

Don't Be The Smartest Person In The Room- Why The CEO of A 100,000 Person Company Says Vulnerability Makes YOU A Better Leader

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You are about to listen to a discussion that I had with George Oliver, the CEO of Johnson Controls, which is a company with over 120,000 employees that specializes in creating smart, healthy and sustainable buildings. My conversation with George is part of the research that I did for my new book called leading with vulnerability. I interviewed over 100 CEOs, just like Georgia companies around the world, I surveyed 14,000 employees to look at how do we bring vulnerability inside of our organizations, specifically to leaders. So if you want to hear from more CEOs, just like George, grab a copy of the book by heading to lead with vulnerability.com, you can also join the substack community where we're going to be releasing all these podcasts, all these videos over the coming weeks and months. And the link to that is great. leadership.substack.com. So I hope you enjoy this conversation with George Oliver.

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When you hear the phrase vulnerable leader,

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what does that mean for you personally? What does that make you think of?

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Yeah, I think it's, I mean, vulnerable leader is always someone that's authentic, and someone that's very open and, and trusting and, and respected. And then I think because of that, I mean, everyone's got strengths and weaknesses. And I think through that people being being vulnerable is obviously showing, showing some of that either through

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your presence or through your stories, or I think it's just about, you know, being very open and transparent. Would you say that you're a vulnerable leader, are you pretty open and transparent with your people?

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I would say, you know, I think as, you know, a lot of a lot of this is built over time, but you develop confidence and encourage relative to understanding that, you know, I think the strength of a leader, this is an attribute, that's the strength of a leader. And I think

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people like to see the the human side of, of leaders, and let's face it, although people have different levels of responsibility, we're all people, and I think the strength of a leader is demonstrating, I mean, certainly based on experiences, you get to where you are based on your skill set and your learnings, but at the end of the day, we're all people and, and treating everyone in a similar fashion, I think is important also relative to, to maintaining that strength. And so I think, I think over time, I've become more, you know, you look back and you you have a lot more to share, there's a lot more learnings and you make a lot more mistakes, and, and then being very open about about that, I think makes people real, you know, makes leaders and people can learn and, and for themselves and understand how that might apply to, to their, what they do and how they make an impact. So I think I think over time,

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I think it's just continue to increase. I mean, just because you get to a point where you recognize that, especially whether you're, no matter what you're doing whatever you're leading,

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you know, you got to be the leader, and people gotta respect and trust, what you do. And I think a lot of what you share and share who you are and what your values are. And in the like, I think it makes a big impact. What about as far as creating boundaries? Because it's part of authenticity, right? I mean, like, for example, do you talk about your family? Do you talk about personal stuff at work? How do you balance being authentic with also having, you know, the private life? If you if that's what you want? You know, I tend to I think, you know, getting back to your first question, I think over time, you know, I tend to be fairly private, and I try to keep, you know, my personal life separate from my, my business life, but you recognize that they do overlap, they do converge, and because, you know, what you experienced from a personal standpoint, really impacts who you are, and how you lead and impact your value. So, it's hard to separate, per se, no.

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It's so I think during this period of time, I think, obviously the last, any, anytime you go through a period of change, like we've gone through with the pandemic and then all of the events over the last two years, I think it has forced, you know, leaders to be more vulnerable and show more empathy and, and so as part of that, you know, as we've been building diversity within Johnson Controls, you know, it's in an after you

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In the, you know, the whole, you know, movement there with, with after the shooting of the death of George Floyd, you know, the ability to be able to really get much more open in getting perspectives, you know, the, I think a lot of times when you're building a team, it's understanding, you know, the diversity and the skill sets and the, in what everyone can bring and be their best. And so we started this, and I let it was to have perspective sessions, and you have groups of employees that have similar backgrounds, or are challenges and the like, and be able to open up about it. And

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so one of the things was, you know, the, you know, we started whether I think the one I participated on with disabled one around disability and, you know, I shared the story around when I grew up, my mother was very disabled with,

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with, you know, debilitating arthritis. And so a lot of that, it forced me to be very self sufficient, you know, relative to what I did, and how, you know, whether it be helping out with dinners and doing your own laundry, and it just was natural. And I told the story that I still do the same today, you know, I mean, that meaning, I still do laundry, and I still do, you know, I chip in and do my part relative to, you know, when I'm with the family and cooking dinners and stuff. So, some of that is when you share some of that, you know, you because it is who I am and the values that I built, you know, you do apply it in what you do, and, and how you think about, like, I don't mind with anything happening in the company to jump in and contribute, you know, I mean, meaning if there's things that I can help and contribute to, I'm not, I'm not into hierarchy, and I'm not into boundaries. And, and so I don't know, there's, so we started that, and we did, I participated on a on a, you know, it was a father's perspective session, and I have two sons, and I said, I'm more than willing to share my experiences, bring it up, you know, my sons are 36 and 32. And, and then, it was interesting, we had a couple of fathers that there were in biracial marriages and, and then share their stories. And I thought I had, you know, I had a good story relative to some of the challenges that I faced as a father, and then you listen to other stories and in the light, and you have a much better appreciation for, you know, the diversity and the impact that people have, and in the challenges that they face. So I think part of it is, and those are a few, you know, stories, but it does, I think,

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I think for people that as you develop as a leader, I think people understanding, you know, who you are, how you got to where you are the experiences you've had, I think you're important, I think are important.

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What

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if you were to think of vulnerability on kind of a scale of one to five, what would be a five for you, as far as something that makes you feel most vulnerable?

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Because you seem like a pretty confident person. So those few times when you are very vulnerable, and you do feel emotionally exposed, and you do feel uncertain, and you do feel, I don't know, maybe even scared, what, what would it take for you to be at a five?

