

5 Questions You MUST Ask To Create Amazing Professional & Personal Relationships

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The time has finally come. My brand new book leading with vulnerability is officially out. If you want to know the difference between being vulnerable at work, and why it can hurt you, versus leading with vulnerability, and why that can be your greatest superpower, then head over to lead with vulnerability.com. To learn more, and grab a copy of the book, sneak peek vulnerability is about exposing a gap. And leading with vulnerability is about exposing a gap and demonstrating what you are trying to do to close it. So how do you actually do that? Again, head over to lead with vulnerability.com to learn more and find out.

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Hey, everyone, welcome to another episode of great leadership, my guest today, Michael Bungay Stanier. He is the Best Selling Author of the Coaching Habit, which I believe is sold 1.2 plus some million copies like that. I know amazing, crazy crazy and a brand new book out called how to work with almost anyone, Michael, thank you for joining me. It's nice to be back. Nice to see you again. Thank you. Yeah, it's been a while. Well, so first, I have to ask why is it how to work with almost anybody why? Why couldn't you've just made the title how to work with anyone? Well, I wouldn't believe a book called How to work with anyone. And I don't know how to work with anyone. So I feel like I would be massively over promising. And here's actually something I love about this book. I mean, I've written eight or nine books now. But of all the books I've ever written, this is the one where the title makes people smile every time. Because I think they I think they can imagine who the almost is. Yeah, they're like, oh, yeah, I know who my almost is. And they kind of feel the pain of that relationship, but also the, perhaps the optimism of all the other relationships now. So yeah, I guess would have been promising too much if it was how to work with anybody, because there are definitely some shady characters out there that you just nothing that we've done. So much of my stuff is like, how do you unweave a complicated topic? And how do you help it engage with reality? That's one of the reasons the Coaching Habit book worked. And I hope it's one of the reasons this book will work as well, which is like, I'm not promising a fantasy, I'm not promising nothing but wonderful working relationships. And they had you build the best possible relationship with all of the key people, except for those ones where you can't Got it. Got it. So what prompted you to write in this book?

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There are three, three levels to answer that question. The first is a personal one, which is like I'm trying to be a writer, that's kind of that that's kind of my big goal in life to be a writer, I'm already an author, meaning I've got books out in the world. But a writer is somebody who spends time building a life

around reading and writing. And so in some ways, it's this is a trailing indicator of me trying to be a writer.

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Second is, you know, the big picture of the work I do is trying to keep our working relationships, human. You know, in many ways, the Coaching Habit and the advice trap. These are books about staying curious longer. And part of being curious longer is actually keeping the humanity in nature changes you as you ask great questions. And this is a this is something that I had been practicing and teaching for 20 years, and it just has always felt like a really useful tool, which is how do you not rush into the work? But pause for a moment, look the other person in the eye and go, Hey, how will we work best together? What if we spend some time figuring that out? Because your working relationships are such influences on your success and your happiness? Stop leaving it to chance and get into it?

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So I have kind of a random first question for you. And this is very serendipitous. So I was having lunch with my mom yesterday. And we went through a place not too far away. And she's she called me and told me so I know all about this.

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So she's a therapist here in Los Angeles. And we're sitting there having lunch in she's telling me she's taking a class in Imago therapy, if I believe that's what it's called. And she's like, you know, I'm reading this really interesting book by an author called Martin Buber. And you should check it out. And it's about the AI though, and or I vow and I hit that like, and I'm like, Mom, what are you talking about? Like,

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why, you know, so I kind of said, you know, they'll try to read it if I get a chance, kind of like brushing it off. And then I saw an interview that you did it and I saw that this is something that you talked about. And I thought, well, that's very serendipitous.

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Because out of all the things that I could come across and that Michael is now writing about I'm like What about

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odds that my podcast guests, the next day is talking about the same thing. You'll be able to call your mother up and go, guess what I just talked about?

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After this podcast is over, I'm gonna be like, Mom, this is gonna be weird. But guess what just happened. So you talk about this, you write about this. You spoken about this. You were on the Lewis Howes podcast talking about this? Can you introduce the concept of what this is? Yeah. And why is it important, specifically, if we were to think about it in the context of work, or business or leadership? Sure. So I came across this idea maybe 20 years ago, and I can't claim to be an expert and mountain movers worker philosopher, but I loved this foundational idea of his is that there are two types of

working relationship, two types of relationships, I it relationships, and I vow relationships. And I thou relationships are those opportunities to be with somebody where you both get to show up in your full humanity, okay, you get to be

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the brilliant and messy and complicated and complete person. And you get to be that in yourself, and you get to see that in that other person. Even as I say this, you can appreciate that this is not a common experience, this is a rare experience. Because there's all sorts of ways that what life is doing is pulling you away from that. And it's pulling you towards an i it relationship, which I think of it as a more of a transactional relationship, which is like, shall we get each other, we get along fine. But we're kind of like, I see you for what you can do for me, and you see me and what I can do for you. And we're kind of working at that level. And there is something like man move, I believe, as a religious man. So it's something about for him, the i thou relationships are the relationships that get you closer to God. I'm not a religious person, I'm an atheist. But there is something still fundamentally

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enlivening about how do you build human to human relationships as best you can. And I think in our organizational lives, there's so many things that pull us away from that, the busyness of it all the grind, if it's the grind, it's the focus on the work, the fact that related organizations are set up to be hierarchical, and to have power structures. And so you're kind of like working through that all the time. There's all sorts of reasons to have a diminished relationship with people at work rather than an enlivened relationship with people at work.

