

MIT Scientist On The Radical “GEEK WAY” Mindset that Drives Extraordinary Results & The 2 Important Forces Shaping The Global Economy

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Hey, everyone, welcome to another episode of great leadership, my very special guest today, Andrew McAfee, co founder and co director of the initiative on the digital economy and a principal research scientist at the MIT Sloan School of Management, co founder of a startup called Work helix. And he's the author of several books, including The Second Machine Age machine platform crowd. And he has a brand new book out, which is called the big geek way, the radical mindset that drives extraordinary results. And he's an overall great guy. I was forced to say that, but he really is I've known and Andrew for me, I'm the writer of my contract if you don't say that I refuse to come on. Yeah, exactly. I don't think it's my blue m&ms. You probably don't remember the first time we met, but it was enterprise enterprise 2.0 conference.

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I think it was in San Francisco was many, many years ago. You're dating is both you realized and yeah, but you were so you gave a talk. And you were doing a book signing. And I actually brought you my copy of enterprise 2.0 to sign and it was a very brief exchange, probably for like 15 seconds. And I was like, oh, man, this guy is awesome. He's so smart. I waited in line to get a copy of the book. And you're like, Here you go. Thanks. And then a few years later, we were both speaking at events. I think it was for PwC. We had breakfast, it was me, you and Fareed Zakaria and some folks from PwC. And including the chairman of PwC. Yeah, that's right. Yes. And I remember that, because Fareed Zakaria asked me for my Yogur

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we were sitting there, and he's like, Hey, are you gonna eat that yogurt? And I was like,

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I was like, you could have it?

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Yeah, wow. Yeah. The thing that I learned from that breakfast, one of the main thing is that Fareed is a journalist to his core, right, you remember how he was cross examining the PwC guys about their business and about things going on in the world. And he had very, very sharp questions. And you could just tell this guy is, is a journalist write write all the way down? Yep. Yeah, no, that was a that was a fun time. So it's been many, many years. And so I'm excited to talk to you again, after all those years, why

don't we start with just why you decided to write this book, what this books about because obviously, your enterprise 2.0, you spent a lot of time in the world of AI. And now this book, I guess, you could see there's some relation, but it's slightly different topic, right? It's more kind of around culture, more around transformation, less about the the technology side, so why write it. And Jacob, if you had told me even a few years ago that I would write a book that anybody could say, was a book about organizational culture, I would have laughed in your face, that would have been the most polite outcome, I just would have laughed in your face, I had no desire, I had no appetite. I think way too many of the discussions about corporate culture are some combination of scolding and virtue signaling, and just this kind of unpleasant brew. And then, you know, we get CEOs to come in, and they'll tell you how they made the tough decision in the face of hard times. And there's just this kind of self inflation going, I just, I want to be clear, there are people doing amazing work in culture. And I rely, for example, on Amy Edmondson is Amy Edmondson, talking about where psychological safety actually comes from. But in general, it wasn't my field. I wasn't that interested, I wasn't impressed by a lot of what I read. And I just, I never thought I would have done it. I write books about technology, about technological progress, technological innovation, and where that is taking us, especially where it's taking the business world. And the, you know, to the extent there was any kind of Eureka moment going on that led to this book, it was this realization that, and I'm not trying to be cute with words here. The company is a technology, I mean, that in the most literal sense, right? A technology is a thing that we invent, to help us get things done better. A company absolutely meets that definition. And when I started to look at the company, as a technology, I became convinced that that technology had received a major upgrade. And they had received it relatively recently. And they had received it in a way that escaped the notice of a lot of us. And I think the only reason that I stumbled across it or came to believe it was because, like, you know, I have this great good fortune that I get to spend my career with one foot kind of in each economy I talked to and work with a lot of companies who became very successful and large during the industrial era. And then I get to go out to northern California and these pockets of intense geek Tom and try to figure out what's going on there. And my pattern matching wasn't working very well because I like these were different. These two kinds of companies were different. And there were all the surface phenomenon, right. People had blue hair, there were dogs, there were foosball tables, and people went to Burning Man and okay, I know that's not what's really