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So that's a good question, I would say. And again, I think over time it, it continues to improve, you realize that, that everything you do is built on the foundation of relationships. And I think relationships are our long term and a built on trust and respect. And so when you get into tough situations, whether,

you know, I could go through a number of tough situations that I've had to lead through, the more that you can, can be yourself, be open, be transparent,

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is what quickly builds those relationships and builds the trust. So I think that's most important.

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When you're going through, you know, transformation, a lot of change. And the only way that you're going to be successful in driving that change is that everyone is fully on board fully supportive, and ultimately, in building the trust, it's needed to be able to sustain what it is that you're doing longer term. And so I think when I in some of this is not only you know, getting a sense on where you are as an individual, but then you know what it is that you can do as an individual that transcends, you know, 100,000 people, right and so,

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the more than I when in all of my engagements, the more that I can be open and transmit

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And, and share stories and, and examples and the like is where people come back

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and assess that Hey, boy that you really, you know, you really made a big impact, you know, so it isn't. So it's, I think it's those elements of those those examples that even though I mean you can, you know, you can always, you know, fundamentally drive change, but if it's one dimension,

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you know, it's then how is how is it received? Right? How was the individual receiving that, and then what is it that inspires them to be themselves and to be able to step up and feel like they can make a bigger impact and be part of a, you know, bigger mission. And so, I mean, I think you can mechanically, you know, do a lot of things and I think the authenticity, the, the openness, the vulnerability is what gets everyone on board, yeah, is what, what brings people on board to, to believe in themselves to believe in the team and ultimately follow the leader, you know, when you look at, you know, any successes, Team successes or business successes are, you know, that that's the environment that they create. And so I think, when when I'm a five, I feel you can feel it, you can, you can get a sense where a people are, are, are on board, they're there, they they've opened up, there's a motion, that is commitment is excitement.

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That would be a five, you know, what I mean? When it's a one, and you're obviously trying to move a mountain or try to, you know, achieve a big, and then you can tell, you can tell whether you've been able to achieve that, that commitment, or, or be able to inspire and get everyone understanding, kind of what the, you know, what the problem is what we're trying to solve? And then how do you, you ultimately, you know, become part of the team, be able to be your best and believe that you can achieve something more together than what you would achieve as an individual. So it's interesting.

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Yeah, you talked about the five as a positive. Because a lot of leaders I've interviewed when I say, what's a five for you, you know, vulnerability is that kind of like an uncomfortable feeling of fear, you know, Brenneke, Brenneke talks about it as fear, uncertainty, you know, risk and emotional exposure. So, what we'll do more as an individual, I would say, yeah, what makes you feel most emotionally exposed and uncertain what kind of a situation you're, to be honest with you, when you go into a situation. And I've had lots of situations professionally, where you go in, and you bring a lot of depth and expertise, you bring, you know, experience and in the light, but it might be areas where, you know, in an assignment that there's a lot of, there's a lot of gaps and less experience and you taking on new challenges that you've got to be open about invulnerable about that, you know, when you go in and, and I mean, a good example was when, when we did this merger, and the plan of the merger was as merger of equals, and over 18 months, I was going to ultimately take the company forward. And, and of course, when you do a merger of equals, it's never as it's planned. And so what happened, we, you know, was difficult merger in the first year, and things were more challenging, and there was a division of leadership. And then you say, okay, you know, based on the state of the company, investors get a little bit active, and, and then they, you know, want change, and so then change occurs, and, and then you're in the seat, you're in the seat, and then you say, Well,

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you know, you could argue, and am I part of the problem? And my part of the solution, right, I mean, I've led, you know, one of the companies that merged, and it was my strategy to, to emerge, and we found ourselves in a in a difficult first year now, you could argue I wasn't at that time, I moved into the CEO position, so I wasn't, quote The boss, but I was one of the key leaders. And so then you quickly have to demonstrate vulnerability that okay, we are where we are. And when you looked at what needed to get done, that was whether I actually ever stated that we were in a crisis, we're in a crisis, right? And so, then you have to be open about, okay, we are, how we got to where we are, and then ultimately, you know, plot a path forward and how do you get people, again, reignited or re excited about, you know, the future of the company and in taking on some of the challenges that were faced as a result of that, you know, difficult first year so,

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and I think your success is

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ability to be able to connect and get people aligned and, and get people again, you know, excited about the future of the company and, and that's what we want to want to vote to do. And that was five years ago, that was back in 2017, can you share a time when you were vulnerable with your team and what the impact of that was,

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and any actually any stories, because you know, one of the people, one of the things that people love to read about and hear about the most are stories, you know, whether they're good or bad, you know, I've talked to a couple of CEOs who shared stories where they were vulnerable, and it actually ended

up not being a good thing. So you obviously have a very seasoned and tenured career in leadership. So any stories that come to mind for you both good and bad, get a lot of I mean, this, uh, I mean, it's, it's, you know, to what level you want to discuss it, I would say,

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you take on, I'd say vulnerable.

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You know, like,

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and this is sometimes part of the learning, but I tell these stories a lot, because I was,

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you know, it, maybe it was the the other side of being vulnerable, maybe it was been, you know, at the time being more bold and vulnerable, but you become vulnerable as a result. And so, the, you know, a lot of times I've, you know, I came up under the Jack Welsh error in GE and down,

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there's a very non vulnerable way.

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Exactly.