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You all know that I spend a lot of time talking about themes like leadership in the future of work. But there needs to be a company out there that's actually powering the future of work, a company out there that's designing, building and managing the systems that the world depends on. Without those types of companies, there is no future and there is no future of work. And that's why today's episode is sponsored by Kindle. They are a technology services company that advances the vital systems in the world depends on every single day. Kindle is the heart of progress. At Kindle progress starts by standing up for something with intention, being pro something with your whole heart. And those of you who've been listening to my program, know that I talk about being able to take a stance for something being able to fight for something, and not just being passive and playing in the gray areas. So one of the things that I love about Kindle is they are pro something, Kindle stands up for progress by committing to help their customers digitally transform technology systems with a global team of curious and diverse minds. Again, both themes that I have talked about on this show quite a bit, because there's nothing better than taking a step forward together. You can learn more by going to kindle.com That's KYNDRY I.com

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What would be an example really quick of a kind of a i thou relationship versus let. So if we were thinking of like a hypothetical example, inside of an organization, would I thou be kind of like, I am working with my leader. And um, you know, basically there for a paycheck like I, you know, I show up, I do my job, I get a paycheck. And that's kind of it, versus I vow is maybe more like, I don't know, I feel

seen, there's learning, there's coaching, there's development, there's relationship, I feel like this person has my back, like more of that kind of, I think you probably know that. My suspicion is that a relationship, you and me working together, we would ebb and flow through I vow to I get to I thou, I'm feeling lucky.

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What I hope is that you and I have a commitment to go look, I'm trying to bring out the best in Jacob and he's trying to bring out the best in me. I'm trying to be present and

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Half to see Jacob for who he is to hear what he wants to understand that I'm trying to be courageous enough to tell him who I am, to be seen to ask for what I want. And sometimes we get lucky. And we're kind of connected like that. And sometimes we fall out of sync with each other. But if we're lucky, we get to kind of find our way back to each other. And kind of like, you know, what I just feeling like, the best version of Jacob is showing up. Not perfect, but the best version, and the best version of Michael is showing up. And, you know, and I still want a paycheck, and I still want a job, I still want meaningful work. It's not just about that I'm in presence, and we're seeing each other, I want all of that. And I think the the I it relationship is like, I feel like a bit of a small cog in the machine. And,

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or, you know, my boss is perfectly pleasant, but doesn't really care and doesn't really get me and doesn't really see me.

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I don't read. Here's another way of answering it, perhaps, when I coach people. And in fact, probably when I work with people, I've never said it like this before, but I think it's true. One phrase that I use to define the type of relationship I hope to have with them is fierce love.

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Love, meaning I just want to be I just want the best for them. I want to see the best in them. I want I want them to continue to grow and become the best versions of themselves. Fierce meaning and willing to show up to do what's required to do that. I'm not going to

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wimp out, or be nice, or kind of not speak the hard truth. Because I want is a fierceness to me in my commitment to that relationship. Yeah, it's an interesting way to think about it. But you also mentioned you kind of flow from one right? So it's not like I always have either or I always have I it sometimes maybe it's the transaction? Or maybe sometimes it's the deeper one. Or are you suggesting that we always need to be in one or the other?

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Look, I think there's lots of relationships you have that are eight relationships and only eight relationships. Yeah, but I mean, I'm just speaking from my own experience, which is I look at every

single important relationship I've had. And sometimes they've been fantastic. Sometimes they haven't. And,

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and I think you can still be struggling and be in an i thou relationship. It's not all about, you know, Angel singing and Unicorns Dancing. You can be in you can be in conflict, and still being an i thou relationship, interest that but I think more slippery, perhaps more dangerous as I just kind of like, I'm not even in conflict, I've just taken you for granted. I've just kind of the minister the exchange that we're having. And I can have a I can have a perfectly pleasant I it relationship. And that may not be as valuable to me as an i thou relationship, even when that comes with conflict and challenge and kind of pushing each other. Got it. Got it. Okay. So you really should just call up your mom, because she's probably got a really good answer to this. Yeah. Like, we need her to come in and kind of go, here's where Michael got it. Right. Here's where Michael? I'm a bit confused. Yeah, hang on. I'll call her on the phone. And I'll address Yes, I guess that would be great. So another theme of the book is really about this concept of how to be able to work with almost anybody kind of a pillar of that is this idea of five questions to ask, which are part, you know, this, this Keystone conversation questions. And so for people tuning in, basically, what we're going to do is we will go through what those five questions are. And then towards the end of the podcast, where we do the leaders toolkit section, we're gonna go through and walk through how to actually have that Keystone conversation and walk through those five in more detail. But before we get into those five questions, is there anything else that we need to go over? Is there anything else that people need to know about before we jump into those questions to kind of set the stage for it? Yeah, I think so. I think we should just linger a little bit on this idea of what the best possible relationship is, because it's a new phrase, and it might be intriguing for people.

