Arthur Jones (00:05):

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.

Michael Chavez (01:20):

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 couple of Fortune 500 companies. And I suppose what I learned in that regard, which really shaped my career, was that there were things that surround strategy that tend to be a lot more determinantal to strategic success, namely leadership and culture.

How I got into this world of leadership development and leadership facilitation really came from a reality that struck me in my final strategic planning role, and that was that the best conversation seemed to be happening after I left the room. And that's when I started to wake up to the fact that leadership really mattered strategically to companies, and I became very interested in the people side of things. So, that's a little quick summary of my background.

Shelie Gustafson (02:27):

So, first of all, it's great to be here with both of you. And so here's a little bit about my background. I've primarily worked in the human resource field for many years. I grew up in the talent development and talent management side of HR, and then I've done numerous mergers and acquisitions. I've been a CHRO for about eight years and am currently with Jacobs Solutions. I came to Jacobs through an acquisition. There have been many lessons that I've learned over the course of my career, but the one that stands out, and this may not be a huge 'aha!' to people, but it's leadership matters, and it's crucial to business performance and success. So let me just tell you a little bit about why for that.

(03:16):

I think many organizations value the grassroots work that is done around culture in an organization and leadership. And, while I agree that there's value in that, the money is when that leadership is at the top. If we want to have impactful and lasting results, it really requires those senior leaders in an organization to set the tone, set expectations and provide guardrails for the entire company. So that's just been the consistent theme as I've been in different industries about what stands out in terms of my biggest lessons around leadership.

Arthur Jones (03:56):

Immediately, I can see some threads coming through, which I think we are going to hear a lot about throughout this talk, which is amazing. And what I liked, what you mentioned there, Shelie, especially around being driven from the top and the guardrails, is that it's a great lead into the next question, which is onto the main theme of corporate culture. And I think you both recently co-hosted a presentation at a global conference that revealed how culture drives performance and the importance of elevating collaboration through partnerships. So, what would you say are the biggest lessons from your joint presentation?

Shelie Gustafson (04:26):

So, Michael and I did present, and the purpose of our workshop was really to explore the behaviors required to drive performance in an organization, and that led us to talk about something that Michael has introduced us to, which is our leadership shadow. The leadership shadow is defined by what we say, what we do, and what we measure. Let me give you a brief example. If a leader espouses that maybe collaboration and communication are critically important to the business and the business outcomes but then is walled off from the

team, doesn't hold team calls, is late to meetings, doesn't show up to individual meetings, that shadow that that leadership casts is not congruent with what the individual has said and that trust, to have trust in leader, trust with our people and confidence from our people, we have to ensure that our behaviors, our words, our actions are aligned to what we say is important.

(05:37):
Michael is an expert on organizational culture and purpose, and I just want to tie this up for a moment. We have to align as leaders, the shadow that we cast to the purpose that we espouse in our organization as well. And that's what's going to, as leaders in the organization, help bring people along, help inspire them, and ultimately, that's where that performance and impact comes and why we say that that culture impacts performance significantly.

Arthur Jones (06:09):
I loved hearing about that. That leadership shadow is something that I've just learned about. It's fascinating because it seems like it really ties into authenticity and aligning your individual purpose with the collective purpose of the company, which is fascinating. And I think it's great because the next question, I think, Michael, you can talk a bit about this, but from what I understand, a big part of creating an inclusive, performance-driven culture relies on leadership and having that clear purpose. So, how would you say leadership and its responsibilities have evolved and adapted to what it is now?

Michael Chavez (06:40):
Yeah, firstly, Arthur, it's one of the biggest 'ahas' that I had, not just in my career, but just in working with clients, was that in essence, we need more and better leadership than we ever did. And that's because the problems we're facing are bigger and more complicated, and they're actually quite complex. And what we're faced with are totally new challenges in business today. So, this idea of a predictive world or forecasting even is almost antithetical to the reality we're living. What the replacement idea is, however, is that while we can't predict, we can be clear and we can create stability in the organization by building up our shared sense of purpose, the thing that we're most in service of. And that is a huge trend, and it's, again, it's often, I think, misrepresented as being about more touchy-feely in our organizations.

(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 leadership energy is spent on narrating clarity.

(08:19):

And it's funny; this was something that I was working on with clients quite a bit, and it actually formed the central hypothesis of our book, which we wrote in 2020 with my colleagues at Duke. What's interesting is that right around that time, I was also CEO of Duke Corporate Education, and that reality hit me. The thing that I was writing about was what I was living, and what I was living was that you have to spend a lot of time as a leader narrating context, purpose, vision, behaviors, values, and values-based behaviors, really. You have to spend a lot of time in that space, more time than you actually initially want to, because what you're not doing is you're not fixing problems for people, partially because you don't know the answers to those problems in this world, but also because you need an empowered team that has to learn fast.

