

CEO Of A 10,000 Person Company Has Always Struggled To Listen...How Being Vulnerable Solved His Problems!

Jacob Morgan 00:00

You are about to listen to a conversation that I had with Jerry Nursia, the CEO of DTE Energy, it's

00:06

a Detroit based energy company with around 10,000 employees. And my conversation with Jerry is a part of the research that I did for my new book. Leading with vulnerability. I talked to 100 CEOs, just like Jerry, I surveyed 14,000 employees around the world. So if you want to learn more, and hear from other CEOs, just like Jerry, grab a copy of the book, lead with vulnerability.com is the URL. This book literally gave me a panic attack writing it. So that alone is reason enough for why you should be able to copy for yourself and your team, again, lead with vulnerability.com. In the full archive of all these episodes, all these podcasts that we're going to be releasing over the coming weeks and months can be found by going to great leadership.substack.com. Again, that's great. leadership.substack.com

Jacob Morgan 00:55

I hope you enjoy this conversation with Jerry Nursia. Okay, so very first question, I guess before we jump into some of the fun vulnerability stuff. Can you share just a little bit of background about yourself? How did you get to where you are as CEO?

01:20

Sure. So I guess the story starts back in Canada. I was born in Toronto, okay. The son of a son of Italian immigrants. My parents immigrated to Canada from Italy in the 1950s, mid 1950s. You know, Father father was a bricklayer stonemason. My mother was a housekeeper in a hospital for many, many decades. And so grew up in a very blue collar family. I was the first to go to university in Canada, studied engineering, came out of engineering school and started working for a local energy company, gas company, pipeline, company storage, that sort of thing. And worked my way through engineering and operations in the business development, and was recruited by DTE in 2002, to come and start their pipeline business, and then moved up through the ranks there, you know, ran the gas distribution company, then the electric company, then became president of the company, and then in 2019, became the CEO, and most recently, the chairman of the company, chairman of the board. So it's been a great career. How did I get there? I would say, really strong ethics, hard work, straightforward, and deep care for and respect for the people that I serve, which, you know, both our employees and our customers,

Jacob Morgan 02:47

how long have you been at the company?

02:51

It'll be 2020 years this November.

Jacob Morgan 02:55

Wow. That's amazing. Congratulations. Thank you. Alright, so thinking about the vulnerability piece, when you hear the phrase vulnerable leader? What does that make you think? What does that mean to you?

03:10

It means the thing first and foremost is humility, the humility to know that you don't know everything, and that, that you invite others in to help you make better decisions, to give you insights that you may not have ever experienced during or known in your, in your own experience, and in your own life experiences. So I when I think about vulnerability is to jeez, I don't have all the answers. And I do need to be very inclusive to make the best possible decisions. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 03:42

And why is that so important? I mean, you've obviously been at the company for 20 years, you've been leading the company for a while. For you as a leader, why is that vulnerability piece so important for you? Or if it's if

03:56

it's extremely important, and, you know, the ability to create inclusivity, I think just drives greater success and much better decision making. So for example, as a leader, you're always faced with many challenges and problems and even opportunities that perhaps you don't quite know, all the answers as to how to handle those challenges or those opportunities. And I think by being vulnerable, and saying, geez, I may not have all the answers. And if I care to listen, and understand what my people are trying to tell me, I may make a much better decision. And that's something that's been with me since since I became a leader many, many decades ago.

Jacob Morgan 04:33

So So what's the business value or the impact of that? So if you if leaders are vulnerable with their teams, or in your case, for example, what do you notice? The impact is on your team when you are vulnerable with them?

04:50

I would say the greatest impact is high energy. And you know, yeah, like I think the energy levels in a room go way up. You And the creative juices start to come out. And in great abundance people get into a more innovative state. In other words, when a leader walks in and and says I have the answer, or even if your body language is I have the answer for you, and I'm going to tell you what to do kind of shuts the conversation down, I would say that would be a minimum energy discussion. Now, if you want a maximum energy discussion, you walk in and say, Hey, man, we got this problem. Not quite sure. We've got all the answers. And the reason you're here is to help me figure out what is the right way through this problem? And how are we going to find our way through it? And you know, and you probe

and you prod, and all of a sudden, you're feeling like a team that's working together? You all, you all have your sleeves rolled up, and trying to figure out what is the best way through this through this issue, or even through an opportunity, for example, you know, many times we're talking about investment opportunities. And we want to make sure that we make the best possible decision. So energy levels are very high. When you when you when you walk in with an attitude of I don't have all the answers. I'm not the smartest guy in the room on this topic.

Jacob Morgan 06:11

Yeah, it seems like energy. And you You alluded to kind of this better decision making. Can you think of a time where vulnerability led to better decision making? Like, is there a particular story or situation or example that comes to mind where vulnerability led to a better outcome?

06:27

Yeah, I'd say, you know, we had a very significant ice storm that impacted our wires back in, in 2013. And I was very new to the electric business, it was my first week on the job, and it was Christmas Eve, 2013. And we got hit with this massive ice storm in Michigan. And we had some significant number of power outages, a lot of customers without power. And, you know, I went out to the field, I went to the point of activity, because I was wondering, how can we have this much damage on the system to try and understand and see for myself, and I met with the frontline, and spent a lot of time with them in the field, two days in the field, Christmas Eve and Christmas day working with them to understand what was happening, what they were doing to repair the system, and asking them a lot of questions about, you know, how does this happen? And what is it that we could do fundamentally different, and got tremendous insights on how we can improve the system by by listening to the frontline, and one of my models with my younger leaders is that whenever you fail to listen to the people who do the work, you'll live to regret it. And so I think you need to be vulnerable enough to know that people who actually do the work usually know best what's required to improve the condition of what they're up against.

