

E005 – The Rise of the 'Chief Energy Officer'

Podcast Guests 0:00

Leadership's incredibly lonely. [THEME MUSIC]

Robert Nankervis 0:03

People will smell very quickly the way their leader thinks, acts, behaves and so on and if what they value is different from what they want the business to think, believe and value. The belief part, it's the spirit of the business that's foundational for the culture.. [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 the Traits of Effective Leaders podcast. I'm your host Michael Lang, owner of SG partners, and I'm excited to be joined by Robert Nankervis in this episode. Rob is a business consultant, advisor and executive coach. He specialises in strategic planning, organisational review and managing change. Rob is the author of Propelling Performance, which provides a simple step-by-step guide to surface underlying beliefs, shaping strategy, developing execution disciplines, and adopting the leadership traits to actually drive success. He also hosts the Propelling Performance podcast, an in-depth interview series with top business experts and leaders from across the globe. In his in-depth expertise spanning over 30 years plus, he provides founders owners, CEOs and senior executives with the support they need to face challenging growth periods and company transformation. Hope you enjoy this conversation as I will.

Michael Lang 1:51

So Robert Nankervis, thank you very much for joining me today. I really appreciate it. And really looking forward to learning more about you and your experiences with many businesses that you've engaged with over the years.

Robert Nankervis 2:01

Great to be here, Michael.

Michael Lang 2:03

So Rob, let me just do a quick introduction to yourself. So you started life at S&S Management Technologies is that where you started?

Robert Nankervis 2:12

Many years ago when people were chiselling things on stone tablets, I was an accountant originally, but yeah, that was about the first 15 years of my career and consulting and coaching has been the last 20.

Michael Lang 2:23

Right. Okay, so out of interest, what got you into consulting?

Robert Nankervis 2:27

Well, it was really the accounting work actually blended into doing systems work, and working in internal consultancy in commercial enterprises. And it seemed a natural segue then that that was something I enjoyed, actually, and much more than not sort of more technical accounting work. And so I couldn't perceive myself going on just being an accounting technician, if you like, for the whole of my career. So was a fortunate happenstance that I gravitated across into consulting and sort of went from projects into leadership consulting, and that got me into coaching.

Michael Lang 3:01

And I suppose one of the pinnacles of working for someone else in that capacity was Ernst & Young, correct?

Robert Nankervis 3:07

Yeah, look, it's always good to have some experience in one of the kind of the big brands and so on and I guess up to that point, a lot of my work and been in larger organisations. And when I had a bit of reflection about what I really want to do, when I grew up, it was interesting to kind of see what was on the other side that you know, what I noticed, in looking at some of the really big organisations is they were quite cumbersome, slow, and so on. And so I was thinking about what the mid tier might offer. And a friend of mine actually said, look, I think you'd really be able to add some value to the mid market. And, look, it's just been such a privilege working with these sort of founder, owner, CEOs, in driving these mid tier businesses.

Michael Lang 3:46

And going out on your own, which is daunting to some. And you've been doing it for a number of years. So obviously you found a successful model, was there any tools or strategies or models out there that you gravitated towards?

Robert Nankervis 3:59

The thing that I realised I didn't have when I was going in on my own, because I had all the basic consulting skills and those sorts of things, but it was the brand. I didn't have any particular personal brand behind me.

And so one of the things that I did was connected with the guise of scaling up and of course, one of the key modalities that I coach is through the scaling up, intellectual property, and so on. So, to be able to rely on that, the brand and that support, and a very large coach community around the world that Verne Harnish started a couple of decades ago has been very advantageous. And of course, you know, I've been doing this now for about eight years, but also building my own brand with you know, the book, podcasts and things like that, and my own leadership column.

So, I think foundationally It was great to have 'Scaling Up', a lot of people know that brand around the world. And that was certainly really important tool in getting started. And I think like most professionals, we just add things as we go to make that journey a bit richer for the clients we're dealing with. So that's the way I've run it in my own practice.

Michael Lang 5:01

And to some degree, your success means that you're now on a Global Advisory Board of Scaling Up with Verne Harnish. So well done to you, and being a certified coach, it also enables you to go in with some tools and strategies that are reputable as well. So if we go back to all the clients that you've been working with over these years, right, if there was one thing, if there's one thing in common that all these clients did, or didn't do, what would that be?