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It's not a best relationship. I'm not promising by any stretch of the imagination that every relationship is suddenly going to turn into this kind of wonderful, you know, golden rain moment kind of thing going on. It's not that at all.

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Your working relationships show up on a bell curve, you probably got some at one end where you're like, does great really enjoy working with this person, we kind of click through it probably some of the other end where you're like, Ah, it's pushing a rock uphill. It's Sisyphean in terms of the effort involved. It's hard. There's sand in the gears, and then there's probably a bunch of them in the middle. And

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I would suggest that each one of those key relationships

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ones that have so much impact on your happiness and your success has a amount of potential. And the goal of a best possible relationship is to give it its full potential. So not just keeping the great ones good for great for longer, not just taking the average ones and kind of adding some magic. But I think this would be a really big win, taking the ones that are really hard, and making them more workable and more bearable and more usable, trying to improve all of that. So that's the goal with the best possible

relationship, the three attributes of a BPR that they are safe, and that they are vital, and that they are repairable, safe. We probably all heard of psychological safety. You probably have even interviewed Amy Edmondson who's one of the great champions of this coming on the show very soon, actually, oh, she's got a new book coming out, which I think sounds amazing. So she'll be a great guest. But you know, for years, she's been the figurehead behind this idea of psychological safety. And most of us get that now, you know, it's like, how do I remove the fear? How do I allow people to show up.

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But take away, figured out that I just didn't want to have safety, I want more in a working relationship than that. So that took me to this idea of vitality, not just vital in terms of essential but vital in terms of alive, I want challenge I want adventure, I want to be pushed, I want to be provoked, I want to be poked a little bit. So for me vital, vital ketamine psychological bravery, psychological safety, psychological bravery, that's a powerful pairing. And then the third attribute is repairability. Because your relationship will go off the rails, it happens sometimes in a big way, sometimes in a smaller way. What does it take for you to fix the relationship? Do you have a challenge to get back to what it was to give it a chance to get to be better than it was?

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I like those attributes. And I think those are important not just in a work environment, but also in a personal environment, right? So especially the repairability, it seems like you're always gonna go through a time, whether it's in your life or at work, where a relationship will be strained. I've actually had a few of those encounters over the past few months where I've talked to friends, and we've had arguments about something and kind of confronted each other about stuff. And, you know, thankfully, everything was able to be repaired and everything was great. But I think that's an important element, right? Because if it wasn't repairable, it probably would have just been dead. And it would have been very unfortunate. Well, you know, as part of the writing this book and researching it, you know, I read, I'm not much of a primary researcher myself, but I read people like Esther Parral, and Terry real. And Dan Siegel. And John Gottman, these are all big names, who have thought about intimate relationships for their whole careers. And when you read across their work, one thing becomes really obvious. The relationships that last are the ones that get repaired. And most of us are not very good at repairing relationships. You know, most of us back away most of us give up pretty quickly. Most of us assume that this is just a wound you get to you get to get and to carry and it doesn't get healed. So it felt important to go look if you can be if you can develop the skill of repairing a relationship that is really powerful. And most of us, I mean, I asked this in revenue, they go of those three, which one do you feel you're best at? And typically about half the people will say, say safe, and about half the people will say vital, and very few people say repairable. Yeah, because repairable to me seems the one that requires the most amount of vulnerability. All right, a favorite. That's right, kind of favorite topic of mine. And

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yeah, it's an important piece because no means I'm thinking about my personal life, right? Like if my wife and I ever get in an argument in which you know, sometimes happens. My wife is usually the one that repairs the relationship and con eyes and tries to defuse the situation, I'm trying to get better at it. And it's not something I struggle with just because I'm like, Oh, this relationship is over. It's more of like,

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I don't know if stubbornness, kind of a defense mechanism of not wanting to sometimes be vulnerable. And it's just the brain shuts down and is just, I'm not going to have any motion. And so it kind of like I get into the Stonewall mode where I become like, you know, a block of ice. So she's really good at repairing the relationship piece, whereas I'm not as good at it, but something I'm trying to work on. Well, let me ask you a question because I know your book on leadership and vulnerability comes out in October. So you've been thinking about vulnerability, yes. What would you how would you teach me in terms of building my capacity to be vulnerable? Because we've all heard about it, you know, Brene Brown has been talking about it for years, which of his vulnerability is strength and I'm like, great, I kind of agree, I think, but actually doing the

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work to take off the armor to melt the ice you open up? Can you give me some guidance around what I do to build that. So the context of the book is specifically aimed in a workplace setting. And the advice that I give people is somewhat counterintuitive.