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And so I think you, you know, it was, it was the, the, probably the opposite where you would, you know, you'd be bold and do things, and then I think it was, you know, you go through some learning some, sometimes good, sometimes bad. And so I think there was a lot of times, I took on some big, big initiatives. And, and as a result became vulnerable, right? I mean, because you, you, you go after something you believe that you can, you can achieve and then as a result, maybe, maybe you learn something different, and then you have to be very open and transparent, that maybe things didn't go as planned and, and make sure that everyone understands that, you know, the whole culture is okay, it's okay to make a mistake, but don't don't repeat it. You know, I mean, oh, I think,

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I think good leaders. Number one, you need to be decisive, you do need to get people aligned, and then obviously, decide when you take the hill. And sometimes when you take the hill, you got to also make sure you're transparent, relative to whether taking the hill worked or not. And so I think you'd become a little bit vulnerable as a result of that. And stories come to mind for you like specific situations that occurred that really

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made you early career, I think some of these foundational lessons were,

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were like, early in my career, you know, I came up through operations, and, you know, just in time lean manufacturing was, was a big deal. And GE was, you know, there was a lot of work to be done. And so back in the would have been back in the late 80s, early 90s, when, you know, my first plant manager job, that was a big deal. I mean, that, you know, when you become plant manager, you think that you've made it, I mean, that's the you know, big deal when you're in operations. And so then you decide, okay, I'm going to be the leader, we're going to be the best. And,

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you know, it actually started with vulnerability, because at the time, there was a major

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aerospace downturn, and to, to be able to position the plant, it was a lease plant, there was going to be certainly some downsizing across the company, across the business. And I was leading a very productive plant up in New Hampshire. And, you know, because we were somewhat vulnerable because of the downturn, and that we were leased facility,

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to took it upon myself to say, listen, we're going to be the best. And we're going to do, we're going to embrace these strategy, we're going to, we're going to be the best we're going to be lean, we're going to, we're going to be we're going to create work cells, we're going to multiskilled, we're going to do all the things that at that time, defined, competitive manufacturing. And so we did that shut the plant down. And just a little bit of background on the plants, you know, make components that ultimately go into multiple engines when you're in that business, you know, multiple engine lines. So when you shut down a plant, you're in essence, you know, you're shutting down engine line, so you have to plan ahead and we did that and said, We're going to be shut down for, you know, two weeks to do this. And we did it. And then we're shut down well, more than two weeks, right. So then you

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Did you say, okay, the vulnerability of being potentially, you know, downsized to the now the vulnerability that the Boston, you know, the decision that was made maybe it's been second guessed,

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you know made us even more vulnerable, you know, so leader, leaders of the business at the time came to visit, it's one of those visits that you know, this isn't gonna go well, it's not gonna go well, and, and what the heck's happening and who the hell is running this plant and, and the like, and then you definitely felt very, very vulnerable. And it was one of these things where still my confidence came through. And I told him, I told my boss at the time to say, you know, I know why you're here, you're obviously assessing, you know, my leadership and my decision making. And I would just tell you, again, that I do it again, I would do it again, that we, the learnings here is going to be fundamental to the success of the business, you know, for a long time to come. And so, okay, yes, it's been a short term impact, I understand. And I'm accountable to that. But you know what I would, I would do it again. And so he looked at me, he said, You're, you're serious. I said, I'm dead serious. And so I didn't get fired. And, you know, the plant. today.

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I'm an icon at the plant. So the plant has gone through multiple, you know, anniversaries, and there's still people working in the plant. And I've met a number of plant managers over the decades that have run the plant. And when they meet me, they say, Oh, my God, George Oliver, You're a legend. You are a legend. And so, so I mean, you know, you go through experiences like that, and I tell some, sometimes they tell that story. And people are fascinated, and I see I didn't get fired, I actually get promoted. Well, it's interesting, because it also sounds like you could have easily passed the blame and said, Oh, you know, what happened? Because our team didn't get things done on time, or this happened, but you, it sounds like you can't do it yourself? Well, this is I mean, let's go back to your first question about, you know,

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accountability and ownership is, is, is being you know, you gotta be authentic, you gotta have accountability on a ship.

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And at times, you know, that does make you vulnerable, right? I mean, because, you know, it opens up maybe weakness, and maybe mistakes, maybe bad decision making, but at the end of the day, and underlying all of this discussion is, is, is integrity, you don't I mean, you've got to be, you've got to be who you are, no matter who you're, you know, you're interfacing with, and tell it straight.

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Because I think at the end of the day, you know, people get become vulnerable, and then they, you know, maybe not that they lack integrity, but maybe not fully transparent. get pressured into, to making excuses or in the like, and so I think that's important, and you got to always every step of the way, you gotta be accountable. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's the difference between just vulnerability versus being a vulnerable leader. You know, some people I feel like try to use vulnerability as an excuse, like, oh, you know, I'm sorry, that messed up, like, you know, I made a mistake, but there's no accountability of like, here's what I'm going to do to fix it, here's what I've learned, which I think is an important piece.

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The other one, I would say, like, when COVID happened, I think that was very, you know, emotional, and very, very vulnerable. Because at that time, there was so much that was undefined,

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you know, with what what was happening and how it was going to play out, and, and then you immediately get this incredible focus on health and safety. And we're a company that actually drives health and safety

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in a significant way across buildings. And so it was, it was very emotional. I mean, I met during those early days, and in the leadership meetings, or calls that we had, and in the light, you know, you know, forced everyone to, you know, to be much more vulnerable relative to their own emotions and their

own, you know, and how they were dealing with it and the like, and I think, that set the stage for, you know, during that period of time for, for the team, you know, being able to cope and be able to, you know, work through the challenges at the same time, while we're trying to maintain, you know, some sort of stability and, and focus on our customers and continuing to deliver, deliver on, you know, the support of critical infrastructure. And so, I think that was an interesting period of time and kind of test tested leaders in a big way. And you go through that amount of change and how significant that was. You mentioned emotion, which is interesting. Have you ever cried at work?