Jacob Morgan 07:43

Now, if you ever think of vulnerability on a scale of like one to five, where five is something that makes you feel very vulnerable, very uncomfortable, what would be a five for you? What kind of a situation or experience would would make you feel that five?

08:00

That a situation make me feel like, I wouldn't say

Jacob Morgan 08:04

you feel most vulnerable at work?

08:09

I would say when we're I guess two things, when we're speaking about family, with our employees, that those are vulnerable moments for me, okay, as to you know, my background, how I grew up, and what makes me tick, and so that people will understand me as a person and see more of my heart, if you will, as a leader, as opposed to, you know, the mechanics of being a leader and all the things we do as business leaders and in in senior positions, but I think letting people know what makes you tick, and

what's important to you. From a value perspective, especially when you're speaking about your own family, I think that's those are usually the most vulnerable moments for me.

Jacob Morgan 08:51

So why is that the most vulnerable for you? So for example, why isn't it asking for help or meeting to a mistake? Or sharing a challenge? What is it about family that makes you feel most vulnerable instead of something else?

09:07

I would say that it's probably the most important thing in my life is, is my family. And so when I'm speaking about my family, I'm really revealing in a fundamental way, who I am as a person and what matters to me. And I also feel that a lot of my leaders and many of my employees, I view them as an extension of that family, and the sense that that's how I run the company. Now that I, when I see many of my employees, I see, you know, family that I grew up with, specially at the frontline, since we were a family that worked with our fans and in the construction business.

Jacob Morgan 09:52

Can you share a time when you were vulnerable with your team or with your company and what the impact was? So it could be something early on in your career, maybe something recent, but just any, any stories or examples or situations come to mind when you had to be vulnerable and, and what happened as a result.

10:10

You know, when a pandemic struck, one of the people were yearning for communication from from me. And I thought that the best way to communicate with them was to show up as my not in a scripted way. But just show up as myself and make myself vulnerable to 10,000 employees. So I started a monthly webcast live webcast with my employees. And what it became nicknamed was asked Jerry, anything. So I started the conversation and it would be live. And, you know, I would speak for five minutes, perhaps seven minutes, I kept that part short, give people a brief business update on, you know, how the business was doing and what I was worried about what was on my mind. And then I would open up to q&a to 10,000 people. And they could ask anything, they could ask anything, and there's up votes. That, you know, the most voted up question is the one that Paula Paul and I host a meeting. And then she watches the screen to see which question is getting the most votes? And that's the one she puts in front of me. And I answer it. And there's really no scripting and all of that. It's you answered from the heart. Yeah. And tell people how you feel and you know, topics range from, you know, how do you feel about the federal election results? How do you feel about the vaccine mandates? How do you feel about this business issue or that business issue? Those are the easy ones, it's when we get into the outside of the business sphere, where they want to know, who is the guy that's running their company, and what you know, or is hurt on important topics. So that's a that's been good. At first, it was kind of nerve racking, I had some of my leaders saying, I can't believe you're gonna do this, you know. And, but I thought, I tell you, it's, I feel like it's created a special bond and relationship between me and the 10,000 employees at dt and they love it. They love those discussions. And you know, sometimes I can't answer the question. And I just don't want to look at I don't have an answer for you, but I'll get you an answer. Or you know what, I'll give them an answer that they don't like, and they respect that too.

Jacob Morgan 12:16

What were some of those hard questions that you had to answer? Like, when you think back to those that ask me anything sessions? What were some of those really like, Wow, I can't believe somebody's asking me that. I like that's, that's a tough question.

12:28

Well, the, you know, there were some that were pretty divisive, right? So for example, vaccine mandates, our population was pretty, pretty split, you know, I would say 60 to 70% of the people 50% of the people voluntarily went and got a vaccine for COVID. And another 20% did so over time. And but there was a good, strong part of the population that did not want to be vaccinated or forced to be vaccinated. And my view was that, you know, we endorsed in the pro vaccine, we're really on me about you need to make them do it. And I said, That's not what I believe, I believe in choice. And I believe that people should make their own personal choices. And I don't know where those boundaries if you start wandering into those boundaries, I'm not sure where those boundaries then move to. And I said, I will make the vaccine available. I am pro vaccine. And the way I described the story to my employees, I said it in two ways to them, I said look at because I got challenged by the people who were against vaccines, and why are you pro vaccine, I said, I'm pro vaccine, because it's, I'm going to tell you a story from when I was a young man. I used to do a lot of hunting in Canada. And you know, two of my friends and I wasn't on this hunting trip. Were hunting. And they chose not to use a safety on our gun. And one friend ended up shooting another friend by accident. Now luckily, the friends survived. But he was permanently maimed by the by, by that accident. And so had he put his head he used his safety on his gun, that accident went on never happened. Yeah. And so I view the vaccine as the same thing as sort of like a safety on a gun. And it's not perfect, but it can certainly prevent some tragic outcomes. And so that's my belief on the vaccine is how I described it to employees. And, but I never forced them to do it. And I took a pretty staunch position and not forcing them to do it. I was almost forced to do it by law. But then law got reversed. And so we never had to do it.

