

## **Expanding your leadership in an ever-changing world**

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Welcome. Hello. My name is Dan Canham. I'm looking forward to talking with you today about leadership and really about expanding your leadership in this ever-changing world. So, I've been working in leadership for 20 years in Leadership and training. I'm not talk about my journey.

And kind of the things I've learned along the way and the skills I've taught other people in conservation.

So, my journey begins: I was a satellite operations engineer for a number of years and I was working at a site and when I saw a boss someone in charge who was technically smart, really sharp, but had no capacity to work with people.

And I remember thinking, wow, I was like how you get the job part of it, but people really don't like you. And I kept thinking I was like it has a huge impact on the nature of the work, how people do their work and how I did the work.

And so, I remember thinking, I was like, I don't know what leadership is, but I know that's not it. I need to learn what being an effective leader is.

And that's we're going to talk about today and hopefully to help you expand your leadership in this ever-changing world.

So, I've worked with all kinds of leaders, private sector, public, and in conservation. No matter where you work in leadership, the core is people. It is all about people.

And so, when you can start to reframe everything around how do you get people motivated engaged wanting to contribute their all you start understanding the nature of leadership and really it's about relationships.

And I hope today to share some key insights with you that you can take on your leadership journey.

Leadership in the modern world requires new ways of approaching challenges. Now you're at the beginning of your journey. But you were definitely moving into a fast-paced and dynamic world.

In conservation itself is unique. It sits at this kind of crux between protection of the resources and natural beauty of our planet, but the continued progress and evolution of humankind. Now, let's face it, we like stuff. We like houses, we like cars, we like food when we want it.

We like lights we need them. But to have stuff we need resources and there are now more people than ever before who have access to financial resources who want things, who want stuff. And that's not a bad thing. It's a competing thing. It's a competition for limited resources that hopefully people like yourself can conserve for future generations to enjoy as well.

Now let me tell you conservation is hard it's not because of bad people. It's because of competing values and wants. Each one of you sits in a unique place where you have the power to change the world in a positive way. Now, I'm not saying it's easy. It will be hard.

In my house, my kids will tell you we have a rule and I make them say it all the time. I tell I remind them all the time and I'm like we do hard things because they are hard.

Because life intersects challenge. Overcoming hard things is where the value is, at least I believe that. Overcoming personal struggles overcoming difficult challenges, that's where you grow. That's where you Excel. So hopefully today I'm going to give you some ideas which will help you make those hard challenges not so hard.

So, I'm going to talk a little bit about some key leadership ideas. How to explore challenges, your own personal flexibility, and how to work with others. These are the Leadership lessons I've learned, and I hope to share with you.

So first some key leadership ideas. First you got to have your purpose. You have to know why you're doing what you're doing because without it, it can get real hard. Like I love helping people grow.

I learned my purpose probably like maybe 15 years ago. I realized I love helping people become their best selves, whatever that means to them. For each of you, you have to find your purpose because it's going to guide you through your career. The next component is that this idea of leadership as an action. It's what you do that matters more. A lot of times we confuse we think, well leadership is a position, I'm the boss. No leadership is what is the action you take in the service of your purpose.

When I decided I wanted to help people get better. I moved into conservation because people there were open, and they were accepting as me and my perspective.

And they were willing to be challenged. And I took action. I tried all kinds of different ways of approaching leadership development and trust me, I've made many mistakes along the way.

But I keep trying and I keep learning which leads me to the next point when you have a purpose and if leadership's about action then anyone, you can lead anytime anywhere, you can take action on your greatest purpose. This last little point kind of sums up what's associated with taking action. And that's that leadership is risky.

When you start taking action and start going into conservation and start pushing up against the status quo the status quo will always push back. The minute you start to say, you know what we should protect this land and someone else believes you should develop the land, well, there's conflict.

And you have to be willing to endure that conflict for that purpose. That's why I start with number one rule number one your purpose must be clear. I've taken many risks in my life. I moved around a lot. I've taken different jobs. I've taken step backs in my career to move forward.

Sometimes you, sometimes take a step back to go forward. That's cool. Like that's part of, like the journey it's not always about sticking to the plan, it's about learning, adapting, adjusting. I left a very cushy job to go to a more small company of 12 people and that was very different from my big cushy job. And those 12 people, we sat around a table and talked about how we're going to lead the company how we were going to organize. That was risky for me, but it paid off.

And so I encourage you when you're on your journey to take that risk, to go for it. So, some of the biggest lessons I've learned in my leadership journey, and I've taught to people, let's start with the first one this idea about building your leadership capacity. So, building your leadership capacity is all about your flexibility. Think about all the leaders that you have met in your life.