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So I've

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I wouldn't say I've cried I've definitely have have, you know,

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when he, you know, filled up or you know, become very emotional or, or filled up, but I've never I wouldn't say outright cried. Yeah.

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So speaking of vulnerability, you mentioned you

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kind of came up during the Jack Walsh era, which is a very non vulnerable time. In fact, at that time.

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You know, I don't even think that authenticity asking for help admitting a mistake, like none of that. I don't think it was allowed or encouraged or talked about. I mean, if you were to think back earlier in your career, would you say that's a pretty fair assumption was vulnerability not talked about? It wasn't encouraged? Like, do you have? Or do you remember some of your leaders at the time who just came to you and said, you know, no emotion, you gotta have the right answer?

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You know, the interesting, you know, because, you know, I'll give you a counterpoint to that, I think, at the end of the day,

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the focus on on people and development and, and relationships and respect and trust, it was, that was corps at the time, and, you know, having the opportunity to engage with, you know, Jack frequently one on one, he was very, he was very authentic. And, and you could be, you know, you could be vulnerable, I mean, when, when I decided, when I decided to, you know, to leave GE and without going into all the details there.

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It was

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the most vulnerable discussion and interaction with Jack and I,

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and most fulfilling that I ever had around me as a person about B as a leader, about,

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you know, the impact that I had at GE, and, and then the ability for, to take that to a whole new heights,

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you know, longer term, so. So I know,

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it gets, you know, that period of time, maybe it was just, you know, overall business, but

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the underlying fundamentals are everything that you read. Yeah, I mean, well, so it's interesting, I was wondering if you can share a little bit more about that, because very few, actually, maybe one or two other CEOs I've interviewed have worked

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directly with Jack Welsh, but he is not, you know, when you think of a vulnerable leader, he's not the CEO that a lot of people think of, I think for sure, but not vulnerable. You know, he very much very emotional kind of guy very authentic from that regard. But most people don't see him as somebody who opened up and let people in in, you know, talking about failures and mistakes. It sounds like you had a very

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impact, impactful conversation with him. Can you share a little bit more about, you know, what's such an impression? I don't want to get on that path. I mean, it's, it's because I think everyone's got different opinions and have different personal experience. Yeah. He was very, he was very people focused. He had this ability to, to, you know, to touch people to engage to, to learn to, you can make mistakes, there was it was okay. I mean, obviously, you got to, you know, you got to learn from the mistakes and not to have the mistakes happen again, but

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that element of it was for as well from a leader, whether he demonstrated vulnerability or not, you could debate but as far as the engagement and the learnings in the, in the, in the leadership, I mean, certainly was

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very impactful in my development. I was, you know, I was there 20. I

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mean, it would have been 2020 years with him leading the company. And then, shortly after that, I ended up leaving, but

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he's very, you know, yeah. And he, he helped you kind of understand the impact, and he helped guide your future direction, it sounds like,

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Yeah, I mean, I think, you know,

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just he's, you know, was always very supportive, and, and I achieved, you know, a lot of growth within GE and, you know, obviously, every step of the way of being able to develop and learn and then get, you know, obviously bigger jobs to make a bigger impact in the company and the like, and, and that continued and then, you know, as I when I left GE and, you know, the, you know, the continued, you know, not infrequent wasn't frequent engagements are very, very similar. Would you say that assumption is pretty fair that early on in your career, that vulnerability wasn't

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Maybe I don't know, this mean stream is talked about as accepted. Versus now it seems like everybody's talking about it.

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Yeah, whether it was accepted or not, I'm not quite sure it was. You know, I think, you know, business in general, when you look at, you know, what was expected how people worked, how they engaged, maybe the separation of personal work, it was very different, right. I mean, it was very different than So, I think that in itself, just the pure, I mean, you didn't have the internet and the way that people engage and, and the like, so I think for all of those reasons, yeah. I mean, I think it was kind of a little bit more separation, I think in today's environment, everything is blurred, right, and relative to whether working from home, or you're doing, you know, and just the amount of communication and the exposure.

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And so I just think that in itself just makes people more vulnerable. Yeah. So in the book, one of the things that I talked about is that there are a couple of ways that I think leaders become vulnerable one, you know, they just raised that way, you know, their parents, the environments in which they grew up. Another one is some sort of an event or situation happens that makes them be vulnerable. Like one CEO, I interviewed told me that he was a CEO of a airline company. And he said, he was very command and control very, you know, hierarchy. And then one day, he gets a call at three in the morning that one of his planes crashed and 100 or 230, people died. And he said, that transformed him and made him a vulnerable leader. And I think a third way that leaders become vulnerable is they, they learn it. So you know, they've worked with coaches, they've gotten feedback from people, somebody has told them, hey, you got to open up and be a human being. When you think about yourself,

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would you say you fall into one of those three, like what has forced you to try to become a more vulnerable leader over the years? So what what was the first one I'm gonna get the second, the third, the first one was, what first one is just how you were raised. So some leaders told me they were the way that their parents brought them up was to be vulnerable and showing motion. Second one was an event like something happens. And the third is just learning over time through feedback through either coaching through something like that.