Jacob Morgan 14:38

Yeah, that was pretty hard. When you mentioned like these divisive topics, elections, vaccines, a lot of leaders are very scared to kind of go near that area because they don't want to upset either one part of their employees or the other. But it seems like for you, it was really important to just let people know what you care about what you stand for where you are on these issues, which Yeah, and I love that approach. So when we You did that? What impact did you notice? So I mean, obviously sharing where you stand at that, you know, that's a pretty vulnerable thing. Because you get a lot of people who disagree with you a lot of people who might say, oh, man, you're nuts. But after you did that, and you shared your stance and what you believed in, what did you notice from your, your team? What was the impact of that?

15:17

I would say that, you know, and Paula can obviously she's not part of the interview. But, you know, she can give you feedback. And she got the feedback. And I got the feedback was, hey, I appreciate the candor. appreciate the honesty and also respect your position. And some people agreed with me, and

some people disagreed with me, but we respect one another. And that's what good people do is, is they respect each other's positions?

Jacob Morgan 15:44

Yeah. It seems like disagreement maybe is not a bad thing. If people disagree in a respectful way.

15:51

I think what people don't like is lack of authenticity. Yeah, right. I mean, your feet and Emeline a baloney, you know, sort of a political wishy washy statement, they respect that a lot less than somebody who says, No, that's what I believe. Yeah, and I'm not gonna change my mind on that. But then again, I'm not gonna force you to do something I believe in unless I feel it's gonna, you know, somehow threaten the the mission of the company or the purpose of the company.

Jacob Morgan 16:18

Now, it makes sense. Any other stories or situations come to mind of when you had to be vulnerable at work?

16:26

Again, there's, I think I've mentioned the tree trim story. Other stories, I'm trying to think. Oh, that one comes to mind right now. But I'll think about, I'll think about that.

Jacob Morgan 16:42

Yeah, if anything else comes to mind.

16:46

I'll tell you, one, print three principles I operate under, when I lead people is in AI, is in a very simple, and I try to teach this to many leaders is you need to know your people. You need to care about them. And then they'll give you the privilege of leading them. So if you know, and that's all about investment of time, you need to invest time to know your people, they need to know that you care about them. In other words, you get their back, and then they're gonna leave, they're gonna let you lead them through good and bad thing. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 17:20

Were you always this kind of a leader? You know, early on in your career? Were you more of a command and control? You know, I'm gonna pretend like I know, all the answer is not share about myself, or have you always been like this,

17:35

I would say, the part I just described, which is knowing, you know, investing the time to know people care about them, and then lead them both good and bad, I believe I always had that I from the time I was 24 years old. And I was putting my first supervisory position out on a construction site, building pipelines, I felt that that I was there for the people, that I wasn't there for me that I was there to serve them. And, you know, sort of remove barriers and allow the job to progress and allow the projects to progress. And that I was there to serve them to remove these barriers. And so I had to get to know

them to find out where their barriers were. And I also showed deep care for him, because I would go go to work really, really hard on the things that were in their way. And that's how I've always led now, I will tell you that in moments of crisis, I think I've gotten better not being as directive and being more of a listener. And that's a really hard thing to do. Because I'm a hands on leader. And if I think I've got the answer when I was younger, I'd probably put the answer out there sooner than I should have. Yeah, now I practice, try to practice this as much as I can, which is to sit back and say, Hey, what do you all think about this? And where do we where do you think we should take this? And I listen. And I take all that in? And then I'll make a decision?

Jacob Morgan 18:53

Yeah, it's an important way to think about leadership. So it sounds like you You were always leading this way. So even early on in your career? I mean, have you ever worked for leaders who are not vulnerable or been a part of a culture where vulnerability was not encouraged or supported in any way?

19:13

Have and and I think it really does stifle progress and innovation. Yeah, I think you get greater innovation when you when you allow others to know and believe that Jesus guy is authentic. He doesn't think he has all the answers doesn't think he's the smartest guy in the room on every topic. You know, I might be the smartest guy in the room and on some topics, but not all topics. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 19:37

And then any stories come to mind about working for that non vulnerable leader or company?

19:48

I would say that they really had a hard time connecting with their people. You know, I would say that was the downside of that not being vulnerable. But I also saw that leader Transform over time, and become more vulnerable. And, you know, when I talked to him to this day I, you know, he talks about that transformation, and how fulfilling it was for him to become more vulnerable, and, and open up more and let people know who he was. And that was a big deal. That was a huge transformation that I've worked for leaders that it was so natural for them that I, and I saw the value of it that, you know, use my own way to sort of mimic that as well. And also knew that you could change, you know, the, the leader that was talking about that was made the transformation, I thought, Wow, that's a pretty fundamental transformation. And if that's possible, anything's possible. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 20:41

You know, one of the things that a lot of people are concerned with, I think, when it comes to vulnerabilities, how can I be vulnerable without being perceived as weak? Do you have any thoughts or experiences on that?