Robert Nankervis 5:29

Look, I think, particularly with the mid market, what I find is that they're extremely passionate about their product or service, their customers, their staff, and so on. I think one of the things that they often get stuck on is that the folks who are running it have typically come out of some sort of functional role, with there being a legal professional or an accountant, whether they sell truck, they've been a surveyor, they're engineers. So whatever that crowd is, perhaps they're in the agri business, or allied health professionals.

I've had clients in all these different sorts of spaces. And they're really good at their actual craft, Michael, you know, they're good at the thing. The challenge is that because of how good they are, that they built a business that scaling, and then running the business that does the thing is actually quite a different task.

And so part of my role as the Coach is to help them to sort of shine a light on, you know, things like their belief systems, what the strategy needs to be, introducing execution disciplines that you need in an increasingly large business, and so on. And so putting some of those bits of jigsaw puzzle, I guess, together, because it's just not, it just ends up not being sufficient to just be really good at the job.

Michael Lang 6:42

And Rob, have you seen a pattern of a consistent trigger point that gets them to that time where they say, I need to reach out, I need to get an external assistance on this?

Robert Nankervis 6:52

There are a number of trigger points, I think, Michael, one of the common ones is intergenerational change. So it may be a child taking over the business from a father or mother, you know, the family transition, it's sometimes to do with something major that's going on in the business, perhaps they've just got a bit of indigestion from acquiring another business, it could be that they have some multiple owners, and they're trying to get some alignment. And usually, it's some variation of, we know we've got a whole lot of the underlying things that we need to have a successful business, because I don't deal with any startups it's all really well established business, on average, they're more than 10 years old, they're millions or 10s, of millions turnover.

So they're already successful, to a level, good customer base, robust products and services, all that sort of stuffs in place. And but they for some reason, they've had a bit of a block, they're stuck. And so that's when they tend to reach out, you know, perhaps it's underperformance in a particular year. And they've thought, look, if we've got everything, why are we here? It should be better than this. So I come in and help them to get clear on some of these things and make the decisions to take it to the next level. And normally, it's something like, you know, we'd like our business to be twice as big as it is. That's a common thing. You know, we're at X, we'd like to be at 2X in three to five years. How do we do that?

Michael Lang 8:11

And they want to be 2X because they've got some outcome in mind from that as far as selling it, divesting in some way?

Robert Nankervis 8:19

In some cases, yes. You know, I'm dealing with one at the moment where that specifically is an objective. And so they're looking at a multi year horizon where they say, look, what would we have to get this business looking like so that it would be in good nick to sell. But mostly, they're not like that. One business I'm dealing with is in its fourth generation, it's almost 90 years old. So they've been through a whole lot of challenges over that period of time, as you can imagine. And they're not a business that's selling, they're just trying to get better with each generation. So all sorts of drivers for what they want to do. But I actually like the idea that, even if they don't want to sell it, that these leaders are making a business that's really valuable, in case either wanted or needed to sell it.

Michael Lang 9:00

So it's about having choices, getting to a position where you have some choices?

Robert Nankervis 9:03

Absolutely.

Michael Lang 9:04

And invariably, the choices are maybe they're not at the helm anymore. So when you think about all the organization's you've assisted and things that you've learned, when we focus on culture, what do you think the most important aspects are, that you need to focus on as a leader to cultivate company culture?

Robert Nankervis 9:23

Look, I think the most common definition of culture Michael is people say, look, it's how we do things around here. And to me, that's really made up of what's the belief system in the business? What's the mindset? What do we think about in the business sort of strategically business model and so on? And then what do we actually do? How do we show up?

And so the most important part to me about that is really around the belief part. It's the spirit of the business that's foundational for the culture. And to me that revolves around what are the values and behaviours that we have inside the business? Why are we here? You know who are we here to serve? Why do we do what we do? And what's our bigger vision really the unachievable kind of life on the hill type thing that we're aiming this business at?

The second part of it, it's the piece I think that the people tend to miss is being clear as a leader about who you are. And it's being that authentic truth to yourself, not aspirational, not I wish I was, or I wish our business was like this. And then it's a case of, in a leadership sense, making sure that your beliefs and values and so on, have alignment into what you're running out into the business, because people will smell very quickly, the way their leader thinks, acts, behaves, and so on, and what they value is different from what they want the business to think, believe and value. And so that incongruence tends to unpick things for leadership teams, in my experience.