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So I think I mean, it's, I don't know, if it's any one of those, I would say, you know, obviously, I got brought up with strong values. And obviously, being able to, you know, I had two great leaders, my mother and father were both,

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you know, really high quality individuals and kind of blue blue collar work their way up, and, and, you know, treated everyone with respect and the way that they engaged, obviously, the way that they raised a family, you know, all of that. So I think that's was underpinning a little bit of a combination for you have a few of those? What's that? I said, for you, it sounds like a little combination of that. So I think that that's who I am, to be honest. And then I think,

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I think the pandemic

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was a little bit of a forcing function, to be honest, you know, because, you know, we were at a time when, you know, I mean, you can imagine everyone is trying to figure out what, what, what, you know, what, what was going to happen, and what the impact would be, and, you know, they've got their own personal challenges and families and, and so I, during that I was,

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you know, it, that I've always valued engaging

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people at all levels of the organization, and I treat, I try to treat everyone the same with with a lot of respect, and I think people would tell tell you that I would be more, you know, like, if I were to engage would be all about, Okay, what's next? What are we going to do and what has to get done? As opposed to, you know, Jacob, how do you feel today? You know, I mean, like, how's your day and, and I understand you got, you know, some challenges with

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your parents, anything I can do to help Well, when you do that, I mean, the, you know, the, at the end of the day people, you know, open up and so, you know, I use that as kind of a little bit of a forcing function to track employees to engage and reach out to people to we have people on the front lines that were scared

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working at customers and doing critical work at hospitals. And so you know, you you do force yourself to not to call the guy and say hey, did you get that job done now you're not opposed to call him and say hey, I understand you're, you know, you're supporting you know, such and such hospital you're on the front line really appreciate what you're doing. You know, what can you making sure that you've got all

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other resources you need and anything I can do to help. And so you do you do? You know, I think that in some ways, and that has been sustained, I think, you know, the way that I lead, you know, maybe to different degrees, but I think that's important. And then the third was, I do have people around me.

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Yeah, I mean, every day, you know, you got, you got lots going on, you got lots of pressures. And some days, you have good days, some days are bad. And some days, you know, when you're telling stories, I do love to tell stories, but I don't tell enough of them. Because every time I tell them, I have people come to me and say, George, if you could just do a little bit more of that, you know, you would have people, you know, totally open on, you know what I mean? And so, there's a little bit of a forcing function around my communications team, to, you know, to force me to not not that I don't want to, but it's just more of the, you know, this idea of, hey, you got to open up, you got to tell you tell those stories, you got to share what you're feeling you got to share, you know, what you learned? And so I think it's a little bit of all three, actually, to be honest, is that an uncomfortable thing for you to do to share how you're feeling open up? I don't, I don't like to talk about myself. I don't, I don't, because I don't like to be I've never, I'm not one to take the credit. I don't like that. I don't like this idea. You know, I listen to me, and I've got all these great stories. So I don't think I don't think of myself sometimes. I get told that, you know, I don't think of myself as the CEO. You know what I mean? I don't I don't think of and I don't want people you know, because I'm the CEO, I'm going to tell you the end, you're going to do things the way that I've done, I don't want that, you know what I mean? But the reality is, I am the CEO, and that they do have a lot of exposure to me. And unless they get to know who I am and what makes me tick,

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then you might not, you know, get everyone's hard to mind, you know, relative to, you know, what we're trying to get done. So I don't know, I'm not I mean, I wouldn't, you know, I think over time you learn how important that is, and you try to appropriately

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use that as part of the you start part of part of how you gauge spending, I talked to another CEO.

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He was the CEO of John Hancock, and she was telling me that same story, we're she also didn't like that. But then she realized the impact that it had on those around her. And then she said, You know, I never realized that. She also didn't want to talk about ourselves. She didn't want to take credit for things. And she said, It's not about me. But then she realized that it actually became sort of a gift for her people, and that her people actually wanted it and that it motivated them and it inspired them. And

when she viewed it from that lens, then she became much more comfortable doing it. So you're right. I mean, I talked to a couple CEOs who are just like I, you know, it's just not comfortable with me. But I think in most situations, the assumptions the CEOs always make is that they think they're talking about themselves, whereas the employees view it as you're letting us in. And kind of managing that balance is a tricky thing to do. Right? Yeah. Well, in?

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Yeah. I mean, there's never you can never do it enough. And you got to make sure appropriately with the time Yeah, your time is, is how do you spend your time, you know, with what you do, and then with what you do how you engage, right. And so,

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you know, I think a lot of times, and I'm learning this even more so now than ever, in this changing environment,

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the depth and expertise over 40 years matters. Yeah. And that now doesn't mean that things are the same, and we're going to be done the same. But when you go through the environment that we've been in the last two years with a pandemic, and then, you know, this huge recovery of demand, and then the implications to supply chain to inflation to, to, you know, all of these to a war in the Ukraine or disruption in the Ukraine and what that means, and, and then planning for maybe some, you know, additional geopolitical risks here, when you go through that.

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Many have not been through one of those experiences, you know what I mean? And so, what you do with the ability to be able to, like even take an inflationary environment. You know, most most business leaders that are leading businesses are maybe not companies, but maybe at least businesses. They haven't experienced hyperinflation. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it really hasn't been. It's been, what 30 plus years.

40:00

yours, right?

40:02

And so

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in. I mean, you can have the smartest people understanding the fundamentals. But unless they've actually worked through a period of time and, and been been accountable and in been not only vulnerable but accountable to what has to get done, it's and then when you share those stories are your depth and expertise and how, how you work through that. And I think that has been more important than ever to be honest with during the the the amount of change that has been happening here.

40:34

And so it isn't necessarily it's done the same today as it was then. But but having as a leader, what did what did you learn? How did you act? What were the mistakes you made? And then what do you what would you do? You know, in the in the current environment? What would that lead you to do? Right? Yeah, yeah. And you mentioned stories. So of course, I have to ask any other stories come to mind about vulnerability or not being vulnerable that you can think of during the course of your career?