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And it is you should not be vulnerable at work. And I'll explain what I mean. So the and I don't think I've actually shared this with anyone yet. So the whole concept of vulnerability that I think a lot of, and I'm curious to hear your thoughts on this, the whole concept of vulnerability that a lot of people are familiar with is sharing or doing something that exposes yourself to the potential of emotional harm, right, it's a lot of Bernie brown talks about. And so I was really interested in the concept of, well, I can easily see how there's value and benefit to doing that in my personal life. But then if we think about it inside of a workplace, we have a very different dynamic. Now we have a hierarchy, we have structure, we have deadlines, we have teams, we have collaboration, there's salaries, there's, there's a very different dynamic there. Yeah. And then specifically, if you're in a leadership role, you also have a very different dynamic, because now you're responsible for people, you're responsible for money, you're responsible for the success of a team. And so what I have found from interviewing a lot of these CEOs is and I talk to 100 of them, is they would say we understand the concept of vulnerability. But how do we bring it to life inside of our organization, because on the one hand leaders, we want them to be these confident, you know, visionary, like they can get us out of a tough situation, they can come up with great ideas, like they're amazing. But on the other hand, we want them to talk about their challenges, their feelings, their emotions, their struggles. And those are two seemingly very point opposing views. Yeah. And so the feedback that I give people is vulnerability would be used if I worked for you. And I said, and you gave me a project, and I screwed it up. And I said, Hey, Mike, come on. Man, I'm really sorry, I totally screwed up this project. Right? That's vulnerability. Leading with vulnerability means you combine vulnerability plus leadership. So in that same situation, it would be Michael, I'm really sorry, I screwed this project up. Here's what I learned from my mistake, here's what I'm going to do to make sure that that doesn't happen again, in the future. In a workplace context, I argue that if you are just vulnerable, especially if you're in a leadership role, it can cause far more harm than good. Because eventually people are gonna look at you. And they're gonna say, Look, you keep talking about mistakes and failures and challenges and struggles. There's no leadership component here. Why are you in this role? Right. So the leadership piece is kind of the demonstrate that you're closing the gap, demonstrate that you have that level of competence. So that's kind of the direction that I go with specifically in the book.

And it's interesting, you know, what it reminds me of a little bit is Adam Grant work on give and take? Yeah, and he was one of the people that endorsed the book. So he, he's, that's, well, that's a great endorsement to have, you know, his key insight around give and take is the people who, who, you know, there's the givers, there's the takers, and then there's the kind of neutral, you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back. Yeah. And there's a certain type of person who is at the top of the list of people thriving in a type of person who is at the bottom. And weirdly, it's the givers both both places, and within the top and the bottom. But the difference is, is givers know how to give in a way that maintains their boundaries, and isn't depleting, the ones that are at the top and succeed. And the ones that struggle are the ones who give to depletion to give to exhaustion. And it feels like you're saying, Look, if you're vulnerable and only vulnerable, you're at the bottom there, because all you are is a mess. Whereas if you're taking vulnerability, and and combining it with leadership, there's a way you're like is the mistake, but here's that leadership action that kind of takes me to the top. Yeah. And that's a crucial, crucial attribute that I think we oftentimes forget inside of organizations. And, you know, we surveyed 14,000 employees, and we actually ask them, what's the number one reason why you are uncomfortable or don't want to be you're scared of being vulnerable at work. And the number one reason is I don't want to be perceived as being weak or incompetent. Right? And it's kind of funny, because

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if you lead with vulnerability, you will not have that perception, because you were demonstrating the competence, you're demonstrating that you're trying to close the gap. Yeah. And so the best piece of advice I have, I guess, in your situation, if it wasn't a work context, if it was, how can I get better at being vulnerable, I would say, add the leadership piece to the vulnerability, right to all the interactions that you have, especially in a workplace setting, is demonstrate something you've learned, demonstrate something that you're trying to do to close the gap, demonstrate progress, forward motion, that is ultimately in both of those are crucial, right? It's competence and connection. People want to know that they can connect with you

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You, but they also want to know that they can trust you that you're good at the work that you're doing. So I think both of those elements are, are really, really crucial, especially for leaders. So what's interesting about that is to connect it to the five questions that I suggest as part of the Keystone conversation that you kind of hinted at. And if you go through the five questions, the first one, the AMPLIFi, question is, what's your best? So this is leadership, this is like, let me tell you when I shine, and when I flow, let me tell you when I'm at the best version of myself now, the second one is what are your practices and preferences? So again, not about failure, particularly, but since going this is how I like to work? And at a really tactical, mechanical way? Isn't my preferences, what I like, then you got the good date and the bad date question, which is, what can we learn from successful past relationships? And what can we learn from frustrating past relationships? And there's a moment of opportunity of this vulnerability here, which is like, let me tell you about the relationships that have kind of gone south and where we screwed up and what my role is. But often, it's in this kind of paired context between let me tell you when it's really worked as well. So there's a way that maybe I could argue that this is vulnerable and leading at the same Yeah, for sure. So maybe we can walk through those five questions, and we can see kind of where some of these things fit in. And then we'll reserve kind of the how to actually have this conversation towards the end. So one of the things that I find

interesting, especially when you look at like the AMPLIFI question, you know, what's your best? When do you shine? When do you flow? That to me means that you need to have a certain level of self awareness about yourself, right? Like, you need to know those things about you. Like, I'm thinking about me, for example, like when do I shine? And when do I flow? And it's,

