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He read both my mother's book which tells the story and the name of the book is mignon. And then he read in Hebrew we read I don't know if you've read the original book in German or in Hebrew. But then in Hebrew, you read another book called Mignon searching for mignon. And he connected the two and got in touch with my mother.

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She's and so she was able to connect to the

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descendants. Yeah, who knew my grandmother. Yeah, crazy

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story. It's interesting that you mentioned that your mom had that mentality and it sounds like your grandmother probably share that if I'm blessed, you know. And it's, it's interesting because so I come from a family of immigrants as well, they came from the Republic of Georgia. And of course, their ancestors, they, you know, a lot of Holocaust stuff happened there too. And even when I talk to relatives and ancestors, and where they are today in the States and some still in Australia, they seem, they think about how grateful they are, and how blessed they are, and that they're just happy for what they have. And it kind of really helps put things into perspective, which I find very interesting, right? I mean, today, we're so quick to complain about little problems, my Wi Fi doesn't work. This isn't like, the problems that we have to deal with so many of us are so minuscule in comparison. And I don't know, it almost feels like the mentality of an immigrant is different than the mentality of a non immigrant as far as how they think about the world, how they think about how hard work, how they think about the things that they're grateful for, because they came from such hardships that it doesn't take, and they had to work so hard, that even a small improvement from where they were is completely transformative for them. And I always find that interesting, kind of an immigrant mentality, do you see anything in that too, like immigrants who who've, you know, had to come from another place? It's just, they just view the world differently.

16:24

I, you know, I see two kinds of immigrants, okay, obviously, those that are angry, yes. And then those who are thankful for their survival, and both are very justifiable emotions, believe me, I, you know, my UNICEF years, I had the privilege to work, you know, in several migrant immigrant, you know, exile situations, you know, meeting people who were the Rohingya and working with them in Bangladesh, or Sudanese, North Sydney, South Sudanese, or, more recently, the Jordanian camp that was housing Syrian refugees, and a very recently working on the USA border of people making the migrant truck and I worked in Guatemala, and in along Mexico as well, you do hear there's common stories there of thankfulness for survival thankfulness, you know, less so in recent years of being able to become part of our nation. I think though, you hear some of those same things in some of the places where there's abject poverty, you know, I think when you when you realize, at the end of the day, what's really important in life, that sense of community, I'd go to a village where they had nothing in Africa, but whatever they had they shared. You know, and it always blew me away, you know, the level of that, or you would go into a hut, and the person would offer you whatever they had, they would offer you somehow. You know, and it just it was it was a community, even the number of villages that have community meetings, and the whole community comes out. And I think about you know, how few Americans vote every time I would see that, or, you know, our we show up at villages when I was with UNICEF, in jeeps, and they knew our jeeps, the whole village would pour out of the huts to greet us. And when we left, the only man to give you really was themselves and so they would sing as you left. And I think I cried every time I never ever found that and an emotional experience. Thing you out?

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Yeah, it's it's different. I it's I don't know what the phenomenon. I don't know if there's been any research on this. But it's yeah, there's some parts. Sometimes it feels like the people who have the least are willing to give the most and the people who have the most are willing to give the least. And it's it's bizarre. And of course, it's not a general rule. There are a lot of people who have a lot who do give a lot. But you know, I think it's it's interesting what you said right? Even the villagers who don't have much are willing to share whatever they have with you. I don't know kind of feels like we don't have a lot of out of that mentality and a lot of places in the world for some reason.

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Also, because there's an interdependency when you have nothing, yeah, that doesn't exist when you have something. You know, when you are live in the village and you all have to walk three miles to get your water you're just singing as you walk. And you're doing it as a community. When it's coming in through your pipes, you don't even think about it. Yeah. And I think that that's part of it. You know, and obviously I mean I work for a family that that is extremely generous and amazingly generous in what they give back. And so I don't think it's a matter of you know, you have money you don't give I just think it's what you give is different than in a village when all you have to give is yourself. You see the value of the give of yourself to give a singing a song that hold I'll hold your child for you, whatever that it is very basic, and it's very very visceral, emotionally.