Michael Lang 10:54

And in your experience, Rob, is it an exception that you'd find a company like this and a leader like this, or is it something that you have to work on all the time?

Robert Nankervis 11:03

Look, I think the thing that people struggle with is about having values, that the reality is that in everything that everyone does their values present anyway, it's just a case of whether they've been thoughtful about how those things have been drawn out. And I use that term advisedly, because some people like to create their values, I tend to look at it from a point of view and saying, Well, look, let's distill them from who we really are. And we're not inventing things, you know, we've all been into businesses where they've proudly got these things chiselled into a glass template on the front desk.

But the reality is very few people actually know what the values are in their business. And one of the early exercises I do with the teams is to help draw that out. What are the three to five things that really represent who they are at their best?

And what are the behaviours that would tell us that those things are actually happening? And then I encourage them to say, Look, how do we bring those things into regular conversation inside the business? How do you use those to work out who should be working here? And who shouldn't when you're trying to recruit people? And so that way, it becomes much more part of their regular day in the life in the business.

Michael Lang 12:12

Yeah, I agree. And from my experience, a lot of leaders struggle actually articulating above the line, or below line behaviours aligned to those values. Again, as you said, it's written up on some wall, and my question to them is, well, how would you know, then I'm exhibiting that value? So that's part of the challenge, if they can't articulate the behaviours, and they can't articulate it with clarity, how are people expected to perform in their organisation?

Robert Nankervis 12:39

And it's also the case, you know, that, that sometimes they just have names, they might have gone to the trouble of creating, like drawing some of these out, but there's just too many, and no one can remember them. There's kind of confusion, isn't that value a bit like value number seven? And so we try and get them a bit discrete, three to five things, you know, would you and I be able to judge whether each other, you know, week-to-week, month-to-month kind of living in alignment with these things? And the experience with business that have done it, is that that sense of clarity and alignment that they get, particularly in assessing who the teams are, and you know, who should be there and who shouldn't, has been a very powerful informer of them getting their team, right.

Michael Lang 13:21

Yeah, totally agree. So let's move on to strategy. What are the key activities needed to be consistently applied to ensure people are aligned to the strategy? So we have a strategy, it's just getting that alignment. I know you've focused a lot on that.

Robert Nankervis 13:36

Yeah, look the interesting thing to me, you know, again, going back to your early question, having worked with corporates for years, lots of the time they'd go away and have their strategic retreat, but you wouldn't hear anything about it until the next strategic retreat. And so part of the challenge for me is that it's both backwards and forwards, Michael. So backwards, the strategy needs to be framed, because you really understand what the belief system of the business is, so that the choices that you're making strategically are aligned with who you are as a business. So there's congruence there.

The second part of it, and I touched on this in what's called the aspiration section of my book, is that we really have to be clear on what the customer expects of us. So if we understand who we are and what we expect of ourselves, and we also understand what the customer expects of us, we've kind of got the left and right arcs for where our strategic choices can sit. And so with those things in mind, we can then start to think about well, what do we need to choose to do, you know, and then you go into the kind of the unique differentiator, typical strategy phrases, to live out what we expect of ourselves and what the customers expect of us. And so I'll tend to cover this in my annual strategy sessions and so on with the clients and we kind of have it within that type of setting.

The next step is sort of so what at the end, then you've got to actually do something with that. How does your say three to five year set of strategic choices? And we'd normally say to people, you know, if you're going from X, say to 2X, you know, you want to achieve these things in the next three years, what's that going to take? Or there may be three to five streams of work or capability developments that will actually get you to your destination.

And then it's a case of breaking that down into the annual and saying, Well, if that's true, and if we're standing at the three year point, looking back, what must be true now? What do you need to do in year one? And then we break that down further. And so what does that mean for quarter one? And then what does that mean quarter one for you? And so what we do around the leadership table is people take out their own three to five specific accountabilities that they've committed to in front of their peers for what they're going to do against those strategic objectives.