20:53

I would say that, you know, vulnerability has to be used to arrive at, you know, optimal decision making, in my opinion, and also, to allow the people to know who's behind this leader, you know, what's the heart of the leader. But I think when it can become weakness, if you overuse it is if you refuse to make decisions, and point the company or your team in a specific direction. And but I think if you are strong

decision maker, and are willing to take risk, and move your organization in a certain direction, or your team in a certain direction, I think the vulnerability to be highly respected to say, wow, this guy that listen, but he also gets things done. Sometimes leaders that are too vulnerable, if you overuse that quality, it's like, you know, you become paralyzed, right? You don't make any decisions. And

Jacob Morgan 21:48

so I'm curious when you say, oh, yeah, how do you ever use what really, you know?

21:53

How do you overuse it? I think that if you're vulnerable, but not assertive, in the end, I think it can be viewed as a weakness, right? So nonverbal leader,

Jacob Morgan 22:08

if you just walk around and say, I need help, I can't do this. I don't know what's going on. You could say that's vulnerability, but in that case, it would be people are like, maybe you shouldn't be having this job.

22:18

Exactly. I get it, you need to move the organization forward. Right? what leaders do is they they create hope for the future. Right? Yeah, they point to the point of future place and say, here's where we think here's where I think we can go. And, and if you're vulnerable, how about how you get there and, and take the input, but still remain fixated on the North Star of where we need to get to, I think you get a lot of respect.

Jacob Morgan 22:45

I think vulnerability, our novice leaders have a unique challenge when it comes to vulnerability because they also have that leadership piece. Whereas if you're not a leader, it may be it's a little I don't wanna say easier, but less pressure on you to take that second step. Because as a leader, like you said, You got to have that confidence, the vision, you can say, I need help. But you got to have that leadership piece that comes in it, which I think is very, very important.

23:10

Yeah, I wrote down. You know, it's funny that you mentioned that because I keep a few things on my desks on my desk that I refer to once in a while, and I, I wrote down three things lead with confidence, grace and compassion. Yeah, you know, and I think if you manage all three of them, well, you can, in the grace and compassion part, are really about vulnerability.

Jacob Morgan 23:35

Yeah. Well, so tell me about the the grace and compassion piece. What is compassion, for example, mean for you, when you say lead with compassion?

23:43

Well, that's knowing about, you know, compassion is sometimes people are up against some pretty tough situations, whether it's at work or at home. And I think you gotta, you gotta leave room for that. Right? So that's what I would call compassion is that you need to have some level of empathy as a

leader to be an effective leader. And, you know, an empathy I think, is a key part of, you know, being vulnerable. And, you know, grace is, sometimes things don't go the way they should, you know, and I can be pretty tough when things don't go well. But, you know, you I keep thinking about this word word, especially in these tumultuous times that we've lived in in the last two to three years as leaders and employees is give each other a little bit of grace you know, things aren't perfect sometimes and or another way to say it is give the guy a break, you know, or gala break that let's go at it again. Let's try again, right. Yeah. Without without destroying their, your or hurting so badly, their confidence or their psyche to be able to continue forward, right? Yeah. Couldn't hurt or encouragement support.

Jacob Morgan 24:58

If you've ever been vulnerable at work in had somebody use it against you or have had vulnerability backfire?

25:05

You know, I, the only time I've had things backfire on me with leaders is, you know, I bring my leaders in pretty close in terms of trust, and I've gotten quite a bit of slack and not slack. But again, quite a bit of room to maneuver. Right. And, you know, knowing that they're an expert in a certain area. And sometimes, sometimes that can be taken advantage of, you know, and it's not ended well, right. So that's something that I've learned that it's good to bring people really close. But it's also good to have some boundaries, if you will, between your leaders, and your people.

Jacob Morgan 25:45

So now, I'm curious, you say taken advantage of, is there a story that comes to mind of, or can you share? What what happened without giving? Maybe? I don't know, names? Yeah.

25:56

Yeah, well, I'll tell you this. You know, and I think if you were to talk to my leaders, that I'm very loyal to my people, right, my greatest strengths is that I will support them and do everything I possibly can to make them successful. And sometimes that can be viewed as, geez, you know, I, I can't do any wrong and RCSi is right. And, and then it might be a time where that it becomes a rude awakening, where if you're not delivering, or you're not leading in the way that you shouldn't, usually it's more about the way they lead, as opposed to not delivering, delivering, delivering power, we can fix, you know, the most leaders, they get to the levels that I work with now, can do quite well. But once they violate that trust, where they lead in an appropriate way, so they can, it's usually not a good outcome.

Jacob Morgan 26:49

So that's happening, I mean,

26:52

I've been a behavior that you know, you need to if I learned something as a leader, is that you need to jump on those bad behaviors right away, and try to bring it and try to bring them back in line. And so that that's probably an area that I always constantly look for now and try to be more vigilant about.

Jacob Morgan 27:14

Are you able to share more details around what happened? So did you? Did you, for example, share something with a leader leader took that and kind of like shared it with somebody else? Or what what was kind of a context around that? That problem?

