60. Tihansky, Hammer & Newman, Corcoran

High Performance Teams

0:00:01 Kendal Lott: I googled high performance teams and here's what I got: A high performing team is a group of people who share a common vision, goals, metrics, and who collaborate, challenge and hold each other accountable to achieve outstanding results.

0:00:17 Jahn Tihansky: At the end of the day everybody's got to work together. This hierarchy of God Almighty up at the top and the minions down at the bottom, isn't always super effective if there isn't a lot of respect across those divides.

0:00:28 KL: The first thing you need to build a high-performing team is respect and trust. Once you have that, you can rely 100% on each other.

0:00:36 David Newman: People will do a better job if they are motivated to do a better job, and it's very difficult to motivate people. We have to allow people to be motivated.

0:00:45 KL: Motivation has to come from within the individual. It's up to the PM to give your team the space they need…to allow them to do their work.

0:00:53 Colonel Stephen Corcoran: You are in a situation where something goes wrong, and you do not want to call the first leader in your chain of command, or in your management chain, there is something fatally wrong with that relationship. If the first person you want to call is the leader, there is something great in that relationship.

0:01:15 KL: Team members must feel free to speak out if they're concerned about something or if they don't feel competent in the role they've been assigned. Leaders must have a grasp of the actual resources at their disposal to accurately gauge the parameters of the project.

0:01:29 Announcer: From the studios of Final Milestone Productions, overlooking the White House in downtown Washington DC, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendal Lott.

0:01:43 KL: Leaders and followers, confronting fears, having reliance, trust, self-awareness and happiness, beyond inclusion, but celebrating and using the diversity of a team and their backgrounds and opinions to get more done well. Everyone gets their say, but not necessarily their way. I bring you perspectives from the US Naval Academy, to the happy PM and to bubbles of excellence. More than lessons in leadership, today we hear of lessons for creating leaders within an organization.

My first guest, Jahn Tihansky is an entrepreneur, educator, adventurer and sailor. He founded an on-water education school, which he operated for over 20 years, running team-building and training programs for corporate clients, such as Coca-Cola, Microsoft and Northrop Grumman. Since 2015,

he has served as the Director and Head Coach of the offshore sailing team at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, and he's led his team to four national championships.

0:02:40 JT: We're actually a varsity sport, and we also serve as a professional development program for the academy. Obviously a midshipman at the Naval Academy are there to develop their leadership skills, and the program is looked at as a great team-building and leadership development program, given the medium in which we operate, out on the ocean, aboard boats, small groups of a crew and it's just a fantastic environment to develop these young people's skills.

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0:03:11 KL: How does the program work?

0:03:12 JT: Well, we sail what are known as larger keelboats, and I say larger, the small boats that we sail are 26 feet. A big one would be 65 feet for us. But by all measures of boats, particularly from a navy perspective, these are very small, teeny boats, but every one of them requires a crew to operate the boat in a way that works well together, to be able to get the best performance out of it. So, the racing aspect is how they measure their development and their potential, at least with respect to technique. But we're out in the weather, and in the open water, and in many cases, we actually are sailing long distances. In fact, over the summer months we race out to Bermuda, which is 650 miles off the east coast of the US.

0:04:02 JT: It's an environment that, it's unforgiving, it has a lot of potential risk, and from an experiential learning standpoint, in preparing these guys for a career in the military, I can't think of a better medium for them to go out and test themselves, build their skills, build their teams and where they truly have to rely on one another. One: to compete. We talk about this being a sport and we measure it by our performance. But two: the genuine risk out there, there's no button to push, a pause button or a phone call you can pick up and say, "Hey, come get me out here, we're broken or, we've injured somebody." We're hundreds of miles away from help. And so, people have to develop these self-sufficiency skills, as a crew, to be able to get their boat to a destination. Like the Bermuda race takes anywhere between three and six days to get there, depending on what the wind and the weather is, and you're running 24/7. You've got to be able to pace yourself mentally as well as physically. There's seasickness. There's sleep deprivation. There's hallucinations at three in the morning, when you're seeing things that may or may not be there, and you've got to navigate, you've got to plan your strategy with the wind and the weather.

0:05:15 JT: And I can tell you, win, lose or draw, when you get to a place like Bermuda, where you've basically hit this small speck of an island out in the middle of the ocean, that in and of itself is a huge accomplishment. But we want to do it and we want to, of course, beat the other guys in getting there. And so, it's a huge reward to be able to do something like that. And it's a legit, genuine accomplishment for anybody who's a sailor, but particularly for these guys, because most of them, when they come to the team, Kendal, are neophytes to our sport. Most of them haven't sailed at all before they show up there. So they're learning from the ground up, but they're drinking from a fire hose.

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0:05:56 KL: On any given boat there's leaders and followers, right? So they're rotating in different

roles of command?

0:06:01 JT: Every summer, the midshipmen at the Naval Academy have to do two summer training blocks; a month-long training, and our program counts as one of those.

0:06:12 KL: So they're rotating in different roles of command?

0:06:15 JT: Yeah.

0:06:15 KL: How does the command structure work, given that they're all fairly... At most, one of them will have two summers of experience when they start?

0:06:23 JT: Well, believe it or not, by the time they get to the summer before their senior year, they are appointed leaders on board the boat. They're either the skipper or the executive officer, second in charge, and they are the leaders of the boat. And they started out as a follower and very likely were just neophytes learning from one another, learning from their upper class, who have a year or two more years of experience than they do and they just pass that information and those skills along…along with the coaching facilitation that my staff and I do in that process. But for the most part, our staffing is relatively small. So, it's these guys are learning from one another as much as anything, which is the most effective way to do it with the size of the group that we have.

0:07:08 KL: Do you end up with somebody on each boat as they go to Bermuda and how many is that?