And so what we've done is taken it from, if you like, the more esoteric belief system of why are we here at all? And what are our values down to what does the customer expect? What are we therefore choosing to do? And what does that mean for you, me and everyone else on the executive team in the coming 90 days? And so to back that up, in that accountability sense, we have metrics around it. So how will we know we're being successful and achieving those things? And the other part is communicating it so that not only the leadership team, but the wider group in the business actually know where this thing's going, and who's on point for what, in that next 90 day period. So it's really a lot about clarity and alignment.

Michael Lang 16:37

So Rob, totally agree with everything you shared. And in my experience, the challenge is getting that cadence going, because they say, yeah, we've done it, and then they go off and chase something else. And you mentioned accountability. In my experience, leadership really struggles with accountability.

Robert Nankervis 16:53

Yep.

Michael Lang 16:54

What's been some interesting examples of where they've been able to keep it alive?

Robert Nankervis 16:59

So one of the ways that we do it is by having a regular cadence. So with my retained clients every 90 days I'm back there, and we're checking in on Well, you said, you're going to do this for the quarter, Michael, how'd you go? Is that red, green? or orange? You know, green? Yes, it's done. Orange, it's not quite done. But it's about due for sign off, in the next one to two weeks we'll be done. And red is everything else. So look, on the whole, our goal is 75 to 80% greens.

So you know, roughly you got four out of five your things done. And over time, my experience is that people get better at judging, what can I get done in that quarter.

The other thing, so we have that cadence set up, but I also train them how to have a monthly and weekly cadence in between and daily huddles, and things like that, that are part of the scaling up model. So that there is this regular rhythm in the business. So their 90 day goals they can break down into what lots of people would know is kind of Agile sprints, you know these one to two week exercises. And also I get the leaders coaching down their organisation.

So if you and I've got our own 90 day goals, say I'm running the finance team, I go back to the finance team and say, Look, I've just been at the strategy retreat, here's what the business is trying to get done as a whole. Here's the handful of things that I end up getting, taking accountability for out of that, as a team in finance, what are we all going to do? And specifically, what are you all going to do against that? And so we end up with this idea of top to bottom, really aligned so that people are doing things that they know were important against what the company is trying to do.

And usually it then gives the leaders like you and I are on that team the opportunity to go back to them and say so instead of people having their coffee catch up, which people tell me they do with their team. I want them to have a more structured coaching call. Hey, you going Michael with those three to five things that you committed to with your team? Where are you stuck? How can I help?

Michael Lang 18:57

Right. And so you know, not taking anything away from your success. I'm just reflecting on what I've done in 12 years. There's been organisations, we thought you could have got there. But you gave up. What has been the consistent thing you've seen of the reasons they've given up?

Robert Nankervis 19:16

I think if they take on too much. And so I remember being with one leadership team, and we talked about the three to five things and their HR director said, Look, there's lots on and I've got 12.

Michael Lang 19:27

Right.

Robert Nankervis 19:28

So we came back the next time. And look, we let that sit. So we came back next time. And of course, there were lots of reds amongst the 12. So it was a kind of a lesson that you know, there are some superordinate things that need to be done for the business and people have to get better at choosing those and actually getting permission to stop stuff.

Michael Lang 19:49

Right.

Robert Nankervis 19:49

Well, I think to your question that's one of the things that people find hardest, particularly entrepreneurs, there's an excitement with starting things and the energy that that creates, it's much harder for most of us to stop things, and so part of the conversation becomes look, you know, to get to do A, B and C, is there anything we need to stop doing?

Michael Lang 20:09

And in your experience, Rob, do you still find that some leaders find it hard to make decisions?

Robert Nankervis 20:14

Yep.

Michael Lang 20:15

And some leaders want to make too many decisions?

Robert Nankervis 20:19

Yeah. And sometimes to be involved in lots of things that they don't have to be involved in. But they're used to it. And I think one of the, I think it's an idiosyncrasy in a sense of often family owned businesses is because if there's a, particularly a patriarch matriarch owns the business, there is a bit of a difference of people wanting to keep getting their permission to do things, because a lot of the team thinks ugh really I'm spending Bill and Mary's money whenever I decide to do something. And Bill and Mary, of course, wish to God that these people that they're paying, would just go to do the job they've paid them to do.