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going on, but what really is going on here? And people say, Well, you know, these companies they are, they use a lot more technology. And that just for me chases the question back one level, why are they so much better at incorporating technology? Every company I talked to every company you talk to realizes the value of investing in technology, digital transformation, nope, you and I don't have to convince anybody of that anymore. But the population of companies that were really successful, deeply successful at this kind of transformation. And using the technology toolkit, man, they were concentrated, and they're concentrated in this one piece of real estate among these fairly geeky people, some of whom do have blue hair, they bring their dogs, they go to Burning Man. And so I kept trying to figure out what is it that they're actually doing differently? And the book, The Geek way contains my answer to that. And no one is more surprised than me. You will, there's not one mention of AI doesn't pick up a page in the book, machine learning doesn't make an appearance in the book, social media is not even there. This is not a book about digital technologies. This is a book about an upgrade to this technology called the company, which which I love by the way, you mentioned Amy,

Amy's great, she's gonna be on the show in the coming few weeks here. And she's fantastic. Like everybody tune in for Amy Edmondson, she's fantastic. And she's done this just rigorous, very clean research for a long, long time, about how do you build a company where people actually feel comfortable speaking up, and I can hardly think of more important homework for a business leader. Yep. So I have a new book coming out in October called leading with vulnerability. And she was one of the people who endorsed the books, I talked to her love it, talk to 100 CEOs for that and surveyed 14,000 employees. And it builds on a lot of the themes and concepts with safety, and with all that sort of fun stuff. And I suppose it probably even ties into some of the work that you've been doing for your new book, too. So why don't we kind of, if we were to look at it kind of from a macro perspective, and you're looking at some of the trends that you're paying attention to? What are some of those key business trends where you think this kind of geek way fits into those. So

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a little while back, Russia invaded Ukraine, right?

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Unfortunately, Slava Ukrainy and we became acutely aware at that point, we've known this for a long time, we became acutely aware of how important battlefield communications we're going to be, especially in this kind of fragmented environment, especially when we have a country that was not one of the top five GDP countries in the world didn't have one of the five biggest militaries at all, they can get really this kind of ragtag group of people trying to defend their country, in the face of a very, very large, we thought at the time, very professional, very well trained military. And we thought this was going to be a fairly quick war, unfortunately. And we knew that communications as in every war is going to be key, right? So here's here's

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something that the more I think about, the more I find amazing. Why is it that there is exactly one company on the planet that could rapidly deploy large numbers of mobile high bandwidth very, very generally useful internet terminals, to the Ukrainian army, talking about starlets? No mystery. I'm sorry about Starlink. I'm talking about SpaceX. But there's absolutely no mystery that that would be a good thing to have in wartime right that the satellite age is 60 years old. We have known from the get go from the time Telstar was launched. We have known that it would be better if it were higher bandwidth, cheaper, more mobile, all these things. Why was there one company in the world that could succeed at this there are large, very, very well established very successful defense contractors, satellite communications companies, aerospace companies, they have huge r&d budgets. They have deep deep technological staffs. They were nowhere close to getting, they literally cannot do it. SpaceX is 21 years old. It was founded in 2002 by a guy who used to run Pay Pal. This is the ultimate outsider story. Now Elon does have a physics degree, I believe, but he did not work at NASA. He didn't have any background there. But he realized the goal, the ambition now, okay, it starts with Mars, but go backward from there. To do that. You need reusable rockets. Nobody in the world could make reusable rockets. Well, why not? Is it impossible? No. You just have to want it and go about building them in a different way. We know high bandwidth satellites are valuable. Is it impossible to make Starlink style terminals? No, he demonstrated that it's not. I find this so amazing, because we have these incumbents

and I'll say it again, they're large, successful, they were profitable. They've got big bank accounts. They're very well capitalized. They have amazing technological talent. Here comes this run.

