

E004 – Cultural bedrock and the bushfire theory

Podcast Guests 0:00

Leadership's incredibly lonely. [THEME MUSIC]

Ed Sill 0:03

Empathy as a leader is really critical. When you reflect on anything you do, reflect on anybody you know, at some point in time, even our great leaders fail. I need to drive simplicity in my strategic planning. [THEME MUSIC]

Introduction 0:17

Hello, and welcome to the Traits of Effective Leaders podcast, brought to you by **SG Partners**. Each episode allows you to hear from real leaders of real businesses, with the aim of assisting you to become even more effective at what you do. Whether you're already a leader, CEO, business owner, manager or an entrepreneur. This exploration of leadership effectiveness covers a range of challenges you may already be experiencing yourself. Now, let's hear from our host, international speaker, Master NLP practitioner, and owner of SG partners Michael Lang.

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Michael Lang 0:54

Hello, and welcome to Traits of Effective Leaders podcast. I'm your host Michael Lang, owner of SG partners, and I'm joined today by Ed Sill on this episode. Ed Sill is a senior executive who has lots of insights to share from his time being CEO of the Locker group. Ed has been with the Locker group since 1996. So this is 21 years he was with them recently leaving. Ed is also involved in the Box Hill Hawks football club, that's AFL to those listeners out there. Ed has done a business accounting and business management degree at Monash University. And I know Ed from the time that I was assisting him in Locker Group with the sales effectiveness programme. Ed has some great insights as being a leader and through change. And I look forward to sharing those insights with you today. As we banter about traits of effective leadership. I hope you enjoy this conversation.

Michael Lang 1:53

So when you finish school, you went straight into Locker, or Valmont or whatever it's called?

Ed Sill 1:57

There was probably a bit of a gap in my resume by then. So did a little bit of uni and a little bit of time in a couple of commercial businesses. But I was looking for a safe port. We just had our little girl, a daughter and I thought I better find a job that had a bit of stability. And there's a job at Locker going at that time. So I didn't realise that it would be 27 years of stability, but it's certainly ticked the first box.

Michael Lang 2:29

So our guest today is Ed Sill and looking at Ed Sill's resume on his LinkedIn I was struck that this is probably the first person as a leader I've ever engaged with that's been with a company for so long. It's so unusual.

Ed Sill 2:45

Well, I think as we get into this conversation, there's no doubt there's some some pitfalls attached to it. I think.

Michael Lang 2:51

Well, let's talk about the pitfalls. Okay, so you're hiring, you're recruiting someone in a leadership space. And you've seen that they've been with a company for 20 years. What goes through your head?

Ed Sill 3:02

Yeah, I think, yeah, look, you want to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, don't you, like let's try to understand this. And I guess if we saw that someone had 20 years of experience, or 20 lots of one year's worth of experience, you'd really put a pretty big question mark across that and say, okay, there's some real challenges there. If they'd had a far more diverse, broad ranging set of skills and experiences, then I don't think it changes your thought process too much.

And then I guess to a certain extent that's what happened to me that we were fortunate to be able to go on a great run of growth and acquisitions, and then management buyouts, then sale of private equity, and ultimately sell to a publicly listed company. So from my personal experience, I didn't have too many years of similar runs where I go, okay, I've just had another 12 months of experience of the same thing. So looking at someone like that, I think you just need to dig under the surface a little bit and understand what their motives were and where they've been, and what were the experiences that they had.

Michael Lang 4:03

So if we're looking at roles or applications at the time of Locker, what would be the longest time you were in a role or an application?

Ed Sill 4:12

So I guess I was surely the Chief Executive of Locker for perhaps 10 years and in that time it changed ownership structures, and we've moved from effectively a private to a private equity, to another private equity. So but they're in general terms, 10 years of not too dissimilar from day to day, responsibilities.

Michael Lang 4:36

Not dissimilar, but the way you just did describe there you would have changing strategies at those periods of time?

Michael Lang 2:51

Well, let's talk about the pitfalls. Okay, so you're hiring, you're recruiting someone in a leadership space. And you've seen that they've been with a company for 20 years. What goes through your head?