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And so it seems like in the past, there was much more, I don't know if you'd call it conversations around it, but much more serendipity. Right? I mean, you talk about the story of the book, this of the books that were written the story of how your mother was able to come here the story of the bombing, and you

know, reading, you know, going to the hospital, and, like, you don't hear a lot of those types of conversations in today's world around the power and the value of serendipity and how often it comes up. Like it's, it's one of those like old world things, right, this happened. And that happened. And it's a, the story element, I think, is really, really powerful. And I wish we had more of that and talked about that more.

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I do believe storytelling is the most important thing you do is, you know, when I used to do anti bias training, there was a lot of data and facts and numbers, and we would share all that in the program. But we used to like play this one this game, it was called Bafana Bafana. And it's a long story how the game is played. But it was kind of silly, but made the point about diversity. And it forced you to think about what eyes you used to see the world with. And I would bump into people who had been in one of my training programs like years later, and they would see me and they wouldn't remember anything except that game, they would come back to me they'd go back far, but fall like right in my face, right? Like, they remembered that because people tend to hold on to things or, you know, I always say like, when I when people wonder what they what sticks in your brain, I'll stand in front of an audience of a couple 1000 people and I'll say, you know, fill in the blank, the moon is made of, and 90% of them are going to yell out cheese. Okay, because when they were about four years old, somebody gave them the whimsy that the moon is made of cheese. And it's all these years later. And we know the moon isn't where at least we think we know the moon is not made out of cheese. But stories stay with you. That's those are the things that you repeat.

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No. Well, so when you think back about the various journeys that you've taken, and I know you've you've lived and stayed in some interesting places. Was there a particular moment, or or journey or an experience that had a profound impact on you or which one had the most profound impact on you?

22:21

There are two that probably that impacted me very profoundly. The first time was in Sierra Leone. I was there as part of a mission to do tetanus vaccines, and to come back and make Americans with Pampers. Pampers had agreed for every pack of Pampers, they would donate every pack sold, they would donate a tetanus vaccine to a mother in Africa. So I went to go film footage to support this campaign and to and the first night we were there, we were brought to a hospital to see a child with tetanus, which I had never seen before. And a hospital in Sierra Leone has a dirt floor there isn't very much running water. There are no nurses, the mothers stay in the hospital and sleep on the floor next to the child who's sleeping on floor on a mat. But in one dark corner with a like a curtain pulled around it was this little bed I guess it was like a almost like a bassinet I guess. And it was a baby, the six days old that had tetanus that was just reading an agony. They didn't even have tylenol to give this baby at the hospital. And I sat there knowing that, you know, at that time \$1 Something would have bought the vaccine, I think \$2 and something would have cured the disease. Neither was available there. And I'm sitting next to an 18 year old mom who didn't speak English. And we were just two moms. She had no idea who I was, I was just some crazy white woman from America, you know. And all I could do was hold her hand because it was the only common language we had. And while we were sitting there, her baby died. And I saw the baby die. I knew the baby was dead. She did not know the baby was dead.

And you sit there and you kind of just don't know what to do. Yeah, the doctor came in and I kind of extricated myself so that he could talk to her. And I heard that woman screaming I can still hear it in my ears. And it was like, you know, all the statistics I read every day in my job at UNICEF about how many children die of preventable causes, but here was one and it changed my life. It did. I have never thought about the birth of a child the same way. I've never thought about the numbers the same way and I've never been as determined to be part of the solution to some of that. As I as as I was the day before this I am now you know it was it was a life changing moment for me.

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Yeah, I mean it really does make you appreciate The things that you have, and you know, things to be grateful for. So my wife and I, we try to remind ourselves of that all the time. Because, you know, we live in Los Angeles and whenever we have problems, let's say something would work or you know, something, first of all problems, yeah, first quarter problems, we always try to take a step back and say, you know, what, what matters most our kids are healthy. We're healthy, we have food. And it kind of refocuses, where, where your attention goes. And you start to realize that some of these other things are like, who the hell cares? Like, that's not a big deal.