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And out of nowhere, that that has made that I'm going to say this very clearly, it has made them look bad. Now that phenomenon is going on over and over, we keep on hearing about the disruption in Hollywood, there's a writer strike, there's an actor strike, the economics of entertainment have changed very, very quickly. They've changed because of essentially, I think the single biggest factor in the change was a company founded by a guy who built software debugging tools previously, and he founded the company based on his insight that you could mail DVDs in an envelope. That's the origin story of Netflix, but then that goes on to disrupt filmed entertainment in Hollywood. These are the stories that get me really excited, because these are the companies that I'll use my phrase are following the give way. And they're showing us that the limits that we kind of thought we had to get used to or kind of had to live with. No, we can blow past them. We don't have to tolerate this kind of lazy slow pace of innovation. The the good enough, no.

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To make stuff better. Did you see the movie air?

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I have not seen it yet is good? Yeah. So there's, there's a scene and I was going to ask you if this is more of a technological thing, or a cultural thing. So there's a scene in the movie era where basically Nike, you know, they're competing against converse and Adidas, they have the lowest market share. And at the time, whenever a company wanted to sign an athlete, you basically give them a licensing fee. And they're really trying to sign Jordan, which as we all know, is basically the athlete that turned Nike around. And the way that they signed Jordan is that Jordans family requested that he get a percentage of every shoe that is sold. And Nike came to him, and they're like, No, this has never been done in the industry. Nobody has ever done this, ever, and none of the companies and the way that they got Jordan was that they, they implemented this new business model where they offered him royalties per shoe that was sold. And because they did that, when nobody else would, they were able to sign him the company was able to turn around became obviously a huge success story. Jordan's a billionaire. And now this is kind of a common practice. And again, in that case, it wasn't a technological change. It was just kind of a mental shift. Like, we've never done that before. But wait a minute, why can't we do that before if it's worth trying to think differently? And so it kind of for you, when you think about companies like Starlink, when you think about

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things like open AI? Are these? Obviously there's a technology piece in there too. But it seems like you know, Elon, and specifically SpaceX, it was also just a mental like, why can't we do this? Like, why can't we think differently? It's a mental thing. Exactly. And let me try to sharpen that a little bit. Because my editor poor, nice, darker, a little brown did a great job. And he said, Okay, well, like what's a geek, we have to define what a geek is here. Like, what do you mean, we use the word loosely all the time. And like, like, you know, the standard usage of the term has been a person who's just way into computers. And that's not what I'm talking about. A lot of these business geeks that I'm talking about in the book,

are really obsessed with computers. But that's not the right way to think about what they've accomplished with their companies. So I had to broaden out the definition of a geek. And for me, it means two things it means first of all, they are obsessed with a hard problem, right? How do we get to Mars is sub subsidiary to that? How do we build a reusable rocket? Nobody's done that before. How do I do streamed entertainment over the internet? These are tough, tough problems. How do I build a sustainably successful company is another tough problem. But so the geeks are, first of all, they're just tenacious problem solvers. And they love really hard problems, and they refuse to give up. The second thing, though, is that they are they are either unconventional themselves, or they are willing to be unconventional, they're not constrained by mainstream opinion. They're not constrained by the status quo. Like you just pointed out. They would not say we can't offer Jordan, a royal royalty per sneaker, because that's not the way you do it. You do a licensing fee. Instead, they said, But wait a minute, what are we trying to accomplish? Let's work backwards from there. There's a great quote from Jeff Bezos, I think in one of his shareholder letters, or one of his shareholder meetings where he said, we are willing to be misunderstood for long periods of time. I think that's great. And that really helps drive home. The second thing that I think characterizes a geek, which is just not being bound by convention, the fact that it hasn't been done before that's not the way we do things that really doesn't matter to us. So getting back to some of the trends would you say kind of speed of change is a trend technological advancement is a chain is a trend