0:07:13 JT: The smallest boat we'll go to Bermuda with is a Navy 44, and there'll be eight midshipmen aboard that boat, and we have two adult, I'll call us leaders, we're safety officers is really what our role is on board the boat, and I sort of euphemistically say that our job is to keep them out of the ditch. We're not there to make their decisions for them, unless it's a decision where we feel that it could have significant harm to them or the boat. But tactically, strategically and just how they plan for the whole thing, we work really hard to let them make those decisions, with some input as necessary and as they seek it, to help them along. But the decision making part of it is obviously a critical part to their development.

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0:08:04 KL: What is the value of developing it as a followership? What is your observation on that?

0:08:11 JT: I think that everybody in the military has started at the bottom, nobody walks in the door as an upper level manager there. And so, you know what it's like, as that grunt working for somebody else, and you see examples of good leadership and not so good leadership, and that helps you develop your own personal ethos along the way. At the end of the day, everybody's got to work together. This hierarchy of God Almighty up at the top and the minions down at the bottom, it isn't always super effective if there isn't a lot of respect across those divides. And so, this medium in which we're operating just levels things out in such a way that people have to confront their fears. They can't hide out in their little comfort zones and again, they just, they've got to get creative. They've got to look around and try to see things that, you just not being a natural in the environment, you don't really see them. You've got smart people who are engaged, and they do have

the desire and goal to achieve the objective, but they realize that they can't do it alone, and top to bottom, everybody's going to have to pull together and contribute their part to making it happen.

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0:09:32 KL: Having to have reliance on each other and respect. Talk to me a little bit about the reliance that people have. This strikes me as the team side of this.

0:09:39 JT: When we're sailing and out on the ocean, I've got to sleep just like anybody else. I go off watch and I go down below, but part of that I say to my crew on board the boat, I say, "Look, when we go off watch half the team is down below getting rest, we are... " I'm going to use the word reliance…"We are relying on you to do your job. We are relying on you to keep a good look out. We're relying on you to watch the radar. We're relying on you, just to provide a safe environment, so we can do our job and get our sleep, so we can come up and replace you." And so, it comes right back down to core. Everybody's got to care, they got to give a damn about it, and then they've got to realize that they bear responsibility for what they're tasked with. And if you are unfamiliar with your responsibilities, you have the obligation to speak up. As humiliating as it might be, you can't leave the flank of your team exposed because of your lack of knowledge, or dare I say, incompetence. You can't allow things to progress with people making presumptions that that flank is covered.

0:10:45 KL: So that's important for our project managers to think about. If you really want to be relied on and be on a team, it does require of you that vulnerability to explain, "I actually don't know this part."

0:10:55 JT: If you think about the environment that fosters that kind of a mentality, oftentimes it's fear of the leadership and the consequences of admitting something like that, vs being open and allowing the leadership to know exactly what they have or don't have, in terms of resources. And sometimes the leadership fosters that by not accepting that everything's not perfect, people are not fully competent, although they may represent to you that they are. And of course they want to be, but you've got to let them gain the experience, and part of gaining experience, in my book, is you've got to fail, and learning from small failures, that don't have big consequence, typically helps people gain the experience that they need, and if you have a culture that is not tolerant of failure from the bottom up, I think you're flirting with disaster there. And so, corporate cultures and any kind of team-building situation, people have to accept failure's part of it. Failure's part of learning. It's a valuable part of it.

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0:12:12 KL: A good team member will highlight what they don't know. A good leader has to establish an environment where people can say they don't know. And that all rolls up to me as one element of mitigating risk, recognizing that, you said, a leader has to know what he or she has to work with. So, this is a risk for them. So, talk to me a little bit about... More about risk and how that's trained for within a team.

0:12:36 JT: The environment out on the ocean, the risks are you can run into something. Run into another boat. You can run the boat aground. There's maneuvers that you can make that are dangerous, particularly when it gets windier conditions. When you're a neophyte sailor, and you're

put onto a boat and you said, "Okay, let's go out and let's learn to sail. But oh, by the way, there's a lot of hazards out here that you may not be aware of." And on the Chesapeake Bay, for example, the water is not crystal clear. You can't see the bottom underneath like you could say, in the Caribbean, you can see where the rocks and the sand are. So, you have to be a good navigator. You've got to look at your charts. You've got to be able to assess where you're going. Bermuda has got some of the nastiest, razor-sharp rocks in the world. You run a boat aground there and you could risk losing your life, losing your boat, etcetera. So, again, that's learning how to just understand the importance of balancing what you're keeping track of.

0:13:34 KL: Our teams have to face risk in whatever the projects is. They're not all life and death. But how do we use that for team building, leadership building, followership building?

0:13:42 JT: Well, I think one of the biggest things about risk is assessing it, understanding what risks are truly there, and then as an organization... I mean, the leadership of the organization is going to make the assessment of how they're going to deal with that risk. But, we talk about respect and reliance on other people, you need the confidence of your entire team to be on board with that. So rather than just saying, "You know what? We're going to do this, and we don't really care what you think about it. Just get on board and let's go." Is having everybody involved with understanding what those risks may be. And again, when we're in the corporate environment, you're talking a lot of financial risk and just viability of an organization risk, it might be the very worst thing you can do. But if everybody has an appreciation for that, and what their part of the process is, and how that contributes to minimizing or mitigating the risk as best possible, I think is critical. And so, organizations that don't share that top down, I think they won't get the best effort out of the people in the trenches that are doing the critical work.

0:14:56 KL: You're suggesting that a technical approach to addressing risk is important for any team, but you're saying more broadly, the way to start handling that is to have people understand their role in the bigger thing you're trying to get done. So we're back to the value of the project and the value of the people supporting the project.

0:15:13 JT: Exactly, and sharing the accolades when things go well and you've achieved your goal, and not punishing your team if you don't, so much, as going back and reflecting on, "Okay. What went wrong?" And very often it's a decision that was made near the top that maybe didn't get the level of appreciation that was necessary or the technical training wasn't where it should have been, or whatever the case may be. So it's just that top-to-bottom, good communication, good relationships, developing that respect and trust. And that comes from, again, people working hand-in-hand, top to bottom.