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And sometimes you have to do that with intentionality. I mean, you know, one of the greatest gifts I got was from a woman named B. Perez, who works for Coca Cola. One year for Christmas, she sent me a gratitude jar, big giant jar that said gratitude, with 365 little pieces of paper. And she said, for a year, every day, write down at the end of your day before you walk out of your office, what something that happened that day, you're grateful for folded up, throw it in the in the jar, and when you're having one of those really crappy days, just reach your hand and and read a bunch, you know, so for a year, because I love B, I did that. It really did work. I don't do it anymore. But what I have started as a result of that is I end every week, Friday afternoon, five o'clock, I do a handwritten thank you note to somebody. Not that many people send handwritten notes anymore. So getting one is a really nice thing when you get one. Within the course of a week, somebody did something you should write a thank you note for Yeah, oh, I've never like been at a loss for who should get that note. It's been more rather three or four people which 1am I going to do you know, um, but it's also very selfishly, the best way to end my week, I end my work week, feeling really fun, like,

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so what you talked about this as being an impactful moment? What, what did that moment teach you? What did you learn from it? Why was this? I mean, obviously, it's impactful as far as a moment and what happened. And you know, I hope most people, everybody listening to this will never have to experience that. But what did you take away from that? After the experience?

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A lot of things. First of all, I took away the universal language of mom's very much, so I just held her hand and she she held mind. And we didn't have to use words. Okay, she just got it that I got it. And that was a powerful moment for me about how important it is sometimes to just put your hand out and offer it to somebody very physically. I think that was one lesson. But the second lesson was that all the numbers in the world don't matter. You know, at that time, 28,000 children were dying every day of

preventable causes. And I had done speeches on behalf of UNICEF all over 20,000 kids are dying today during the you know, yada yada yada, and preventable causes. The death of one child that could have and should have been prevented is one too many doesn't matter that this 20,001 is one too many. And that was like that was the defining moment where that just hit me right smack in the face.

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You mentioned there was a second moment that also very much impacted you what was the second one,

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the second moment happened. Actually, also, while I was at UNICEF, we were working in salary camp in Jordan, with the refugee camp for Syrian refugees. And, you know, you roll out of your tent early in the morning, you work all day, and you know, till the sun goes down. And there's always kids, when you have a UNICEF shirt, you're like a pied piper. So there's all these kids that likeglom on to you and walk around, like you'd like the Elephant Walk, you got a kid on each end and a kid on each leg. And there's always a couple of really shy kids and they walk behind you. And they like if you turn around quick, they turn around quickly. They don't make eye contact. So on a particular day in this camp, I had a girl she was about 1112 or 13. I really don't know how old she was. She was carrying a baby which was a sibling of hers. And a little boy who was probably three. He was walking so he was at least you know two but I think he was three. And they followed us all day long. So at the end of the day, we realized we had never stopped to eat. And I realized that meant these kids had not eaten all day either. And the fact that they had not stopped not complained, not asked for it. That was like one reckoning moment because I don't know about your kids, but I know my kids and like for home and Breakfast isn't out on the table by a certain time. I'm like, Mom, what's wrong with

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my daughter and my seven year old daughter is I want a snack. I need a snack. I need you there. She's not exempt. She becomes hangry she's a seven year old.

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She can anger. Yeah. So that was the first part of it. And at one point, we had been working in a breastfeeding tent. And they give the moms these biscuits so they can keep their nutrition up. And they've given us each biscuit to taste. And several of us were not eating carbs at the time. So we had palmed our biscuits. And one of the women with me, took the biscuit out of her backpack, and gave it to this baby to the three year old. And we all expected him to like quickly run off and hide somewhere and eat it, you know, like, Oh, my God, I gotta I got a cookie, you know. And instead, he kind of looked at us. And it was the first time he made eye contact with us. And he opened the package, and there were about 20 of us and blue UNICEF shirts standing around. And the first thing he did was he broke the biscuit in half. And he handed half to the baby. And we cried. We did all of us cried. Like, we just it was an epiphany moment for me to like, I just realized that this child had nothing. But he knew enough that whatever he got, the baby had less like he had to share it. And it made me take a step back and think about what biscuits do I have, what do I have that I'm not even considering breaking in half and giving to somebody and it was the other defining moment. And I think about that story, you know, thought about it during COVID, I was very, very privileged that the Waltons were really responsive to COVID.

And they created a \$35 million fund to help with the COVID crisis. And they supported things like a teacher in Minnesota, who just realized a lot of kids were doing homework by themselves. And so she said, You know what, I'm going to be in my office, and I'm going to turn my computer on. And if you're doing homework, and you just want a grown up in the room logged on. And I'll just be there and I'll just watch. And like she wasn't getting paid for that, you know, but like we got to celebrate her and to recognize that was her biscuit like she knew she had something she could give away. And she did. And that's that spirit of generosity that I've seen time and again, especially as I've worked for the Waltons, not only their generosity, but the generosity that their generosity makes possible. That has been phenomenal.

