

CEO Topgolf, Artie Starrs: How Leaders Stay True To Themselves & Share Their Experiences Without Oversharing

Jacob Morgan 00:00

You are about to listen to a bonus conversation that I had with Artie stars. He is the CEO of Top Golf, which is a golf entertainment company they have around 25,000 employees already is one of the over 100 CEOs that I interviewed for my brand new book, leading with vulnerability. And I'm releasing a couple of these interviews. So you can see what some of these conversations were like including this one with Artie, if you want to learn more, or grab a copy of the book, head to lead with vulnerability.com. And you can also head over to our substack community, which is where I'm going to be sharing more insights on this. That is great leadership a.substack.com. When you hear the phrase vulnerable leader, what pops to mind? So obviously, I'm writing a book on leadership and vulnerability. So we were kind of combine those two things. What what does that make you think of?

00:58

Well, vulnerable is a very intentional word. And the words that come to mind on vulnerable. Authentic is certainly one. Removing distance is kind of another embedded, whether it's your audience or your co workers. And you know, my personal belief is authenticity. And removing that perceived or real distance between the people that you work with is kind of fundamental to being a leader, at least in the culture we live in today, it may or may not have been 3040 50 years ago, just based on where the professional world might have been. But to me, it's intimately connected. And I'm not quite sure how you, not everybody needs to be similarly vulnerable, but they need to be vulnerable in their own in their own way. It's kind of table stakes for modern leadership.

Jacob Morgan 02:01

So when you say similarly vulnerable, what do you what do you mean? I mean,

02:09

and I was actually coaching somebody recently on this, who was asking my kind of advice on it. You got to be true to yourself. So not everyone is as extroverted. Not everyone has had the same experiences. But everyone has had their ups and downs and the things that have shaped them and molded them professionally and personally. And they are a part of who you are. And they need to be represented on your platform as a leader. At the same time. You can't quote unquote, overshare, or be self indulgent with your vulnerability. So it's this balancing act of being true to yourself, and what is you are comfortable with authentic way. But also recognizing what the audience is able and willing to receive and what is relevant to them, because you run the risk in particular, as a CEO, that your vulnerability can be self indulgent, it can be about you only, as opposed to the experiences that have shaped you and made you the person that you are that are relevant for the group that you're leading.

Jacob Morgan 03:28

So would you say self indulgent, any given example of how vulnerability could be self indulgent for a leader? Like how would you say for it to be self indulgent?

03:41

If it has no, I put it through two filters. Ultimately, there's got to be some business purpose. Like there's got to be an intent around the business, that intent could be fostering better leaders, that intent could be emotive and not financial, if that makes sense. It could be in the leadership development front people development front, it doesn't have to be build trust or connect with people, something like that. Yeah. But there has to be like a business purpose. And, you know, the second filter I would put in it is there's some risk with vulnerability that it ends up being a personal therapy session. That Hey, you, you you spill your guts on something, and it's, it's all about you. Yeah. And that's, that's just kind of a no no, as a leader, when when you when anything you do that you make it all about you. That is culturally off. So if we reflect on, you know, the work environment that my father might have worked in at, you know, he worked at PepsiCo for many years in the 80s and 90s. There was vulnerability at that time, too. It probably wasn't as progressive as we might call it today. And there's certainly things that I might do that he would he would look at me and say, Boy, that's not how CEO I worked for did it? But that's okay. But you just can't cross that line where you make it about yourself are entirely about yourself. Yeah, like

Jacob Morgan 05:21

the intentionality. So basically not being vulnerable for the sake of being vulnerable, but having some sort of like, why are you doing it? That's right. And I think that's actually more relevant for a leader. Even if you're not a CEO, but just leading anybody as opposed to just being an individual contributor, because an individual contributor you don't have that maturity, you don't have that extra responsibility of leading and guiding others and motivating them. So yeah, I think it's that extra pressure for leaders to kind of have the intention behind it. But the bar is higher for us. Yeah, ya know, for sure. Um, can you share a time, a story? Anything that comes to mind for you when you were vulnerable at work? Yeah.

06:06

There's a few. There's a few examples. Probably the most poignant one. When I used to work at yum brands,

Jacob Morgan 06:18

did you remember David Novick? Oh, yeah. Oh, I interviewed him as well. Yeah, David's a great guy. Oh, small one. I also interviewed million Ponte,

06:29

Mille and yeah, I used to work with villain. Oh, really?

Jacob Morgan 06:31

Oh, man. Small world. Yeah. But those guys are pretty good, too.