But often these businesses attract people who like being in a family business, and in a sense, sometimes get treated like the kids, you know, you may have had this experience as well that this is almost paternalistic culture is developed. So that's one of the things that we try and overcome by getting really clear about whose role is what, who's accountable for what, and making that pretty clear about well, if you're the CEO, here's the sort of things that you know, you need to be accountable for, I don't think you need to be deciding on what type of pencils we order.

Michael Lang 21:25

Exactly, the control freaks of the world. So, which leads to what are the three core leadership traits that you think are most important to be a great leader?

Robert Nankervis 21:34

The traits I would describe, the sort of the way I've described them in the book is that the senior leaders have to stop thinking of themselves as a Chief Executive Officer, and start thinking of themselves more as a Chief 'Energy' Officer. And so the core principle behind my book was that there are really three main spheres of energy that you control as a leader. And that's the energy around what you believe, the energy of and what you conceive, and the energy around what you achieve.

And so this is really, if you like the mind, body spirit of an organisation. And too often I think leaders get trapped in the operational part, which is what I would call the achieve part, which is where you're lining up the structure, processes, people, it's the most visible thing. And for people who've come out of functional type backgrounds, it's the obvious place to play. When you're running a whole organisation, it's a lot more complex than that, obviously, and you need to have skills and leadership traits in these other dimensions as well.

So under 'believe', you're shaping the values, vision and purpose of the organisation, whereas under 'conceive', it's much more around the business model, the strategy and the risks. And so I think people need to be able to play across those different facets of the business to be able to lead well.

Michael Lang 22:51

I suppose when you talk about those three areas, people will play where they're most comfortable. And people will also play in what's uncomfortable if they've got the inspiration to do it, or if someone is guiding them to do it. Because as general human beings, we like to feel comfortable more often than not. And as you said, you started with by saying, the companies you work with, they've had a great idea. And they're usually the expert on that idea, but when it actually comes to leading the company, they're not an expert at that. And what I find challenging is, they're not consistently looking to be an expert in that area, as in leading, so they go by default to managing because that's what's easiest for them.

Robert Nankervis 23:36

So part of the role that we have as coaches is to help them lift up those skill sets. That is true, though, that for some, they may have a specific skill set that they really want to keep pursuing. And they'd rather have somebody else come in and lead the business and that's happened in a couple of organisations, I've been coaching where they brought in an external, COO, CEO. And that's been a very effective approach. The leader has sometimes just been more the chair, or they've been kind of the carrier of the values and purpose and vision of the business where the strategic and operational parts have been run by the COO. So that's been another way of tackling it if the person either doesn't want to or can't lift those leadership skills.

Michael Lang 24:16

And it takes a very self aware, leader, owner of the business to understand that and get out of their own way, right?

Robert Nankervis 24:23

Oh massive respect for the ones who can because it's sort of like handing over your baby to somebody else, you know, that there's another motivation that I find, Michael, and that is if people somewhat wish to sell the business, having somebody else leading it can be quite a good strategy because it helps separate that owner/ leader part for when you make the final transition to another owner.

Michael Lang 24:43

It's a risk isn't it I mean, decide whether you want to be sold with a business or that you don't. If you don't, then replace yourself.

Robert Nankervis 24:51

And for those who think they do, they probably don't.

Michael Lang 24:56

Not until they're in the first year of burnout where then they'll find out that, Hey, I made a mistake.

Voice Over 25:03

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Michael Lang 25:16

Cool. All right, number one lesson learned from people's failures.

Robert Nankervis 25:21

I think the biggest failures that people would tell me has been their failure around what they've done with their own people, the people they've either kept on that they shouldn't have, particularly, often the loyalty and I've touched on this before with family, the loyalty is very strong, and often both ways, between the staff and the owners and the reverse. But it can mean that people get stuck and held on to for too long.

So are the poor values, or as the business scales, their skill set doesn't scale sufficiently to continue working at the level they need to. And the other part is that they're not that great at hiring. And so they may in fact, introduce some folk to the business that they prefer not to have had there. And so there is such leverage, when I've seen organisations that have really got this right, the performance that they have, and lift that they've got out of having the right people on deck in the right seats, doing the right things, has been extremely powerful.

Michael Lang 26:20

You mentioned loyalty, is it loyalty? Or is it the moving away from conflict?

