

# CEO Of Hyatt Hotels On How Being Vulnerable And Practicing Empathy Transformed Him & His Company

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You are about to listen to a conversation that I had with Mark Holt Amasian, the President and CEO of Hyatt Hotels Corporation, which has almost 200,000 employees around the world. My conversation with Mark is actually one of the favorite conversations that I had from the over 100 CEOs that I interviewed for my book leading with vulnerability. Again, these conversations are unscripted, they're candid, CEOs, like Mark had no idea what I was going to ask them, which made it all that much more fun. So the insights are real, they are authentic. And they're extremely, extremely valuable. And I think practical. So if you want to hear more from CEOs, just like Mark, and if you want to get access to the book, you can go to lead with vulnerability.com, to grab a copy for yourself. You can also join the community where we're going to be releasing the full episodes, the archives of all of these interviews that I've done, head over to great leadership.substack.com. Again, that's great. leadership.substack.com. So I hope you enjoyed this episode with Mark Hello magazine, the President and CEO of Hyatt Hotels Corporation.

01:11

Alright, so very first question for you then is, when you hear the phrase, vulnerable leader, what comes to mind for you? What does that make you think of?

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I guess the first thing that comes to my mind, when I hear a vulnerable leader, is someone who's open and sharing and playing in terms of how they talk about themselves playing spoken about how they talk about themselves.

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It's that that authenticity piece, it sounds like,

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yes, definitely authentic. And, and there's a bit of a, what you see is what you get kind of element to it, like, you know, not not really trying to be the personification of a role, but rather be a real human being first and foremost, and demonstrating what that means in for that person.

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Okay. And why do you think that's so important? Because we all know, leaders who don't have those qualities, and don't act that way. But for you, why is vulnerability so important?

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Well, vulnerability, I think, is one piece of the puzzle. It's not the it's not the only attribute. That's important. But I think, for me, I guess early in my career, I learned that my title is the booby prize, you end up with the ability to get compliance, but that's very different than connecting with people. And I never wanted to have people motivated by executing orders that they might take for me, but rather, you know, helping to discover what direction we should take and, and helping them along that path. And, and I think that the only way that that works is that people don't see you as your title. They don't see you as an authority figure, but rather, a real person who has a certain job to do, but is really someone who they can relate to. And someone who they can understand in human terms, not just in hierarchical terms.

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She said early on in your career, was there a time when you were more of that command and control and people just saw the title? And they just did what you told them to do? And you kind of had a realization? Or were you always this kind of a leader who practice empathy and vulnerability? Yeah,

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no, actually, there are, there are just a couple of things that I would mention. The first is when I first showed up, I knew I knew little about the actual operating business itself. I knew a lot about the financial structure and the legal structure. I didn't know much about the operating business. And in one of the first meetings I had with our Head of Sales and Marketing, I asked some questions that I was curious about, relating to who our biggest customers where and how their revenue with us broke down, and so forth, and so on. And two and a half weeks later, I got a massive report back. And I didn't actually intend for them to go and do all that work, that I was just trying to get his, you know, glean something from him. And that it hit me that, you know, when you have my title, and you ask a question like that, some people see that as a mandate to go and do something. And so I it took me a long time to appreciate what the shadow of the leader was and how to manage that. So you didn't put people through paces that you didn't intend? Yeah. And then I had a very interesting experience, or one of the first conferences that I was a part of It was an honor conference in hotel honors. Our our guest speaker was Tom Ridge, who was formerly the governor of Pennsylvania and the first Secretary of Homeland Security. And he had a long held military background. And he said to me, he met with me for about 15 minutes before he came on stage, and said, I have been doing some research on UAC, that you're relatively new in your job, you're less than a year into it. What have you learned? What's the most important thing you've learned so far? And I actually my response to him was the words I used a minute ago with you, which was, I think, I've learned that my title was the booby prize. And he said, he ripped him around and said, Well, you've learned one of the most valuable leadership lessons. And I said, I'm really shocked to hear you say that, because I seen your background in the military. I thought, you know, autocracy and authoritarianism was what, you know, how people in the military actually would lead. And he said, on the contrary, the best leaders, the ones who rise to the very top joint chiefs and otherwise, are fantastic people, leaders, first and foremost, they don't rely on their rank, to get stuff done. They they are, you know, you can get people to comply. But if you want their hearts and minds and souls, then you've got to really lead through human lens, and I really landed with me, it really landed.