Ed Sill 4:43

I think, to a certain extent you're changing, you've got changing dynamics. Typically what I've found in the various ownership structures that I've worked under, most of them allow the business to get on with being a better business. So they didn't govern the business by their timeframe. So private equity is an example. And you've always got a reputation for having a three year window, whatever that timeframe is, their writing instructions to me were no different, which was create a good business, build a good business.

Michael Lang 5:14

Right.

Ed Sill 5:15

And then obviously things change. And as you're starting to get to the point where they might want to exit strategy, or the process has changed a little bit. But the strategy around the business ultimately didn't change a great deal, as I say, just different ownerships, different polling structures...

Michael Lang 5:30

But that was the nature of that particular private equity. For instance, I got another client who has inner private equity, and they're coming out, I think, their fifth year. And so I said to the Managing Director, well you're not gonna be able to get any funds to do anything dramatic, right? You're fixed, they just want profit, bottom line. So it depends upon the private equity structure, and their patented behaviour.

Ed Sill 5:53

No doubt, undoubtedly. So we went into that with a degree of reservation around what that was going to bring. We didn't find it, we didn't experience it. Now, again, I think your points right, as we were getting towards what clearly was the right time for them to sell, absolutely, there's going to be a change in the value they'll necessarily going to be willing to put into the business. But that didn't suggest for a moment there was capex. In fact, another great philosophy was, if it makes sense now it will make sense in 12 months, let's get on with it. So now, we weren't at that stage talking about restructuring businesses or making significant change, which we might have been if we knew we weren't coming to the end of the road.

Michael Lang 6:36

So when we think about our culture Ed, and the journey, you have been on with Locker, one as being a person that he is within an organisation where you're not driving culture, you're just the end result of whatever's happening in culture, from another leader, to the person that's in charge of culture. So what are the aspects that you think are really important to create a fantastic culture?

Ed Sill 7:00

I, we had a fairly lengthy period of roll up in the industry that we were playing in. And like all good businesses, we had a tagline, which was at that stage 'one team, one goal'. And I was reflecting on it. One day after a management meeting and reflecting it really should be changed to 'one team, seven goals', because the lack of alignment was startling. And we sort of tried to unravel that, and unpack that a little bit. And I think it came back down to that trust, and that safety position that we didn't have enough trust within the team, and people didn't feel safe enough to be themselves.

So it was a highly political environment. So it really probably taught me the most important lesson at that point in time was you just got to keep working on creating a safe environment for your senior people. That doesn't mean that you know that they're not open for challenge or scrutiny or accountability. But they just feel safe in providing their views.

And so that's probably, if I looked at anything that as a bedrock of creating culture, that was the one thing that I would say, I'd always go back to, and I reflect on that constantly and positively to say that that's something that's really important to me, in terms of setting up the cultures and the values of an organisation.

Michael Lang 8:23

And that there reminds me of, you know, one of the aspects of Patrick Lencioni talks about that a lot of leaders don't like to have meetings, because they walk away from the meetings, and they feel that their leaders have not bought in, they don't walk away saying, hey, you've got my back. So he said, one of the aspects is to create robust meetings. So by the time everyone walks out, everyone is aligned to the outcome, because you teased all the nuances of why they don't believe in it, and so forth. So, but to do that, they've got to feel safe to be vulnerable to have those robust conversations in those meetings.

Ed Sill 8:59

Absolutely. And you know, and that is the challenge that you need to empower and have confidence around the people you're dealing with. And I think it's like any good management team, you've got to make some pretty strong calls on your way through as you build that out. Having trust in someone who your questioning their ability is clearly not a manageable or workable situation.

So once you have that, and you get to that point, it becomes so much more fun to run that business because it is when I used to describe it as blood on the walls, that's probably incorrect and a bit graphic, but now there were really robust conversations around areas of the business that we're working on wasn't about strategy at that point in time. Strategy was agreed, it was how do we deploy or what are the tactics that we need to be focusing on? It just made for a safe environment and environment of everyone. You can measure energy levels, against safety levels.

Michael Lang 9:58

Cool, that's interesting. Yes.