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you know, like, you have to have a certain level of introspection to be able to go through those questions, and maybe not everybody does. I don't think they do. And, you know, cunningly. I mean, I think this is basically

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a self help book cuttngly wrapped around a business book out, well, maybe vice versa, I'm not sure how you call it. But

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for each of the five questions, there are three exercises that you can go through if you want to kind of deepen your sense of self, refine your language. So you're not just speaking and kind of jazz hands cliches, but you're kind of getting deeper about this is what's true. For me, this is how I show up in the wild. And maybe towards the end, we can go maybe one exercise for each one that people can test in the practice. I think that'd be really cool. Okay, so what's what's your best? When do you shine? And when do you flow?

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Would you say that this is just a matter? I mean, is, I'm assuming self awareness is a critical aspect of this is just knowing

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when do I perform my best? And are we talking about like time of day, the environment? who I'm working with, or like all of the above? I think it's all of the above. And, you know, I deliberately didn't ask what are you good at? Because I think that's a pretty limiting question. Yeah. I didn't ask, what are your strengths? Because I think that's a bit abstract and a bit kind of high level. And, you know, when somebody comes to me and goes, here are my five top strengths from the strength finder. I'm like, Yeah, but but I don't totally know what to do with that. I mean, I'm thrilled for you. And I'm probably helpful. It makes sense. But I don't know. But so what, whereas this is like, tell me, when you light up, tell me when you're in the zone, tell me when you know, that flow, state me how to send me he, the Hungarian psychologist, yeah, you're kind of pushing, you're growing, things seem to be coming easily to you. Tell me about that. And that is often a combination of what's the type of work that might get you excited about that? What are the contacts? What are the people around you that might doing that? Like when I'm having this conversation, I'll tell people, one of the moments where I'm in the flow state is when I'm by myself. So ironically, one of the ways to work best with me is to not work with me, like leave me alone, some of the time, not all of the time, but some of the time. And it may be just about like, here's some inherent skills I have, which I love to do, like I am, I'm really good at kind of design, you know, kind of pen and paper. I'm like, What's the shape of a book? What's the shape of a course? Let's see, what's the shape of a keynote? How do you get that experience, I can do that really quickly

and really easy. And I light up when I'm doing it. So it's about talking about that. And actually one of the exercises that's connected to this and just to kind of make this practical for people and make a distinction that could be helpful.

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There's an exercise that talks about the difference between being good at something and being fulfilled by something and how they're different. Now, this is obvious as soon as I say it, because as everybody listening, you're like, I can think of some stuff that I'm good at. But quite frankly, I never want to do again. I've done it enough. I've you know I've practiced

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that too many times, I've thought about it. And like, just because I can do it doesn't mean I want to do it.

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But here's the mistake we make with other people, we assume that because they're good at it, they're probably fulfilled by it, because they're good at it, I should give it to them to do. So you can imagine a classic two by two matrix, you know, a square with a cross in the middle, along the bottom axis is what are you good at? Not much, quite a lot. And on the vertical axis, pretty fulfilled by no and yes, hopefully, you've got some stuff in that top right hand quadrant, I am good at this. And I'm fulfilled by it, you're like, brilliant. Tell me about that. Hopefully, you've got very, very little in the in the bottom left hand quadrant, because that means you're not good at it, and you're not fulfilled by it. And you're like, why are you doing that? This is not helping anybody. You suck at it, and it's sucking you dry at the same time? Is that a terrible thing? Yeah. They did. Sorry, mineral. Go ahead. Go ahead, please. Then you get that interesting combination in the corners, which is, what are you good at, but not fulfilled by, that's a really helpful thing to communicate to somebody like, look, I can, I can be the backup, I can do it at a pinch, I can coach I can mentor I can teach, but don't give this to me to do. There's no joy in it for me. And then there's what am I fulfilled by but not yet good at. That's really interesting, because that's your learning edge. That is the place where you want to grow. That's where you want to, you know, Dan Pink and drive. And, you know, we get motivation from purpose and autonomy and mastery. Well, this is where mastery is calling. But you're like, but but I'm not good enough yet to trust me by myself. So give me a guard rails, give me coaching, give me check ins make sure that I've got a safety net, you know, helped me get good at this. So this is a way this is part of that exercise, that self awareness, you're talking about Jacob,