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Yeah, like your point about, there's a difference between people doing things because you're telling them to do it, because of your title, versus getting people to really buy in and want to do it because they're following a vision. And they're following you as a person not as a job title. Right? And actually forgot to ask how many employees do you guys have now? About 165,000? Wow, 165,000. Okay. So okay, 165,000 employees, massive global organization. And so I know that putting people first and vulnerabilities is an important aspect for you. But if you were to imagine vulnerability, kind of like on a scale, where it let's say, one to five, and on the five is something that makes you feel very vulnerable, very uncomfortable, very emotionally exposed, what would be a five for you on that vulnerability scale? For you personally?

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Well, I think I think the things that are at that end of the scale relate to things that are deeply emotionally felt. So talking about my family experiences I've had with my family talking about delicate or sensitive topics, like mental health, or including my own mental health. Those are sensitive topics. And they there's a tremendous level of sort of trust that you put into others when you go into topics like that. And so I would say that those are probably at that end of the spectrum. Okay.

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So, and why so what is it about those subjects, whether you're talking about your own mental health or your family or a sensitive subject? Why does that make you feel the most vulnerable? Like, what's the underlying thing behind it?

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Well, I think that I think the reason I, one feels I feel vulnerable is that there's so much emotion coursing through me, when those topics come up, or when I talk talk about them, that, you know, it's you feel exposed in a way that is a typical in a business context, sometimes not, you know, you wouldn't necessarily see people sharing things of a very personal nature at scale, in normal life, so. But it is something that I have found to be really important during the pandemic, so many people were going through so many challenges with respect to how they were managing their lives, that what I realized is talking about my own challenges helped to provide context for them, and maybe even allow people not to feel alone in that journey

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now. So even if we went one level deeper, so emotionally exposed, is it because it makes you kind of question yourself and question who you are as a leader is that kind of like the even one layer deeper behind the emotion is because it makes you ask these tough questions about yourself and who you are.

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Yeah, I think that's part of it. I mean, you know, we have focused on empathy as a as a critical capability for a long time and I thought I was a very empathetic person. I did some assessments, site, psychographic expense assessments. And it turns out that you know, my my, my in, in inherent inclination or practice of empathy was that over relatively low level, lower level, interesting low fifth in the scale. And I was shocked. So I pretty much rejected the result. But I decided to go home and talk to

my kids about it. And I realized after talking to them that it was true, because they gave me some very plain feedback and wasn't mean spirited. And it wasn't hyperbolic, it was like, Yeah, I mean, I know you think you're president when you drive us to school, but you're on your phone half the time. And sometimes, at red lights, you're checking your emails, and we have to tell you that the light turned green. And then I started thinking, wow, that's absolutely correct. And that's not, that's not a practice of empathy. That's a practice of distraction.

**Jacob Morgan** 10:40

So it's hard. I'm very much guilty of that. Sometimes they have to remember, like, even I have a two year old and a six year old. And I have to remember very consciously, like if I'm with them, or dinnertime, I try not to even keep my phone memory. Because you, you have so many apps and like buttons and things on there that it's people are not comfortable being bored anymore. We always have to busy ourselves. It's hard. It's really hard.

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Yeah, and it does, it does require I think you have to be deliberate about it. So I think that's an example of how I don't you know, when you start getting into those kinds of topics, you start to question, your own efficacy in being empathetic at work, which I think is the practice of empathy is critical in our business, and in particular at Hyatt. So I would say, Sure, it's a it's a constant reminder and something that is, you know, anxiety inducing from time to time?

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Yeah. Can you share a time and one of the reasons that I'm going to ask this is because a lot of people like stories and examples and situations from leaders lives, and you know, they're things that they've done. So can you think of a time when you had to be vulnerable at work with your team? And can you share the story or the context around it and what the impact behind it was?