Ed Sill 10:00

Yeah. And that's the more there's people graduated on. And I've always enjoyed graduating younger talent into our management team. And you could almost see a flick of the switch around the three month mark, where you're really being exposed, I'm hearing everything that's going on, I'm engaged, I'm being asked, I'm not necessarily always having my way, etc. And you can just see the energy levels start to grow and start to explode out.

Michael Lang 10:29

Wouldn't it be cool in the boardroom? Or the meeting rooms? Where you have this visual thermometer that displayed to everyone where the energy level is?

Ed Sill 10:37

Yeah, it's a bit of a conundrum in that I'm a great believer in getting your work life balance, right? And that thought processes evolve now, in my mind, at the very least, to say, okay, when are you at your most productive? When you're at your most efficient? And so I don't necessarily so, you know, if I was to measure it, you know, if there's someone arriving at 7:30, and leaving at 6:30, is that energy? No, not necessarily, is energy that the speed of response to the speed of actions, degree of intensity of conversations? Yes, they are - a little bit harder to measure. Equally or more so important, than I think then, necessarily time and effort. I mean, it's a difficult space to measure isn't it, you know.

Michael Lang 11:20

Certainly from the experience last year, where the whole world had to learn from our working environment space to say, Okay, well, because some of the old time leaders were there controlling as in 'when I see you at work, I know your work', right. So now they're working from home, and they're challenged by what is control anymore, but workers are saying, Well, you know, what, I'm more of a morning person, that's where I'm most productive. And therefore, I'm gonna log off at two o'clock in the afternoon, and I don't want to be seen, or felt that I'm not pulling my weight. So last year was a really interesting year to see where it actually ends up.

Ed Sill 11:55

I have this theory, and I call it the sort of bushfire theory that when a bushfire roars through locally, the next five to seven years, everyone's really attentive about prevention. And then after about five years, the level of the standards start to drop back and you find within 10 years, you're back to where you were pre bushfire. I think everyone now is really open minded about how do we exercise people's working hours better? And how do we be open minded to that? And how do we engage better? I wonder though, we're going to just see a bit of a drop off over a period of time, and we keep going back to, No we need you in the office five days a week?

Michael Lang 12:34

Yeah. So but that comes down again, from leadership is that, you have an increase in whatever you're looking for. And then you're embedding and then it's the nature of does a leader have the energy to create the next wave or the next cycle we have to go through? So therefore, it comes back again to Well, Ed, you've been placed for so long? How did you keep reinventing yourself? To say, Okay, well, there's a next level for me, so I need to get there. And when I'm getting there, I'm going to take my team with me.

Ed Sill 13:04

Yeah, now, I think a couple points there that I guess, we were lucky, by and large that opportunities that came before us were the right strategic opportunities, and we were able to take advantage of them. So when when I was first appointed into the role, at within, we're able to do acquisition reasonably quickly, that doubled our size. So there was some challenges around getting that embedded. And of course, then a couple of years later, we did another acquisition that doubles again. And then a few years later, we did another acquisition that added another 50%.

So broadly speaking, we went from 15 million to 150 million within a series of acquisitions. So at that point in time, if you're not bringing energy levels to those changes, then the organization's got a problem. So I think I was constantly energised by the next opportunity, as we saw that. So that's what brought to me the opportunities and again coming back to the same point, it wasn't 25 years experience of doing the same year, we were learning on the run and growing on the run.

And so no that was really exciting times and all great learnings as you go on your acquisition programmes, you know, the first business we looked at, we'd love the sales culture in the business, they were wonderful, wonderful sales culture that they brought to the table, but we didn't really spend much time looking at the manufacturing processes and they proved to be really challenging. So of course the next acquisition, what do we do, we make sure the machines are really up to date, where are your logbooks etc, then we forgot about culture and then about six months in we go, well, we've got a bit of a problem with culture. So I reckon by the fourth or fifth time we're starting to get okay with it. Now, just making sure was a little bit more rounded than then perhaps that the hotspots where we're indicating.

Michael Lang 14:48

Cool. So you mentioned strategy before so what do you think the key activities that as a leader you need to consistently apply to ensure people are aligned to your strategies?