06:36

Yeah, they're great guys. Yeah, man, I think is well known, in large part because of David as leadership, development, you know, powerhouse in place. I mean, that's, it's ultimately why I went there, and why I have such great memories of working there. And I became a much better leader working there. But yeah, I think coming out of what was the originally the PepsiCo tradition, you know, we were, you know, at a place like Yum, you get coached up, you get coached on coaching. I mean, it's, it's pretty intense in terms of, and we have David to thank for so much of that. But we have, we, we had frequent off sites, and big big groups, small groups, but in the small group settings, where it were, it was, you know, call it not my direct reports, but once or twice removed, and you're trying to train the next level of leaders. And we would do these when I was the CEO pizza, you do two, three times a year, and you'd go to someplace. And, you know, at each one of those where I would share my life story with, with business intent, I learned something pretty meaningful about myself, and then also the impact it can have around people who otherwise might look at your resume or might look at your public persona, as distant. So, you know, the story, which probably my personal story isn't relevant for today's conversation, but just going through the things that have gone well and gone poorly, throughout my personal journey where my family was from things that little things along the way that impacted me and made me the person that I am, was surprising to people not because my life is necessarily any more interesting than anyone else's. But just the willingness to share the pitfalls along the way and so on, you have people for the rest of my time there's a you know, when you said this, this had a huge impact on me because of this, this and this and you create it to my earlier point you truncate the distance between what someone perceives these big jobs and the people are like in them, and you just make it more human. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 09:13

But when you think back is there like a particular because you know, one of the things that that people are really interested in are like stories or examples of you know, when when was already vulnerable? Like what what was happening? What was the situation? So, can you think of a, like a specific moment or a time when maybe you shared one of these things and kind of walk through like, what was going on? Was it a business meeting? What did you say? What did you notice when you when you were vulnerable with people? Let me for example, Milton Milton, I think he was Milland. Maybe it was the CEO of Genpact. He told me or No, I was talking to the CEO of concentrics the other day and they have 300,000 People and he told me he he feels very vulnerable when he's in these one on one meetings with people and they're giving him candid feedback. And he was telling the story of like one of these one on one meetings that he was in and how he was receiving that feedback and how he was getting so uncomfortable. Something something specific like that, that would kind of narrate the vulnerability piece, I guess.

10:21

Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 10:26

And it can be from early on in the career to doesn't even need to be recent.

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I'll give, I'll give two examples. One was, it was in probably 2014, or 15. I was recently the president of Pizza Hut, named the president pizza at us, we had a Global Leadership Summit. And it was, was it Africa, it was my first time remember, first or second time was the it was the biggest presentation that I was gonna give, that I had given it young to date. And my strength, as a leader was more intimate settings, these big meetings was not my thing. I don't have mentioned working with David Novak, David is really powerful on the stage. He has, he loves that. He loves it. And he's awesome at it. My style is a little different. And I had gotten feedback from my coach, like, hey, you know, we think you can go the distance, but you're gonna have to get better at this. Yeah. And so I got trained, and I got better, and then, you know, still working on it. But this presentation that I gave was memorable in the sense that it was well received. The feedback was, was good, but the conversation and the story with which I told about our business was mostly the things we'd gotten wrong. It was mostly a dissection and an honest assessment and in and in front of a group saying, hey, here are the things where we've let you down, here are the things where, and I own it, and it stops with me and look at me, and here are all the things that we're going to do to to get this brand on track. And, and we did and it, it. It served it served our team, well, it sort of served the, because they felt like okay, there was kind of air let out of the balloon. And, you know, I said it in front of, you know, five 600 people and so on. I think on a more on a more intimate level. You mentioned these smaller groups and a group of eight to 10 people when you get away and you get out of town and people's minds are we have this program called Heart styles, which was run by a husband wife, business that ultimately young bought

Jacob Morgan 13:00

hearts that you've never told me about that one.