12:03

Yeah, I mean, we were doing empathy training, back in 2012. And I, one of the things that we were doing is in pairs, they were there a group of us, and I was going through it, like anybody else would. So I joined up with a GM that was in that same training. And one of the topics that we were supposed to go and talk to the team at the hotel, this was in Mexico City, was just to go talk to team members about recognition, and how they were recognized at work and what we could do better or different to elevate our recognition of their work. So I sat with the assistant front office manager. And you know, what, again, back to the booby prize of my title, the conversation at the inception of that was a lot of everything's great. Like, it's all great. And I was trying to understand, like, how she came into the white family, because we had bought the hotel, two years prior, and I wanted to know about like the, her beginnings at Hyatt and how that first day was, actually it was one year, one year prior. And it was great. Everything was great, because I'm the CEO, and she's terrified, and it makes you feel horrible. Like, it's, it's the worst feeling for me. So I, I actually started off asking her some more basic questions about what that morning was like, was it Sunny? How long did it take you to get to work, just to put her in the moment and then talked about my first days at work and how anxious I was and how scared I was. Because I, I was taking on an organization much bigger than anything I'd ever run before. And I just shared that with her. And, you know, within a couple of minutes, we were both in tears, because

she was she was relating to me how our onboarding process at that time was all about the various ways in which you could get fired. Wow, that was, that was the onboarding process. And I was mortified. And she said, I heard all these great things about my family. But then I had form after form after form, I had to fill out and sign and, and I had, you know, people telling me that there were consequences for doing this thing wrong or that thing badly or whatever. And we came out of that. And I thought, Okay, well, that's a fail. We've got, we gotta go back to the drawing board and redo our onboarding process and, and really make it a welcoming event and a celebration. And by the way, we'll get to the legal documents that you need to fill out some later date. So I think, you know, she was terrified to be talking to me at the inception. But I think that by opening up and just saying, Look, when I started, I really felt uncomfortable, and I was really scared. Allow her to sort of say, well, I guess if he's I'm prepared to admit that then I might as well share what my actual experience was like. And I think that was a big unlock.

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Good story. When was this was this a while ago,

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it's a while it was a while ago. So that really cemented in my mind the importance of this, this is back in 2012. But I remember it like it was yesterday. And it's anytime that you have that sort of powerful connection, and, and someone relates something that was hard for them, but also really real about their lives. You have to it's sort of like it commands your respect, as you can see,

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and I'm assuming you guys ended up making changes internally. Fundamentally, yeah. But it's one of those things where had you not been vulnerable? And had she not shared with you? Things? Probably, who knows if they would have ever changed?

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Yeah, I think that's right. And, you know, I think that it also goes to, you know, being thoughtful about how you design things, because so, you know, not surprisingly, that that process that was in place was designed by our legal department, in our HR department, not through the lens of a new colleague coming into my family, but through the lens of what their requirements were. And it was a huge stark reminder that if you want to design something great, design it through the lens of the person who's going to be the user. And in this case, that was a fail. So that was many lessons came out of that many lessons.

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You mentioned that one of the things that makes you most vulnerable to talking about mental health or sensitive issues and topics, do you have any stories or situations you can share about something that made you feel very, very vulnerable and uncomfortable, like one of those types of things that you mentioned?

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Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think in the, in the pandemic, early in the pandemic, we realized that business was going to be gone for a while on time, and that we would need to make layoffs. And I think that I felt vulnerable for many reasons. We our purpose as a company is to care for people so they can be their best and the and the sense of care. And, and really engaging at a human level is really the center point. It's the it's the key thing in our culture, and and how we actually interact with one another. So how do you reconcile being a caring organization and caring for people so they can do their best and yet, at the same time, have to effectuate a massive reduction in force? And so you feel vulnerable? For many reasons, fundamental reasons, like, How can this be right? You know, how do I reconcile these things? Am I actually is this a dereliction of my responsibility to fulfilling our purpose? How do you reconcile those things, and you feel very, out of sorts. Ironically, I also had, you know, a lot on my mind with respect to financial viability and total liquidity and financial capacity to endure a lot of losses. And yet, that's actually I just had inherent confidence. And I have a lot of background in that area. So I felt like I could figure that out. It was the political aspects of managing through the pandemic that cause tremendous vulnerability and tremendous anxiety.

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Did you ever think that your business might not survive?