Ed Sill 15:00

So I was given a book by a boss at one stage which was on strategy. And I've got about 20 pages in, I hardly understood a word. And also, I was embarrassed by it, I read it, went back and tried it again and tried it again and tried it again and just didn't, for whatever reason, my brain was not able to absorb that. Now, I do enjoy reading. So it was a reasonably uncommon experience. And it just got to me that at a personal level, I need to drive simplicity in my strategic planning.

So I'm a great fan of the one page, talk about it, you know, build your house on a one page, what's your strategy, and if you can't explain it to me on one page with some reasonably simplistic items on that, then I'm not going to be able to necessarily sell that and buy into it. So that's the first piece, is the simplicity point around it. And then when you transfer that into your measuring, how do you measure that out, again, keep your measuring points really simple. So I know we went through some organisations where the amount of data that we reported on was just overwhelming. And then of course, there's some that we're going to try to tell you well, here's the bank balance at the end of each month. And that's about all we did.

But I think no, keeping your strategy and your measurables simple. And then just consistently measuring those now, very simple. As soon as something goes offline, according to your plan, okay, we then need to start honing down in onto that, and start measuring that as we put some corrective actions into place. But if we can't capture our plan on one page, and if we can't capture our measurables, on one whiteboard, then my view was that we're going to allow too much wiggle room for people to talk about from a strategic viewpoint. And all of a sudden, we just start to broaden now what that place looks like.

Michael Lang 16:53

How do you keep the strategy alive?

Ed Sill 16:55

So I think when I think about building out my house, there's core values that I think are always the foundation. And so once you've got those in place, they don't change and then I always like to talk about what are the enablers of strategy, and I'm a people's person. So when I think about who enables strategy, it's about your people. So again, you're starting to get your pillars around, how do you finally get to the marketplace and talk around what's important there? So I think that bottom half the house, in my mind from a strategic viewpoint shouldn't change greatly. It's then to your point how to regenerate the top half?

You know, I think it's not necessarily about, obviously, you're trying to measure, trying to understand it, how often do you regenerate that? I always was a bit uncomfortable with the concept of rewriting a strategic plan annually. But then you reflect on it and go now 12 months is a long time, and the competitive dynamics that you were seeing, the market dynamics you're seeing, they've changed. So, certainly in the last few years, it was around revising your strategic plan on an annual basis and trying to update that and fine tune that. What that led to a little bit was people wanting to rewrite the strategic plan. Rewriting our strategic plan every year, then we've failed the simplicity test, and we failed the measurable test? Yeah.

Michael Lang 18:26

So what do you think as a leader, what are the core traits, three core traits that are important to be a great leader?

Ed Sill 18:34

If you'd asked me that, three years ago, six years ago, 10 years ago, I'd probably have in general terms, different answers, you know, the themes, I guess, why should you be disappointed if the themes change, but on reflection now, as I enter my sixth decade, you sort of think, I think empathy as a leader is really critical. You know, if I talk about a safe environment, I don't think you can have a safe environment without having some empathy for your team and your people. And for yourself. This reflect on why first leaders in organisations and the first thing that was very clear was that they were never wrong. And I reflect back on that now and go no that's creating an environment that's made it really tough to be safe.

So I think that empathetic piece, I think it's really important. I think great leaders inevitably have a wisdom attached to their thought process. It's something you can't necessarily get out of a book. You can get with experience, experience helps wisdom but I think most leaders are able to assess things reasonably quickly and have some thought processes that just narrow down everybody's thinking. And the third one is something that I always felt that I had for the first chunk of my tenure was energy. I felt the ability to revitalise myself or re energise myself, I'd like to think I brought energy to the business and the team pretty constantly and I think so therefore it's critical.

I had a great leader guy out of the UK and he had energy in a different way. Would he bounce into a room and be the life of the party and say, right, we're going? No. But he rang me every morning from the UK at three o'clock in the afternoon, every working day. And it just left such a profound peace on me that the first thing he thought about when he woke up was that I'll see how Ed in Australia's going. And I always felt that was great. That was energy that could be easily just to go and make yourself a cup of tea and get on with the day. But he presented energy to me day in, day out. So they're the three Michael that I reflect on, and probably align myself to and look to in great leaders that I've worked for.