13:04

Yes, they bought we bought it after David left. Okay, but it was a it was the couple's name was is Steven Moore, a clinician who worked very closely with David in developing a lot of the stuff. And what when you get away, I mean, it's important to get away, I think one insight I would give, it's very hard to do this, like in your office, you kind of gotta get away you gotta get on the road, you gotta get in a place where everyone is similarly uncomfortable. And you know, specific things in my life that spoke to I think the leaders of that time. One was when I was growing up. I was one of these kids that was like, okay to pretty good at a bunch of things, but not really that great at anything. And I, I often share this story I ended up playing, you know, I ended up playing, playing competitive golf and got got decently competitive golf. And one of my leadership platforms is, hey, for a long time, you can work on your weaknesses, but at a certain point, you got to lean into your strengths. And I shared a story of I share this story often of when my I want really wanted to be a tennis player as a kid. And we had a foreign exchange student come over, and he whipped my butt. The whole summer. I found out he was ranked I think like 130 in France. I didn't realize it was all of France. I thought it was just for 14 year olds. And my mom tells this story frequently that literally one day and I was getting pretty good at golf. I put I put my tennis racket down and I moved to golf and kind of the rest was history. And you It's not like a particularly like, told in a small group told to the right people told the right time. It's an expression, at least for me of like, hey, people think the CEOs are perfect. Everything's worked out for me along the way. There's a gazillion things in my life that I either wasn't good at. made big mistakes at. And if you can just make the CEO jobs feel approachable and have everyone leave these conversations like, Hey, you can be there too. I was terrible at public speaking god awful. And worked at it, and got to be pretty

good. And I have my own way of doing it now. But too often people think like, oh, my gosh, you were born perfect. You're perfectly educated. Everything you've ever done is perfect. And it's just not how it works out. So I don't know, I don't know that I have the perfect answer for you on this. I could. I could self indulgent tell you a bunch of things about my life that are irrelevant, but

Jacob Morgan 16:10

I'm sure they're all well, it's the personal stories that I think people are most interested in. Yeah. Because it's, you know, oftentimes CEOs don't share personal stories. I mean, I've had CEOs share terrible times as they were going through divorces, and how that impacted them at work and made them feel vulnerable. I talked to the CEO of Swiss Air, who told me he was always a command and control CEO. And then one day, you know, his plane crashed 100 people died. And that transformed how he was as a leader. And he became very vulnerable after that. So I've heard all sorts of personal stories. I think people, people like them, it makes it more human right? Yeah.

16:46

Yeah. The, the most, the most meaningful leader in my life was my grandfather. And so I went to, I went to Princeton for college as an economics major, and play golf. So you look at my resume on paper. And it's like, it just looks good. You know, I just have one of those resumes that I go, Yeah, you know, investment banking, and CFO and sort of all these things. And, but far and away, the most influential leader I ever was around was my grandfather. And he grew up on a chicken farm, or he had a chicken farm, about 30 minutes away from where I went to college. And I spent my college years in this sort of dichotomy world, it this extremely privileged. Powerhouse, type, a incredible institution, yet develop this amazing relationship with my grandfather, who lived modestly built his own house had a lovely farm. And while he never went to an institution like that, he had intellectual curiosity and abilities that I, I frankly, will probably never have. And the lessons learned there are the ones that I take to my job every day, you know, he would tell me, everybody puts their pants on one leg at a time. So when people ask me about my college experiences, it's it's it frankly, ends up being more about my grandfather than it does about an Ivy League education.

Jacob Morgan 18:38

Yeah. And do you talk about him at work like that? People know.

18:42

As you know, we're using the impact he had all the time.

Jacob Morgan 18:46

Is that a vulnerable thing to do? Or is that?

18:49

I think for back to my earlier comment, I think for me, it is in the sense that it in it. It serves a business purpose, because the perception of my background and the perception of like a finance person. You know, I'm working in multi unit retail, you know, I've never worked a shift. I'm motivating people who grew up in the restaurant business or started in a kitchen and so on. I didn't do that. But my leadership platform and how I treat people is informed by an extremely important person in my life, and that's my

weigh in. My weigh in is a self made person who set my life up for the success that I've been able to have and anyway,

Jacob Morgan 19:49

no, I like that. What do you think makes you feel most vulnerable? So when you think about different situations or circumstances or things that you have to say Think of kind of vulnerability on like a scale, what would be the extreme end of vulnerability where when that happens, or when you say that you really, really feel vulnerable?

20:08

I'm pretty open with my mistakes. So like, in some respects, when something goes poorly. Fortunately, I think you've been pretty well trained and looking at it head on, dissecting exactly what happened. So when something goes wrong, I lean into it, and I talk about it, I share it and when something goes wrong, and it can be uncomfortable for I think people that work with, but certainly want to celebrate successes. But studying why Mistakes happen in a business setting is paramount.

Jacob Morgan 20:55

Did that make you feel the most most vulnerable, though, or the most? Like, expose the most? Yeah, because

21:01

in when you're a leader, and something goes wrong, it's like it's out there. And no one wants to talk about no one wants to talk about it, they want to sweep it under the rug, they want to, it's very easy to say, well, we're gonna move, we're just gonna move past it, we're gonna move forward, and you have to do that. But I get the most I get a big charge out of being transparent. When something doesn't go, right.