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Yeah, there were definitely at the very beginning, I thought, if it depends on how long this actually how severe it gets, and how long it takes to recover, because the the lockdown in, you know, that began on March 12, and 13th. Across the country was really shocking. Nobody had ever experienced anything like it. I mean, you know, and our, our revenue base was off 95% In the next month, and, you know, that catches up to 5%. Yeah. So we were, yeah, we were sort of sitting around thinking, Okay, well, you know, how many months of liquidity do we have? Where are we going to get capital? Who could be potential buyers of assets that we can't, I mean, you go through a lot of contingency planning, because you have no idea. There's no visibility whatsoever. Everything was okay. People didn't understand the virus. Let's not forget, like the very first thing that people did was ran out and got wipes until months and months later, even a year later, only then realized it wasn't it wasn't communicated through surface contact. It was aerosolized. So the level of ignorance was so high. And that's, that creates tremendous uncertainties. So you sort of have to just, you know, kind of believe that there that science will catch up with it. Some of the early prognostications from some of the major consulting firms was that we would be three years before we had vaccines. You know, at that point, there was a lot of uncertainty. But it wasn't. It wasn't the financial part that really, that really affected me. It was it was all people issues. And so yeah, I would say that that was sort of a severe example of how, you know, the current commercial realities definitely resulted in a lot of anxiety and a lot of a lot of vulnerability.

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How many people did you guys have to lay off,

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we ended up laying off about 35% of our corporate staff and a higher number of our field staff. So 10s of 1000s of people.

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I remember seeing a video from Arne Sorenson. Before he passed away, I did, did you ever see that video that he did?

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I've seen, I saw one video he posted during the pandemic, but it that's the one you're talking about?

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Yeah. Where he was like, you know, he got very emotional, you can see tears in his eyes, where he was talking about the impact it was gonna have to the business. And at that point, he was going through chemo, so he already lost all of his hair. And it was just, you know, it was one of those, like, viral videos that a lot of people shared, because they were very touched how this leader who's going through his own times, you know, and then, of course, he passed away a few months later, but was still trying to take care of his people and felt so you could tell that he was like, very upset and just crushed by what was happening. And it was probably the same video that you saw.

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Yep, it is. Yeah,

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it was a very hard thing for a lot of a lot of people to see. And yeah, I think a lot of people respected and admired him for it, before he passed away. But it's, yeah, I mean, the vulnerability piece is very, very challenging for a lot of leaders. You mentioned also mental health and family. So is, this is something that you're comfortable talking with, in front of your team, or just like a select group of people at the company.

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I have, I have been talking about the importance of mental health now for a long time, I would say, a year and a half, at least, okay, maybe, maybe not more than that. And the reason I started talking about it so much was because of the level of stress that I was under. And I started to recognize the impact that it was having a mood, I started my children. And, and so I was I became increasingly concerned about managing through that, and about helping my kids get through it,

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what impact was it having, like, what did you start to notice about yourself or feel?

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Oh, you know, just, I would say, tremendous Sleep, sleep related problems, to start with, but also just, you know, feelings of, of it inadequacy and inability to sort of render disparate facts into something I could feel competence in. And, by the way, meanwhile, I'm leading the company. So I am, I am keeping a positive attitude on really, on behalf of the my colleagues, but personally going through a lot of questions, internal questions about my capacity, and my, and my own ability to sort of manage through. So I was feeling I was feeling this, that pretty acutely. And I thought, Well, geez, I'm a pretty strong person. I'm, you know, inherently a glass half full, very future focused person, if I'm, if I'm experiencing

this, and I've got family members who are going through this, too. And we've got a strong family. I can't imagine if you had other challenges in your life, or you had a less coherent code, cohesive family, how are other people managing through this? So I started talking about it extensively, because I thought, I don't I want to try to be an example of how you can talk about these things and try to remove some of the stigma associated with it. And started started to actually talk about what we were going to do. We created resources to make sure that we were identifying where people were stressing out and experiencing extreme anxiety or maybe depression. And we enlisted help from some medical institutions, including Cornell to help us develop a tracker and resources, identifying new courses that people could could could access. And then, you know, I even more personally on a one on one basis, I talked to my team members about how their families were doing and I ended up at the under that year, I wrote a letter to every spouse of every one of my direct reports about what I had experienced with their spouse. My direct report over the past year, as a thank you letter to the family, because I said, you know, this is really important for them to understand just how remarkable they their spouses had been in helping 10s of 1000s of people get through a really challenging year and, and acknowledging that I'm sure that their families likewise had experienced some really serious issues along the way, but I felt it was really important for for them to know just how much of an impact that their loved one had in my family. And I had family members, I had, sorry, direct reports who lost family members over the course of the year. So it was particularly is particularly challenging. So I would say, it's all of those things together. But you know, and I ended up in conversations with individuals about how they were doing, about how their kids were doing. You know, we all had teenagers, most of us had teenagers living at home. So they were going through their own stresses and strains. And we became like a support group wasn't like a collective support group, it was more like, you know, sharing individual experiences, and seeking out sort of perspective and advice and, and ideas and just support. So that's what it really would have turned into. But I would say it's both it was both at a at a broad level, talking about mental health as a construct, and what we were doing to help people in the company, but also one on one, to really try to be more plugged into and in tune with what was going on with my own direct reports.