I've been blessed, absolutely blessed with having some great leaders, some of whom have become important parts of my life, some of them that on a personal level we have no connection on.

There's great learnings that you don't have to necessarily connect at a personal level with a great leader. So I reflect on that. And those are the attributes that I probably naturally lean towards, are those three.

Michael Lang 21:20

Cool, Ed let's go back to the energy though. So your leader in UK rang you as soon as he got up at three o'clock every day. What did it really demonstrate to you Ed?

Ed Sill 21:32

Yeah, well certainly it wasn't a checking up process. It was a checking in process.

Michael Lang 21:38

What about? You?

Ed Sill 21:40

I think he was creating a safe environment. He was creating a trusting environment. And he wanted to know that from a long way away he had my back.

Michael Lang 21:50

And when you were reccounting that story, I wrote down a word is he cared about you. Right?

Ed Sill 21:58

Yep, absolutely. Very true. So Phil in that instance was one that transcended a professional career, we ended up becoming great friends. Happy to declare that, you know, love the man greatly.

Michael Lang 22:10

Yeah.

Ed Sill 22:12

He passed away a few years ago now.

Michael Lang 22:13

You use the word energy, but to me it sounds like caring, and how you demonstrate that?

Ed Sill 22:20

Absolutely.

Michael Lang 22:21

Which is in line with the empathy as well about stopping enough to listen to another person and demonstrate that you care.

Ed Sill 22:30

Interesting. So I wouldn't say if I looked at Phil, would Phil have been an empathetic person? It took a lot of work to get him sometimes across that line. So empathy wouldn't necessarily be something that we would flag him with. But I think as he matured and got older, then that might have changed a little bit. But once he was loyal to you, he was forever loyal. Yeah, so that loyalty wasn't easily found. But once it was found, it was there.

Michael Lang 22:59

Yeah, cool.

Voiceover 23:03

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Michael Lang 23:18

So what's the number one lesson you learned from your failures Ed?

Ed Sill 23:23

I think the number one lesson is that it happens.

Michael Lang 23:26

Yeah. True.

Ed Sill 23:59

And wherever I look at anything in life, you think about it, Michael, and you reflect on anything you do. Reflect on anybody, you know, at some point in time, even our great leaders have failed. They've failed. And so now, as someone who's probably a little bit prone to self abuse in terms of failure, it's been a learning curve for me that you've just got to accept that first of all, you're going to fail. Another great mentor in my life, also from the UK said to me, as long as you make more good decisions than bad decisions, you're in front of the ledger. And I never quite agreed with that.

And I think good leaders, hopefully have got enough wisdom that they're making lots more good decisions than bad decisions. But I certainly got the context of it to say, you're going to make mistakes, and you're going to reflect back on and reflect on some of the hiring mistakes. What are you thinking of now? But the learning from that, Michael, was that just be, have enough humility to say I got that wrong. I got that wrong, and I need to fix that. And I need to fix that quickly. See a lot of organisations don't learn quickly enough from their mistakes.

So yeah, that's what I would say is that, again, I think it's an interesting question in terms of, if you'd asked me to run an organisation that was going to put a man on the moon I would say, you couldn't get a worse leader or most more inappropriate leader than me to do that. If you said, Okay, what we would like you to do Ed is entrepreneurial grow our businesses and our organisations within parameters of the markets that we serve and the products that we have, then I'm okay. I'm okay. And so I guess that's just an observation that we will fail, we will fail in our areas of expertise and how we learn from it and rebound from it is going to be real critical piece.

Michael Lang 25:30

I think one of the challenges for us leaders is the word failure and the energy we put around it.

Ed Sill 25:37

Yeah.

Michael Lang 25:38

For me, the word failure was just like drummed into me, from my dad in an early age that I just could not fail.

Ed Sill 25:45

Yeah.

Michael Lang 25:46

And so therefore, for me to grow, and take risks, I couldn't do it, because failure was such a strong antichrist or whatever. Right? And not until I got comfortable with the understanding, actually, you're not failing, you're going to have a learning.

Ed Sill 26:00

Yeah.