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What happens if you're not able to do that work? So you identify when I'm the best when I'm when I shine when I'm in flow? But I'm not able to spend enough time in that situation? Or, you know, I'm not able to do that inside of my corporate setting as much as I should be. What, what then? Well, I feel like you're probably at a crossroads where you're like, what choices Am I making? Because

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any choice you make his praises and punishments. Yep. So you kind of have two choices on the table. Do I stay or do I go class in class song. And if you go, there's, there's upside and downside to that you're leaving what you don't know you're stepping into a new thing. You're trying to find a new role or perhaps a new job altogether. You know, there's risk but there's potential upside. If you stay, you're like, look, I don't shine, and I don't flow here. I don't get but I have a good job. I have a salary, I have security. I have other things outside my job that fulfill me and I get some of that now. So it's like you. You got to make way that your way of the choice. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Okay. And this idea of prizes and punishments, for me is a really helpful way of forcing what the choices are. And I try and do it for both. If I don't do this, what happens if I do do this? What happens? And then I get to see the more complete picture about okay, what my action might take me. Okay, I like that. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Alright, let's jump to the second question. So that was the AMPLIFi. Question. Next, we have the study question. What are your practices and preferences? Yeah, this is, obviously this is very broad. This can encompass a lot of things, right. I think you can. At one level, it's just about the mechanics here. Like, how do we work together? I use Slack or you email you morning, you evening virtual office? Yeah. How do we do meetings? What does that look like? It can be kind of personal as well. It's like, like, for instance, my name Michael Bungay. Stanier. It's complicated. You know, when I got married, I took my wife's name, but I didn't add a hyphen. So people are like, is Bungay the middle name or is it Yeah, how does it work? How do you even say it? No, I got a letter once to Michael banging spaniel. So like people are people are weirded out by my surname. So I get to explain that to get to explain that I don't like Mike just

35:00

titled, Australian. Yeah, they calculate me Australian. Yeah, so I was born Melbourne too, so I can make that joke. Well, there we go, that's perfect.

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But, you know, it can also just what's amazing about your practices and preferences is that they seem minor, but they can be quite a big cause of irritation. Like as a very specific example. I use Asana as a way of managing projects and managing tasks, I use it as well. And I grew up learning productivity from David Allen, who wrote getting things done, you know, he's kind of one of the, you know, in the year 2002, it was the book on productivity. And one of the things that he taught me was you always start a an action item, or to do item with a verb. And that way, you know what, you know what the action is, if you don't have a verb, how can it be introducing, so weird enough? It's like, this now just now matters to me. So when I'm talking with Claudine, my assistant, I'm like, if you give me a task, it has to start with a verb. Otherwise, I'm like, this isn't a to do. And I get unreasonably irritated by that oversight. And so I preemptively stop. A little rift between Claudine and me by being able to say to her to dues have to start with a verb.

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So instead of saying, like,

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oh, man, trying to think of a to do that would start with that, like, if you had to write something, instead of saying two pages for your book, it would have to say write two pages, or 2000 words for your, I'm not going to say, you know, the Jones Smith report, I'm gonna say, write the first draft of the John Smith report. So I'm like, that's really clear now what my action is? Got it. Got it. So this, to me also seems like a challenging one, right? When we think about practices and preferences, because everybody has so many. We're seeing this big debate now, especially in the corporate world of hybrid versus virtual in office. So how do you kind of negotiate? And balance that? Because to me, this to me, it seems like a big negotiation, right? Preferences, and practices is a negotiation, everyone's going to have their own? How do you come to an agreement? Or how do you balance all the different preferences and practices that people have? Yeah, you're absolutely right. You've nailed it, it is a negotiation. And so the way that then gets sorted out will depend entirely on the context. You know, it's like, if I'm like, if I'm the founder and CEO of Microsoft, I'm gonna have my practices and preferences, and I'm probably going to do it the way I want to do it. I'm like, I'm sorry, I don't care who you are.

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If it's you and me, then you and I are going.

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Sometimes it's not who's won wins. But how will we work with these two different approaches? No, John Gottman, one of these great therapists, writing about relationships. He says that 70% of all issues in a relationship are perpetual, meaning they don't get to be solved. I think that's a really freeing insight for two reasons. One is it says, Stop trying to fix the 70% That won't get solved. Okay? You have to learn to negotiate around it. Understand that there's always going to be some difference here. So how do you find a way a best? One is I'm oftentimes reminded to do Oh, that's nice. I haven't heard that. But that's a really helpful phrase. Yeah, sometimes I will joke and I'll make a comment. Like, she'll do something that annoys me, and she'll look at me she'd like Jacob Do this. Do this. She like, closes one eye. That's so cool. I've never heard that before. But I love that. Like, you know what, the way we manage the 70% is we close one eye, or we just go, you know, I'm just cuz I've just done this before the podcast, I just did the washing up and my wife, like I grew up washing up in restaurants. So I know how to stack a drying thing really? Well. My wife just randomly throw stuff on there. I'm like, this is a 70% It's never she's never going to change this. So I'm just going to go. She has no idea how to stack up a dishwasher. I'll just clear it myself. Yeah, and you know, sometimes I make comments to my wife. She's like, you know, Jacob, you do a lot of things that freakin annoy me and I close one eye and you gotta close one eye too. And I'm like, God, you're so smart. Yes. You should stay married to this woman. i Yes, I plan on it. I'm not sure if

39:32

we have to send to this podcast after it's done. That's right. Okay, so practice is perfect. But let me just say 70% not fixable. 30% fixable. Which is also vast. I mean, can you imagine improving most of your relationships by up to 30%? Yeah, it's huge. That's a lot. So that's what we're doing with these practices

and preferences. Okay, let's jump to the next one. The good date followed by the bad day question. So it's good to pair them up, because they're kind of the flip side of that.