27:30

Yeah, it was a, I'll say it this way, we were working on a very large investment opportunity. Okay. And there was a lot of friction between that person and the client. Okay. And, you know, really, that our my person needed to move to a different place, right, in order to save the relationship. And there was a lot of arrogance there. And, and there was a feeling that Geez, you know, Jerry won't make this move. And while I did, and, and so, yeah, it just was not a perfect outcome. Yeah. I don't know if I could give any more details. Because somebody reads the book. If that person reads the book, they might know it's them.

Jacob Morgan 28:19

So where was the vulnerability in there? Because Because you said basically, like you get you're very loyal to your people, sometimes you get close to them. So

28:26

yeah, it was the loyalty, you know, this person had worked for me for a long time. And, you know, we had built, we have built the business together, and he was like, family, right? And so it was like, Okay, this guy will never do anything to anything adverse to me, but I wasn't my intention was not to do adverse things, but it was almost a self selection thing in the end. Yeah, you know, we're

Jacob Morgan 28:53

so in situations like that, you know, one of the things that happens to a lot of people is if they get burned, so to speak, or if they, you know, let's say they share something at work or ask for help, and it gets used against them, they tend to shut down and they say, you know, what, screw this I was vulnerable once it backfired. It hurt me Never again. So if that happens, too, and let's say you share something about your family and somebody passes it on to somebody else, or you ask for help and all of a sudden, people are saying, oh, Jerry's incompetent, he you know, he doesn't even know how to do this. How do you get past that to like, still continue to be vulnerable still be okay with with sharing and talking about these things?

29:34

I, I have, you know, you are who you are. Right. And I think this I've had a strong ability to lead obviously because I've gotten to the role that I'm at. And so a lot of it is about confidence in yourself and knowing that I am who I am and I've gotten this far. So I must be doing the right things. And and I think fundamentally change who we are. Is, is always a mistake. You You know, that was something I was coached on by one, you know, some of my mentors, it's just be you, you're gonna do just fine if you're you and I think that's what you know, sometimes your greatest strength is can also be your weakness, and you just have to know that and, and use it use it wisely.

Jacob Morgan 30:17

Yeah, man. And I like the way you phrase that your greatest strength, or your greatest weakness can sometimes be your greatest strength. So it sounds like in your case, you don't recommend that people just kind of shut down, you just need to kind of learn from that experience and kind of keep going.

30:38

Look for signals, you know, like if you're overusing it or overdoing it. You know, I think as you get older, you get wiser, and you learn from your mistakes and build on your strength. Right? And that'll help shut down the weakness.

Jacob Morgan 30:52

Yeah, no, that makes sense. And you said you worked with, with coaches, you worked with people who kind of helped you kind of go down this road, which is, which is great. Do you have any advice for people who want to be vulnerable at work, but they don't know where to begin, or where to start or what to do?

31:12

I would say that, if you feel like, you need to be more vulnerable, that you do it with people you trust the most, you start with them, and practice with them, because I think they will respect you for it. And, and that's how I would start is picked one or two colleagues that you respect a lot and you feel like they're trustworthy and and loyal to you and care about you, as a person and care to see a develop. i That's how I would start

Jacob Morgan 31:42

one of the I think really interesting aspects of vulnerabilities also like for brand new employees, because for example, if you remember, you know, when you were right out of school, you got your first job, chances are, you know, like, on day one, you don't want to be the person who's like, Hey, I don't really know how to do this, or, Hey, I need help with this. So for him, this is, you know, where I think a lot of the snowball effect comes into play, right? You start off on day one, you don't feel comfortable being vulnerable. And all of a sudden, you're there for months, a year, two years, and just the vulnerability never gets built into you like, like a muscle that you need to exercise. So for those more junior entry level employees, how do you be? Or how can you become vulnerable? Without that perception of like, dammit, we shouldn't have hired you, Jerry, because you're already asking questions on day one. Like, how do you balance that for new new employees?

32:40

That's a great question. And I just brings back a vivid memory for me, you know, when I was 2324 years old, I shows it was probably 24 years old, I went into the engineering construction department of the gas company that I worked for. And, you know, there was a lot I didn't know, you know, about the technical aspects of the job, especially the highly technical components that we were installing, you know, and, and of course, safety, in that business in the natural gas business is paramount, right. So what you put in the ground, has to be abundantly safe. And I was the guy that was determining what was going to go on the ground. So I had to learn a lot. And they were my boss and sit me down. He was a really tough guy, you know, really, kind of gruff kind of gentleman and typical construction, engineering boss, you know, and, and he was also a sizable fellow, you know, so he had the statue that

went along with that physical stature that went along with it. And he sat down a bunch of young engineers, and he said, you know, what? The best engineer young engineer is the one that admits what he doesn't know. And I'll respect that all day long. I'll and here's my phone number. didn't have cell phones back then. But you know, here's my, here's my, you got my work number. Here's my home number anytime a day or night, that you feel like you don't know the answer to something really important. I want you to call me. And I'll give you the answer. Because the most dangerous guy, most dangerous engineer, young engineer will be the one that thinks he knows. Or she knows the answers, but doesn't really know. So err on the side of asking more questions and more clarification, so that you do know, so you can be abundantly Sure. And so, that kind of got drilled into me at a very young age by this gentleman. And, you know, he was one of my mentors in my career. And, you know, I've always been so my advice to young people is, there's no you know, there's a, there's a very old saying, and it's a cliché, there's no dumb questions, there really isn't. And most wise people, when you ask them questions, they're gonna they're just gonna want to teach you most people want to teach, you know, and and they'll give you and you're given them the opportunity to teach you and they'll respect you for that. So ask lots of questions. Don't ever be afraid. Ask questions.