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0:15:53 KL: How is the kind of leadership development you're doing with these younger adults out on the water, how do you see that playing for a larger discussion on how teams can be built, motivating them and handling fear?

0:16:07 JT: I spent a week out at the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming learning about team building, and one of our instructors was a guy named BP McCoy, a retired Marine Corps Colonel. And when we were first going into Baghdad, and I think it was 1991, he was leading the battalion that had to go across the bridge in Baghdad, and he's leading his group of marines there.

And the Iraqis are trying to blow this bridge up that we're trying to get across. And he's got a bunch of these 19, 20-year-olds that he's leading, and there's mortars coming in and he's watching people getting killed right and left. And I hate that, this is very grim, but there's body parts everywhere. He said, "The hardest thing in my life... " he said, "I'm looking here, and my job is to motivate this group of people, and we've got to go take that bridge. That is our mission right now, to not let that bridge get blown up." And they just watched 15 of their buddies blown to pieces right in front of them.

0:17:01 JT: What do you do there to motivate and inspire your guys? And he led from the front. He said, "Guys, we've got to go." And he said there was nobody left in his group that hesitated for one second. He said, "The guys ran forward charging." And at times like that, you've got to just not show fear yourself. And that rallied his guys and they got the job done. So it was selfless in the way that he went about it, and that selflessness, really, I think that in and of itself, is a huge inspiration that people see, "Dammit. If he's going to go out there... " And in this case, lay his life on the line, "I'm with him." Leadership, when you get to that position, you have to be... You have to show people that you're willing to go out there and get it done yourself. The most powerful examples that I have in my life are those people. They're people that are not afraid to lead from the front. They're not afraid to get their hands dirty. They're there to help and encourage when necessary, but they really... Their actions are what inspires.

0:18:05 KL: So, I think you just hit it there. Leadership has the inspiration aspect, particularly in the face of the unknowns for people.

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0:18:16 KL: As leaders, develop teams, and have high-performing teams, functioning teams, what's the role of ethics and morals? We know we should have ethics and morals but how does that apply in the creation of team?

0:18:28 JT: I think it's a core value that most everything has to be built around, that you as a leader and as a team member, that you have respect for one another's needs; emotional needs, physical needs, mental needs, and being respectful of that. At the Naval Academy, they have three virtues that form the basis of a midshipman: honor, courage and commitment. And honor is, in fact, the morals, the ethics. And that is doing the right thing, recognizing the impact that your actions are going to have on who and what they're going to be. Telling the truth. That's about being trustworthy. When I know I can rely on something that somebody says, the value of that, the efficiency of that is amazing. And when you can't rely on somebody, you have no idea whether they're telling the truth or not, that really is... It rots the ability to be effective.

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0:19:24 KL: You don't have to take your team out on a sailboat to Bermuda to whip it into shape, although that would be fun. But that metaphor can be helpful for building the kind of team spirit you need to achieve high performance. Honor, courage and commitment. You must be able to totally rely on and trust each other as you drive, or sail, toward a common goal.

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0:19:53 DN: We know factually now what the ancient Greeks knew ages ago, that happy people are productive.

0:19:58 KL: That's one of my next guests, David Newman. He and Lisa Hammer are Co-founders and Principals of Leadership Techniques. They're also part of an elite group of instructors who deliver courses for PMI Seminars World, a series of professional seminars which are held annually in various cities throughout the US and internationally. They're firm believers and proselytizers of the happy project manager, and as you'll hear, happiness is, in fact, a key ingredient for an effective team.

0:20:23 DN: We deal mostly with people at the front line levels, and that's where we really like to operate. We like to say, where the rubber hits the road. So we're working with the people in middle management, project management, that really need to be able to get things done. And they get stuck, because they don't understand how to motivate people, how to allow people to express their motivation and their creativity. It's amazing how much management is going on that is really, what we consider, to be from the dark ages, where people are managing by the whip instead of by trying to allow people to achieve their inner potential.

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0:21:04 KL: What are the types of issues that you're actually seeing and addressing from a project manager's perspective?

0:21:09 Lisa Hammer: The soft skills are hard. They're not easy to measure. They're not quite as obvious. But a lot of studies are showing this now. Why do people leave their jobs? Why are people unhappy? And it's not because of the money. It's not because of the work they're doing. It's because of how they're made to feel; whether they're empowered to do their job, whether they're trusted, how they're being treated by the boss. So a lot of those skills are really obviously affecting the workplace and people's happiness.

0:21:40 KL: And so, what have you been able to directly discuss on that?

0:21:43 DN: We have our action-oriented leadership course, which is where we talk about soft skills, but in a proactive way. So for example, one of the things that we discuss there is diversity. Very often we don't get to choose our own team members, so we have a diverse team, hopefully. And so, what we talk about is, not just accepting it, not just being inclusive, but celebrating that diversity, drawing from it to make an even stronger workplace, a stronger team. Because if you have a room full of people that all have the same background and agree on everything that's being said, really, you only need one of them then.

0:22:18 KL: Right exactly.

0:22:20 DN: But it's awesome to have these people with different backgrounds and different perspectives on things and different opinions, and be able to discuss that. And then, you can all learn from each other and come out with the best way. We all have biases. Maybe younger people are biased about older people because they think we won't be technologically competent, right? And some of us aren't. Maybe some younger people are biased about older people, because they think we talk a lot. Some of us do. The point is to not allow the biases to influence our business decisions,

who gets assigned what task, who gets assigned to what project, who gets hired, who gets fired, who gets promoted. We can't allow our biases to impact those decisions.

0:22:57 KL: So this is really important. Ultimately, this is actually how an organization performs, for example, makes the profit it needs to make to be a successful business. So you're seeing this as a business decision.