40:00

same coin. The key insight, Jacob is our past patterns repeat again, in our future. Even though like, sure you're a different person, it was a different time it was a different company is a different country. It was a different sector. But your past patterns repeat again in your future. So why not notice them? Learn from them, teach them so that you can amplify the best and avoid the worst. So I think when you're talking about this, and this will be interesting to get your feedback based on what you're saying about vulnerability, when you're thinking of something. Yeah. When you're when you're talking about, let me tell you about the best of the relationships, you know, like I'm working with you, you and I co authoring our next book together. And I'm like, great, before we get into the idea of what we're going to write about, when you've co written stuff with people before and it's been amazing. What happened, what did you do? What did they do? And now let me tell you the same Jacob, and we're like, got it. This is already telling us a lot about how we're going to make this successful. But then if I go but Jacob now tell me about a time you've tried to co create something with somebody and it kind of went south, it was disappointing. It was miserable. It never took off, I kind of ended poorly. What happened then who did what. And I think when this is kind of based on kind of what we know about

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the way our brains work, when you when you're talking about the best of times, start by explaining what the other person did. That way you don't take more credit than do you. When you start talking about where relationships went badly. Start where you contributed. That way you don't spend the whole time just talking about how that other person is, you know, yeah, sociopathic knights nutcase. And it's all their fault. You know? Exactly. Close the other AJ can close the other eye. Yeah, so this really made me think a lot about vulnerability because one of the kind of the challenges right is, especially in a workplace setting, sometimes when you're vulnerable, it's received well, and sometimes when you're vulnerable, it's not received well, yeah. And so I've heard several stories from CEOs where sometimes they'd be vulnerable at work. And they'd realize it creates a lot of human connection and other people open up. And that's, that's sort of like the good date. And so if you were to ask some of the CEOs, what have you learned, they would say, well, when I'm vulnerable, it creates trust, my people can come to me with problems and stuff like that, and it creates more connection. And then I interviewed other CEOs, and she asked to be made anonymous. But she was telling me a story about how she wasn't the CEO at the time, she was an executive at the company, and she was working for the CEO. And the CEO freaking hated her. And the challenge is that this person was vulnerable. Early on, when she started there, she talked about how she didn't she never went to college, she didn't have a traditional education, she talked about her insecurities, things that she wasn't confident in. And the CEO at the time used all of these things against her to try to undermine her success and authority and progress. To the point where she this this lady showed up to work one day, only to find that her office was moved down farther from the CEO, then you was before

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she had this person to work with a coach and later found out that his coach was reporting all of the insecurities that she was telling this coach to the CEO, watch. Yeah, that's, that is just, I mean, it's just

an ethical breach of the word is just outrageous. Yes. There's all sorts of stories like this. And then I asked her, I said, Well, did this teach you that you should never be vulnerable again? And she said, No, it taught me that I need to be more careful and selective of who I'm vulnerable with. Yeah. And so I love that story. Because, to me, the good day question is like about success. And the bad day question is about learning opportunities of when things don't go well. And so I talked about it in terms of moments in the book of like, a fixed moment or learning moment. And a fixed moment is something that reinforces why you should never do something again. So in other words, I was vulnerable, somebody use it against me, I'm never going to do it again. That's not a good place to be. It's better to say, Well, I was vulnerable, it was used against me, here's what I learned about the other person about the situation and myself so that going forward, I can do a better job. And so that's immediately what I thought of when you were thinking when we were talking about the good date and the bad date question like the learning moments, and the successes that you can repeat going forward. I've got to build on your story, if I may. I agree with what you're anonymized CEO is saying, which is like it tells me that I've got to be thoughtful about different levels of vulnerability with different people. Maybe we're going to feel my way into it with some people. It's not a hey, we've never met before, but let me show you my childhood scars and my wounds

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but

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But here's what I also believe

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this will be used against you at some stage. Oh, yeah, this won't work at some stage you will be betrayed. I think it is part of the

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it sounds callous to say that the cost of doing business but is the the price you pay for being committed for I vow relationships is disappointment and betrayal. But I don't think because it has not worked once with one person. That means it fails as a strategy. Because I go look,

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I,

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I do this with as many key relationships as I can. It works really well with five, it's ho hum with three, it doesn't work with one and one and 10 screws it up and uses it against me unbalance prizes and punishments. Do I win? I think the answer is probably yes, you win. Because I, you learn better to manage the ones that are working in different ways containing it, you know, trusting God, but tie up your camel, kind of that sort of approach.