(09:17):

So, you've got to spend time managing the guardrails as opposed to handcuffing your people to you. And again, that's a byproduct of the kind of change we're encountering, the kind of problem sets we're dealing with in business, and it calls for a very different kind of leadership than what a lot of us had as exemplars in our careers earlier on.

Arthur Jones (09:41):

I find that fascinating, especially because of the way that you're talking about individual responsibility, but also how you have to empower other leaders along the way to make sure that that vision is then... It carries out the rest of the company.

Michael Chavez (09:54):

This fundamental idea of collective learning, the ability of the team to learn or the organization to learn, is a very different challenge than individual learning. It means that we are building a shared sense of what is happening and why and a shared agreement on what

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.

Arthur Jones (10:25):
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?

Shelie Gustafson (10:41):
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.

We say that we need a partner in the organization, but I don't know that leaders really internalize what does that mean and what are the behaviors that are displayed for a true partnership. When I think about it, I think about, well, what's the definition of a partner? And I like to use the definition of partners who are invested in each other's success and achievement of a common purpose or a common goal.

(11:33):
And so, if we think about it, that definition means we either win together or we lose together. We have partners that show up every day in our lives, in our personal relationships, business dealings and everyday activities, but I like to think about what that means in our work world and what are those behaviors? And really have leaders do an assessment, "Am I engaging on those things that I'm showing up as a partner to other people?" And I'll give you a quick example.

(12:08):
A long time ago, I used to scuba dive, and I think of that as a partnership. So, there are a couple of rules of thumb when you scuba dive. First of all, you never do so without a buddy, which means you never do so without a partner. Right? You check each other's equipment

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?

Michael Chavez (13:44):
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.

Arthur Jones (15:04):

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?

Michael Chavez (15:45):

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. Right?

(16:26):

I actually think that that is why psychological safety is having a bit of a renaissance, is that as we've gotten more really confronted with these highly complex challenges, never before seen challenges, all of a sudden, we're being reminded of the fact that we need to be better at learning, which means we need more voice. And Inclusion is having; I think, another renaissance from the perspective of voice, not just in terms of making people feel included, which is important, but it is actually, you don't get inclusion if you don't have psychological safety because you might include people in meetings, but if they don't give you their voice, what that means is you're not getting actually true inclusion because their voice is not engaged, their thinking is not engaged with you. So, it is such a vital aspect of organizational life in this idea of psychological safety.

(17:24):

There's one other really important point about it, and that is it's really... This was proved by Amy Edmondson's research, but also by Google in 2017 in a really widely publicized study that they did to determine what drives high performance in teams, and what they found was number one, which was that people feel safe speaking up. It's the number one driver that they found, again, consistent with other research. But it was just really interesting to see that recently, in 2017, that was really popping up again. I'm sure it's exactly the same now, if not even stronger, because of what we've all been through in the last five years. However, I actually think that psychological safety is a very central core element that leaders have to manage and monitor.

(18:11):

The point about that study was... A side corollary of it was you saw high variability in the degree of psychological safety throughout Google in that study, which means that psychological safety is not the purview really of the C-suite. It's the purview of local leaders. Local leaders create climates of psychological safety or not, and that's surprising to leaders that I work with because a lot of things that they might be complaining about in terms of the organizational culture are things that, seemingly, they have no control over, but in this particular instance, psych safety, that is the ability for people to feel that it's not only okay to speak up with problems, perspectives, but it's actually rewarded and required.

First of all, that's what psychological safety is, and that can vary quite a bit from team to team. So, local leaders here become extraordinarily important in their ability to create an environment of psychological safety team by team throughout the organization.

(19:24):

It's interesting, though, to do that really well; one of the hardest things to do as a leader under stress is to... Because I don't think any leader wakes up in the morning and says, "Hey, I'm going to create a confusing leadership shadow," or, "I want to destroy psychological safety today. It's Wednesday. Let me destroy psychological safety." No. What happens is that it happens unintentionally, and it happens often because of stress. It seems to be the number one driver from my experience of stress. The pressure of time causes us to destroy psychological safety. Why? Well, what we haven't necessarily done is rewire the team for their default because their default is not typically psychological safety. Teams' defaults are more of being a little bit careful and managing how you are showing up. It's called impression, managing how I'm being viewed, and that causes me to edit my voice.