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And that was a very vulnerable thing talking about that mental health aspect for you.

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Yeah, I mean, I, by the way, I recognize that it's, it's a sensitive topic for others. So, you know, it's not something that even as you go towards a period of time, when a lot more people are talking much more openly about it, there's still stigma associated with it, it's it's not, it's not the easiest thing to talk about. Because, you know, goes into, it goes into maybe your own sense of vulnerability, or or, you know, being being at risk in some way, shape, or form. And it's a weird thing, like, I'm there, I'm their boss, and, and so do you want to really admit that you're having a tough time to your boss, instead of hey, no, I got this, I'm going to be great and blah, blah, blah. So there's, there are many different cross currents that you know, do recognize are true.

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This vulnerability also manifests for you kind of like on a day to day. So we talked about some like, you know, big moments that have happened during your life. But what about just kind of on a day to day,



you know, just just mark working in the office with his team members? Would you say that vulnerability manifests in some small ways?

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Yeah, I think, you know, in the recent past, we've been working on trying to expose people to and invite people into a space where there's a much more agile, maybe dynamic way of working. And I think one of the key aspects of that is to seed delegate or seed decision making to groups of colleagues who are more junior in the organization, but are working together in a cross functional team. And I have found it really important in those interactions to remind people that I don't have an answer, I'm not sure I'm not. It's not like I have an answer. And I'm holding, withholding it from you. I don't know what the answer is. And by the way, there's not one answer, there are many possibilities. So you will need to go towards that I am really clear about what the outcome is that we should be driving for. But in terms of how this manifests itself and how it proceeds. It's in your hands, and, and to be really, really explicit about that so that people don't sit, sit back and say, Well, you know, why doesn't? If he knows the answer, why doesn't he just put us out of our misery? And we'll just go ahead. And the answer is I don't have I don't have an answer. And I have to be explicit about that. So I guess that's a form of mobility or just honesty.

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We talked about kind of what's on the five scale for vulnerability for you what would be like on the one the two to three scale for you things that are vulnerable, but you're comfortable with doing and it's not? It's not as big of a deal for you. It doesn't make you ask those deeper questions about about yourself,

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I guess, I think somewhere in the three to four, three range maybe would be something that didn't go to plan in a business context, which, you know, it always leads me, I guess I'm wired this way. So not all people were this way. I'm wired to think, what did I screw up? What could I have done differently? So I always think that, but I, I, you know, I go towards those things, because it's really important that others go towards those things, too. And we're have talked about things that didn't go well and make sure that we've learned from them. On the one scale. You know, I think, somehow the ability to laugh at oneself when, you know, stupid things happen, or maybe inadvertent things happen is really, really important. And also recognizing that if, if you've come come off, and it somehow came off, and something, some comment you made, came off the wrong way, or created a rift of some kind, or whatever, instead of feeling too self conscious about it, to go toward that and maybe make light of it to say, hey, that was a real screw up on my part, I'm, I'm sorry about that. I think being prepared to apologize or to admit that you screwed something up, is in a day in and day out kind of context is is a part of the fabric of developing a rapport. And that's on the one on the one end of the scale, I think.

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Can you think of a time when somebody was vulnerable with you? And what the impact had on you as a leader when somebody kind of reciprocated there?