Jacob Morgan 21:27

Yeah. But does it make you feel uncomfortable? Because I think it's a Brene Brown. She says that vulnerability is, you know, this emotional exposure, it's the uncertainty in the risk, the uncomfot uncomfortable feeling that you are, you know, exposing yourself and meeting to a mistake asking for help. So when you dissect these, these mistakes that happen and you feel that accountability for it, does that make you feel uncomfortable, or you said, it makes you it sounds like it makes you feel comfortable, you get energized from it.

22:00

I get energized about not letting happen again. I don't think I get energized about making mistakes or but i i I guess for me like vulnerability in some respects. It's it's natural in terms of how I was brought up my parents were, my mother in particular is naturally very vulnerable. So how Brene Brown describes vulnerability. I'm probably just more comfortable with it. I don't I don't know how else to put it. I don't mean to disagree with an expert. But

Jacob Morgan 22:37

I mean, it's, I mean, what I'm finding, at least from the research I'm doing is vulnerability is very subjective. I mean, different CEOs, different leaders that I talked to feel more vulnerable for different situations, right. Some CEOs say they feel most vulnerable when they're in front of a lot of people, some vulnerable CEOs say they're most vulnerable when they're getting candid feedback. Other CEOs say they're most vulnerable, when they have to admit to a mistake, or ask for help, that makes them feel really uncomfortable. They don't like doing it. So it's, you know, it's very different for everyone. And that's why I was curious for you what would be on that extreme vulnerability spectrum of what makes you most exposed, uncomfortable, uneasy, as far as either situations or

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the thing that makes me feel the most uncomfortable is when I can't relate to somebody else. So, you know, embedded in this vulnerability discussion is heightened relatability now, so, when I'm uncomfortable, it's when someone has an experience that I can't relate to. And the flipside is, is if I express an experience that someone else can't relate to,

Jacob Morgan 23:54

would that be something like a like a tragedy like a something like that or or

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tragedies, you know, tragedies I think are personal tragedies I hate to force rank them most people have had you know, a similar set of tragedies death in the family things like that there are certainly in people's people's lives have various degrees of challenges and mine has been very blessed in that sense. So I but we're I feel uncomfortable and I probably the most vulnerable is in the is in the situations where

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maybe I haven't had the experience that is as deep or as profound or as tragic as that and that problem really is one of the reasons why I'm so intentional about

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talking about things that haven't gone right. Making sure that that's communicated broadly across our team, personally and professionally.

Jacob Morgan 25:20

But so, is this any particular thing come to mind for you about not being able to relate? Like, has there been a time where you shared something with somebody, and you can see that there was no relatability? Or when somebody shared something with you? And it just Well, I

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think if we recently these events in South Texas in the shooting, it's just an it's Yeah, I don't know what I want to be vulnerable. But but there's, there's no there's no way in and this disbalance but there's no way in for me, I like there's this right that companies may feel to talk about it in some way. Those kinds of things in, in my mind, there are there's no words. So vulner like that's where it I'm the most

uncomfortable the George Floyd. You have to have a voice you have to you have to have a way into to talk about it. That is

Jacob Morgan 26:30

it's not easy.

26:32

That's that's probably, I mean, you're, you're doing a great job digging at this question. That is probably where I feel the most vulnerable?

Jacob Morgan 26:43

And what is it about those things that makes you feel vulnerable? So the fact that you can't connect with the people, but why? Why is that such a bad thing? Does that just kind of reflect on you personally? Does it make you question your leadership? Or why Why does that make you feel so uncomfortable?

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Well, a lot of these a lot of these issues. I mean, take the take the school shooting

27:11

in a situation like that, I may have political beliefs that contributed to it. You know, yeah, I hot I own

Jacob Morgan 27:20

a gun. Yeah.