(20:18):

And so, as a result, leaders have to work really hard with individuals to get them to increase their comfort level, but they also have to get really good at doing something unnatural, which is in an environment of speed, they have to actually start to frame the work, the tasks, as both an execution challenge and a learning challenge, and that's the part that most leaders forget. It's really hard to remember to do that. Personally, I find it very difficult to do, but it is absolutely one of the key drivers. Being able to say, "Look, I want to get this right, but we've never done this before. So, I also want to know, I want to learn from what we do." And learning here can't just be about what we did wrong. It has to also be about what's positive, what we did that we did well that we want to repeat. So, you have to frame learning both. If you only frame learning as negative, "I just want to know what we learned," people quickly figure out that you're just substituting the word learning for failure.

(21:23):

But if you use it in a balanced way if you say, "I really want to know what we learned in both positive and negative," and you really drive into that, you really bring in voices and investigate open-endedly with people these challenges and follow up productively with them on what they give you, you will see that psychological safety will start to become embedded.

Shelie Gustafson (21:44):

If I can build on that and respond to Michael. I think, Michael, it's also important for leaders to create this environment of psychological safety; it's something you do every single day. It's not one big event. It's not showing up and saying, "Okay, we're going to have a meeting where we're going to improve our psychological safety." It is engaging in those things every single day. And I think this point about learning is really important that you raise as leaders. I think that we have to acknowledge we don't know everything, and that lends voice then to other people, too, to say, "Okay, it's okay if I don't have the answer to everything, but let's explore it together. Let's bring our voices together and explore and learn together."

(22:27):

I think that leaders require a high degree of vulnerability to set that tone, but then they need to keep up that cadence of learning every day with their team. Because I think that's what, ultimately, as you've described earlier in this discussion, we're in this world of significant change and unpredictability. Right?

And so that learning piece has to be a part of our everyday leadership and everyday working with our team.

Arthur Jones (23:03):

I really found that fascinating, especially that parallel that you had there, Michael, of learning and executing at the same time. It's a tricky thing to get right, but the way you explained it is beautiful. And also, that issue of vulnerability, I think, Shelie, is so important as a leader, where you don't have all the answers like you said, but you are honest and open and working your way through it, which I think is fantastic. And I think that ties in brilliantly to the next question: How do you create a culture where everyone, regardless of their job title, is empowered to be a leader, even if they aren't managing anyone?

Shelie Gustafson (23:35):

So, we work to do that. And again, I think it's an everyday action in terms of talking about the importance of leaders and encouraging employees to show up with that voice. I think that as leaders, we have to set examples, but then we have to open up the doors for other people to be leaders. So, if I go into a meeting and I take the reins of the topic and the agenda and what I think about whatever the topic is, I'm not going to create the leaders on my team. I have to create an environment where they can lead.

So, where I set the expectation that I want to hear from them, I want to hear their perspectives. So, I think what we do as senior leaders is to ask people questions and then give them the platform to be leaders.

(24:30):

And then there's the backend. It's coaching where need be. It's providing a lot of positive reinforcement for them having done that, and my own experience over the years has been that when we give people those opportunities, they're going to take those opportunities, and then we have to let them run with it. And it can be challenging for us because we're not always in control. And so I know for myself, that's been something that I've had to deal with, but you know what? They do better than if I were the person in control. So again, it's about creating this expectation and then being there to support and allow others to lead. And when we have the right people, they're going to take that opportunity.

Arthur Jones (25:11):

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?

Michael Chavez (25:30):

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 good at those things, those engineering sorts of things, scientific things, whatever the domain is for what the company does. Domain skills, we need those, right? But we also need people to develop critical thinking skills. We also need people to develop a lot of social skills, which a lot of us don't... What do we do all day long as leaders? We communicate. How many communications classes did you take?

(26:24):

So, we're in this learning mode as leaders in building out our skillsets, but I also think that Vivienne Ming, who is a neuroscientist, a mathematician, an amazing woman in Silicon Valley, and she does a lot of work on figuring out how we can build better humans. And she looks a lot at the brain science of that.

She was asked at a conference that I was at with her, "What's the job description of the future?" And her answer was, "To be a creative and adaptive problem-solver." That's still a human skill. We still need that. Now, she corrected herself and said, "It's actually to be a creative and adaptive problem-explorer," which I like even better, which means we've got to be exploratory in nature. We've got to be open and curious. That can be developed, by the way. We have to be generous with our time, with our narratives, with the context we create for people.