Robert Nankervis 26:28

That's a good question. I actually think it's a bit of both. And they probably conflate those things. But, you know, I remember a case where there's a guy who probably shouldn't have been in this client organisation. But some of the work he had done over time, the owner told me, he had been really fundamental in helping the business in some of its toughest times. And so he was by my assessment on the behaviours and the skill sets. And so somebody who really shouldn't have been in the business because he was disruptive, he's actually degrading the culture around the other people he was leading.

So you know, you had one person who was problematic, creating four other problematic people like this was a real issue. But sort of, to the credit of the owner, he was reflecting on this guy's history and respecting what he'd done. And we have to kind of separate out Yes, well, that's great. But that is still history. And there's been support over time for what was done, then we need something quite different now. And this is actually actively damaging your business.

Michael Lang 27:26

And how long will it take them to finally make a decision and act on that decision, Rob?

Robert Nankervis 27:30

Oh a long time. And I just had one recently, where there was a leader in their business, and there were some difficulties with that person. And I said, look, I think this sounds very similar to a conversation we had 12 months ago about this. And they agreed, they realised that in the loyalty that the hope and the aspiration of this person would lift. It just didn't happen.

Michael Lang 27:51

But you mentioned loyalty and aspiration, I think that they hold on to hope, because the other alternative is they need to make a decision to give them to leave, and then they've got a gap to fill. They don't believe that there's someone else out there that could fill the gap. Or they don't want to fill the gap in the meantime, or they're not quite sure how to fill the gap and what happens afterwards, right?

Robert Nankervis 28:16

Yes, so the lack of a plan B is often a barrier, you're right. I can't think of an exception where they haven't done what they need to do and then said, Well, that would have been well done in quite some time ago. There haven't been any regrets that I can think of...

Michael Lang 28:31

The only regret is they say, if only I'd done this sooner.

Robert Nankervis 28:34

Correct. That's the only regret. It's not the regret of the losses, that there's a missed opportunity in the meantime of what they could have done so. And, of course, a lot of stress and carrying it. And what people told me, Michael, is that they spend way too much time dealing with their non fit non performers than they do with the people that they are trying to retain. Who are the top performers. And of course, ironically, this annoys the top performers. And they're actually more likely to leave.

Michael Lang 29:01

Correct, on their own standing, because they said, I'm not being appreciated. I'm out of here. And I want a new challenge. I'm not getting it here. Yeah, you're right. And it's really interesting, the organisations that need their top talent the most and get them through being stuck, are the organisations that don't realise when their top performance leave, right?

Robert Nankervis 29:25

Yep. And sometimes just aren't clear enough, you know, quarter to quarter on who their top performers are. And so what I get them to do is to say, look, you know, who are these individuals, we know who they are, by name, and who are the kind of ones who are on the track as well, so that we get some of your top performers mentoring your top performers in waiting, which is kind of reflecting the respect we have for both those groups. So but you have to take the time to actually get your leadership group aligned on identifying them and agreeing the actions.

Michael Lang 29:55

So a lot of things that you've been doing over the years is around change management transformation, Rob. So what are the most important things that people need to be focused on to get this right?

Robert Nankervis 30:05

I think the first key thing is why are we doing this? You know, why are we taking this business on the road? Why are we acquiring another business? You know why, why why. And so if people understand the rationale, and I think the other part of it is, then making that rationale clear. So bringing out the repeated messages about where we're taking the business, and so on, and backing it with demonstrated actions, you know, going back to what I was talking about before, what are we going to stop? Because, you know, if we say we're going into this new territory, or this product line, or whatever, well, are we going to stop an old product line? Are we going to shut off old systems? Are we going to stop dealing with the customer group that we've said, are no longer our core customer group?

Or is that an 'as well'. And so there's partly these physical demonstrations of the difference. And it's not just getting A3 flyers put up around on all the walls and things like that people see through those things, if nothing else happens around it. So I think there's a congruence for the actions that people need to take that show that this is actually true, there are numbers on it that you talk to next month, next quarter. Here's what we said, we'd do. Here's what we've actually done. And it builds this trust in leaders.

Michael Lang 31:18

And what I like is what you shared is a lot of people just constantly say this, what we're going to start doing, but I love that distinction you made, well, what about those things we're going to stop doing? That is really thought provoking Rob. Yeah. So well done to you. So are there any other factors that we need to consider within the leadership group, when we're transforming? Because you're right.