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And so, yeah, it causes you to think very objectively about your personal beliefs, what contribution you may have had to you know, my my own personal beliefs, think the government's failed us. And how do you how do you talk about that as a, as a CEO in a way that's relevant that balance is how I feel, but at the same time, is relevant for the audience. So that's the heart of that's the heart of vulnerabilities. That's something you really should be talking about. As a CEO. Yeah, yeah. No,

Jacob Morgan 28:07

it seems like it also makes you question kind of like on a deeper, like, who you are as a person or who you are, as a leader, it seems like those, I hear that a lot from CEOs. In fact, there aren't many CEOs who say that, or leaders for that matter who say admitting to mistake makes them feel that vulnerable. Because it's one of those things where they talk about it as a learning moment. And they're able to kind of move on from them. But the things that make them really uncut, for example, in the CEO, who said, he's really uncomfortable getting candid one on one, like honest, brutal feedback from people. And I said, Why does that make you feel uncomfortable? And he said, because it likes make me me, makes me question like me, like who I am, as a leader, who I am as a person, like, it really gets to the heart of it. Whereas the mistake is kind of like superficial, you know, it's like up here, we all make mistakes, we're all imperfect. It doesn't force me to really reflect on who I am as a leader and who I am as a person.

29:03

But it's, I guess, you're sort of highlighting two elements, like there's the professional business element of vulnerability. And then there's the human emotion element and I'm probably bounced and bouncing forth. Back and forth between both. Yeah, and they're related, I think, yeah, they are related. But you know, when you get when you when you get your team behind something, and you take them for charge up the hill, and you're excited about something and everyone is looking at you and oh my god, he's right. And then like, it doesn't work. Like there's some vulnerability there. Like I you know, I at least I feel it. Yeah. It's, it's different than some of these contexts.

Jacob Morgan 29:57

The type of mistake I think matters and like what it is probably matters. If it's, if it's like something small and yeah, you can kind of brush it off. But if it's something that you very heavily invest in, you get buy in from everybody else, you get everybody to follow you, and then it doesn't go well, then yeah, that really starts to make you like question who you are. Speaking of mistakes, what has been the biggest business mistake you've ever made?

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Oh, boy, how much time do you have?

30:37

I think the biggest business mistake

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I've ever made. The one that really hit me in the gut was early on in my career, I was the CFO for a movie theater company. And we had basically completely we had incorrectly calculated the sort of the profitability and cash flow. And I was the CFO of the company. Some of it occurred before I got there, and some of it was clearly on my watch. And we had a payroll. Like a staring us in the face, were we going to be able to make payroll, we ended up solving it ended up not being a big thing. But there was two or three nights where I went home, and people weren't going to get paid because of a mistake that ultimately I owed.

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Now.

31:43

That's, that's the one that I still have nightmares on.

Jacob Morgan 31:47

Yeah, and that's a good example of a mistake. And it does have vulnerability because it impacts

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people's lives in a big way. And it, it was it was a, it was a powerful moment. And in in in, it informs at least my view of financial leadership, which is you can't make mistakes, cannot there's some jobs

where you're out there really taking risk, and you're swinging for the fences, and in marketing and brand and advertising. You do that. And sometimes you you know, you hit homeruns. And sometimes you don't. But in as a classically trained finance executive. You can't make mistakes. You can't like that, and that one.

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Thankfully,

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it didn't happen. We worked through it, we were able to. But but there were a few nights where I was worried about making payroll for a few 1000 people at the time.

Jacob Morgan 32:48

Oh, wow. Yeah, I could see that being a hard causing some sleepless nights. Yeah. So why do you feel vulnerability is important?

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Or is it important, maybe

Jacob Morgan 33:03

I should start with that.

33:04

I think it is important. It's, it's culturally important. And one of the best pieces of advice I ever got from my in my career was from David Gibbs, the currency. And he said to me, as I were having a coaching session, I was talking to him once about leaders I admired and so on. And he said, every single person you admire, has had massive insecurities made huge mistakes. Whether it's when they get on stage, or go on CNBC, or get on an earnings call, or go into whatever, whatever their thing is, they all have it, every single one of them has it. And I didn't really realize that until somebody. So when that sort of hit me in the, between the eyes, and looked at these leaders that I admired and listened to, and so on, and recognize that I felt I could be them. I felt, I felt like, okay, I can do this too. And if the leadership platforms that I'm blessed to have, could accelerate people's feelings around. All these people that you admire all these people that you're looking at, they put their pants on one leg at a time they get the same sets of issues as you do. And making that relatable, would truncate the period of time where people weren't comfortable being at work and trying to advance and become a bigger and better leader because it's that time wasted for me vulnerability is it's about distance. If you work in an environment where If there isn't transparency and the group around you isn't open to feedback open to sharing. What's made them who they are. It just delays the time for which everybody else can get there. And you're just cut, you're blocking. It's like,

Jacob Morgan 35:19

you're just blocking. Yeah. Like, that's a good way to think about it. How does vulnerability manifests for you like on a regular basis? So we talked about, you know, some big moments when you had to give

the speech. But how does it manifest on a day to day like, just as you're working with your peers and your co workers, would you say that vulnerability comes through some way in just day to day?