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I mean, I get lots of stories, I'm trying to think, you know, some, some good ones. I, I mean, you're always I mean, I go into, you know, I've had lots of different experiences professionally. And, and,

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you know, it's like, it's, it's,

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it's,

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well, I mean, let's face it, right. I mean, in these roles, that we're in you, you find yourself in farms that, that you look around, and you say Listen, why, why am I here? You know, you get, you know, I mean, I've been in farms with the President and work with, with, you know, the,

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His Royal Highness. And now it's the His Majesty, you get in these farms, and you say, you know, I think you'd become vulnerable, because you say, if, okay, you know, and how to operate and make sure that you're contributing at a level that, you know, you you need to in the, in the environment you're in. So I think naturally, and people don't see this naturally, because you're you're always viewed as the leader and always self confident and doing what you do, you know. So it's kind of like impostor syndrome, and at some point, yeah, and so I, I share stories that, hey, I'm no different going into a meeting with the president or the, you know, the these forums and I'm in, I'm on a number of forums, you know, leading sustainability and decarbonisation globally, and we've had, you know, a lot of different and you feel vulnerable, go, you know, what I mean, going in, and no different than maybe people, when they, you know, early career, that maybe you're getting a meeting with myself, you know, you feel vulnerable. And so, then you know, then you obviously, try to prepare and make sure you're playing to your strengths, and you want to make the biggest impact you can make, but you do feel vulnerable. You know, I mean, we're all humans. Yeah. So you've had a little bit of impostor syndrome of like, What the hell am I doing?

43:02

Like, why, you know, what am I going to be able to contribute? When you look around? And you say, wait a minute, you know, but, I mean, we all we all have gone through those experiences as we continue to grow. Do you remember a particular time or meeting where you had that feeling?

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Oh, no specifics. I mean, it's just, you know, when, like I said, you know, you get these forums with

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people, and you just know nothing, nobody knows specifics, okay?

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Do you find that it's easier to be vulnerable, early on in your career? Or when you're an executive? So when, at one point, can you be more emotionally exposed, embrace risk and uncertainty and talk about mistakes? And say, I don't know, is that easier to do as a new employee, early in your career? Or when you're an executive? And you're, you know, the CEO? And the question, I would tell you that I think it comes with confidence and maturity, maturity, confidence, professional development, I think it you know, it grows because of that. But I would also say that the learnings, the more you can early the faster than you, you know, from a development standpoint, that you can ultimately develop yourself.

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So it's not so much the tenure that matters, it's the development of those other attributes that matters. And the sooner you can develop them, the easier it is.

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Yeah, like, for instance, you know, as I

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as I get to, you know, part of this is, you know, when you when you're leading and engaging people in no matter what levels

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when I engage people, even at the lowest levels, I can make them vulnerable, you know, what I mean? I mean, when I say not make them, but I can open it up and I can tell a story and then, you know, I'll say, hey, you know, do you have similar stories and it's

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More around, you know, getting openness and talking about, you know,

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experiences and stuff. And so, you know, the word was when you know, when people that don't know me, I get, they get a view of, of George and then people that actually have engaged with me is slightly different, I mean, meaning because they get a different level of engagement, and then because of that they, you know, higher level of learning, you know, experiences and stuff, and they open up. So, I think, in companies that leaders strive to create that, that environment, you get it, you'll get an earlier career, and people will learn from that, and then develop appropriately and become better leaders. So I think is part of it is the culture,

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the culture that, that allow people to be themselves to open up to talk about their, their differences and vulnerabilities, and, and then, you know, for teams to embrace that, and, and then, you know, which

gives them more confidence and being able to, to develop and be themselves and stuff. So I think it, you know, it's kind of a self fulfilling process, that's going to be fundamental to, to, to the cultures that you build.

46:22

One of the other things that I'm exploring in the book are kind of like signs of vulnerability, not necessarily that when these things are displayed, it means that leaders are vulnerable, but they're kind of things to pay attention to where a leader may be signaling some kind of vulnerability. And these are things like asking for help or admitting to a mistake, or even giving or receiving praise, you know, sharing personal information, showing emotion, when you think about some of the various signs or ways that you can show vulnerability, how do you do it? Like, what, what to your team signals that you're being vulnerable? It's when you do what?

47:04

What signal?

47:12

I guess when you, you know, when you engage? And I mean, number one is, you gotta, you gotta, you can't always have the answer, you know what I mean? And so you've got to open up and not not be the smartest person in the room. So I mean, everyone's looking for the boss to have the answer. But at the end of the day, recognizing that, hey, in a lot of these situations, you don't have the answer. And you've got to, you got to say that you got to listen. You know, I mean, I say that a lot, say, Listen, these aren't, you know, different things where we don't have the answer. And they all think that you do, and you really don't, and that you're asking for help, or you're asking for input or, or different perspectives,

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that I think does create the value because then recognizing that, hey, you got to where you are, because you let in, you're able to, to leverage different, you know, talents and different perspectives, and ultimately create, change and deliver value. And that never changes. And so the higher you go, you might have more decision making or more authority, but, but how you got to where you are doesn't change, right? As far as how you, you make sure that, you know, I mean, obviously, everyone's got different skill sets and different experiences, but your job is to not only bring what you're, you know, what you've learned and all of your successes, but being able to leverage others, perspectives, learnings, and ultimately, their failures. So I think creating an environment where people are open to that, and then sometimes just being open and asking questions, you know, just making, you know, ask questions and take time for, for listening, because I think there's another view that,

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you know, everything's being one way or told or, you know, being directive versus then, you know, being more participative, and more, more listening, which I think creates a lot more value. So I think the vulnerability is demonstrated through through that type of engagement. Yeah, you also mentioned Oh, so that kind of recap there. So it sounds like your vulnerability kind of signal, or one of the ways that you show it as you listen to your people. And you're comfortable with saying, I don't know where I need help or stuff like that. Earlier on, you also mentioned empathy.