Michael Lang 26:00

And it's okay to lean into that, right. But the big thing, though, is to have a learning, you have to have self awareness, it has to come first, to say, Oh, I didn't do that right. And that's okay. Now let me pull out a part. As opposed to denial. I didn't do that right. Well, that's not my fault. That's someone else's.

Ed Sill 26:18

Yeah. Yeah. How do you think then that matches with accountability?

Michael Lang 26:24

Well, I find a lot of companies I engage with no matter what size, leaders really struggle with accountability. And it's been fascinating, and it's a journey in myself that in a home life, I'll hold my kids accountable. And I'll be really comfortable with that, because that's my role. And I'm really comfortable that, and yet, when we walk over the threshold of a business, we seem to not be comfortable. And it's whether we need our people to like us too much, that we're worried about what the repercussions could be that if they left or something else that stops us, or just this word accountability, which is probably not something we use at home, we've used other verbiage. But the word accountability could have negative connotations as well.

Ed Sill 27:10

Yeah.

Michael Lang 27:11

So you know, I'm using terms like positive accountability frameworks, just to get that energy different. Accountability is still there. I had a leader, a sales leader once say Well, I'm really not happy with the word accountability. I go, right. What about holding your team accountable? No, I'm not happy with that. But I'm happy with them holding themselves accountable. And I'm going, Whoa, there's some beliefs that are stopping you embracing. Because we know that great people love to know where they are and where they need to go. And if you're not willing to have those conversations continually with them, then they get despondent, and they think that you don't care about them. So they go look somewhere else for that. Great people strive for the next challenge.

Ed Sill 27:58

What do you think the core issue is that in general terms, the lack of accountability I see is chronic. So where do you see that? If you had to say, what's the critical issue, the core issue there? What is it?

Michael Lang 28:10

It's the belief system, which comes from value sets, right. So somehow, through life, they've had an experience and they said, Well, this is my value around being held accountable. So they might have had someone hold them accountable. And it was a negative experience.

Ed Sill 28:26

Yeah.

Michael Lang 28:27

So they locked that in. Well, I wouldn't do that to anyone else, or the word accountable through hearing about it. They said, Well, that doesn't sound like something that I want to experience. So therefore, I'm not going to do it to someone else. So I once was talking to a sales leader. He said, Well, to me, Michael, accountability is when I was in the army, and therefore are shouted at. I said, Well, there are you've locked that one in so therefore you're not going to hold your team accountable.

Ed Sill 28:55

Yeah, it's fascinating. I'm watching the political debate in Australia at the moment, there's this sort of ongoing phrase, 'they need to be held accountable'. And I still don't quite understand that framework. It's almost like anytime you make a mistake, there is an ultimate accountability attached to it. And I'm sure that is deservedly so in certain circumstances, but are you going to create a safe environment? If people think there's always going to be some sort of retribution for making a mistake? In the environments that I've been leading and growth environments and entrepreneurial environments. You know, used to always say that 'what's the safest way to avoid a bad debt? Not give credit'. 'What's the easiest way to give go out of business? Not give credit'. It's just simple rules isn't it that we need to apply.

Michael Lang 29:47

I don't have the answer to help a leader embrace accountability other than put in a process, a system, and build some cadence around that and after a while, when you're leaning in you'll find that it's okay.

Ed Sill 30:02

Yeah.

Michael Lang 30:02

Right?

Ed Sill 30:03

Yeah.

Michael Lang 30:03

But people will get stuck. Because they're not willing to take that experience or take that little pain to get that gain afterwards.

Ed Sill 30:11

Isn't it interesting, you probably have to work with a few people to get them over the line. But any leader that I've come across with some energy and self awareness, etc, but they do like being measured. They do like being measured, because they like to beat it. And I'd take a little bit of pride Michael that a lot of the leaders that I've worked with over time, from an accountability viewpoint, will say to me, we never felt threatened by you. But we were aware when we disappointed you. When it wasn't a random array, and it wasn't a throwing the desk over and all that sort of stuff. It was just a really short, sharp conversation. Saying we've agreed to this and it hasn't happened.

Michael Lang 30:54

Yeah, it could be just the phrase 'I'm disappointed'.