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One is, I do talk about

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I openly talk about

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openly talk

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about my dad, who recently passed, I'm sorry.

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Not in a

36:14

not in A. I don't think in a self indulgent, I hope not in a self indulgent way. But I talk about, I talk about it as, hey, it impacts me. Yeah. And I talk about it as, hey, if I'm not my best, this is why. And, you know, giving people permission to not so much call me out on it, but basically be like, Hey, I know this is on your mind if you need to meet it another time or so on. Because the expectation is that you're always on the expectation. The expectation is, and in particular, when people are preparing for the time with you as a CEO, like it's, it's, it has to be special time. But I'm not, you know, I'm not perfect, I do my best. And it's almost creating an atmosphere where grace can be given now, because if I can ask for the grace or record request the grace in some way, shape or form, then everybody else can, too.

Jacob Morgan 37:22

Yeah, yeah. When you're vulnerable with people, what impact do you think it has on them? So I don't know when you talk about your data with them and, or when you admit to making a mistake, or asking for help or doing any of these things that makes you vulnerable? What do you think it does for those around you for your team for your company as a whole,

37:43

you get better feedback. You get people open up to you. Yeah, you you create, and there's so many, so many vectors you can look at, about what you're really trying to do it as a leader. But you in my mind, if you can truncate the distance of relationship, build information flow and action to market. That's the like, it's just it's how do you accelerate all that time. And if you can, if you can be in a position as a CEO, or as a leader in a company, where you are getting actionable feedback, real actionable feedback, and you don't have to waste time looking for it, go through a massive 360 process to wait for it, but you can just get it. So most of my one on ones it's happening, it's it happens naturally. Like you don't even have to ask for it anymore. And people and if you can, if you can create an environment with your team, where you're getting great feedback, and I think it stems from being inherently vulnerable,

because you are then open to it. That's the that's the biggest one that I see. I I feel like I get much better feedback, the more the more vulnerable I am.

Jacob Morgan 39:09

Have you ever done anything at work that made you feel ashamed of something that you did? And deep

39:18

questions, that's a strong that's a strong word. Wow. Yeah.

39:27

Yeah, I have. There have been a couple of moments in my career, where, you know, you have to transition. It's the right thing for the individual and the right thing for the business to transition someone out of either a role or even out of the company. Yeah, and there are a couple instances where I've got intense regret in terms of how either I or the company handled it. I definitely, shame is probably the right word.

Jacob Morgan 39:58

Yeah. So just wasn't it I don't know how much detail are specific that you can go to, but it just it wasn't done the right way. Like it made the person feel bad or something.

40:08

You're always balancing the

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you're always balancing the business need and what's right for the individual, you know, and then obviously the team, the team as well. And the you're trying to imbalance is the key word. Like you got to you got to strike. And there's a couple of times where I didn't do it, right.

Jacob Morgan 40:37

It's funny that actually has come up quite a few times from the leaders. I've been interviewing as far as moments where they have felt the most ashamed. It's been around transitioning people. Yes, it's a very, very common theme. It's, it's interesting.

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It's, I like your worst use of the word ashamed, because that is probably the best way I would describe it. Now, now, I'm being vulnerable.

Jacob Morgan 41:05

Like I said, this is from a lot of leaders I've been interviewing, that is the thing that seems has caused the most shame. And I always wonder, why is it just because? Yeah, why? Why? Why does it cause shame? Actually?

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Well, it's probably because at least in my case, there wasn't enough transparency leading up to the discussion. There's usually an element of surprise, or something was lost in communication.

41:46

Yeah, I think that's another theme of vulnerability. And that is surprises are bad, like, are generally bad, like surprises, or you can have good surprises. But most of the time, they're most of the time, they're bad. And most of the time, they're bad because the news is delayed. The back to this sort of information flow and how much trust is in the org and, and so on. You know, why I felt ashamed is because part of my personal trust and personal values were, you know, I violated them, I guess, is probably the best way to put it. And that's, that's, I guess, the definition of shame. Yeah, you're, I know, Brene. Brown, as has a more advanced definition of it. But at least for me, it's like it's a it's a violation of your, of who you are.

Jacob Morgan 42:49

Has anybody ever taken something that you have shared in a moment of vulnerability and use it against you? Or have you ever had it backfire in any way?