Jacob Morgan 35:01

And it sounds like if that's not encouraged, or your leaders don't support that, maybe you need to rethink the team or the company you're a part of.

35:08

Yes, exactly. Okay. One of

Jacob Morgan 35:11

the things you also mentioned is confidence, which I think is also very, very important for vulnerability. How do you build that confidence? You know, obviously, the more experience you get probably confidence gets built. And you know, you've been at the company for 20 years now, you probably allow a lot of confidence in what you're doing. But for people who have who haven't been there that long, or maybe they're they're new to the industry, and you do a role, how do you build confidence?

35:34

Well, I would say, confidence is built by served in several ways. One is small victories, you know, don't try, don't swing for the home, run every time. And, you know, small base, hits, doubles, triples, and then every once in a while, go for the fence, take some risk, especially when you're young. You know, my advice to people, people ask me, how did you get here, I said, I took career risk, I always took jobs, nobody else wanted, and worked my butt off to be successful in those jobs. And that builds confidence, you know, once you, you slay a big, a big opportunity. And that that's just something that builds natural confidence. And then you do the next one, and the next one. And your confidence just continues to build its building blocks. And then sometimes your confidence gets shattered, you know, you're gonna have failures. And what you have to say is okay, I'm gonna regroup. I'm gonna learn from that and go at it again.

Jacob Morgan 36:26

Yeah, I like that approach. Would you say that you have a trusted network inside your company of people who you can be vulnerable with? Or are you vulnerable? With everybody equally like your entire company of 10,000? People?

36:39

I'd say that, obviously, there's degrees of vulnerability. And, you know, I would say that with a trusted network, you're probably I am more comfortable being more vulnerable. Yeah. You know, obviously, the broader the group, and the less I know them, I will be vulnerable. But you know, there's degrees of vulnerability now, right? I would say, depending on who you're interacting with.

Jacob Morgan 36:59

So tell me a little bit more about the degrees of vulnerability and how you think about that. So what is when you say degrees of vulnerability is a kind of like a scale, you imagine where you're most vulnerable things like your family, you're only going to share with a couple group of people and like, the less vulnerable something is, the more you'll share it with? Kind of?

37:20

Yeah, I wouldn't say that. You know, what I'm known for you asked me a question, I'm gonna give you an answer. Yeah. I mean, that's probably the first level of vulnerability, I'm always gonna give you an answer of what I believe, and what my thoughts are on a topic. That's one level of vulnerability. And I would say that I make that available to all my employees. Right. Now, that level of vulnerability. I think as Yeah, you know, we come closer to the, you know, the, to the family piece, which is, you know, most near and dear to my heart. I would say that, that it would depend on on the situation as to how I might answer that question, or, or have that conversation? I mean, I've volunteered as well as I would, perhaps with somebody that I am very close to? And isn't that trusted, more trusted network, if you will?

Jacob Morgan 38:10

Yeah. And how do you what do you look for in these people? So when you're trying to create this trusted network? Well, I guess a few questions. One is, is it like an official network? Like, do you actually go up to some of your peers and say, hey, you know, I would really like it, if I can confide in you and share things? Like did you build that kind of a relationship where you or you just started doing it one day? And how do you decide what that network looks like, for other people who want to build that kind of a network for themselves at work?

38:40

I would say, you build that over time, you know, and I've got the great fortune in the job that I'm in that most of the people I've that are in my inner circle I've worked with for probably, you know, at least close to a decade, and some of them multiple decades. Right? Yeah. So some of these people I've known for 30 years, 35 years, you know, we started in different companies and and ended up at DT together. So you know, there's, so there's a pretty tight knit group that I've developed really strong relationships with and and others that I've sought out over time, they're starting to building new relationships with and what do I look for, I look for a diversity of thought, you know, and I look for people that are like me, but also not like me, you know, in a way they think about things because sometimes, if you only you know, interact or exchange ideas or thoughts with people that are more like you, you may not make the

optimal decision, right. Or Or think about things in the most optimal, optimal way. So I seek out a diversity of opinions. I sort of shopped the idea if you will, or are you trying to get people's input, either privately on a pretty sensitive topic, so that I can make the best possible decision.

Jacob Morgan 39:59

What about the If you don't have that benefit of working with somebody for a long time, so in your case, it was working with somebody for, you know, 10 years or something like that. But for a lot of people, they don't have a lot of co workers they worked with for 10 years. So what do you are there qualities that you look for?

40:17

I look for, you know, obviously, discretion, you know, is important. And also that we seem to, you know, if it's early on, it would be, you know, that we've had some kind of interaction that would give me have been able to watch you and kind of ascertain that you're a trustworthy person. So trust is important. Discretion is important, I think discretion is part of trust. And that your agenda is pure, right, you're not going to try and use, you have to make a judgment, or you're going to try to use what I told you, against me or for me. And that's a judgment. And that's trial and error, especially if you're a younger employee, and you're just starting out and you get burned a couple times, and you move on,

Jacob Morgan 41:07

you bring up a good point, there is a little bit of trial and error, I feel like a lot of people are very, they're trying to look for all the answers to make vulnerability perfect. But I think the reality is that as you become vulnerable, you you, to your point, you're gonna get burned a couple of times, you're probably gonna get hurt a few times. You're, you know, that's just how life works. That's just how the world works. And it's like, it's not avoidable.