0:23:07 DN: There's two very real, pragmatic reasons for it. One: We know for sure that happier people are more productive. If you're working in a highly ethical environment, where you feel comfortable and respected and understand that those biases are not going to work against you, it will cause your happiness to increase, which causes your productivity to increase. The other reason is much more obvious than that. It's that, if you are, let's say you're operating at a certain ethical standard, or that the requirement for your ethical standards are at a certain level, and you're operating at 10 times that level. So, your ethical practices and principles are well above the norm and the standard, then the chance of you being litigated against are reduced substantially.

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0:23:56 DN: Our job as project managers is to facilitate other people's jobs. Authority is way overrated, especially in the project management community, because one of the most common complaints we hear from project managers is, "How am I supposed to manage this team? I have all the responsibility and I have no authority." And the answer to that is, to achieve people's inner motivation. Allow them to be motivated. Allow them to be happy at work. Give them what they need in order to be able to do a good job, and allow them to be successful. Allow them to make mistakes. And if you do that, you get that same level of motivation. People will do a better job if they are motivated to do a better job, and it's very difficult to motivate people. We have to allow people to be motivated. However, it's very easy to demotivate people, and we as managers have the ability to demotivate people very quickly.

0:24:45 KL: You put some red meat on the table from the project management perspective.

0:24:49 DN: Mm-hmm. [chuckle]

0:24:49 KL: You believe that project managers, in the environment project managers find themselves, they overestimate authority.

0:24:55 DN: Yes.

0:24:56 KL: Where does that come from?

0:24:57 DN: Because people who enter the workforce are typically in an authoritarian environment. And so, that's how they're being managed. So then when they are thrust into a project management role, then they are trying to apply that same management technique, and it is not necessarily effective, especially in a matrix type organization.

0:25:18 KL: I'm going to ask that again. So you believe that the organizations that make up most of the, let's say in here in the United States, you believe that essentially we still have authoritarian structures?

0:25:29 DN: Absolutely. Yes.

0:25:30 KL: Okay, so that hasn't changed.

0:25:31 DN: Not a lot.

0:25:31 KL: In the 80s we talked about how the world was different than the 50s. In the 90s different than the 80s and in the 2010s, the teens here, we're talking about how even the 90s are old game. You're saying this has not changed. Interesting.

0:25:41 DN: We've been teaching now since 2010. We've had dozens of classes, we've had hundreds of attendees, and the people that are in our classes are describing their environments as very authoritarian. So in the authoritarian environment, we'll call them unenlightened managers, are setting out the goals. You still have managers and project managers who are sitting in the ivory tower, coming up with a task list in Microsoft Project and then distributing that to the team, and saying, "Here's what needs to be done and here's when it needs to be done." And there's a big difference between doing that and allowing the people to generate it themselves, between brain storming the whole project in a room with the whole team and allowing everybody to come up with the goals and metrics. If I manage by allowing a person to set their own goals, set their own metrics, as long as they're consistent with what needs to be done. But they set the goals, they set the milestones. So, let's say somebody says, "Well, that's going to take me about four weeks to do this task." And I say, "Okay. What will be done at the end of week one? What will be done at the end of week two?" And so on. If they define those goals, and they define those metrics, they are far more likely to achieve them than if I tell them that.

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0:26:58 DN: There are about 400,000 CEOs in this country, in the United States as of today. There's about one and three quarter million general managers. There's over 10 million project managers. So, you can implement these things within your own project, within your own team, and if we make subtle changes at the 10 million person level then we start having an impact on the organization. And the reality is, if your project team is successful, if you meet your goals on time, on budget, meet all the requirements, have satisfied the stakeholder expectations, and in the end have a team that wants to do it all again, that is going to spread throughout the organization. The general managers are going to see that and say, "Hey, why don't you do it like them?" And the CEOs are going to see that and say, "Hey, why don't you do it like them?" And the key to it is that we need to get the project managers to accept accountability for themselves first.

0:27:50 KL: Aha.

0:27:51 DN: So, I will accept accountability for my role as the project manager, and then, I will transmit that kind of accountability to the people that work for me.

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0:28:03 DN: Would you rather have a project manager who you tell, "This project has to be done in 12 months." And that PM does their due diligence and says, "It can't be done in 12 months, but I'll

do my best, because you said it has to be done in 12 months." And then in month 13, "Well, it's going to take another three months, and it's late, but it's your fault, because you're the boss and you're gave me the timeline." Or would you rather have a project manager that stands up and says, "This can't be done in 12 months. What you want can't be accomplished in 12 months. So I can either tell you what can be accomplished in 12 months, given the resources and constraints, or I will tell you that it can be done in 15 months, and I will hold myself responsible for getting it done in 15 months."

0:28:44 KL: This is very much what project managers are instructed in though. This is the whole purpose, where our body of knowledge kicks off at the scope level. Because if you get the scope per scheduling, you're there. I would push back that professional project managers, if applying the body of knowledge and thoughtfulness, are actually aware of that and understand that.

0:29:03 DN: We met Jim Snyder a couple of times, one of the founders of the PMI and one of the things that he talks about is the lack of ethical practice amongst us project managers by not standing up and telling the truth. Because, nobody wants to tell the emperor he's wearing no clothes, and we're all afraid for ours jobs.

0:29:21 KL: Hop in Lisa.

0:29:22 LH: Well, we also talk a fair amount about people who are accommodators and people who are cooperative. And often we think, if somebody is really, really cooperative and they're accommodating, that's a great person to have on your team, or that's a great way to be as a manager. But not really, because those people are just accommodating what's going on. You really want a collaborator. So you want somebody who is accommodating, but you want them to speak up. You want them to be proactive and talk about what needs to happen, what would work better, and not really just be a yes man.

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0:30:00 DN: Polls tell us that unhappy workers cost billions in lost productivity. Organizations with a happy workforce have 20% higher profits.

0:30:10 KL: So, how do we measure this happiness thing?