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just more uncertainty in the world as a trend like what are like I'm trying to think of what are the what's the situation

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The environment in which the geek way model flourishes. So what's the environment that we're in now that allows kind of a geek way to flourish? There are two tectonic forces that are reshaping the global economy. One of them is globalization. The other one is tech progress. And let me try to make that concrete. I went back and looked at the data. And it turns out early this century, about 20 years ago, US companies on average as a whole, if you lump them all together, and you look at their investment year after year, they were spending about twice as much every year on non digital equipment as they were on digital equipment. So you know, you gotta if you're gonna run an economy, you need pizza, ovens, you need delivery trucks, you need bank vaults, you need drill press, you need lots of gear, I'm not talking about buildings, I'm talking about equipment. And in the 21st century, you need a bunch of PCs, and servers and network equipment, software, that's all the digital stuff. It was almost two for one physical to digital. When Marc Andreessen wrote that great essay Software is eating the world. You know, he was absolutely prescient, when he wrote that in 2011, we were spending about US companies were spending about as much money every year on digital as they were on physical, the digital had caught up. Now for the most recent periods where we have data, the situation is just about flipped US companies as a whole, are spending almost two to one on digital equipment over all other kinds of equipment. If you look at it in real terms, if you adjust for inflation, physical equipment investment is on a slow, steady downward trend. The digital investment is on a very, very steady upward trend. And I don't think that's going to change anytime soon. But think about what that means. Every company and most CEOs that I've talked to agree with this, Jacob, how many times have you heard a CEO say, we're a technology company now? Right? It's a cliché, it's also true, they are a

technology company. Now, because they're investing so much more in technology. That means that they're subject to Moore's Law kinds of improvement in underlying technologies, that means that their upgrade cycle has gotten a lot faster, that means that they have to manage a lot more complexity of different kinds than they did in the past, it almost certainly means they're writing and maintaining a lot more software than they were 20 years ago. So when your investment changes that much, you start to look a lot like an old fashioned high tech company. And I think one part of what's going on here is that the place in the world, I think in the world that has the most experience running technologically intensive companies in a very competitive high tech industry. And it's probably Northern California. So when I look at it that way, it's not as much of a surprise to me that this style of running a company grew up in that petri dish, and it's now going to industry after industry. After all, we're all high tech industries now. And if you can't master the dynamics of high tech, if you can't run a successful high tech company, oh, man, that gigs are going to come to town and you are going to be in trouble. And you mentioned the second one was globalization. So the first one, obviously, we're seeing a huge influx in digital technology investment. And I mean, especially with chat GPT and generative AI. That to me is I mean, it feels like it came out of nowhere, seemingly, you know, six months ago, and now it's just, I mean, taking Oh, I mean, I use it, I have a small team of people that I work with, and I'm using it on a daily basis. My dad's asking me about it. I have great family members that you're like, what's uh, how do you know what catch up to those that there's like retired people, and it's, it's nuts. It's completely crazy. So I think we can all see and feel the technology side of it. Globalization, I feel like some people understand what that means some people not so much. So why globalization? How do you explain what that is?

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That that one to me is relatively straightforward. In the last couple of decades of the 20th century, a huge portion of the world's population stopped living under a centrally planned economy stop living under a communist or a collectivist society. And they joined the market oriented society. I'm talking about former Soviet Union, China, India made a massive transition to a market economy. So the the number of people who could who could participate in global markets went up a lot. And we built better physical infrastructure. We built much, much better digital infrastructure to integrate all those people. So I'm not super surprised if there's a lot more globalization. And that competition is more global markets are more global. Knowledge work can be done anywhere physical work can be done lots of different places. That's the other main phenomena that every company that I talked to is grappling with. The topic of vulnerability is front and center inside of a lot of organizations today, but should you actually be vulnerable at work? In my brand new book leading with vulnerability, I actually say that you should not

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I'd be vulnerable at work. But instead, you should lead with vulnerability. The difference. Vulnerability is about exposing a gap. Whereas leading with vulnerability is about exposing a gap that you have and then demonstrating what you are trying to do to close that gap. To figure out how to make all of this happen. I interviewed over 100 CEOs and surveyed 14,000 employees around the world. And I put all of that into my brand new book, which just came out, you can learn more by heading over to lead with vulnerability.com.

