

Transformation has become an overused buzzword for companies and consultants in the last five years, but the market-proven truth is that companies, and by extension employees, are now required to be more agile, resilient and willing to upskill. So, how do large companies manage significant, lasting changes across the operating model during times of transition with organizational performance, innovation and collaboration as priorities? Success is driven by engaged and empowered employees, but it requires the right leadership, corporate culture and silo-busting collaboration.

There's one golden thread that runs through all three: the power of collective purpose. My name is Arthur Jones and the guests for this If/When episode are Shelie Gustafson, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer at Jacobs, and Education and Leadership Development Coach, Michael Chavez, who is founder and Managing Director at Broad Vista Partners.

(01:03):

Before we get started on the lineup of questions that we've got going, I'd love to know a little bit more about your background as leaders and what's led up to your careers up until now? Could you please share some more information on your background, along with the biggest leadership lesson you've learned along the way? Michael, I'll start with you with this one.

Thanks, Arthur. My background didn't start off with leadership development. It started in the world of strategy consulting, which led me to take on a few other roles in strategy within a consulting firm. My background is in strategy consulting, which led me to take on a few other roles in strategy within a consulting firm. My background is in strategy consulting, which led me to take on a few other roles in strategy within a consulting firm.

cmMund doun' Mon e t R 4 o !O My backgrouny pack o ir





(07:45):

And by the way, I think we're moving in that direction as well. We're certainly becoming a lot more people-centric and a lot more attuned to the emotional needs of people. And that was one of the, I think, really big learning from the pandemic, but quite apart from that, it's a need that we have to ensure that people are aligned and know what to do when something comes at them, and they find they don't know what to do. And that's the job of leaders today. A lot of

we ought to do about it, and that's where organizations really accelerate and adapt. And that's why I think one of the most central points about what is required of leaders is to create organizations that can learn faster.

And that's a great segue to asking you about this as well, Shelie, because I think that you could talk about partnering up or the collective leadership. What is your take on what Michael said there about empowering other people and working and collaborating together to drive the leadership that we need?

I think it's absolutely crucial. As Michael has said, the role of the leader has changed over the years, and it's because the context in which we work has changed. One of the areas that I've really focused on is the word partnering and what that means for leaders in the organization. So, we use that word a lot.

because you don't just rely on your own assessment. You get your partner's assessment. You're in constant communication with each other.

Even though you're underwater, you're using hand signals to check in, "Are you doing okay?" Or, "Where are we going? Are we ready to be finished with this?" That partnership ensures the safety and the positive experience of both individuals.

(12:48):

So, if I take that back into the work world, we have partners every day that we work with in our business relationships within a company because nothing ever gets done by one single person or no decision is really made by one individual. I think leaders have to come together jointly in partnership to effectively work together and to really learn together, as Michael said. So I think we can take some of those behaviors that I just described and say, "Well, what do those look like in the work world in terms of setting expectations, checking in with each other, communicating, et cetera?" And so I think those are really, really important, and I think that word partnership, as I think about it, is something that all leaders today have to think about in terms of how they show up. And I'll go back to the leadership shadow: What is their shadow as individuals and as partners that they leave in their organization?

What struck us about was our partnership that we've had in working together over the years, and what dawned on me is this idea of partnership is you're entering into it because you're trying to create something greater than what either of you can do, which means you have to be really aligned on these very fundamental questions. "Why? What are we trying to create? Why are we doing this together? How should we be interacting?"

And those things cannot be agreed upon by simply assuming them. We actually have to spend time explicitly discussing those sorts of things with each other. And it's iterative; it keeps going. You do it again and again and again. And so, you're constantly stepping out, stepping back from the work and renegotiating... Not negotiating, recontextualizing for each other, really, about where this goes because, in my thinking, the evidence of a great partnership is where you're not spending a lot of extra effort speculating on each other's motives. It's because you're so aligned. Right?

That's the evidence of a great partnership, but it takes work, it takes some iteration and it requires vigilance all the time.

I love that. That's great. And it's fantastic that you bring up your own partnership and I also loved Shelie's example of the buddy system, which I think is brilliant because it immediately gives you the idea of a very trusting partnership. And I love the fact that you brought that up because I think it ties in nicely with the next question, Shelie, which is about one of the lessons that I've learned in terms of the research for this interview was that the key role of psychological safety within a corporate culture.

(15:29):

And so I think that the way you've spoken about relationships and partnerships and building that trust with people is important. I think it's part of this, but could you please explain why psychological safety is so important within a corporate culture, and also how can companies improve this?

Psychological safety is vital to everything we've just been talking about. In fact, if you're going to have an organization that learns, that cannot happen if people don't have a voice or if they don't feel that they have a voice. So, psychological safety really is about maximizing the voice we have in the organization, such that we increase our sensory muscles as an organization. We're just better able to sense what's going on and examine what's going on because we have different perspectives and voices. And it's linked to this idea of the need for people to come together to solve big, unknown problems. So they (





(20:18):

And so, as a resui



That actually tees up the next question beautifully as well because the next question was going to ask, outside of job-specific skills, what are the most important skills for employees to invest in the long term with the view of becoming leaders in their own right? What would you say are those skills they should look into?

For me, first and foremost, I think we're seeing a bit of a resurgence in interest around the liberal arts, which seems, again, paradoxical to what we've just been through. We think we need a lot of engineers, we need a lot of coders, we need all that kind of stuff. But we're also in a world where the complexity of the problems is very high. And so what we're needing is all-rounders. We're needing people who are



leader. But one is that ability to make decisions when we don't have all the information or in difficult circumstances because if we don't have leaders that do that, then we are just paralyzed. The leader's paralyzed. The team is paralyzed, the company can be paralyzed.

So, getting comfortable to make a decision when you know you don't have all the information, but then that learning comes and vulnerability and humility comes with that because we're going to make mistakes. So, we have to be able to acknowledge them and take accountability for them. And then being willing to shift once the path is more clear.

(31:14):

I also think that leaders need to have this commitment to whatever that North Star is, the direction that they're setting. Now, it doesn't mean that we can't be flexible and change course when we need to change course, but leaders who don't articulate a North Star or don't stay aligned to something and they're always shifting, I think, create confusion and frustration in the organization.

(31:42):

And the last thing I would say is we're not leaders if we don't have followers. So we have to have people that are helping us along the way and joining us. To do that, something that I've learned here by working with the leader is that you have to bring with you a dose of inspiration for others. That doesn't mean that you have to be loud or it doesn't mean that you have to be extroverted in your leadership, but you do have to have the communication and be able to share the information or the stories that are going to tap the hearts and minds of people that they're going to want to join and be part of it.

(32:30):

And maybe I will add a last one just because I find that leaders who bring humility with them as well, really, I think it goes hand in hand with the inspiration as well. Somehow, that person who has that good sense of humility, along with all the other things, curiosity and willingness to make decisions when you don't have all the information, just does something for people in the organization that creates a lot of respect. And people say, "I want to be part of that leader's team. I want to join











Thank you.