There are those strong "go get it done" leaders. There's the listen, the people who can listen with so much empathy leaders. They're amazing. There's the visionary leader who seems to know the future and it can enroll people and get people excited and they're amazing at it. And there's those leaders who seemingly have the ability to connect with every single person they meet and build massive networks, very impressive.

Then there's these unique leaders who can seemingly do all of these things at just the right time. They have the capacity to be a visionary when needed, they have the ability to switch gears and be empathetic, all the parties involved.

Your leadership capacity is the ability to take on different roles as needed, which is no easy feat since most of us cultivate one leadership personality. So, what we want to do is talk about what are some of the ways that we can expand that leadership capacity.

One of the first ways you can do it is by reframing challenges. So, what does this mean? You know, I've worked with hundreds if not thousands of leaders.

And one of the things that leaders often get paid to do and when I say leader, I mean the boss, is to solve problems. They get paid to solve problems. They get good at solving problems. So when a problem emerges, they spend five percent of the time on understanding the problem in 95% of time fixing it. Which sounds great on paper, it does.

But then it leads us to this realization that many organizations, individuals spend a lot of time trying to solve the wrong problem.

So what I'm asking you to do is slow things down. When a challenge emerges the first thing you do is go 'stop.' All right, what is actually going on here? Don't get hooked into the presenting problem. You want to start stepping back and looking at what's actually taking place here and trying to see the things you can't normally see.

One of the ways you do that is by being like Sherlock Holmes. What you got to do is stop and ask like, so what what can I see? Look at it from all different perspectives.

Look at all different ways that you can look at it. Then you start to understand that the challenge is much more complex than we give it credit for.

Now I'm going to give you a one particular frame of reference, which I think is great and it comes from adaptive leadership. I'm going to modify the language a little bit, but that's okay, I think it's easier this way.

We often think of challenges through a technical lens. So, there's a technical problem, which is based in logic. But then there are human challenges, these are about people, their values and beliefs. When you approach a problem. You have to separate the two out. There usually interwoven, but by separating them out, they have different expectations and different approaches.

In technical problems, the problem is clear the solutions clear the type of work is about execution. The timeline is faster, the expectations is to fix it. And what's required? Knowledge. This is actually how we approach most challenges.

But when we change our point of view and look at it differently and reframe it, human challenges are very different. They're very unique the problems require learning. Most of the time human problems are complex, convoluted, and usually not even the challenge we think it is up front.

But because we don't know the problem the solution also requires learning because really, it's about changing people's beliefs and attitudes.

The type of work is very different, it's experimentation. And that I think is one of the most empowering things that you can get out of this is your mindset can go from I don't to fix it. I have to learn and experiment. The timeline is slower, and the only expectation is progress. And what's required? Curiosity.

So, I'll give a couple examples. The first one is straightforward: heart attack. When someone has a heart attack you go to the doctor. The doctor, the surgeon is very smart, is very knowledgeable, cuts you open. They fix it, right, not saying it's not complex. It's very complex but requires the knowledge and skills of an expert to fix the problem.

So, they save the person's life. The person goes to their primary care provider. The primary care provider says you have to change your diet. You got to exercise more.

And then all of a sudden it gets harder because while it seems very clear that you've got to change your way of being, change your diet and exercise more, research shows people tend not to change. Why? There's a lot more play. There's a lot more at stake. Maybe you're a person whose eating habits are tied to your culture. It's very important that on Sunday nights on Tuesday nights family meets for a big dinner. It would kill my grandmother if I didn't eat her food. She likes to feed me and feed me and feed me. So, all of a sudden the challenge changes. Changing your values and belief is very different.

Think about human-wildlife interaction. Humans move into habitats; they're occupied by animals which can be dangerous to us. Well, the technical problem is just getting rid of the animals. But that doesn't solve the bigger problem is how do we get humans and animals to live together?

How do we get humans to start saying things like, wow, should I really move into that nice mountain range? What about the animals? What about making sure they have a place to live?

We're now moving into values and beliefs. That's a very different way to look at it. But it's also very empowering. You get the ability to slow things down and experiment, and just continually learn. That's reframing a challenge.

The other thing that we have to do is explore tough interpretations. Exploring tough interpretations is pretty hard. It's actually an act of leadership in itself. Why? Well first in interpretation is just another explanation of why things are the way they are. And we're looking at all possible options. When we start to take apart challenges and pull them all apart, what we tend to do is we apply easy or really comfortable explanations of what's actually happening.