42:58

Honestly, I haven't, at least not that I know of.

43:03

And

43:07

I think they're, you know, I think the reason is, I've been fortunate enough to work with people who, by the mere act of sharing it, and it's obviously, you can, there's one on one, small groups, big groups.

43:34

I've not had it and I think it's because I've been fortunate to be surrounded with high trust individuals, and we've created high trust teams, and being vulnerable as part of it. It's kind of chicken and egg, like, like, you can't you can't expect the trust without the vulnerability, and vice versa.

Jacob Morgan 44:01

One of the things that a lot of people get worried about when it comes to vulnerability is I don't want to ask for help or admit to a mistake or share something personal because people are going to think that I'm a weak or I'm incompetent or not capable, or you're going to use it against me. So how do you how can you be vulnerable without being perceived as as weak or without somebody using it against you in some way?

44:28

Well, I think most incident instances, there's

44:38

there's pot there's positive outcomes that come out of it's, it's ultimately a very positive expression. So like, the word, the word has a bit of a legacy negative connotation to it. It does Yeah, but once you do Like, Oh, that person is so vulnerable, like, I guess it is. But you know, I think culture is changing. And it's it's becoming, it's becoming more positive. But the moments of vulnerability and the lessons learned through vulnerability and what you're dealing with. There's just so much immense positive that comes out of it. So when you express it, it's just important that you are positive and optimistic at the right moments in the right time. And it's not just here's what, here's what went wrong. Here's the tragedy, here's, here's what I'm dealing with. But it's also there's hope. There's hope and vulnerability.

Jacob Morgan 45:43

But what if it doesn't go your way? Like, what if? You know, would that fear for example, do you think that's just an irrational fear? Where people should get over that fear? Because it seems like a lot of people are legitimately scared of opening up at work because of that, that fear of not being able to get that promotion or maybe getting fired, or, you know, getting that incompetent. stereotype, right? And I don't know, if there's any way that you can combat that? Or if that's just something that you need to accept and then move on?

46:18

Well, I

46:21

the only real answer I have for you, it goes back to why I believe in vulnerable leadership is because if you're in a senior level job, and you've had a lot of success, and you can mean the reality is the number of mistakes people make is a function of probably how old they are, not how good they are. So my my best answer to you is, it's the job of a leader to create an environment where relevant series of setbacks that are business, personal, emotional, that impact your leadership platform are put out there in the table so that people feel they can relate to them, and they can share them themselves. I do fear that there are people that don't feel that way. I don't know that there's anything that I can do other than encourage my fellow leaders to share their story for them to be vulnerable in their own way that they're comfortable with. And create an atmosphere so that the best talent can achieve the it's high their highest potential and not be restricted by feeling uncomfortable about something that happened in their life, but I don't think it's I don't think it's my job to pry. Yeah, I don't think it's I don't think it's I don't think it's my job to pray.

Jacob Morgan 48:02

But I'm sure you work with people or have worked with people who are just not vulnerable, you know, they don't feel comfortable sharing or asking for help or doing anything like that. What do you do in that situation? Do you just kind of leave it alone? Because they're still leaders, right? They're still, you know, they got to where they are somehow, but they're just not vulnerable? So it's interesting that, you know, there's kind of this balance of teacher who are vulnerable and successful and not vulnerable and successful. And but they still got there.

48:29

Yeah. Well, I think you've got to look at their team. And is their team being served? There back to our earlier comment, earlier comment. I don't think you can like legislate vulnerability. I don't think you can say like, here are the vulnerability standards, and you need to live up to them. I think you can be successful, being, quote, unquote, less vulnerable than I think I'm not, I don't think it's, I don't think I can't point to people. But I think if you're less vulnerable, you have to invest in different ways in your team. And if there are, there are people on your team that need that outlet, you need to help them find it. It's just like anything else in leadership, if I don't have a skill that is within my toolbox, and it doesn't exist on the team, but the business needs it, you got to go find it. So if there are people on your team, that their talents are being restricted, because you are not creating an environment, well, then you need to get a coach that can come in and foster that environment. If that isn't your gift, it's just like anything else. Find find us find an expert that can do it if you can't do it yourself.