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Can you talk a little bit about more, kind of the role that that plays and how you have had to use that as a leader?

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Yeah, I think I mean, empathy. I mean, obviously, that's been a buzzword here the last couple of years, you know, especially the emotions and all of the the impact that these events have had on our people.

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There is a view that in the best leaders I've worked for, and I've worked for a lot of great leaders, they, they have this ability to connect an ability to, at the individual level. And it's as simple as you know, remembering names are, it's as simple as, you know, when I ran a plant, this goes back to my first plant experience was, I knew everyone, and, and I knew, and I made,

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you know, it was important to me to learn more about them to understand, you know, I knew their families, and I knew when there was, you know,

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tragedies and issues and then reached out

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to extend, you know, support or, or sympathy or whatever. And, and so, I think it's, it's all situational, right? I mean, depending on what what is actually happening, but it all comes down to the ability to, to connect and in develop an emotional

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connection with people. And I was because comes down to people. And so I think in these times, it's how do you do that, you know, large organizations and, and companies and the like, and, and, you know, so you got you, I mean, part of that is obviously, being vulnerable and, and maybe talking about things that, that you might not have talked about, you know, openly

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and demonstrating, you know, support or,

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or, or better understanding, I think the other thing is, with these perspectives, sessions that we've had, let's face it, I mean, I've learned a lot about, you know, I mean, I know a lot, but learn a lot about diversity and different groups, and then we've had different groups talking about what it is, you know, what they feel and what they, you know, how they're impacted. And so

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once you want, and so part of this is learning, being open listening, and then using that to engage and be more empathetic, you know, so,

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you know, even just, you know, sometimes asking, like, more going through this whole George Floyd thing, and, and engaging, you know, with that, with the, with our black community was to, well, how you feeling? You know, what I mean? Like, you know, let's, let's talk about how this has impacted you and your family, what's your, you know, is there anything I can do to, you know, to help and just

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open it up, that you actually, sincerely, you know, are interested? I mean, goes goes a long ways. And so, I don't know, is that does that help? I don't know if that. Yeah. And I don't know that does that does

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his vulnerability were backfired for you? Like, has anybody ever used it against you? During your career? Like, you know, maybe you asked for help, and you admitted to a mistake or shared something personal and somebody was like, see, you know, George shouldn't be doing that role, or he shouldn't be a leader because he doesn't know what he's doing. Or his that always ended up being a positive for you? Yeah, I wouldn't say there's been any, you know, any significant negative, per se mean, any casualty as a result of it?

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You know, I mean, there's always going to be as you come up through larger organizations, there's always going to be, you know, people that will use information, you know, different ways. Yeah, I mean, but nothing that ever, let's say, derailed me, okay. No, yeah. Well, it's good.

53:46

If vulnerability is so important, and you know, we talk about it so much inside of organizations, why don't you think more leaders are doing it? Why is this such a challenge for leaders to be more human, be authentic, talk about themselves, or stories or failures? Why why do we struggle with this so much?

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Well, I mean, the day, I mean, we're in a different world, right? I mean, with all of the the challenges that are happening, and like we talked earlier, even just how people work, how they're connected information, communication, and so there's a lot of forces that are different than than when I started 40 years ago, and then as a result of that,

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you know, the the people side of it becomes, you know, this, it becomes a multi dimensional, right, I mean, as far as, you know, how all of that is, is impacting people both in on a professional and or personal level. And so, I think as as, as all of this, you know, continues to all of this change is happening, how do you as a leader,

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maintain focus, you know, to make sure that through all of those forces, you keep everyone alive?

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mind to ultimately what success is, and in their ability to be able to with all of those be able to contribute at their best. And so I think to do that you got it is definitely an emotional element that that has to be struck. And, you know, I think, you know, the command and control environment, maybe that goes back decades, you know, that's not not so much and, and then when you're in an environment that, you know, because with all of that change that, you know, let's face it, right success of business is all about people, about people in leadership. And so, as a company, if you're not able to attract and retain and develop the best people, then you're probably not going to be, you know, in the top quartile or, or kind of the one that is going to be positioned to win. Right. Yeah. And so I think it forces leaders to get pretty grounded relative to, to the people element, and then make sure that from a cultural standpoint, you're building a cultural a culture, that, you know, obviously, this is a big attribute in how people are engaged within that culture.

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I don't know if that makes sense. But no, that's, yeah, that's my view. So really quick, how much more time do you have left? Because I want to make sure we don't go over what you hear about 10 minutes. 10 minutes. Okay, perfect. Has there ever been a time when you felt vulnerable, but you couldn't show it?

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For whatever reason, he

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or she had not to show it? Yeah, either. So you felt that kind of uncertainty or risk or emotional exposure? Or, you know, however, you would describe that emotion and you, you felt it, but either you decided not to show it for whatever reason, or you couldn't show it because it would cause some sort of harm?

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Yeah, I don't know, if it's intentional, I think it comes with positions, you know, what I mean? I don't think it's personal or intentional, I think, you know, you,

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you know, a lot of times you, you know, you tend to get scripted, or you get, you know, there's a message or unless so, you know, off script and, and so

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I don't think it's intentional, per se, where I've deliberately not been,

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but part of it is just prioritizing, you know, time and effort relative to how you engage, right? And I don't think anything deliberately

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or purposely avoided.