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And it's still increasing as we get cheaper phones and cheaper connectivity into different parts of the world, rural rural areas, places where there's a lot of poverty, but still, they're trying to get connectivity. And as more and more people come online, I think we're going to see that even continue to grow places like India, Brazil, China, I mean, it's growing like crazy. It's a think about that. And it's fascinating as those economies grow, and they're growing very quickly, and as they industrialize, and as they continue to contribute more to the global economy. Are they going to follow the industrial era playbook for how you manage how you lead a company? What the org structure looks like, how you make big, definitely not? How you run a major project? Gosh, I hope not. Because there's a much better way out there. I hope that the entrepreneurs of today and tomorrow, you know, with all respect, I hope they're not reading the books that I read when I was an MBA student, I hope they're not reading, you know, the things that I was teaching in the 90s. Because there's been an upgrade. Yeah, a huge upgrade. So it's interesting. You mentioned bureaucracy. I know you also talk about it in your book. I had Gary Hamel on the podcast as well a little while ago, who Fantastic? Who gets very angry when you bring up the B word with him? And I'm always fascinated, because it seems like everybody hates bureaucracy. Everybody knows that. It's not helpful for organizations, everybody knows that. There's got to be better way to do it. Yet everybody still lives and works in a bureaucratic world. And why is that the case? Why is this such a hard thing? And where does how does bureaucracy fit? When you think about the gateway? Are they just completely antithetical to each other? Like one just kills the other? No, it's not quite polar opposites. And Max Vabre. The one of the founders of sociology pointed this out, I think over a century ago, he said, Look, you're not going to run a decent sized organization. This was the brand new 20th century, right. So you're not going to run a 20th century organization without professional administration. And he talked about without people sitting in offices shuffling paper. And he was right, it large organizations require some coordination, they require some hierarchy. Bureaucracy is a label for that. And it just means Do you have processes that get followed? Do you have stable job titles? Do you have hierarchy? Are there professional managers, every company I know, almost every company I've ever come across meets that definition. The problem is that when with bureaucracy becomes excessive, it gets in the way of what the organization is trying to do. And there's a you know, I read Gary and Kelly's book, it's fantastic. But some of the stories that you hear you think they're making stuff up, except that they're absolutely not, I came across a story of this

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person working as a middle manager in Hewlett Packard, pretty well run company historically, in the early years of the 21st century. And she needed to get up, she wanted to spend about \$250,000 on consultants, so not nothing. But she needed to get approval to do that. And she knew that so she wrote up a request, put it into the system. And she realized that she had to get 20 different signatures to spend that level of money. And she said it was using my boss, it was my boss's boss, it was my boss's boss's boss. And then she kept on drilling down. She's I've never heard of these people. I don't know who they are. She trusts tracked it down to a procurement office somewhere in another country. And she was reduced to calling them and pleading with them to finish filling out, you know, clicking on the online form. She said it was so bad that when she found a point person who would listen to her and eventually approved the spending, when that person was moving on from her job, she asked Jennifer, what's her name? She asked Jennifer for a LinkedIn recommendation, because they were such close colleagues at that point. Thanks, Jacob. That's, that's even a true story. But this is a bad joke that happens over and over again. And one of the great failure modes of the industrial era was that

companies just got barnacled up, right? They just got jammed up with all kinds of bureaucracy. The stats in Gary's book are they're hilarious if they if they weren't so you know, teeth nationally French tragically funny at the same time tragic right at the same time. And so what the geeks have not completely vanished bureaucracy I think that's almost impossible to do because it's such a deep tendency for us human beings, but they are keenly aware of it and they try like hell to fight it. And I think when you when you go deep and you look for the explanation of why there's so much bureaucracy it