(27:25):

And we have to be, as Shelie was indicating, this kind of leader who is able to create the right climate and the right environment around them that causes people to feel engaged. So we're very much in the human business now as leaders, and we have to lean into the fact that this is fundamentally about learning to be really good with human beings. That's a skill set that I

think is... If I had to put it into a nutshell, that's what I think is the big one. These domain skills are around critical thinking, but curiosity is huge. We're seeing it more and more as being a critical skill set. And I think a lot of that has to do with another set of skills, and these might be mindsets, really, the ability to recognize as a leader that you have limitations and biases and being willing to hold those out to be tested and to question those and to not take your initial baseline routine, knee-jerk kind of way of managing or working as given.

(28:28):
Always question yourself without overly doubting yourself. That's hard, hard to do, but that's really what we're finding, which is absolutely critical because a client of mine once asked me, "What's really leadership development about these days? Is it sitting in a classroom? Is it doing action projects? Is it on the job? What is it?" And I said, "It's all of those things," but really if I had to boil it down, for mid-career professionals, even early career professionals, leadership development is fundamentally about learning to notice what your defaults are and question them and see if they're appropriate and maybe pick a different way of managing or behaving. That's very close to what Shelie started out talking about with respect to the leadership shadow, recognizing that I may have some defaults that aren't terribly effective, and that's okay, but I've got to have a learner's mindset. I've got to say, "All right, that's not

going to work that well, or that didn't work that well. Let me try it slightly differently. Let me try this behavior."

(29:28):
And that is actually, again, paradoxically, leadership is full of paradoxes, is what's needed to evolve into a leader that is actually better able to perform. The paradox is to perform, I've actually got to learn. I've got to almost not perform. I've got to almost do the opposite of performance. Rather than getting it just right all the time and trusting myself in everything, I've got to question myself and not lose confidence. I see that as very interesting and insightful and an amazing journey to be on.

That's what I think, a lot of leaders I talk with are overwhelmed with this personal insight that is part of leadership development. And I often say, yeah, no one ever told you when you got this job, other than a promotion and people reporting to you, that you are going to embark on a journey of self-discovery and learning, that that's what a lot of this is fundamentally about.

Shelie Gustafson (30:26):
So I'll add these skills and characteristics that I think help make that well-rounded effective

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; I want to help. I want to be contributing to make a difference in whatever that work is."

Michael Chavez (33:14):
I love that you brought up humility, Shelie because that is something that I think is linked to

everything we've been talking about, right? Humility says to your people, "This is a psychologically safe environment," because you're setting up a learning context when someone's humble, saying, "I don't know everything." Okay, great, we need a voice. It almost immediately sets up the kind of context that you want, and it's so important to learn. Also, in speaking about the North Star, you reminded me of something that a colleague of ours that we've worked with, Dr. Elsbeth Johnson at MIT, said multiple times, and that is, "If external ambiguity is the new normal, internal ambiguity is the new enemy. If external ambiguity is the new normal, internal ambiguity is the new enemy."

I love that phrase because it is a call to leaders to be in that North Star all the time. We've got to be establishing a North Star, making sure people get a North Star, see it in a similar way at least, and that we're all aligning around it.

(34:23):
And that is a job of leaders, that is probably one of the central jobs of leaders today is that North Star narrative. You don't just point to a North Star and say, "There it is, go," and then hands off. You're actually building that constantly orienting to it with and for people. So love that North Star comment, Shelie. I think it's just so central.

Arthur Jones (34:48):
Brilliant. And I think I'd like to go back to your answer as well, Shelie. Right in the start, you mentioned a little bit about adaptability, being able to shift and change, and being resilient; I think that is what you were getting at. And I think it's a great segue to the next question, where empowering long-term success in a company and at an individual level also requires job pivots and agile careers. So my question to you, Shelie, is, why should more employees be open to this type of continual adaptation? And more importantly, how can they create agile careers that offer long-term benefits for them and their companies?

Shelie Gustafson (35:24):
Somewhere, I read that employees are going to want to have multiple careers over the course of their lifetime, and we like to say at my company that they should be able to have them all here. We try to create an environment where people can do different things. So if you look back at history, jobs have changed, needs have changed of organizations, skillsets are different. And today, we are right in the face of what generative AI is going to do to many,

many different roles. There are some people who are saying, "Well, jobs are going to go away as a result."

(36:05):

I heard someone, and I really wish I could remember who it was; Michael might remember because I think we were at the same event, but the individual had said, "A person shouldn't fear AI per se, but they should be concerned if they don't know how to leverage and use AI."

And I'm sure this individual said it much more eloquently than how I remember it, but that really stuck with me. It's we all are going to have to learn to use generative AI for the benefit of our roles, and sure, jobs are going to change, but by them changing, it's going to free us up to do even... Maybe I'll call it a higher level of work or a different type of work.