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But I'm sure you know, this times, there's some things you just don't talk about, right. At the end of the day? And I don't know, I'm kind of thinking a lot.

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No, that makes sense.

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Do you think it's harder to be a leader now than it was? Let's say 1015 20 years ago? Is it? You know, even a CEO? Is it harder? Is it lonely? Or is it more challenging today?

58:23

Um, well, I don't know, if I, is it harder, easier, I would say.

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It's multi dimensional. And I mean, it is, you know, I mean, what worked, you know, 40 years ago to what works today, it and then what the demands are. And so, you know, I would say,

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you know, the demands on CEOs today is far greater, right, or companies, public companies don't don't make an individual on companies and CEOs, obviously, are at the top of the company are much greater today. So like, In what regard like, well, whether it be you know, before and when you go back, it was mainly just, you know, keeping your head down and delivering, you know, growth and delivering earnings.

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Now, today, and that net environment, is not only doing that, but doing it and being in achieving your ESG goals, and achieving, you know, from a social standpoint, all of what we're doing to do to drive equity and drive, you know, much greater diversity and, and the like, and so, there's a lot more in because of the public nature.

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All of this is very transparent. Right. So we're in the past, you know, those were those were things we always worked on, to be honest with I sometimes I think people think that as a company, we were focused on these priorities before maybe they weren't as, as,

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as being it

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driven as hard, but it was mainly internal. Right now with the external,

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you know, it's the demands are much greater, and obviously the CEO becomes the spokesperson and makes, you know, has the accountability for the company ultimately delivering on on the objective. So it's not harder, it's, um, it's just, you know what I mean, cuz you're doing all the things that you would normally do to build a high performing company, and culture. But it's much more transparent. You know, it's much more transparent. And so it doesn't make it harder. I'm not quite sure, but

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But it's all elements of, I mean, everything we've talked about here is about leadership. It's about excellence. It's about delivering for customers, it's about creating a high performing culture.

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Those were the same in many ways. They were the same, you know, years ago, as they are today. It's more of how all of that is then, you know, assess measured, become transparent, you know, yeah. Yeah, I have a hard time saying that, you know, than I, these weren't priorities before, but they definitely have been brought to light and obviously commitments, bigger commitments have been made, which maybe, you know, to your point make a little bit more difficult. Yeah, they've always been priorities, why bother being vulnerable? So for people out there who are either going to read the book, or maybe watch this, or listen to this conversation with you? And they're thinking, you know, that's great, George, why, why be vulnerable? Why let people in? Why open up? I don't see the need, because there are a lot of leaders out there who don't do that. And they're still successful. They're running big companies, they're running successful teams. So if you were speaking to all the leaders out there, and vulnerability, and trying to tell them why this is so important, what would you tell them?

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Well, what I would say, I mean, any, any long term success,

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you gotta be who you are, you gotta you gotta live, you know, you gotta live your values, and you can't compromise.

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And that, not only as an individual, but, but then as a team, you know, in a team dynamic, making sure that that's fully understood is what drives, you know, high performing teams. And so I'm not quite sure. And it's about it gets back to, I think, how we started our conversation about, you know, building relationships, building trust, within, within those relationships, developing respect, these are things that you earn, right, I mean, they're not given to you. And so I just think, you know, authenticity, and then obviously, the vulnerability that comes through that

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is a way to build those relationships and to, to create those, you know, that, that respect, and that trust, that then allows teams to get much further to what they would accomplish them, if they were separate

and apart, which, ultimately, if they're not working together, then ultimately they're separate. And so I just think it's foundational

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to everyone being able to have an environment to be their best, and then learn from the days and maybe, you know, not so good. And, and then

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I think accountability.

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I think this the, the enabler to, to this, or to continued improvement is accountability, because you can talk about it, but unless you understand how that translates into value, then it's, then it's purely emotional, you know, what I mean? opposed to? How do you engage, and then tie that to fundamentally doing things differently, and creating value and working differently or engaging differently, then people, you know, recognize the value, right and see why it's so important. So I think it's trust and respect, I think it's the accountability is the force in how people work together.

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And then that's how you get the best. And that's how you get the best out of people out of teams, and ultimately focusing on customers and how we contribute value. And I think part of it, you know, part of the culture. And, you know, large companies are tough because, you know, you can you can argue large companies or, you know, over time that, you know, there's acquisition, there's divestitures, there's a lot of change happening to maintain, you know, the core, the culture is, you know, when you look at all of what CEOs do, it's fundamental to the long term success of a company and, and that does, that ties to the leadership the values the you know, in

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And these are things that I think contribute to, to the success of being able to build a successful. Yeah.

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Maybe one last question, you mentioned values. Why are values so important? Can you share? What are your personal values? And how do they guide your behavior as a leader inside your company?

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Yeah, my values is pretty simple. You know, you'd say, you know, this this full, you know, I mean, across the board integrity, no matter, you know, in your personal life, your business life here, you know, you ultimately you got to be viewed as someone with a high, you know, high integrity, right with everything you do, because that's fundamental to trust, right? I mean, in, you know, with what you're doing, I think that's fundamental. And then it's just more of the, you know, how you engage and how you treat people and, and,

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you know, what you build and

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I don't know, it's just, it's more of who you are, and how you, you conduct yourself and, and how that expresses, you know, kind of the things that are most important to you.

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And those values are important, and when you don't have them, it sounds like that's when leaders really struggle. Like they they don't have the identity, they try to conform, they do things that maybe are unethical. So those values are really, really important.