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is really, really simple. It's us, right? It's this very basic human desire for status. And there is, aside from oxygen, I don't think there's anything we crave more and more routinely more regularly than status. And for me, that's a very elegant explanation of why we should expect to see this sclerotic bureaucracy. That's the default. That's not the exception. Because we got people who want to be prominent

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when it gives you that, yeah, I mean, it's like playing a video game, right? I mean, video games are you level up are the best examples of hierarchy, right, you level up, you get better weapons, you get better magic spells, you get better. Same thing in the corporate world, you level up, you get the better desk, get the better spot, better recognition, better benefits, better pay. And it's funny to hear you talk about bureaucracy. So it's just kind of a funny little story, I go to LA Fitness not too far away from me, and

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I play a lot of racquetball. And in sometimes in the racquetball courts, it gets pretty hot. So we asked them to go turn on the air conditioning. And so we went to the front desk to ask them to go turn on the air conditioning, the people who work at the front, they bring in their supervisor, the supervisor brings in the manager, Manager brings in the general manager of the store. And the general manager of the gym says, oh, we can't control the air conditioning, you have to call our headquarters in Dallas. To get out. I swear to control the air conditioning that is in Los Angeles. And, and that to me is just the ultimate like, as my dad would say, stupidity Unlimited, right? I have to call another state to control the air conditioning at the gym that I go to, because I have to get to get permission because there's so many layers, and there's just one person in Dallas who's like the chief AC officer, who can give them permission for that. So it's insane. And it's not just not what I would I don't think happened there was that somebody got a blank sheet of paper in HQ and designed that process. I don't think that's what happened. And and also you bring up that we do want, we want to rise up, right? I want to be super clear, a lot of this is not this kind of Machiavellian scheming. It's much more subconscious than that. A huge amount of the status games that we humans play in our social interactions have huge amounts of hierarchy and status built in. We process tons of that completely subconsciously. It's just the lower part of the iceberg. So I'm not making the case that all of us are these scheming, Machiavellian, you know,

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fiends inside companies, no, we're doing what humans do. Okay, consult me on that bring me in the loop on that. The end result of all that, and if you're not super careful, you're going to wind up with the situation you saw in the gym that Jennifer saw when she was trying to get something approved, just this weird, sclerotic bureaucracy, and it kind of appeared out of nowhere and makes everybody unhappy. And the geek rested the geek remedy for that it's a to me, it's fascinating. It is not. Now don't be

bureaucratic, that lecturing just doesn't work. It's like saying to human beings, don't try to don't try to gain status, don't try to rise up, it's not never gonna work. But what they do instead, I think it's unbelievably sharp. It's very, very simple. They strip away opportunities to acquire status that are not aligned with the goals of the company. And this is John Doerr. And Peter Drucker, you're talking about management by objective and OKRs. And, and all of these things, great, set up what you want the organization to accomplish, build a bureaucracy that translates that down into what each part of the company is going to work on. So everybody knows the goals and what they're going to try to hit, and then get out of the way, right? Just let them do their thing they get out of the way. Part is the really, really hard part. But it's, it's essential. So before I ask you about the four norms of geek companies, I wanted to ask you about middle management really quick, because we were just talking about that. And there have been a lot of articles written lately about I don't know if you'd call it the end of middle management, but why middle management is in trouble. You see a lot of companies like Amazon like meta,

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Twitter, a lot of organizations are saying that they're trying to improve productivity and efficiency, and they're trying to flatten and remove hierarchy. And the default for a lot of these companies means getting rid of their mid level leaders. And then there's kind of a counterpoint that a lot of people are saying, which is that these mid level leaders, you shouldn't be getting rid of them. These are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the culture of the company for coaching other people for unlocking the potential of others. So I'm curious to get your thoughts on mid level management. Is the role changing? Do they still serve value and purpose? Yeah, I had my thinking on this stood on its head by Satya Nadella. So I got to interview him for the book. And he's fantastic. His book, hit rewind, has some really great insights on it. I learned a ton more when I got to talk to him. And I asked him this question. At the end of our interview, I said, you know, Satya, the thing we keep hearing over and over is that the leaders at the top want changed.