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But the benefit you get from the five or six relationships at a flourishing because of this commitment to a best possible relationship outweigh the cost of one or two that have not worked? Couldn't agree more. Yeah, I mean, it's it's

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part of what's going to happen. But I think people need to remember, it's going to happen far less frequently than you think it will happen. But the majority of the time, it will be a positive outcome. But sometimes you will get that negative outcome. So it's worth it. It's worth the risk, right? It's sort of like, you know, if you take a shot in basketball, you're not going to make all the shots, you might make a lot of them, but sometimes it's going to bounce off and you're gonna miss it doesn't mean you should never shoot the ball again. Yeah, it's not even I would say like, this is just part of the risk portfolio you have in being the person who is taking the lead in such an important emphasis. Yeah. Okay, let's do the last question. And then we'll walk through kind of the the Keystone conversation, and that is, how will you fix it when things go wrong? And I think for a lot of people, they think of this, and they'll say, Oh, that's easy. And I'm just gonna say I'm sorry, or like, I'll get some flowers or chocolate or whatnot. Is it that simple?

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It might be

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the power of this question is actually the fact that you're asking the question, and it's there in the language, how will we fix it? So already, there's this great service, built into it as this kind of shared commitment that we're going to fix out when things go wrong. And so there's a built understanding that things will go wrong, you know, so often, you're having this conversation and you're like, at the moment, this is amazing, and we like each other, and we're in the honeymoon period, you know, probably, you're probably never gonna go wrong. But

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of course, it will go wrong. And so there's something about this, which is like this gives permission to keep talking about the health of the relationship, acknowledging when things go off the rails a little bit.

48:09

He's me.

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And then I think, in terms of how will you fix it, when things go wrong, I think there are three broad actions that can be really helpful in repair. The first is being willing to speak up when you've been hurt when you've been some damage has been done, because certainly for many years, and still, to an extent, my natural reaction is to try and swallow it, you know, just endure suffering as my curse. So I'll just have to bear bear the wound, and an ability to to name what's going on is really powerful. Secondly, I think there's something really powerful and being able to say, hey, is something happening over there? Like I practice this, because sometimes I'm a bit obtuse. And I kind of miss that I've done something was said something that cause some tear in the fabric. And so I'll often ask,

49:02

what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said, as a question that allows the other person to maybe say the thing that they've been trying to find a way to say, yeah. And then thirdly, Jacob, I think getting good at knowing how to apologize is a pretty great skill. I gotta work. We we've all had the, we've all heard that, you know, the terrible fake apologies, you know, I'm sorry that you're such a loser that you got offended by this. That doesn't work. But I think there's also a way that you can go too far on the other side and apologize for the stuff that you're not even responsible for. Yeah. So I always think to myself, I'm responsible for my side of the table. My coach, Joe Murphy taught me that my side of the table, and if I screw up through behavior, or action or intent, I'm like, I can see it, I can acknowledge it. I can name the impact it had. I can commit to try not to do it again. A good apology is really powerful. Yeah.

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Okay, so those are the five questions amplify study, good deed, bad date repair question. Now let's jump to the leaders toolkit section as I like to call it.

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Music, you know, I'm gonna any childlike play drums with a spanner and a screwdriver.

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We'll just go

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there we go. Right. Do you have a drum that what was that? No, it was just me pounding on the table. Oh, okay, that sounded pretty good.

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Here we go.

50:34

Oh,

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lady called to transition into the toolkit moment. I love it. Okay, so for this section, we're going to walk through the Keystone conversation questions and maybe see how they can be applied. And we went over one exercise, which was for the amplify question. So maybe we can walk through a practical example of how this would work. And if there's space, you can maybe throw in maybe one or two exercises for some of those. Yeah. So how do we bring this to life? What's the practical application of this? Yeah.

51:04

Okay, folks, my conversation with Michael Bungay Stanier continues, and you're not gonna want to miss it. Because in the leaders toolkit section, which is only available for subscribers, at great

leadership.substack.com, we are going to go into the three stages of the Keystone conversations, and that is the preparation, the actual conversation itself. And then the maintenance piece, we're also going to explore how to actually run a keystone conversation walking through those five elements. And lastly, Michael is going to share some additional exercises that you can use to walk through these five questions. It's a very, very important thing for leaders and really, for all employees, anybody with a job to be able to know how to do, again, only available for subscribers at great leadership.substack.com. And when you subscribe, you're gonna get access to one of these leaders toolkits, episodes every single week from one of my amazing guests, as well as weekly guides. These are in depth articles that I personally write will also get a weekly five minute leadership hack that I learned from one of the world's top CEOs that I then share with you via video, all of this again, for the single subscription and great leadership that subset.com So head over there right now, join the community. I'll see you over there. And I will also see you next week.