It's the why and it's the continual articulation of the why, the emotional context. And it's what are we going to start doing and what we're going to stop doing, but in my experience in transformation change programme, is that cadence of what the leaders need to do, right, and they can talk about it. But as you said, what do they need to demonstrate? So what is the cadence that you think they need to do in your experience?

Robert Nankervis 32:04

Well, I think it's the initial piece of communication, but it's the storytelling around that. And what I try and get leaders to do is to keep walking back to the belief system. Why do we do what we do? How is this aligned with our values? How's this moving us towards our vision? How's this helping our customers? And so that people have got these little hooks then to say, Oh, yeah, this isn't just because Bluey, we had a nice walk out in the park this morning, and came out with a brilliant new insight, right? There's actually a lot of rationale behind this, and why we should be doing it as an organisation, why it makes sense for our customers? What's in it for me, you know, how will life be better or different or whatever, for me?

And the reality that not all changes are good for all people. And so I think there has to be an honesty with that, that if we've got two factories, and one's closing, or we're offshoring, or whatever we're doing, this stuff sometimes can't get candy coated, you know, what does it actually mean? And so, the power I think, that leaders get out of this is, if they're counting these decisions against where the business is going as a whole, it depersonalises it to the extent that people don't think, ah, it's not just because they don't like me, they don't like our function, our group or whatever, even if I don't like the decision, I actually understand and respect why the business has made this decision. Because the boss has been saying for the last few years, we're going from here to there. And I can see how this decision gets us from here to there. Even though I'm not a beneficiary of it myself.

And so I think that's part of it. I think the other part of it is, if you are on these journeys of growth, transformation, and so on, inevitably, there'll be something in the way, you know, you're inside the current. If you like atmosphere that you're in, you're trying to blast your rocket out into the universe, there's a barrier. And our job as leaders is to understand what those barriers are, and to help people disassemble them, what are those things that we're going to knock into? And what are the enablers that we have to add to help people? Do we need extra resources? Do we need a new system? Do we need to buy more machines, another factory, more vehicles, what's going to help us to actually get there.

And I think when you have all those things in place, what it allows is for the wider team to tell themselves their own story because remember, you know, as leaders, we can tell the story, but it's kind of it's our story. They have, the success comes when they tell themselves a productive story about what needs to be done. And if we have given them enough hooks about the values, the purpose, the vision, customer expectation, the strategy for the next couple of years, how are we going to get rid of some of the things that are in our road together. Some of the, you know, where we're spending on some of these enablers to help them do the job. They've got a whole lot of hooks there that they can start to build their own more Micro decisions around about how to advance the cause in their own area.

Michael Lang 35:04

So Rob, you mentioned what's in it for me, I was reading a business book about a company turnaround. And they really grasped transparency to the point where they shared all their financials with all the employees, what they realised was that they actually also had to do an educational what financials mean, and distil it down to what their role means in those financials. And you know, some of their journeys, some people realised what they were doing was not giving a return for the financials. And so they actually had to make a change or had to exit. How do you feel about that total transparency within an organisation? Because some leaders struggle with that.

Robert Nankervis 35:43

Yeah, they do. And I've had a couple that have, and I respect whatever they want to do Michael and see as their business they can decide, but when people do understand the Numerix, and I remember travelling a few years ago went to SRC in Springfield, Missouri, which is Jack Stacks' business, Springfield Remanufacturing Corporation, and they have numbers everywhere.

In their break room, they have itemised balance sheet, profit and loss, cash flow statement, that the wall height wide poured with all these things, handwritten on it, there's no mystery about what the numbers are. And on the back of, the lady who was showing me around, on the back of her ID card, was the bonus levels, if we make this much profit, we're at bonus level one, if we make this much more profit, we are at bonus level two, she said, there's no mystery about what we get paid.

Like, we know the performance that's expected. And they've got traffic lights, they've got actual traffic lights, actually, in the one I've visited, showing how they going. Data on everything. In everyone's workstation, there's a whiteboard, a TV screen, and Jack's view is that people love sport. And when you go on the sport, there's a scoreboard up.

Michael Lang 36:53

Right.