0:30:12 DN: The way it's most commonly measured is through surveys. But you can measure it in your own team by looking at what's going on. Is your team, are the individuals, afraid to make a mistake? What happens when they make a mistake? Do they hide it? Do they blame other people? Do fingers start getting pointed?

0:30:28 KL: How's that measured? Is there diagnostics for this?

0:30:29 DN: When we do internal training, we conduct surveys and interviews with people to find out how engaged and how satisfied they are in the work environment, and one of the areas we focus on is communication. How is communication happening? How is it received? How are people enticed to reach their goals? And what that comes down to is that we know that happy people are more productive. We know that in order to get them to be happy, they need to be engaged in their work. We understand that's a very overused term. What does it mean when people are engaged in

their work? And we can talk about that. But we know that to get them engaged, you need to empower them. And empower them to do what? It really comes down to empowering people to make decisions. And so, when people make decisions, if they make a wrong decision, what's the result of that? Does somebody then take over, grab the mouse from their hand, so to speak, and start making the decisions themselves? Are the people allowed to make the correction? How closely watched or they? And of course, that's a matter of building up trust.

0:31:31 DN: There's the obvious quantifiable metrics too. Sick time. Are people calling in a lot? Is there high turnover in the company? How is morale, in general? Which, of course, you can measure, but you can also easily observe.

0:31:43 LH: You could observe by walking into an organization. Usually within a few minutes, you could tell what the environment is like. And we tell some of the folks we work with that, just something as simple as a smile, changes everything.

0:31:57 DN: There's another way to tell also, which is that we interview. And it's interesting, a lot of times the actual answer to the interview question isn't nearly as important as the disparity of the answers that you get from the employees versus the managers. And so, the first phone call or the first interview is with the executive team and some folks in the room. And you get certain answers from the folks in the room. How many of your projects are on time? What kinds of problems do have? What kind of communication issues are going on? And sometimes the answers are showing you that there are some issues that are going on.

0:32:35 DN: But we had a very specific instance where the executive management team told us that, "We just want to make things a little better. There's really no problems here. Right guys?" And everybody around the table said, "Yeah absolutely. Things are really good. Oh, we have lots of open communication." And then we did the private interviews with people, and that answer was consistent with what executive management told us. When we got to the project management level, their answers were very, very different than that. There's not a lot of communication. There's not a lot of transparency. Or there's a lot of interruptions here. There was a lot of negativity. And so my point is, there was a large gap between what executive management was saying and what the frontline leadership was saying. And so, that starts exposing where the real problem lies, is in that communication channel between middle management and top management.

0:33:25 LH: You talk about the ability to let people make mistakes, and you might think, "Oh, we can't afford mistakes." But people have to make mistakes. Bill Gates said something about, "It's great to heed the success of doing well, but you learn a lot more from the mistakes you do." And you see that in organizations, if people feel that they can be honest and they could be open about what's going on, and they could go and say, "You know what? We just had this and it didn't work the way we should. Let's talk about a plan." It's a much different environment when they're working very hard to cover things up.

0:33:56 DN: How do you work every day and not make mistakes? By not pushing yourself. By doing what you already know how to do. But that's the exact opposite of what we want project managers to do. We want you to push the boundaries.

[music]

0:34:12 DN: What makes you happy as a project manager, right?

0:34:15 KL: Productive teams.

0:34:16 DN: Productive teams.

0:34:17 KL: That was the wrong answer though, wasn't it?

0:34:18 LH: No. On time. On time, on budget.

0:34:20 DN: Successful. It's part of it. Well, successful. You can be productive. But successful, right? And what does success mean? On time. On budget. Meeting requirements, and the new things that we're adding in now, which is meeting stakeholder expectations. Because when I began my career as a project manager, and I think Lisa was the same way, we were assigned our goals, our targets, and then we put on our blinders and said, "Now we're going to meet those requirements. And you'd better hope those requirements match the strategic vision and the client expectations, because that's what we're going to do." Well now, the project manager is obliged to ensure that the requirements do satisfy stakeholder expectations. That's where the agile part of it comes in, right? Constantly checking back, requirements, traceability matrices. We have the tools. It's, are we applying them and how do we apply them?

[music]

0:35:17 DN: What's one of the most commonly asked questions in the project management environment? When are you going to be done? How done are you?

0:35:24 KL: Yeah.

0:35:24 DN: So it's easier to ask that question than, How can I help you? How can I help you, ends up with an action on you, right?

0:35:31 KL: Right.

0:35:32 DN: We don't want that.

[chuckle]

0:35:33 DN: The thing is to stop asking the easy questions and start asking the questions that really facilitate people getting their work done.

0:35:40 LH: But leave them to do their job as well. So, for example, if you're working with somebody and you have a project and you need it done in two weeks, you don't want to go to them every day and say, "How's it going? How's it going? How's it going?" Set certain milestones, say, "Okay, this is due in two weeks and I would like an update in three days. Tell me where you are." And let them go do what they have to do. But to keep going in and saying how're you doing is just annoying them, and really being interruptive.

0:36:07 DN: We need to protect our team from interruptions. Interruptions are disastrous. A five

minute interruption can cost you as much as 20 minutes.

0:36:17 KL: Oh, I know it.

0:36:18 DN: So, three five minute eruptions, you've lost an hour of productivity in the day. And the worst cost of all that is the psychological toll. Interruptions induce stress, and stressful people are not happy. And guess what? Unhappy people are unproductive.

[music]

0:36:35 LH: The PM needs to support their team, and that's a critical area.

0:36:40 KL: What do you mean by that?

0:36:42 LH: Have their back. We often say that if a challenge or a problem goes on, that the PM goes to bat for them, that the PM is there to support them, to work with them, to help them, so they aren't afraid to come to them with problems. That the team knows that there's someone there that can help them out, that could guide them and move them on their career path as well. And part of what we also find is that younger folks like more immediate feedback.

0:37:12 DN: Your team needs to get the credit. They deserve the credit. They do all the work.

0:37:15 KL: Oh, we were about to leave that out there...