Jacob Morgan 32:23

Remember, my brand new book leading with vulnerability is available for pre order. And I just want to read you one of the endorsements that we got this one is from the CEO of MasterCard, he says, I applaud Jacob for pushing us all to understand that there isn't a one size fits all approach to vulnerability, the insights and experiences from these leaders have the potential to strike a nerve, no matter your title or tenure. Do you have any stories that come to mind of how when you had to be vulnerable with with your team,

Tiger 32:52

literally my first day in an office in 1985. And I remember that first day when I walked up to the senior most person. So I went up to him and I said, I don't know anything. So I'm here to learn. Are you willing to teach me that was the beginning of a relationship where he ended that five minute conversation saying you're like my son, I'm going to teach you a lot. And any questions you have any problem you have come talk to me.

33:23

Those are definitely powerful stories. And I also read that in one story, you can probably give some context on this. And this is really kind of going back to the theme of humility, that in one of the trips, I guess you were just stuck eating peanut butter out of a suitcase for a while. Can you share that story and what happened there?

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Well, you learn early on you traveled to developing nations that one of the greatest things to bring with you is peanut butter. And we really loved when the peanut butter industry came out with those little packets of peanut butter, you know,

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it's funny, kind of on a side note to that and this is you know, not not in comparison to that but I remember when I took a trip to China once and my friend and I we went hiking through something called the Tiger Leaping Gorge and you know, there's no food there. And so basically there's this little shop at the beginning of the gorge where you hike for several days. And really all you do is you stock up on Snickers bars, and you just and I'm it was it was a hard trip but I've never eaten so many Snickers bars in my life and it was so delicious. For like breakfast lunch and dinner, man but it kind of reminds me of the peanut butter, right? It's when you have

34:41

these take peanut butter and saltine crackers because you know it's really really hot. You sweat a lot and so the salt is important. And then peanuts are great because it's protein. So you find that you're not hungry after proteins. You aren't hungry after sugars and carbs. So yeah, I a lot of peanut butter. For a lot.

35:02

And so what what were you doing there? Like what what was going on? Were you just kind of traveling and peanut butter was just the staple of the of the trip?

35:10

Yeah, pretty much. I mean, I don't even know which of the many trips you're referencing, because it took a lot of trips for UNICEF. But, you know, my role was really to collect the story and come back and tell it while I was CEO, you know, I have to use the power of the podium that I had the privilege to hold, you engage America in what was happening in places that I got the privilege to go to when they didn't. So, you know, it's one thing to read in the newspaper about the Rohingya walking, you know, in from Myanmar to Bangladesh, it's another thing to talk to the mother who actually made the walk, and then to be able to come back and to actually tell her story and give voice to her in a place that she would never voice otherwise. And that was really my role. So that I think I took peanut butter with me everywhere.

36:00

It seems like there's a lot of leadership lessons that you can apply. And you know, most people who are watching and listening to this, they're inside of organizations, they're probably never going to do these types of trips that you have done, they won't go through these experiences that you've gone through. But it seems like there's still a lot of applicable lessons out there for leaders specifically, you know, this idea of, of helping others of doing good. And no, there's a lot of research out there, right, that says that when you help others, it releases those those chemicals, right? The dopamine, the oxytocin, the serotonin, it puts you in a good mood. But oftentimes, I think the stereotype of leadership is that you, you're the leader, and you tell everybody else what to do. And everybody is a worker, and I don't need to know anything about you, as a human being, I don't need to care about your family, I don't care about your hopes, your dreams, your passions, you show up, you do your job, at the end of the day you go home, and you know, you're out of sight out of mind, which I think is a very, very unfortunate way to lead. When you think about leaders today in the corporate world. What from your experiences do you think can be applied to the corporate world for leaders out there who are trying to become better? Like what advice would you give them based on what you've experienced and seen? Well,