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Yeah. Yes. I've had a colleague, come to me and talk about the work that they had done

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over an extended period of time a mentee of mine, to work on behavior and leadership behaviors and trying to advance themselves and had come to, I guess, a resignation appointed resignation to say, I'm not, I just don't know that I can, I can do it. I'm not sure if I'm able to overcome these behavioral things that apparently are my are shortcomings and holding me back. And she described to me that, that there was a position filled, and the person who filled the position I shared with her that she theoretically was a candidate for the job, but she, she wasn't selected. And she said to me, you know, for the first time, I kind of got to a point where I, I didn't bother to ask why. Because I wasn't sure I was prepared to go through the effort, emotional effort to to review some, you know, topics that I had talked about before. And it really hit me hard. It was such a open admission about, you know, the journey that they had been on that it really, it took me a little while to compose myself to try to be helpful and constructive. And in speaking with her, so that happened recently, and I was really, I was a bit laid low by that. And I think that that, that again, that demands a lot of respect and demands a lot of compassion.

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So and what impact does that have on you when somebody can be that vulnerable with you and say, You know what, I don't know if I can do this, and I think I'm the right fit. How does it make you feel?

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Yeah, it makes me mean, my own inclination is to be sure that I am truly listening and understanding Well, I find that too often, me included, we listen to respond instead of listening to understand. So I spent a lot of time asking questions, and making sure that I was really understanding and, and being clear, in many instances that I actually I don't have any insights or answers of any kind. What I reverted to was saying, even as she was expressing to me, concerns about having failed me or us as an organization, I was saying the same thing to her like, you know, my my overarching feeling is, I hope, you know, I feel I feel some some pressure because I feel like we may have failed you. And I guess the most important thing I can tell you is that I'm here to support you I'm not quite sure I know what that looks like, at this moment as we sit here now, but that's what I am committed to do. So, because I think platitudes at a time, like that don't really work. Yeah, it makes it makes it much worse than just being honest and saying, I'm not sure, I don't know how I can support you, I'm gonna give it some thought I am committed to supporting you, right? It will, I will go way out of my way to do that. So

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one of the things that a lot of people are very concerned with, when it comes to vulnerability is the perception of being weak or incompetent or not good at their jobs. You know, for SEO, obviously, I don't know if you feel that that pressure, but you know, a lot of people who are going to be either hearing this or reading the book are not CEOs. And so you're probably thinking, Well, you know, it's easy for Mark to do that. So he's the CEO, nobody's gonna like, you know, say, Oh, Mark shared something personal, he shouldn't be CEO, because you're at the top of the company. But for a lot of people who are entry level employees or mid level leaders, how do they balance that vulnerability with fear of being perceived as weak or incompetent? Any suggestions or advice?

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Well, you know, when I joined Hyatt, I, the first thing I said to people was, I was ignorant. I didn't know the business, because I didn't grow up in this business. But I joined a CEO. And I said, I was going to need a lot of help. So I'd laid myself bare in some ways at that time, and I think that worked extraordinarily well in enlisting people to help me. Among other things, people were like, Oh, my God, this guy really doesn't know what the hell he's doing. We have to help them. But I think I think it's an environment it, you have to set the right environment so that people don't think that, you know, there's some sort of exacting scale of competency or, excuse me, excellence that is going to be applied with every word that comes out of your mouth, not every passing experience is a referendum on your capability. And and secondly, I don't think that I think a lot of what makes people effective, is how they actually engage with others, as human beings, more than knowing what their experience base is. And I think that people learn that, you know, being the most skilled, the most experienced the smartest person in the room isn't necessarily the great path to success. I think being real is a lot more important. I have this expression that I used a lot in over the course of my tenure, which is authenticity beats perfection every time. And I think that that's true. So, you know, I think that the key from my perspective is to actually make it true that the culture and the environment, demonstrate that authenticity beats perfection every time. And if you do that on a consistent basis, then people can be drawn to be authentic instead of trying to be perfect.

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Yeah. Have you ever had anybody use a vulnerability against you? Or try to like backstab you in some way after you shared something personal, like mental health? Does anybody ever said, Oh, marketing, we see? Yeah, look, he's struggling.

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No, not not here. At least. I worked in banking. before. Before I went to business school, I would say I saw some behaviors there that were not the were not the most admirable in terms of people trying to take advantage of other people's either perceived or actual weaknesses. So yeah, a lot of backstabbing. Yeah, a lot of like, unforgiveness, there's no grace and banking, I think, well, back then it was like a, you know, very, it part of it is just the incentive system, like a, you know, eat would you kill kind of mentality, you know, so you I don't know, I just think that grace is in short supply and in corporations these days, and it's in great need, not just in corporate ends, but in general. Yeah,

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I know, we only have a couple of minutes left. One of the things that you mentioned earlier, you were asking me before I hit record is is this book just about vulnerability or some other stuff? So one of the things I wanted to ask her what are some of the other relevant attributes or variables that leaders need to possess that kind of go with vulnerability that allow vulnerability to thrive and have its desired impact?