(36:51):

And so, back to your point about agile careers, I think that it's a mindset that we need to have as employees and leaders, and we need to help our employees understand that mind shift. It is about being curious, open, and willing to try something out. On the flip side, it's also organizations that need to look at their workforce differently. So it used to be that you would hire an engineer to do a certain type of job, and you just want them to always do that type of work.

(37:25):

So, in our organization, we might hire an engineer in one of our market segments, but we're trying to create opportunity. Maybe they want to work in a different market. It might be a slightly different skill set, but they have institutional knowledge, and they certainly have skills, but it's how do they shift that to the type of work that we might need them to do in another market?

(37:52):

We had an interesting event happen a while ago. We had invited employees who might want to learn more about digital capabilities, and it was going to lead to some new jobs. We opened it up for people to come and learn, and we thought we might get a handful of people who wanted to learn about this. There were several 100 people that showed up, and what that said to me is people are interested in doing different things and learning and growing. And so this agile career, and we use that terminology, having an agile career, has really resonated with folks, and I think they're intrigued by it.

(38:34):

And so again, it's a mindset shift for an employee to think differently about how they can take their skills and adapt them elsewhere. It's also a shift for the employer to think about how you leverage your workforce differently and create an environment where you can use them in a different way.

Arthur Jones (38:55):

I know that this is going to be quite challenging because you have such great wisdom, both of you, but to finish off, what would be your one piece of advice for leaders and employees to drive performance?

Michael Chavez (39:05):

I was just reflecting. I think most of the leaders I've worked with are starting to become aware of the fact that they've overmanaged their careers and undermanaged their learning. So I think that that's starting to shift. I think one of our biggest challenges was a piece of advice that really resonated for me; one of my clients, a major Fortune 100 company, had a board member come in and talk and was asked this question, "What's your best career advice? You've been through all these great roles, CFO, et cetera, and now a board member of a major company; what's your advice?" And this really resonated with me. She said, "Be open and lean into being out of your comfort zone. Be open to being out of your comfort zone and lean into it."

In other words, look for opportunities that are going to pull you out of your comfort zone because that's where you're going to learn the most.

I think that there is a lot embedded in that one statement. It means all these things we've been talking about with respect to humility and curiosity, but it also speaks to making sure we're setting up challenges such that we can treat our career or ourselves as an innovation project. Right? We often say that in a lot of the programs that Duke Corporate Education has run, we've often given leaders these applied learning projects. And we've moved away from that because there's so much to do with respect to your own leadership and treating that as an innovation project. So, if we thought of ourselves in this very work-in-progress kind of way, right? This seeing ourselves as a work in progress, that amps up our authenticity, that amps up our learning, it amps up our agility, it nurtures our curiosity. It does all of these great things when you do this kind of leaning into jobs that are not necessarily in your comfort zone. I think it's really important.

Now, you can't just willy-nilly try stuff that's really, really highly risky and not something you can actually do because you don't have the domain skills. Those have to be in place and you have to have a personal North Star to be able to do that really well, but that's the evidence I think that we would be looking for in leaders of the future: ask them not what they've done, but what they've learned, what they've built, what they've tried.

Shelie Gustafson (41:29):
So since I started with leadership shadow, I'm going to end with leadership shadow, and it goes to self-awareness. So, I think my piece of advice is to check your shadow, and you check your shadow in a lot of ways. First of all, you focus on internal reflection, and you check on yourself: "Do I have congruency between what I'm saying and what I'm doing?"

And the other piece is asking other people for input and feedback, and that goes to this whole point about learning is: "Are we open to getting input that's going to help us change our behavior and help us change that leadership shadow that we leave?"

(42:08):
I used to work with an individual, her name is Dr. Tasha Eurich, and she wrote a book about self-awareness, which is fantastic. And I think if we're open to input and we're just constantly measuring, watching our shadow, we'll make the right decisions for our organization.

Arthur Jones (42:28):
Brilliant. Thank you very much. There's just so much to learn and unpack in this. So, thanks to both of you.

Normally, at this part of the podcast, I'll try to round up and give a lesson that I've learned, and there are just so many, but I'll have to say my favorite today is learning what Leadership shadow is. Also, Shelie, I love the idea of the buddy diver and finding your buddy diver at work and someone that you can partner with to become a better leader. So, thank you both, amazing insights. I really appreciate it.

Michael Chavez (42:54):
Thanks very much. Really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

Shelie Gustafson (42:58):

Thank you.