37:15

first of all, I don't believe you can be an effective leader without knowing the people that you're leading. And many years ago, one of my friends, Kathleen Allen, describe leadership as a bicycle. And sometimes you're the front wheel, and you're pulling everybody along. And sometimes you're the back wheel, and you're propelling people forward. Yeah. Okay. I think it's a really good image. And then another friend of mine, Margie Lipschitz, used to describe it as a fire that had to be both bright enough

to draw your attention to it, but then hot enough that you didn't want to get burnt by it. It's to let that one do. But I do think that what leadership is about is being part of the team, not just at the front of the room, I think sometimes that leader is the kid in the back of the room, not the kid in the front of the room. And I think that equally important to leadership is fellowship. And I, in recent years feel like we've we've forgotten a lot about fellowship. You know, if everyone's at the front of the room, there's nobody to be part of your team. Yeah. And I'm a firm believer in being part of the team. And that teams do better than individuals. So I have operated in the organizations that I've run on what I call the 1/5 brain theory. It got named that because the time my, my leadership team was myself and for other people, but I intentionally with great intentionality selected for people who each brought things to the table that I didn't have the they brought a skill or a personality trait or knowledge, something I didn't have. And that collectively, we were so much better than any one of us was. And we felt it and we were a really impactful team, we actually took a UNICEF income budget from 200 million to 600 million during the worst economy that the nation had seen at that time. So when I got to the to the Walton, similarly, my leadership team is a team. We are interdependent on one another, and sometimes I lead and sometimes I follow, but there has to be room at the table for everybody's ideas. So I think that's really important. I think another thing I've learned from the villages I've been in in particular, is the United States and this is something that Walton foundation stands for now. We have defined collaboration, as finding people with whom we have common ground and then working together towards a common goal. What that has done is made us a divided nation because everybody's only working with the people with whom they have common ground. And at the foundation, we are committed to redefining collaboration You in but with intention sitting at the table with the people you don't necessarily agree with, but being forced to come to the table and trying to find common solutions as opposed to having to have common ground.

40:12

Yeah, it's important, especially in today's world, because everything seems so divisive and pulled apart. Like it's, you know, it seems like it's even hard to have conversations now. And I'm sure you've experienced this, right? Whether it was politics, or the vaccine mandates, like there are family members that don't even talk to each other anymore, because they disagreed on certain things, or friends who've known each other for decades who no longer speak because they were on opposing sides of a particular issue. And it's, I mean, to me, that is just crazy. Like, you should be able to talk about an issue without being able to kind of go after the person. And I don't know, when this became such a hard thing to do. Like, I remember growing up, you know, at the dinner table, we would have like hard conversations, right? I mean, this was like, like, even today, if I get together, you know, my family's there, my grandparents are there. Look, somebody will purposely bring up something that's just awkward to talk about, like, nobody wants to talk about somebody might talk about vaccines, or, or country or politics or Ukraine, and it's this were a dinner with non family members, people would be like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, we're not talking about that. But you know, one of my family, it's kind of like, look, we're all adults here. Just share what you think, you know, what do you you know, what would you do? How do you think about this? And I don't know why this just seems like a very hard thing for people to do nowadays. But, you know, in my family, it was always very common to talk about the hard stuff. But I

41:39

think we were also never given the skills, you know, and one of the things that I admire in the Walton family is approach their diversity of opinion with curiosity instead of animosity. It's

41:49

Graham Ted lasso approach, right?

41:51

Yep. So like, when you say something I don't agree with instead of my saying, You're wrong, I'm right. I start with, could you tell me more so I could better understand why you feel that way. That allows you to explain your perspective, and it forces me to listen.

42:06

Yeah. Is this like an actual technique that's been implemented? Something that's been taught to?

42:14

Absolutely it's adhered to? And like a family meeting? Yes.

42:17

Hmm. Is there anything else like that, that you guys have done that unique that allows you because obviously, you're investing and in a lot of philanthropic efforts, you probably have to have a lot of difficult conversations to around where investments go? Are there any other techniques like that, that you guys have implemented besides that one that you think leaders can use?

