



Episode 63 Show Notes: Learning To Lead in Times of Disruption & Crisis

Dick Richardson knows the impact of disruption and crisis. An executive leadership development consultant, owner and co-founder of *Experience to Lead*, (an organization that offers unique experiences to improve the leadership of individuals, teams, and organizations) he has also experienced the stresses of disruption and chaos both in his professional life and personally as a survivor of Flight 1549 “Miracle on the Hudson.”

In this episode, Dick joins us to discuss the role that experiential leadership development plays in preparing leaders for disruption. He shares insights gained through a method of experiential learning that uses parallels between modern day and historic military leaders as the guide. He discusses leading in times of stress and chaos; the link between many crises and HR’s areas of responsibility, and a key takeaway from his experiential programs that you won’t want to miss. Dick also shares advice to HR leaders on their personal and professional development.

Dick previously worked with The Conference Board for 10 years designing and delivering experiential programs for executives, and he has carried that experience into his new organization. Previously, Dick was the Director of Executive Leadership Development for ITT. Before that, he held a variety of leadership positions in Learning at IBM, including global roles based in Hong Kong and other overseas assignments. His last position was Director of Executive and Management Development where he was responsible for the leadership curriculum for all IBM managers and executives. He holds two patents for innovations in organizational learning, and he has been recognized by various industry groups with awards for leadership development and learning.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **What can global leaders discover in historic locations such as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania?** Dick uses locations around the world for his experiential leadership learning and he draws parallels between historic locations and modern-day leaders.



Examples:

- **Replacing one leader with two– 1864 and 21st Century parallels.** Marissa Mayer, the current CEO of Yahoo, came from Google. She was the eleventh employee hired by Google and was the VP, Search & Customer Experience - a key leadership role. Her leaving was a key loss for Sergey Brin, the co-founder of Google. In comparison, Robert E. Lee headed North for the battle of Gettysburg after the victory at Chancellorsville. He had a tight and small executive leadership team. Stonewall Jackson, who was killed at Chancellorsville, was a key player on his executive team. Stonewall was ultimately replaced by two generals. Marissa Mayer was so key to Google that she was replaced by two people as well.

- In a further parallel, Marissa was the sixth CEO at Yahoo in 3 years – the previous five CEO’s had all failed. General Meade was the fifth General as Commander of the Army of the Potomac over a two year period – Lincoln had fired the previous four Generals. You can go back and see what happened to historical figures with broken and absent executive teams and how they handled organizations in disarray. It is easy to find parallels in business today.

- **Are leadership parallels evident or do they come up in the moment?** A historian facilitates each program. Clients and their teams are interviewed to help develop a good picture of the company and their issues. The Facilitators do their homework to anticipate and identify parallels, however, it is always best if the client draws the connections themselves.

- **HR issues emerge as critical turning points during disruption and crisis.** If you examine critical turning points historically and modern day, three quarters would be considered ‘HR issues’. Emergencies in succession planning, confusing communication – these are issues that are fundamentally people and leadership issues.



HR STUDIO PODCAST

ADAPTIVE LEADERS LOOK A LITTLE FURTHER INTO THE FUTURE THAN THE AVERAGE LEADER. THEY TRY TO ANTICIPATE AND ARE MORE SITUATIONALLY AWARE.

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- **What leadership insights come about?** Adaptive leaders are the ones who are trying to look a little further into the future than the average leader. They try to anticipate and are more situationally aware (like military leaders). They will ask the question, 'besides what is going on in my industry or my company, what are the larger issues going on in the world that could affect us?' Companies are getting surprised by political actions around the globe. Some leaders are more ready to deal with unanticipated challenges than others.
- **What can HR leaders do to help during times of disruption and crisis?** HR leaders have to be at the table. Business leaders get better advice and are more likely to follow that advice when HR is at the table. Starbucks is an example of a company having issues with the media and their culture. They closed all their stores for one day to conduct diversity training. It was a bold move. If you were to go back through Starbucks' meetings and memos, you would likely find that it was HR and their Learning people that said the answer to the problem could be found in Learning and HR.

HR is sometimes seen as conservative and careful with actions. HR people should be bold and courageous.

- **Experience to Lead takes leaders and organizations around the world.** It has an agreement with NASA that provides access to locations including Johnson, Kennedy and Marshall Space Centers. They also have an agreement with the US Olympic Committee, enabling them to deliver programs on high-performance teams at their training facilities in Colorado, CO and Chula Vista, CA. Their program, *Brace for Impact*, which is for leaders in times of stress and chaos, is delivered in Charlotte, NC. They also have programs in Europe exploring the D-Day Invasion and the Battle of Waterloo.
- **Dick has a personal connection with, and is the 'historical artifact' for the *Brace for Impact* program.** He was a passenger on the Miracle on the Hudson flight. He was in seat 18F and was standing on the starboard wing when he was picked up by one of the Hudson River Ferries. He has first-hand experience of how leaders handle that kind of crisis and chaos, dealing with events beyond their control. Some leaders are not ready for these events. The team uses assessment instruments to tap leaders' values, their derailers, and their strengths so that they can anticipate how they will react in a crisis.



- **How are leaders convinced that the investment is worthwhile?** Typically, someone in the company has gone through the program and recommends it. HR people can help leaders make the connection and see the benefits of different types of learning and different types of HR approaches.
- **Career advice for HR professionals who are trying to make the decision between being a specialist or a generalist.** If possible, cycle through different functional areas. Find things you are passionate about, things that are intellectually stimulating, and content that is interesting. Go where you think you should go, but be open to opportunities. Don't perceive yourself as stuck. Pause before you make big decisions. Be sure it is the right thing for you and the right fit for the company.

Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Experience To Lead website](#)
- [The Conference Board](#)

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