39:29

I think the most important thing is to never stop learning about yourself. You have to continuously learn more and more about yourself and know yours now. Well, I had a longtime friend of mine former CEO, said to me that he came to realize some years ago that the yield the limit to his ability to grow his leadership capability was his was governed entirely by the degree to which he was continuously

Learning about himself. The more he learned about himself, the more he could enhance his leadership capability. And I interesting Yeah, and I didn't really appreciate it when when he told me this 12 years ago, but it stuck with me, obviously, I it's vivid, and I remember exactly where we were, and when he said it. So I think that's number one. And, and I think that I think the practice of, of true empathy, and as I said earlier, you know, listening to understand, as opposed to listening to respond is essential. Because too many people, they can't quite get themselves out of broadcast mode, and a true listening mode. So I think those are two really, really important attributes that go hand in hand with, you know, being able to be vulnerable.

40:55

Yeah. What one moment, would you say most impacted your leadership career? Who you are as a leader?

41:06

Wow. That's a really hard question.

41:19

I would say, the thing that probably the most significant turning point for me was that conversation I had with my kids about my, about my level of empathy. Because I was pretty devastated. Coming out of that I was now I dropped them, I so I used the opportunity to talk to them about it. And then I drove them to school the following day. And I told them that I had been thinking about what they told me and that I was going to really work on it. And after I dropped him off, at school, I pulled over for like, a half an hour just to collect myself. And I just realized that, you know, you can really, you can really be at risk if you're, if you're not seeing yourself clearly. And at least in my life, my children have the best capability of like bringing, bringing my feet and maybe planting them firmly on the ground, or sometimes slamming me on the ground. I don't know, sometimes there's new directions. So I would say that was that really did have a huge impact on me, and really, you know, sort of vaulted me into a very different pathway for what how I was practicing leadership. So yeah, I would say that's actually interestingly ironic, because I hadn't thought about that question before. But it was a personal experience, not a not a commercial experience that led to a leadership change.

42:49

Have you ever done anything at work that you were ashamed of?

42:53

Yes, of course, I think losing my temper is unacceptable. Because it just makes, you know, it draws into temper into question, the safety of, you know, coming to me with bad stuff. But, you know, I have had not recently, but I have had experiences where my frustration level is boiled over. Thankfully, not for a long time. But I, one of my first bosses was someone who never raised their voice, didn't need to either, because in, in, in a very in sort of OJ could communicate that they had high expectations that were being met. So I always thought that that was quite effective. So I think that losing one's cool is not not is not cool.

43:46

What is the worst business mistake that you've ever made?

43:50

I think the consistent one, historically, is and again, thankfully, one learns from this over time, is that when things what when when you when you will come to a realization that there's not a fit for a person in your rotation. You can never move quickly enough to put that person on a different track in and freeing up that space in the company.

44:19

This has been the most common mistake that CEOs have told me. I can't tell you how many times like from the 50 or 60 CEO interviews I've done I'd say that it's like 80 90% of the time that comes out as the worst mistake.

44:31

Yeah. And it's really interesting because I think there's some it's complicated because you don't you get sometimes you can confuse compassion. You can confuse kindness with niceness. You can confuse trying to hold someone carefully with doing something that might be very painful in the short term but is absolutely the right decision for them and for the company. So it's those things and I think that once you've seen it to occur and reoccur. I think the worst disservice you can do is not be honest with people about the fact that it's not working, and that they really need to find some place where they're going to be fulfilled. And they'll have success. And to help them do that, by the way. So yeah, I think that's, that's, that's probably the thing that is the recurring theme.

45:25

Do you think you have to be vulnerable to be a leader because we all know lots of leaders out there who are not vulnerable, yet they're very successful, they've run big companies or millionaires or billionaires, and you look at them and you think this person doesn't have a vulnerable bone in their body? So do you think you need to be vulnerable to be a great leader?