41:30

That's humanity. Right. But at the same time you got before you got burned, you got a little bit of value out of that. Yeah. And that you take the value and say, Okay, well, that doesn't work anymore. So now I know better.

Jacob Morgan 41:42

Can you think of a time when somebody was vulnerable with you at work? And what the impact was on you as a leader? And do you have any stories or situations that come to mind? Where, where that happened?

41:54

Yeah, it you know, people have told me there are a lot of people have told me their life stories, and some are very inspiring, you know, and to say, wow, you know, against all those ads, you got here, right. And I felt, I really do like to learn about people's life story, because it helps me understand the leader and the person that I'm dealing with. And just feel that's part of, you know, my premise of knowing someone so that you can care about him. And, and lead them. So I usually, when people are telling me, When are being vulnerable about something I'm listening, listening pretty intently, you know,

to try to understand, okay, how does now I know and connecting the dots as to, okay, now I see why this person behaves this way, in certain circumstances.

Jacob Morgan 42:43

Yeah. And what impact does that have on you as a leader when somebody is sharing your life story, or they're confiding in you or being vulnerable? How does that make you feel?

42:53

Sometimes, like I said, it can be pretty inspiring. Sometimes it can be sad, you know. And so you're gonna, you're thinking, Wow, man, I think I had a tough, you know, but this person got here with all of these challenges, or sometimes it can be pretty inspirational about some of the things that they accomplished and did in their lifetime and some obstacles that they overcame, it's pretty cool. I mean, it's just, it's really good to get to know people. It's fun. I enjoy doing it.

Jacob Morgan 43:21

Does it create you think more trust or engagement or anything like that? Or is it?

43:26

Absolutely, yeah, I think if you listen, and, and, you know, respect, you know, the privacy of the conversation, I think it does create a bond and trust. Sometimes, you know, being the engineer, you want to help people solve whatever they're up against. Yeah. And as I've gotten older, you learn that my wife teaches me this, sometimes I just want you to listen. You know, I don't want you to have the answer. I don't want you to come up, start coming up with solutions. Yeah, in plants, and action plans, you know,

Jacob Morgan 43:57

our wives must know each other because my wife does the same thing.

44:02

It's amazing to me, I was having that conversation. My wife today is saying that was on a walk with her and her girlfriend. They're talking about all this stuff. And I'm going Oh, my God, you know? And but it's that's how they listen. You know, I think women are really good at listening, and being compassionate and, and building that trust and bond, I think, probably much more efficient at it than men are. That's my that's my sense. Anyway. Yeah,

Jacob Morgan 44:27

I agree. Sometimes I try to give solutions to my wife and she's like, Jacob, I just need you to listen, I don't need like, you don't need to solve it. And I'm like, damn it. Alright, fine. Yes, that's right. So I have a couple of questions for you. But I kind of just wanted to take a minute and see if there any other stories, experiences or thoughts that come to mind because ultimately, the most valuable thing for the book for the podcast for anything is really stories and experiences. And you had a couple of for example, when the first time you became a leader, I love that story about what your manager said about calling him giving your phone number Any other stories or situations come to mind either good or bad when it comes to vulnerability?

45:09

You know, I, one of my leaders, you know, we serve a very impoverished part of the state. Right. And, you know, I had grown up in Canada did not really understand the culture in Detroit, extremely well. And one of my leaders one day said to me, you know, you've come from a different country to work here, and you're gonna be, you know, serving many people in the city of Detroit, what do you understand about the city of Detroit? And really, the only thing I understood and, you know, growing up in Canada was what I saw on the news about Detroit, right, which can be a pretty jaded view of the people of Detroit. And he says, you know, your work is out there. It's not, it's not in here, it's not nice conference rooms, you know, you need to get out in the community. And so I decided that, I thought, Okay, I need to go look for what's right in Detroit, and what's good in Detroit. So I started going to churches in Detroit, Baptist churches, Church of God in Christ churches, and, and I started attending their services, and, and befriended some of the pastors. And I gotta tell you, it really changed my opinion of Detroit, you know, Detroit in the news can be portrayed as a pretty violent city. But when you sit in those churches, and you see the people that are there, and you spend time with them, and you eat with them, and and go into the neighborhoods of Detroit, and deep into the neighborhoods of Detroit, you really start to see the beauty of Detroit, and the people, the beauty of the people of Detroit. And so that was that's my advice is when you're uncertain about something, don't jump to conclusions, go see it for yourself, experience it for yourself, and then then decide how you feel about it. And that was one other experience for me when I was new at dt.

Jacob Morgan 47:00

Yeah, I like that story. Is there a difference for you between being vulnerable versus being put into a vulnerable situation? Because it seems like with being vulnerable, you have a choice, it's more intentional, and it's something you decide on. Whereas being thrown in a vulnerable situation. I mean, you might just be talking to somebody, you're doing something and all of a sudden, you just get thrown into a situation where you feel very, very vulnerable. For example, I don't know, maybe you're doing an Ask me anything. And somebody raises their hand and says, Jerry, you know, you're doing a terrible job leaving the company, the stock price is going like, right, that's a very vulnerable situation. So is there a difference for you about how you think about those two things? And have you ever just been thrown into a vulnerable situation without, you know, kind of your intention behind it?