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happen, the rank and file wants change to happen. And there's this large population of of, you know, I guess, clock watching middle managers who just gum everything up. And he says no, I reject that. He said, Look, for most of my career, I was a middle manager. And most of us came out of that. I wasn't trying to do the wrong thing by the company. But I did have too many conflicting objectives. I did have to go to many places to get anything done. I wasn't given enough, you know, autonomy. And he said, When I took over a CEO of Microsoft, I had this very large, pretty dispirited workforce. And I thought about how I could unjam them I forget if he used a different verb, but he My job is to unconstrained them to give them fewer conflicting things to do to make it easier to get their jobs done. And he said that, that's just the the middle managers are clogging things up is the wrong way to look at it. And he came down much closer to your second point of view. These are the coaches these I've heard them called the transmission belts of the organization. And if you as the leader can figure out how to get out of the way and give them the tools they need to do their jobs and point them in the right direction, man, just watch what they're going to accomplish. And I think the proof of that is Microsoft's market capitalizations. And Sachin Adela took over right? To me, it's amazing because it shows that you can unjam an organization leadership can unjam an organization like you know, from the book, I start off the chapter about ownership by talking about where Microsoft was, in the years before Nadella took over.

And man that that was a dispirited organization that was not lighting up the tech world at all. And a big part of what I think Nadella did was get out of the way of his managers and make sure that they have what they needed. And they knew what the company expected of them. Brilliant, brilliant work. Yeah, I think his famous quote is shift from No at all culture to a learn at all culture. And so yeah, he's done a tremendous job, very, very different leader than then Palmer was for sure. Very different leader. But he also he realized something that you said earlier, he realized that, that when he came in, and the Microsoft that he grew up in was not a place where it was okay to be vulnerable. Yeah, absolutely not. He said everybody had to be the smartest person in the room, you had to be on top of your numbers in every meeting vulnerability was career death at Microsoft. And another part of his brilliance was to turn that around, and make it a place where leaders were okay, being vulnerable and showing vulnerability. It's not any kind of group hug therapy idea, the opposite of vulnerability is defensiveness. And no man, was Microsoft, a defensive company before he took over? And that will that will send you out of business. Yeah, I mean, the big thing that I talked about in the book is kind of to your point, it's not just to be vulnerable. It's to lead with vulnerability, meaning to demonstrate the connection and the competence. And I think too often, what we see inside of our organizations in terms of vulnerabilities will say something like, I've made a mistake, I'm sorry, which is vulnerable. But that's not leadership. The right thing to say, if you want to add the leadership piece is I made a mistake, I'm sorry, here's what I learned from my mistake. And here's what I'm going to do to make sure it doesn't happen again in the future. And I think as a leader, like if you're leading a team, or a function or an organization, and you just keep showing up to work, and saying, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, I need help. I'm struggling. I screwed up, right, we're gonna wonder why the hell you're in the role, right. But you have to demonstrate that forward progress, the leadership, the momentum of something that you're doing to try to close those gaps. And I think that's what we need to see much more of inside of our organizations. So getting to your the employee agree. Yeah, I mean, it makes complete sense. And so getting to your theme of the four norms of geek companies, we can talk about these for a few minutes before we jump to some action items. So we have speed, ownership, science and openness. Why don't we start with speed? Why is this such an important element, and I'm assuming by speed, you mean, create products and services quicker, respond to customers quicker, just fast, fast, fast. I mean, something even a little more specific than that. I mean, following the spirit and the philosophy of the Agile development movement, which I found out as I was researching the book was actually born on a weekend, in the winter of 2001. When 17 software nerds went to, I believe it was Snowbird, Utah for a weekend because they were so frustrated with the way the software was getting written. And at that time, basically, everybody was using the waterfall model or some variant of it, where you wrote a great big, thick binder, and then you program the binder and you're delivering it to the customer late and they hated you because it wasn't what they wanted. And they were these gigs were so frustrated by they said, let's just get together and get a whiteboard and see if we can come up with anything. And that was actually the birth of the agile movement, which is all about as you know, very rapid cycles, very, very fast pace of iteration, not velocity, just pace of iteration, where at the end of every cycle, you're going to get feedback about whether or not what you created is making the customer happy. Does it actually compile does it