Ed Sill 30:57

Yeah.

Michael Lang 30:58

So now we're really tapping into some emotion here. And there's a bit of guilt there. Fine. We'll work with that. Right?

Ed Sill 31:04

Yeah.

Michael Lang 31:05

Well, Brené Brown wouldn't like that. She said, No one really functions high on shame. It's just to say I'm disappointed.

Ed Sill 31:12

Yeah.

Michael Lang 31:15

Psychologists would take that back to your parents, the worst thing you can hear from your parents is I'm disappointed.

Michael Lang 31:21

Yeah.

Ed Sill 32:21

That's when you go whoops, okay.

Michael Lang 31:23

So again, inversely, the respect has to be there to start with as well.

Ed Sill 31:27

That's a good point. Yeah, yeah.

Michael Lang 31:30

So Ed you and I've had a history where we did a sales engagement improvement programme, right? What's the most important thing you need to focus on when doing a change management or transformation programmes?

Ed Sill 31:44

The joy of 2020 hindsight, which is the best management tool, isn't it? I think, in most instances, to understand is, first instance, is the organisation in the right place? Is it capable of the change? Forgetting about change management, planning the change, lacking in some regard. So I reflect back on the work that we did, Michael, and I would say, the operation is successful, the patient died. And the reason that happened was that we as an organisation weren't open minded enough and willing to be going on a change journey, we were generally closed minded and, you know, the old saying, we've been successful doing away with that, does the organisation have the ability to change?

I think that once you've made that decision, and you're moving more into an operational change management process, I'd be looking in and saying, let's be very, very careful of what we don't know, as we move change management. And that will be my biggest reflection on a couple of areas that have gone, there's been some significant challenges around that. So there's a couple of times here, I think, Michael, is that now I would identify that in the last five years, my energy levels have been well below what they should be, to be an appropriate leader. And I was getting by on a little bit of rote learning, a little bit of respect from around the various parts of the business, etc.

So that level of energy meant that when we're going through change management, I wasn't driving a rigour early on, on a couple of areas to say, am I absolutely sure? Am I believing what I'm being told too much? Am I taking pre ordained ideas or thought processes into the review here? And when you're coupling that with a lack of energy and drive, and efficiency, and you're starting to start to create a bit of an environment that is going to be prior to failure.

Michael Lang 33:49

I hear you. I hear you. Thank you, Ed. So if you had your time again, as the leader in the company you're in? What's one or two things that you'd do differently?

Ed Sill 34:02

I'd have got out earlier.

Michael Lang 34:04

Is that energy thing you're talking about?

Ed Sill 34:06

Yeah, absolutely. It's driven not by anything other than, saying that time's up. Time's up. So I thought I'd, I don't know what the time frame is. And as I said, I had numerous changes and etc, etc. I have a passion for the sport and I look at one sporting organisation that I follow particularly closely, and I will reflect on that and go now the senior people in that organisation now haven't changed for over 10 years. At what point in time does it need a regeneration? So I'd reflect and go, Whilst I was doing different things, I still had similar accountabilities in certain spots, and I was well past my use by date, my energy levels, my market comprehension, all the critical factors that you need to be supportive of those businesses, I was well past.

Michael Lang 34:56

Because I remember near the end, you said to me, I just don't feel challenged enough. Their mandate has changed I feel constricted. So it's time to get out.

Ed Sill 35:06

I think that was probably with the joy 2020 hindsight and a cop out from new restrictions or constrictions. But I wasn't driving that anywhere. So there was stuff that I was still doing well, there was a general people management piece and managing up and down the organisations that I'm okay at and are still putting some time and effort into that. But the next evolution did I have the energy, and all of a sudden I'd say oh I'm too constrained, too restricted. Yeah, I think in hindsight, there's a burnout factor attached to just not creating an environment personally, for me to take that next challenge. So you know, it did become a safe house for me. Absolutely. Absolutely. Was I in a comfort zone? I got back into a bit of a comfort zone.

Michael Lang 35:57

Which then reflects on the people leading you, possibly not challenging you enough, not holding you accountable, not doing something that would get that energy up and running again?