Robert Nankervis 36:54

You know, whatever the sport is, there's a detailed scoreboard right? And you know, go the Olympics, you go to any of the football codes here. Cricket, doesn't matter what the sport is, right in front of you is the scoreboard. And he said business is the only place where this doesn't happen. And he said, if people like sport, why don't we gamify business a bit more and make it more engaging. And so if you go through the process I've been discussing where you're really clear about what you believe about the strategy to deliver on those beliefs about how you're going to execute on it.

And then you start saying, Well, what are the numbers have to look like to show us that this is happening? And then you start putting those up, and people get less, I think less scared about those things. And to your point before as you educate them on them, as they see that nobody died from being kind of accountable for what their number was this quarter. And it really does normalise these things. And I've been really humbled by how open a lot of these founder owners in their own businesses have been around around the numbers and the how that liberates the team really, when they can see what's making a difference and what isn't.

Michael Lang 38:03

Yeah, I think the book was written around that factory, that you went to actually...

Robert Nankervis 38:08

Is it called The Great Game of Business.

Michael Lang 38:10

That's it. That's the one. Thank you. Alright, so speaking of great books, you've got a picture behind you with Propelling Performance, your book, how many years in the making?

Robert Nankervis 38:21

Too many years? Very long gestation of that baby Michael...

Michael Lang 38:25

But you're getting the content perfect, long journey, right?

Robert Nankervis 38:30

Well, the interesting thing is that I was actually pleased that the distillation process in the end took longer, because the more recent work that I've done over the last couple of years, with clients, and so on, really helped to add some more stories to the book and some insights, which when I first started writing it, I wouldn't have had so despite getting a fair old touch up from my accountability group and my coach about how long it was taking me, it was I think time well spent on I'm very happy with the product. And of course, you know, COVID year last year, it was good to use that lock down time, when you know, the time I saved from not travelling to actually get something over the line and start a podcast and so on. I didn't want to leave a COVID year with not much to show for.

Michael Lang 39:12

Fantastic. So I'm walking through the airport, which is a rare occurrence these days. And you've got the bookshop there, and I see your book there. Why should I buy it?

Robert Nankervis 39:24

My goal is to help 5000 businesses. So and obviously in my retain practice, I can only help about a dozen at a time. So this is really a distillation of what I think about business. And I wanted to have some Australian examples in there. So a lot of what we read is really based off the American literature and case studies. And so I wanted to give a salute to local businesses who've been doing some really great things.

And I also want to declutter a lot. Like you know, behind me here in my library, I've got over 400 leadership books and a lot of the fundamentals and kind of natural systems of business, if you like are pretty clear. But what wasn't clear to me when I've had my own leadership roles of teams and so on, you know, what leaders do you pull and in what order? And so what I want to do through this book was say, look, there's a number of fundamentals, how do I break it into a model that people will be able to remember to put things into an order, so that if they're unclear what to do, there's at least there's an audit where they can start to unpick the best place to start because we can never do everything, but where where's the point of leverage where we can, as leaders have our most beneficial impact? And that was sort of the rationale for, for doing it.

Michael Lang 40:43

Well done to you, and how do I get access to that book?

Robert Nankervis 40:46

Off the website? I mean, it's on all the typical Booktopia's and book depositories and Amazon's and off the robertnankervis.com website.

Michael Lang 40:55

And the podcast you're doing how's that going?

Robert Nankervis 40:58

Yeah, it's been good. I recorded the first season last year. And we've been rolling those out sort of every two weeks. And in the next month or so we'll be recording season two. So the idea is kind of, couple of seasons of podcasts per year that I sort of fit in around my real job of coaching the clients.

But look, it's a great way of connecting people like my clients and some of the experts that I'm privileged to be hanging around with, but most people would never get to meet these folks. So it's a great way of sharing some of their wisdom and their stories with a wider audience. So it's been a good thing to do.

Michael Lang 41:39

Rob, I really appreciate you sharing your wisdom to my wider audience. And thank you very much for having this opportunity with me. I look forward to getting your book and digging even deeper and sharing it with my audience. So thank you for that. And really appreciate the openness that you've leant towards this podcast. So thank you.

Robert Nankervis 42:02

Great to be here, Michael. Thanks for having me on.

Voiceover 42:07

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