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Run, you're getting feedback from reality, you're getting feedback from the customer, you're learning as you go, I find it really hard to overstate how, how many benefits there are from that approach. So for

me, the great geek norm of speed is basically its cadence its iteration it's do something, get feedback on it, do it visibly, and then do it again. And I don't know of a company that I would call a geek company that is not kind of fanatic about that. You remember when the motto for Facebook was, could no longer be moved fast and break things, right? That just wasn't going to work anymore. They didn't walk away from the move fast part. It's move fast and fix things now. So this iteration is non negotiable, that to me, that's the that's what defines the great geek norm of speed. And I should back up one step. For me. Well, for a lot of people, a norm has a pretty tight definition, it is a thing that the people around you expect. And where if you don't conform, if you don't behave that way. There are going to be consequences. Right. So, you know, for most companies, the color dress shirt you wear is not a norm. Yeah. But for good companies meant if you said we're going to do the waterfall model on this software project, you would someone would have a conversation with you, right, there's an expectation that you're going to follow this iteration heavy approach. Yeah. And I always like to say late, it seems like late adopter now is out of business. I think it was at the Gartner hype, hype curve that they used to have you had the early adopters and the early laggards and the late adopters. And now it seems like if you're sort of on that other spectrum of the curve, where you're watching to see what other people are going to do, it's probably not not a good approach for the geek way in today's world. Here's another bad approach. Plan a lot before you start doing anything in building building analysis. A lot of time upfront, analyzing, planning, defining what you're going to do, if you follow the waterfall method, and your competitors are following an agile method, you are in a world of trouble. I open up the chapter on speed with a side by side case study of Volkswagen trying to develop software for its first electronic car, which was just a comedy of errors again, if it wasn't so tragic, versus what what Tesla is able to do and how quickly it's able to deploy even fairly major upgrades to the cars software. Yeah. Okay, well, let's jump into the leaders toolkit, where we're going to talk a little bit more about those three norms. And then we'll talk about some action items, maybe what people can do to implement some of those things. But why don't we continue on. So we talked about speed, we can jump now to ownership, science, openness, and then maybe you can give some action items or tips on what people can do. So let's jump to

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my conversation with Andy McAfee continues for subscribers of great leadership plus, on Apple podcasts, or on Spotify. And in this bonus conversation, we are going to talk about what he would do if he were brought into a company now to implement some of the concepts from his book and to create a culture that supports and embraces the geek way. We're going to talk about a few things specifically the geek norm of speed, what that means what that looks like. And he's going to share a couple examples of a geek versus a non geek company. And we're going to wrap up this bonus episode with why everybody including you should be interested in the concept of the geek way and how that can impact your career. And your organization. This episode again, only available for premium subscribers on Apple podcasts have great leadership. Plus, you can also join our substack community where every week I am writing in depth, strategic guides and insights and strategies for how you can become a better leader. You also will get a weekly leadership hack a very short video that I recorded for you over 40,000 strong again, that's great leadership.substack.com And lastly, if you enjoyed this episode, please remember to share it with a friend, a co worker or a peer somebody who you would like to see become a better leader. Thanks for tuning in. See you next time.