0:37:16 LH: No. When we say support your team that's...

0:37:18 KL: That's part of the, support the team.

0:37:19 LH: Absolutely.

0:37:19 DN: Give them the credit. Be the sound and lights guy and let the band have all the glory. When you start forming these relationships with people, and with organizations and stakeholders, and all of a sudden you're all helping each other then your projects move forward, that creates a happy project manager.

[music]

0:37:37 KL: Support your team folks. If they know you're there for them, they'll give you 110%. Allow the individuals to flourish by giving them the space and a voice. Set a high ethical standard. PMs need to be accountable to their team, as well as to their outside stakeholders. Lisa and David are registered education providers on PMI.org. So check out their offerings in the course catalog there, or visit their website, leadershiptechniquesllc.com to find out about upcoming classes.

[music]

0:38:13 KL: Now, let me take a quick break here to tell you about the afternoon plenary session speaker on May 9th, day one of the University of Maryland's 2019 Project Management Symposium. Elyse Roeser, Senior Project Manager at the Clark Construction Group will be

speaking. She's a civil engineer and a PM. She actually got her Bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland, and has worked on some of the hottest, or coolest, building projects in the DC Beltway landscape, including, The Anthem, an ultra-modern concert hall on the DC Waterfront. At the symposium she'll speak about the construction of the new US Coast Guard Headquarters. This high profile construction project was complicated by its location on a national historic landmark. Come hear her story and the lessons learned. UMD PM Symposium, turning knowledge into practice at the PM Center for Excellence, May 9th and 10th, 2019. Hit Google, sign up, learn lots, get PDUs. Now, back to our show.

[music]

0:39:15 KL: Colonel Stephen Corcoran served 28 years in the Marine Corps commanding at every level, and spent six years working in special operations. He's currently Chief of Cyber Strategy for Telos Corporation and is very involved in mentoring veterans who are transitioning from military to civilian life. And that's why I reached out to him.

0:39:34 CC: What I started doing was counseling veterans on transition, and I started asking myself the very simple question of, why do these high performers, who have gone into the most uncertain and tenuous situations, and have done absolutely tremendous work for this nation, are having a hard time getting into the civilian workplace? The veterans were very, very comfortable working in, what I call, bubbles of excellence; high-performing organizations. And they had a very hard time understanding and translating what they were able to do and bringing that into the civilian space, and that led me to high performance.

0:40:12 KL: Tell us about your background and how that begins to shape that common ground.

0:40:15 CC: When I transitioned out of the military, I was very lucky in the sense that I walked in from one bubble of excellence, I walked into another bubble of excellence and it kind of... I just assumed that this happened for everybody. So I went to the Telos Corporation. I'd been there for six years as the Chief of Cyber Strategy, and it was just a phenomenal, and continues to be, a phenomenal organization. And while I was there I started working with veterans and realizing that they weren't having the same experience I was having.

0:40:46 KL: Mm-hmm.

0:40:47 CC: And so, what I did was, I took a leave of absence and I went to the National Outdoor Leadership School to understand leading civilians and understanding civilian organizations. So I basically walked into another bubble of excellence or a high-performing organization; the National Outdoor Leadership School. And then, as I started to talk to veterans, I just basically started to take the United States Marine Corps and the Special Operations' community and the National Outdoor Leadership School, and my six wonderful years at the Telos Corporation and say, "Okay, what are the commonalities here? What are the leaders doing? And, what environments are they creating to create that high-performing individual, as well as a high performing organization?"

0:41:30 KL: So, what are you finding is this common space from a performance perspective?

0:41:36 CC: Well, from high performances, we go back to the beginning, which is, we get everyone to the table, and we say that, what we are trying to achieve is 100% from everybody.

That's what we want. We want 100% of their education and their experiences, and we want to be able to roll that out every single day, because that is what gives us the gold inside of the corporate world, as well as the gold inside the military. Because, when I looked at my formative experience in those four organizations, I had such a sincere desire to wake up every single day and give them 100%. They didn't have to ask me for it. I just wanted to get in there, work with the people I was working with, work for the people I was working for, and just give them everything I possibly could, and enjoy it. So the number one thing I came up with inside of all four of those organizations, two military communities and two civilian communities, is that the leaders were very self-assured and they were very, very emotionally and intellectually courageous to be able to absorb different ideas and to have the courage to lead high performers. And as I started working with veterans, I started realizing that's the number one thing that they're missing.

[music]

0:42:54 KL: When you say emotional and intellectual courage, what do you mean by that?

0:43:01 CC: So, one of the things is, that we have to realize as leaders, and this is again going back to the commonality of pulling this thing back, is that my education and my experiences have a limitation, and I have to have the emotional and intellectual courage, to number one, to realize that. And then, number two; to realize that inside of my organization there are individuals or potentially the entirety of the organization that is going to be able to, not only take the downside of what my negative things are, but take the organization to that level of high performance, that is the greatest output that they can possibly do. In an intellectual way that sounds okay. Everyone goes, "Yeah, that makes sense."

0:43:45 KL: Right.

0:43:46 CC: But then when we start dealing with egos, we start dealing with emotions, and when you start dealing counter agendas, and then we put that in a corporate environment where we see success as a zero-sum game, then we start to see where things start getting peeled back, and people aren't willing to give 100%, because they're in fear. They're not willing to go to a boss or to get the mentorship that they're looking for, because the boss is in fear. Because in order to get 100%, when I'm working in the Marine Corps, when I was working with Special Operations, National Outdoor Leadership School, need to tell us... The thing is that these are very brave people, and it wasn't just physical bravery. It was intellectual bravery to think about things in a different way, and in order to press those organizations and to press the individuals and push the individuals to their highest potential. And then, when you get down to the emotional piece, when you start looking in a corporate environment, and you believe that success, if someone to the left of me and the right of me that is going to affect me negatively if they achieve success, you're never going to get high performance. And if you can't have a leader that creates an environment where you're pushing everybody, and everyone is an integral part of the organization, you're going to have haves and have nots, and you're going to have people that are not going to fully buy in.