42:37

Well, I think, you know, as a foundation, we do some things a little bit differently. One, we stick to our lanes, we're really clear what our expertise is. And so like, for example, after the murder of George Floyd, a lot of foundations became social justice foundations. I because I come out of a dei background to begin with, looked around the foundation and said, Look, we fund education, I've got a whole team of education experts. We fund the environment, particularly protecting oceans, and rivers. I've got great oceans and rivers and environment experts. And we fund community development work in our home region and northwest Arkansas on the delta. And I've got a bunch of community development people. I don't have anybody with a dei background. So why am I going to suddenly try to pretend to be something or not? Now I do believe though, I can move the needle on social justice, through education through the environment work we do, and definitely through the community development work we do. So let's bring in the expertise to marry it to our expertise. And let's stick to our lane. And I think that's really important. And I know, and I've talked with a lot of CEOs over the past few years, many of whom are now being called upon to enter the social justice arena or social problem arena, not just social justice, without the training without the expertise, and they're trying to sort out when do I speak? How do I speak? And so the things that I would say is the first question to ask is, do I have agency over this issue? Can I actually have impact on it? does it relate to my business model? does it relate to my product? does it relate to my philanthropy? Like, if it's an education issue, we're going to have a perspective on it. Okay, yeah, like,

44:19

so I was gonna ask one, one quick question, because that's been happening a lot. lately. You know, there's been a lot of conversations around the woke movement. And you know, Pete, by the way, the conversation was today's like, April, but 17 or 18. By the time the episode will actually air will be much later. But you know, one of the big stories today is the issue with Dylan Mulvaney and being the spokesperson for bud and companies, like trying to jump into that social justice space. And there being a lot of critique from people saying, You have no business being in that, like, what are you doing getting into that space? And to your point you brought up An interesting right question to ask, which is, is this? Is this relevant? Is it impacting my business? So do you think there's, I don't know, are companies just jumping into things for the sake of jumping into things without kind of thinking through those things and to decide if it even makes sense for them?

45:18

I think, you know, listen, I'm I am an optimist. So I'd like to believe they're all jumping in for good reasons jumping in because they care, because they hold a certain level of power, because they can have impact. But how they do that and what they do, I mean, it's like, I used to feel this way at UNICEF, when a donor would walk in my office and say, I want to fund the water plan and X country. And I'd say, Great. Have you been to the country? No. Do you know what kind of water plan they need? No, but I think we should put them in this way. Okay. And I'd say, okay, great. What's your background? And water plants? You know? And they would say, none? And I'd say, okay, maybe we should start the conversation again, you know, you want to fund the water plan? That's great. Why don't we have a meeting with some people who have that information? And then let's talk about what we could collectively do. Okay. I think the same thing is true today. I think that we have had such upheaval between the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, you know, the racial reckoning that's taking place across this country long overdue, that there's been a necessity for those who hold any power to jump in and to lend the power of their podium. But I think that we didn't necessarily do it as well as we could have. Because we didn't take the step back to say, Do I have agency? What can I contribute? How do I best be a part of this. And it's not always the thing that you have to write about, speak about the maybe more quieter ways where you can be far more impactful, it may be giving space to those who really have the ability to alter the issue, so that the end and you know, amplifying them, it may be giving space to those who also have the experience to do it and and respecting the wisdom of experience, you know,

47:07

yeah. Now that makes sense. So let's the last 1415 minutes or so I really wanted to focus on some some action items and specifics for leaders out there. And one of the things that I want to talk to you about is this idea of being open to new opportunities. And I'm trying to remember who it was that I spoke with, this was like a week or two ago. And I was asking him for career advice. And he says one of the biggest mistakes that a lot of people make is that they're too rigid in their career plan. And they they kind of develop this comprehensive plan for themselves. You know, I did this when I was younger, right? I thought I was gonna get an MBA and become a CMO and kind of climb that corporate ladder and nothing panned out the way I wanted. And so for you, it also seems like you had to be quite open to new opportunities during the course of your career. Can you share a little bit about what what is being open to new opportunities? I mean, are there things that you can actually do to be proactive to take advantage of those things, instead of just sort of, you know, letting fate dictate where you go? My

conversation with Carol continues for subscribers only, and you won't want to miss this follow up conversation with Carol, we talk about the importance of being open to new opportunities, and Carol shares a specific set of questions that you should be asking to determine your future career path. And also, how can you tell when it's time for you to transition? And what do you do when you opportunities come your way that actually scare you, again, only available to subscribers of the show, on Apple podcasts or on Spotify? And when you subscribe, you're gonna get a bonus episode every single week from one of my amazing guests. How could you possibly say no, if you get a couple of seconds, please remember to rate and review the show on Apple podcasts or Spotify. That part is totally free. And it helps me bring in more amazing guests like Carol. Thanks for tuning in. I'll see you next week.