47:50

Yeah, I think it happens to everybody, right? I, you know, you get thrown into situations where, oh, my God, I'm not sure I got this one. Right, and you're starting to feel vulnerable that way, and that, that's a pretty intense emotion, much more intense than in than when you're intentionally being vulnerable, right? I mean, when you have, when you feel like you have control, I think the emotion is probably a higher level emotion than when you find yourself in a vulnerable situation, whether it's, you know, physical vulnerability, or, you know, situational vulnerability at work, whatever it might be. But, yeah, I mean, my advice there at work would be, just be cool. You know, and don't overreact. Right. And time has a way of fixing a lot of things. So and also seek out help, you know, if you're feeling vulnerable about, you know, how you're doing things or how you're being perceived, I mean, talk to somebody about it, talk to your trusted network about it, and work through it. Talk to your partner about it, you know, at home. Yeah, it was a good thing, like talk about,

Jacob Morgan 48:57

yeah, some of these things. It's also it's like, you can't, you can't figure everything out, I have a solution for everything. I mean, sometimes it's gonna just gonna just take being thrown into a vulnerable situation to kind of see, see how you respond and what happens? Yeah. Well, when you think of vulnerable and I only like a couple minutes left. But when you think of vulnerability, what are some of the other attributes or qualities that you think are important for leaders that kind of build around vulnerability and make it more successful? I always think for example of like those Avengers, those Marvel movies, and they have those Infinity Stones, and you bring all the stones together to unleash this great power. So if the if the power is vulnerability, what are all those like stones that need to come together to make that vulnerability? Really powerful for you?

49:42

I would say, you know, humility is like the number one feature right? If you've got a big ego, or you're very arrogant, you know, you're have hubris, you know, uncontrolled hubris. I think it's pretty tough to be vulnerable, right? So I think humility is one of the major building blocks I would say that the other one is trustworthiness, you know, and integrity. I think I'll help create vulnerability. I think confidence also helps great vulnerability, that you're confident enough for yourself to be vulnerable, and show people who you are, you know, I think that that comes with with time as well. And that's why I think you scale up on vulnerability as you as you go through through life. But those are probably the big building blocks, you know, trying to think if there were any others those sorts. Yeah, yeah. Those are the ones I think of.

Jacob Morgan 50:43

Okay. Well, again, if you think of anything else, after our call, you can always email me and and let me know, maybe one or two questions for you. One is, have you ever struggled with being vulnerable? Have there ever been times where you were just like, can't do it?

51:00

Yeah, I have, I mean, you do earlier in your career than you do later? You know, I, you know, when I first started getting into more senior roles, sometimes I used to get feedback from the broader team, like, beyond my, my immediate team that these people don't, you know, want to get to know you, they want to know who you are, who you are as a person. I'm thinking, wow, I'm pretty friendly guy. You know, I talk to everybody, and but are you sharing enough to let people know? What makes you tick? Right. So that was something I had to practice it and that takes time. I mean, that's the practice. And I think you you become better at it as you go. And then eventually, you're just doing it naturally. And people saying, wow, you know, that was, that was a really great discussion, where you, you know, showed your vulnerability and but you know, after a while, as you practice, it just becomes very normal, very natural for you.

Jacob Morgan 51:53

And last question for you, do you have a leadership hack, technique, strategy, something that you have done over the course of your career that you think is unique to you, that helped make you more successful?

52:05

I would say it's the relationship building with the people that I work with most closely. And I believe that that's how I provide inspiration now is that, you know, making people feel like they're part of the team, you know, taking the time to get to know them. And also that they genuinely know that, that I care about them as people. I think that investment of time and the relationship. There's it just, it just creates great teams and teams that do incredible things together. And that's been my, my, that's probably been what I've been what's got me to where I am today.

Jacob Morgan 52:45

Yeah. And when you say investment of time, like, what does that mean, investment of time? Is it just like, hey, how's it going? Let's go for coffee. Like, what does that investment of time actually look like to get to know people?

52:58

Well, yeah, it's things like, you know, Hey, Jacob, if you and I are trying to build a relationship by first thing I started doing is spending time with you, I come to your office, in your office, we, you know, shoot the breeze about, I start to find out what's important to you. And, and then I start to respect what's important to you, right? If you're someone that has a young family, for example, and you need to get home at a certain time, but I know that you work your butt off, right, I'm not going to worry about the fact that you're leaving at 5pm. And because I know you're working after you're done with your kids, you know, gone through your activities with your kids and that you're contributing, so don't get hung up on. So I try to be flexible with my people to accommodate what's important to them. So but you're not going to know what's important to him. Unless Unless you invest time being with them. So you could be go for coffee, you could grab lunches, dinners, and all of that is about getting to know one another and then get into getting into the thick of things with each other. You know, like, let's work on something really important together. And then you really find out what people are made of and what what's important to them even more. So.

Jacob Morgan 54:03

Yeah, well said. Well, those are all the questions I had for you, Jerry, thank you so much for taking time out of your day. I really, really appreciate it