[music]

0:45:07 CC: It comes down to three things that these organizations do, and these are three things anyone can do from a self-leadership perspective, a peer leadership perspective or an organizational leadership perspective. They create a desire for everyone to be there, because they want to be there.

They have an unbelievable sense of respect for everyone in the organization, and have a sense of appreciation for everyone in the organization. Because there is no relationship on this planet that you want to be part of unless you have desire, respect and appreciation. But that takes brave leaders to be able to create that environment, and to thrive in that environment.

0:45:49 CC: The other piece, which is the important part of this is, the biggest thing that veterans see, and why they're not willing to give that 100% is, because as soon as things start going bad in the corporate environment, they start cutting people. And it basically becomes everyone's in their own lifeboat rowing, and that to a veteran, and that to a guy who, or a gal, who has spent all their time focused on selflessness and on sacrifice and on giving to the team, that makes them reticent to give 100% when they see that. In the military, when I'm talking to veterans, it's called, being on the X. When you're on the X there's a point on the ground where you are pinned down, you're surrounded and you might have some wounded, and now you have to make your best next move to get out of there, you don't leave your wounded. The number one thing is, you take care of your wounded, you suppress, then you move to your next best position, okay? In the corporate world, it's everyone run for the door, when things get bad. It's a sense of, you're on your own. And we have reams of caseloads of senior leadership making sure that they are taken care of and individuals around them are taken care of, then they bolt.

[music]

0:47:06 CC: Telos Corporation is a top 25 cyber security company, and maybe five years ago we weren't exactly in the best financial position. After sequestration, revenue streams were drying up and there was a lot of companies at that point in time were cutting, letting people go, and there was a lot of fear out there. But I watched the intellectual and the emotional bravery of our CEO come out there and say, "Listen, we're not going to cut people. Because if we cut people, we're not going to be in position to be where we want to be when this all ends. We're going to hold on. We're going to get through this together, and we're going to be in a better position when it's all said and done." Okay, so we went from being red to an internationally ranked cyber security company. And that goes back to the CEO, the leadership, everyone in the organization realizing that, "Hey, we are going to give 100% for each other, we're going to give 100% for the organization." And there was a tremendous trust bond with the CEO, as well as the entire leadership of the company.

0:48:14 KL: Projects see this a lot, right? When a project is under a threat of some sort, a good team is not defined by how well it works together when everything goes well. It's when the client is upset and they're talking about cutting positions and they're saying, "I hate this deliverable, and why wasn't I getting what I wanted." That's when you see how your team decides to fix the problem together. That's the definition of a team that actually knows how they're working together well.

[music]

0:48:43 KL: We know that trust is important, right? But you see it in the sense of, how come veterans have perhaps some trouble with a private sector, in that they're used to one model? There's a different model happening. And from that you were able to identify why, and it was about the courage of the leadership itself that creates that trust bond.

0:49:02 CC: Right. And there's two sides to this coin. That's the organizational side, I looked at. But then I did a deep dive on the veterans. And we found some things in there that they need to

come to the table on. On the military side, physical courage is just expected; it really is. I have not... In all my situations in the military, in high stress, high risk types of things, I have seen a boatload of courage. And so, what I do with them, I do this for both sides, the civilian side and I do it for the military side, is I say, "Okay, we have to take that physical courage and we have to give you that emotional and that intellectual courage, because why is it that I can put you on the battlefield in uncertain circumstances and you do exceptionally well, but now I put you in a new environment, where it's a transition to civilian life, and you're falling apart, and your racing backwards to what you know and you're pining away for an experience you're not going to have again?"

0:49:57 CC: So, we work very hard on teaching them mobility, of having that intellectual and emotional mobility, to get off their own X. And then, that's a part of self-awareness, and that's a part of communications, of teaching them that, "Hey, it's not going to be in the same framework in which you're used to." Veterans are very good at implicit communications. If you look at a high-performing military organization, you're going to see that they're not really talking that much. They work in a lot of implicit communications, a lot of non-verbals, and they work so close together that they can just pick up on things and that there's not a lot of talking. There's one thing I learned in the civilian world, and this is," Hey, guess what? Everyone does not have that intimate knowledge of everybody. And you are required to be very good at explicit communications. That is how people operate in the civilian world."

0:50:48 KL: That's really interesting, and I just love how you're reflecting on the non-military space; how we look. We talk a lot. We have to. In fact, the bulk of project management we talk about as being mostly a communications exercise. So much of the tools are really about making sure people know what needs to be done, they know what is going on and then knowing what has been done, but they're all conversations. It's about communication.

[music]

0:51:15 KL: What else did you discover? What's another theme that you want to address?

0:51:18 CC: I'll give you a story about Telos, okay? The CEO was not happy with where his office was. He basically moved it to the front of the building and completely opened up. When you walk in the building you can see him in there. And I'm like, "What is he doing?" And I had a conversation with him. He said, "I want to be accessible and I want people to see me, and I want to be able to interact with people." And I said, "Wow! That is desire at the highest level." He is, without saying, "Hey, I want you here." He's telling everyone, every single day, "I desire to be around you. I desire to be here with you." And when you come down to desire, the greatest organizations have figured this out. They have figured out that, I will get you, at six o'clock in the morning, thinking about work, not when you come through the door. I want you at six o'clock. I want you to give me 100% every single day. Because when I desire to have you there, and I desire to be there with you, not just in the good times but in the bad, and there's no other place a great leader wants to be than when it's not going well. They don't run for the exits. They run for the team, and they make themselves available.

0:52:28 CC: So when you create that desire, that's your first step to high performance, because there's a natural inclination, people go where they're wanted. That comes down to the leader creating that desire.

0:52:40 KL: Building that trust and building actually people just wanting to be self-motivated to show up. They bring themselves.