45:42

Wow, I, I, that's hard for me to answer. I would say that in our industry, it would be it's much more challenging to be a great leader, or an effective leader, I would say, in our industry, because it's such a people driven and people dependent business. So the interactions across the organization, and the authenticity of that and the realness of that the plainness of that the humanity of it all matters a lot. And so I think if you get someone who's not, who's not attuned that way, hard to really get followership and also be effective. So I think it may be different in different industries. But I think for sure, in our industry, that's the case.

46:33

And what do you do if you work for people who don't embrace that? So you know, you have a team, I think you said over 160,000 employees? I'm sure not everybody is comfortable with vulnerability, probably even members of your executive team, maybe not all of them are comfortable with vulnerability. So what do you do in that situation? Because it's one of those things where you like, you can't force it, right? You can't say be vulnerable, or I'm going to fire you. So how do you, you know,

what do you do in that kind of environment, where people are just like, they might say, hey, you know, what, I'm being authentic. And my authenticity is not to be vulnerable?

47:07

Yeah. I think that, that the thing that you can, the only thing that you can do, is to open up space for people to be who they are. And by the way, it might be that some of those people self select out, because it does feel comfortable for them. But I think you continue to open up space we did, we went through an extended purpose journey. Seven years ago, eight years ago, nine years ago now, for a long time. And I remember one of our senior people in the field had a general manager, who was really having a tough time embracing a purpose, led way of leading, and he spent time with them over and over again, and was demonstrated his own vulnerability and was really bringing them along. And he felt like he was on the verge of giving up on him because he just didn't see the movement. And then one day, the GM comes to him and says, I've had a really hard time mustering up the courage to come and talk to you about this. But all of the work that we've been doing around purpose has led me to be very, very introspective about my relationship with my son. And I've had real problems. And I, I've now found a way to work through them, in large measure because of our conversations. And I feel dramatically better. And here's how I think I'm going to translate that into what I'm doing in my hotel. And the guy was blown away completely blown. Wow. So I think that the answer is it's a human, there's a human dimension of, you know, being in touch with your with your emotional self and your, your psychological self. I guess. That's kind of undeniable. I mean, I guess there are people who, who don't have access to that. But I don't know many people who don't recognize that that's part of what being human is all about. So, to me, you know, people ask me about whether values are universal? And my answer to that is, I don't know in concept or theory whether they are but I can tell you that our values are really human values and, and that, that that's really the common thread that we're all human beings. And that at that core level, it's really about tapping into that humanity, to be able to care for other people, including caring for yourself, by the way, you can't care for yourself, if you don't even recognize what's going on and yourself that goes back to knowing yourself, like knowing when you get anxiety ridden, or when you get pissed off what your responses can look like, and how to manage that. So to me, I think it's continuing to open up space. By the way, it won't work in all cases, but it can't be it will be hurtful, it'll it'll end up helping that person or your colleagues sort of advance their own understanding, I think over time.

50:09

Alright, last few questions for you. Advice for people who want to be vulnerable at work. But maybe they're scared, they're uncomfortable with it. But they want to kind of dip their toe into that water, they want to be more vulnerable. They're inspired by some of the things that you're saying. And they say, you know, what? I'm ready. Where do I begin? How do I know who to be vulnerable with? Like, you know, there's a lot of confusion around this. You can't just be vulnerable with everybody, you're not just gonna go in front of your entire company. So any guidance on how to approach it? Yeah, I mean, I

50:43

think you develop relationships and reporters at work, and you end up developing higher levels of trust with different people. So I think starting small and starting with, you know, people that you feel like you've developed some level of trust with is the right answer. I think that's the obvious answer. But

yeah, I agree with you, I, by the way, this is not performative. Like, I don't think of, oh, this is a circumstance in which I need to be vulnerable and pull that out of my quiver. That's not That's not how this works. It's, it's much more natural and almost autonomic for me to respond in certain ways. And for me, back to my title being the booby prize. You know, I think that I have found it most effective, to engage with people in starting to talk to share my own experiences, and my own frustrations or my own failings as a means of unlocking a dialogue. And cuz, you know, people come towards that, and they, they're fascinated to hear it, and they're interested. And they also get, you know, in many, many cases feel like they've got permission. So for me, it's not like something I do, because I consciously think it's the right time for me to be vulnerable right now. What happens? It's more like, you know, I need to actually relate to this person. And the best way for me to do that is to actually share something about you know, what, just

52:20

the intention piece makes a big yes. Great. Okay. Yeah, the intentionality