Ed Sill 36:08

Yeah. Yeah, I think if there's probably a tyranny of distance attached to that

Michael Lang 36:12

Yes.

Ed Sill 36:15

So if you know, you're speaking to the guy who's my senior leader over in the US, and I'm still keeping really close contact with he'd say no you brought energy all the time. And maybe that's the case. And maybe that was the pantomime that we have at meetings, but it certainly wasn't the energy that I would normally bring. Yeah. And I could really see that a little bit at the time. But certainly, in retrospect, you'd watch some things you were doing going wow. Okay. So that's a telltale sign, but there's nobody really close, there's probably a couple of people I've worked with for an extended period of time. In fact, one one did say to me, he said, I've never seen hunched shoulders on you. It's interesting. But in retrospect, that was gone.

Michael Lang 37:01

So Ed, your journey now is you're going to be a private investor in company or companies, right? So you're taking all these learnings, and you're going to be filtering companies leadership to say, Do I want to invest in that company? So it's going to be really interesting journey for you.

Ed Sill 37:15

Really exciting, really, really exciting. So I think the coming back to the failure piece, I reckon, one thing that I can teach, the next generation is about failure. Hopefully most of us who've been through a little bit, have had the courage to teach through failure. So if you know, finding and aligning ourselves with strong management or management teams that we engage, when we connect, that's going to be the first critical piece. So again, it's not necessarily to say we're going to become friends, we might become business friends, but you know, we were really excited about where's that energy? Think about where are we seeing empathetic leadership?

All those things that I resonate with them and tied to and if we're fortunate, we've probably had 30 discussions already with potential management teams. And some of those have gone negatively, because they see us as coming in wanting to control and go, No, no. We just want to be here to pass on our experiences, positive and negative and sort of broadens our experience that we think will help. So back to your point, I think that's one of the most exciting pieces that we'd be able to work with management teams and just provide our history and our experience. A little bit of wisdom, not to say we've got all the answers or not to say they necessarily should listen to all of our positions, but it has to be learnings for them on the way as well.

Michael Lang 38:41

Sounds like a couple of your criterias going forward would be 'easy organisation ready for change'. Uses leadership, self aware and open, right?

Ed Sill 38:52

Yep. Yep.

Michael Lang 38:53

Cool.

Ed Sill 38:54

In both instances, couple of businesses we really like. And we like the management team. We like the MD, the MD is not ready. It's not ready. And that's fine. And perhaps been there done that myself.

Michael Lang 39:13

I really appreciate that

Ed Sill 39:14

I always appreciated your time Michael. I always feel I come out of these conversations, more informed that I go into them, which is a good thing.

Michael Lang 39:22

Oh thank you. Thank you, and speaking about a sport that you love and talking about when to step down in the AFL we've just seen a recent example of someone that well and truly stayed too long.

Ed Sill 39:35

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think unfortunately, it's tarnished the reputation that you talk about energy.

Michael Lang 39:40

Yeah

Ed Sill 39:41

There's a guy who brought energy every single day. No problems. I think, unfortunately that organisation got cast so much in his shadow, over such a long period of time that unless you're amazing, and evolving your thought processes. Yeah, that's going to be pretty counterintuitive to allow an organisation to grow.

Michael Lang 40:02

I think when you talk about energy, is the energy for me and me alone? Or am I going to share that energy? Right? Because we're talking about the word ego here. To have a healthy ego as opposed to having an unhealthy ego. Right?

Ed Sill 40:18

Time builds your ego in some instances doesn't it, success builds your ego. And it gets to the point where the ego ends up being counterproductive. I reckon if you did a review of all historic, successful sporting organisations, you would pick a time at which the hubris took over. And the egos took over. And there would be suddenly a decline.

Michael Lang 40:48

Well, I mean, Jim Collins, level five leadership is humility, right?

Ed Sill 40:51

Yeah.

Michael Lang 40:52

So having the humility to say, you know what, the ego is talking on its own now. Am I listening to say, Oh, hang on? So, Ed, thank you so much. I look forward to hearing about your journey, and I look forward to staying in touch with you. Thank you.

Ed Sill 41:09

Thanks for your time Michael.

Voiceover 41:13

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