0:52:47 CC: That's exactly right. I'm not trying to motivate people. I want them showing up, 100%.

0:52:54 KL: One of the things that I see in a lot of the management training was about motivating people, right? How can we help motivate teams? It's important for leaders to recognize that. And then as I have myself run teams and run a company, I'm finding, I don't own motivating people. I can't... Actually you can't really motivate people, and if you do, it's only temporary.

0:53:12 CC: That's right.

0:53:12 KL: Typically, it has to do with compensation, and you never win that game. It's an endless, endless, endless spin. And I found out, no, people have to be motivated on their own. But it's about setting the environment for it, and I think you've really put your finger on it, getting them to desire to be here by showing that you desire them here.

[music]

0:53:34 KL: How is appreciation shown, do you see, in large corporations?

0:53:39 CC: If you get desire and respect right, you're about 80% there. Because, as a professional, and if you're in a high-performing organization, when we talk about respect, it's not courtesy, because a lot of times military guys get confused with that. Yes, there were certain military courtesies that we gave each other, but respect was earned, and it's always earned. It's earned every single place. And the easiest way to get respect is you give respect. So, if you know that I see you as, I need your talent. I want that. I've got to leverage that talent and I need that. Okay? And when you create an environment, and I tell you, the Marine Corps, I have to tell you, they saw this in the 90s and it was absolutely brilliant, where we created a culture of, everyone gets their say, not necessarily their way. And oh, by the way, I'm going to force you to the table, to come with your assessments, and you have a seat at this table, and you are going to give your honest assessment from your education, your experience, your functional area. And oh, by the way, I might ask you to help me out on some other things.

0:54:42 CC: So, when you create that environment, and everyone knows they have to show up and they're expected to show up, and they're expected to contribute, not just participate, that at a certain point in time if you are the leader and you're working on a hard problem, they know. And there's all training on how to do it. You don't want to have anarchy. You don't want to have about a thousand different things going on. You have the respect of everybody. You automatically give that to them and say, "Hey, you're here for a reason." You pull them in on day one and you make them important on day one. The most important experiences of our lives are not the ones where we got the most money, not the ones where we got the accolades, or whatever, public recognition, a medal, a citation, or anything like that. The most important things in our lives were when we had a challenge, we worked together with a team and we gelled and we worked exceptionally well together.

[music]

0:55:36 CC: I look at the projects that I work on now inside the company, and anyone who has got

a vested interest in it is welcome at the table, and if you sit at the table, we expect you to say something at the table, and also to follow through on it. That gets people excited. You can tell them to do something, but if you start telling them how they need to do it, and things like that, then you're going to take away their ability, their art and their science of what they know. They're going to give you that 100% when they're invested in it. They're invested in it if you get them invested in it from day one. And I'm going to give you one thing that you could use in regards to desire and respect.

0:56:16 KL: Okay.

0:56:16 CC: You are in a situation where something goes wrong and you do not want to call the first leader in your chain of command or in your management chain, there is something fatally wrong with that relationship. If the first person you want to call is the leader, there is something great in that relationship, in the sense that there is a trust bond there. There is a leadership understanding there. There is a desire there. There is a respect there. Because that is to me, is the litmus test for any organization, any individual, any leader.

0:56:56 KL: It's important to value each individual on your team. Share information and keep everyone in the loop about how your project, with its desired outcomes and benefits, fits into the overall strategy. Bring the team to the table and include them in the decision-making. You can reach Stephen on LinkedIn, that's Stephen, with a PH, Corcoran.

If you're interested in the military PM connection, I recommend you listen to PM Point of View Episode 26: Military Transition: Joining the Ranks of Project Management. And we covered some of the similar topics. What I realized upon listening to these speakers, is that a lot of the building teams and the leaders that lead them, approach is really a manager's approach to reducing risk. With all of these people working together on projects, and trying to manage well, the act of leading well is a risk mitigation activity. Open and honest dialogue leads to an atmosphere of trust, which enables you to really count on each other. Let your team know that mistakes are okay, and in fact they may even be necessary if you want to push the boundaries of possibility and reach the next level of performance.

0:58:00 KL: Leaders need to be fearless, with a selfless commitment to the team. That means being receptive to warnings or differing ideas and suggestions. Help and encourage when necessary, be an inspiration to your team, and perhaps most of all, share the accolades. So, with that, I'd like to thank my excellent guests, Jahn Tihansky, Lisa Hammer, David Newman and Stephen Corcoran.

0:58:25 S5: Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Additional original music by Gary Fieldman, Rich Greenblatt, Lionel Lyles and Hiroaki Honshuko. Post-production performed at M Powered Strategies.

0:58:40 KL: Now, let me tell you about a podcast I've been listening to. The Drunken PM Radio, with Dave Prior. I have no idea what inspired the name, but the episodes focus on agile discussions with guests that really tackle some of the hard issues. I'm not an agilista, but I find these episodes fascinating and you may too. Find it on projectmanagement.com or any of your favorite pod catchers. Enjoy.

PMPs who have listened through this complete podcast may submit a PDU claim, one PDU, in the talent triangle, Leadership with the Project Management Institute's CCR system. Use provider code

4634 and the title PMPOV0060 High Performance teams. You can also use the PDU claim code 4634EBDJTZ. Be sure to stay tuned and stay subscribed for next month's episode on change management.

0:59:31 Greg Brown: Take control of change before it takes control of you.

0:59:35 KL: That was Greg Brown, author, speaker and change management expert. You'll be hearing from him, along with April Mills and Dana Brownlee about change management behaviors and communications.

Visit our Facebook page, PM Point of View, to comment and to listen to more episodes and get the transcripts. Leave comments on projectmanagement.com portal. I like to read those. Evaluate us on iTunes, and of course, you may contact me directly on LinkedIn. I'm your host Kendal Lott, and until next time, I happily count on you to keep it in scope and get it done.

1:00:04 S5: This has been a Final Milestone Production sponsored by M Powered Strategies.