Jacob Morgan 49:44

So it sounds like vulnerability. You don't have to be vulnerable to be successful, but if you are, it seems like it. It helps it kind of unlocks a little bit more

49:52

in the current environment. It certainly increases your chances of it accelerating talent development having people that want to work on your team. It's it's, it's a cultural trend that I personally I hope stays. And you know, the the most vulnerable leaders on our leadership team here at Top Golf are the most effective. I can't interesting, I can't, I don't have a regression analysis to sort of pinpoint that the precise so on and so forth. But I would tell you, you feel that they have the most loyal following their teams are the most aligned, they bring experiences to market the fastest. The jobs are filled the fastest. I mean, it's, it's, it's pretty clear. And it's also a part of our culture. I mean, we're, we're in the, we're in the we're in the experience business, and we have very high energy people. And so

Jacob Morgan 51:07

interesting, or maybe one or two questions left, and we only have a couple of minutes left. What are some of the factors that you think are crucial to helping vulnerability thrive? So well, you know, vulnerability is one attribute or characteristic that a person can possess. But are there other attributes that you need to have as an individual in order to make vulnerability be more successful,

51:29

I think it helps if you're a good storyteller. Okay. So you're putting those moments into appropriate context and making it interesting to listen to. So if you're predisposed to being vulnerable, and sharing it, and you can complement it with a relevant suite of stories, that like anything, capture the audience, it can have a big impact.

52:05

I think you have to be open to caught on

52:10

increasing vulnerability over time. So it's kind of an extension of your question, but you can't just like start and stop. Yeah, you have to, you have to like, you have to keep doing it. So like a characteristic is,

you got to be focused on the thread with which you're exposing, like, you have to, you have to be conscious that, you know, like any good storyteller, you got to be conscious of what people are hearing. And this is where that balance between like, you can be too self indulgent. And it ends up being about you, versus what is it that you're really trying to relate like, there is an element that is about you, you're sharing something about yourself, it's important that informs you, forms who you are. But there's also got to be an intent for the listener, the intent can be, hey, you can tell your story to the intent can be there's actual themes in this that are relevant for the challenge that that you're. So you got to be willing to keep going. It's not like a one and done. And then I think there are rituals, like feedback, like we talked about earlier. Like, you got to have feedback rituals in your daily weekly, meeting cadence and so on. So that it keeps coming. It's kind of a continuous circle. Yeah, no, I

Jacob Morgan 53:38

like that. And maybe last question for you. Anything else about vulnerability that you want to share a question that I should have asked you but didn't any other stories come to mind just kind of like a freeform one or two minutes of anything else that you want to share that maybe we didn't, didn't touch on?

53:58

Whether it's to your listeners, or to how you're thinking about framing this book. My own experience and being vulnerable, and we which I think leads to environments of, of trust on teams. It is, it is the most gratifying part of the job. Interesting when and it's gratifying for for a few reasons, and it's more gratifying than some other things that might hit the headlines. You know, number one, the power of putting yourself out there and that sort of I there's there's risk, there's uncomfortableness and then just the pure act of sharing makes the place you're working at feel a lot better. And for those people who either haven't done it or don't work in an environment where it's where it's maybe supported, I just added I'd encourage, I'd encourage the individual, just go for it, there's plenty of places that will have you. Yeah. But I, it's hard to describe how great it feels to work on a team where you can be. And it's like a total on off switch, once you're out on once you're on a team, where you can be vulnerable, and someone else's vulnerability is appreciated, and you can relate to it and support them. It's like you don't ever want to work on a team that doesn't have that like it's it's it's it's either have it or you don't once you have it, you don't ever want to leave it. I don't know how best to describe it other than it's just the greatest. It's the greatest feeling. Because work doesn't feel like work. It's just it's awesome. I mean, you're Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 56:12

No, I mean, I think a lot of people wish they could be part of that kind of a team. And that kind of

56:17

you know, a core value for us at Top Golf is individuality. We talk about it as we frame it as the spirit of the shield, our brand is a shield. And it's one of the reasons why I love this place so much. And if you went to any one of our venues or met anyone or people we don't have like, there's not like a top golf profile, our profile is you. And if you are going to be about individuality, which a lot of a lot of companies are they might use a different word, but I think you know, bring your best self to work and so on so forth. If you're not creating an environment where people are going to be vulnerable, how can you

create an environment where they can be themselves like so it's it's it's part it's part and parcel. The word vulnerability may not be one that some might like. But I don't think you can disconnect the two if you're asking people to be there bring their best self to work, be their own self at work. Part of that is, is being vulnerable

Jacob Morgan 57:24

and couldn't agree more. That's why I'm writing the book. Well already, I really really appreciate your time, your insights, your stories. I mean, it was awesome. He has some really, really great things in there for people to pay attention to. So thank you again for taking time out today. Really appreciate it. Absolutely.