But I want you to think of this phrase. You've probably all heard it at some point, right? The elephant in the room. The elephant the room sums up this idea that we have a hard time naming what we think is the most challenging problem we face.

And we don't discuss it because it's too big. It's painful, difficult to cope with, we just don't know what to do. I've had many challenges. In conservation there are so many difficult challenges that we face and so many of the leaders I've worked with have a hard time exploring tough interpretations because we don't want to offend people. We don't want to hurt people's feelings.

We don't want to say things which we think might go against our own personal values. But this is where you can take and seize the act of leadership, you know, what else can

cause the problem? What are we either avoiding or not talking about the ability to explore uncomfortable interpretations is part of developing your leadership capacity.

The more options you have, the more solutions you can get too. So what is it in terms of interpretation look like?

I can tell you some real-world examples. One was well, the question was how do we stop climate change or how do we reduce climate change and then one person came up and said maybe that's not the problem we should focus on. Maybe we should focus on how do we thrive in a climate change environment?

I'm not saying that's right or wrong. You don't have to agree with it, disagree with it. It's just an interpretation of what we should focus our energy on. Another interpretation, which I think is more closer to home for a lot of people is I tried so hard to work with that group over there. You don't know I talk to then; I listen to them and they're just like unreasonable.

Another interpretation might be maybe you're unreasonable. Maybe when you walked in there all those things that look nice weren't really that nice. They were just in the service of you trying to get your your voice across, your statement across or trying to convince them that your point of view is right.

Remember, I'm not saying these a right or wrong or good or bad. All I'm saying is sometimes we have to slow things down and try to talk about the undiscussables.

The things that we don't, we can't see or don't want to see. Because what that really does is empowers you to see things differently and have more options.

So if leadership is about action and you are the one who takes action then your greatest leadership resource is you. So what does that mean?

Well, each of us has a personal flexibility. At the beginning I said there were different types of leaders, that range of leaders. Well, all of you can cultivate that range of leadership skills. Basically, you're just creating all these personas that you can put forward when necessary. They're your resources. But in order to do that, which it's not easy because most of us I said before cultivate one kind of persona. You want to cultivate multiple personas. Just like when you're hanging out with your friends versus your family versus, your teacher, versus your boss. You have different personas, right? Your friends are like, well, you act very different when you're with us. Yeah, because you're my friends have a different relationship with you, versus when you're hanging out with your parents, versus when you're hanging out with your boss, right? All of those personas are ways that you deploy yourself.

Those same things you can bring into the workplace is a leadership skill. Maybe you're the visionary leader or get the work done leader, but really need to be all over them.

When you have personal flexibility that gives you the range of actions you can take. I'm unique and those adaptive challenges, the flexible challenges where you need to be constantly adapting to the issues at hand.

But in order to do this, you got to know your default system. You have to know your personal tuning. Each of us has triggers, hopes, fears. You got to know what triggers you because when you get triggered, you'll react differently, right? You all probably have it. We all have triggers, it's knowing them if someone says a particular says something to you like well, you know what Dan?

I don't think you know what you're doing. Well that will trigger me. I'm like, I've got experience. I know what I'm doing. No, I can be like, okay tell me more. Change my approach.

That's your personal tuning because you have to know what's going to get you all riled up and how to manage it. That empowers you to approach challenges differently.

The next thing you have to do is find and cross the edges of your own discomfort. This is how we grow. We grow when we become uncomfortable.

Think about when you first did you learn to play a game, or you learn how to play an instrument or a sport? You know, when you first start at it? You're not good. That's uncomfortable. You got to stay there though, and you get better. Leadership is no different. You got to find the edges of your discomfort.

And stay there. Try it out, experiment, you'll learn, and you'll grow. And embrace vulnerability. Vulnerability is simply this: putting yourself out there without knowing the outcome. That's leadership.

When you go out there and just try something big you embrace vulnerability, you can make progress on the most difficult challenges. Doesn't mean it always go so well, but it'll you'll learn definitely.

By expanding your comfort zone and moving outside your comfort zone. You actually create the space where the magic happens. You actually create progress on these big difficult challenges. I'm not saying it's easy. I opened this up by saying we do hard things because they're hard but hard things result in magic.

So, I want to do a little activity. So, if you can do me a favor in a second, put everything down, don't take any notes or anything. I just want you to be fully present. What I'm going to do is I'm going to put up a slide. The slide is going to have a word on it. All I want you to do is experience that word. I want you to feel your reaction to that work. That's it. Just feel it. Not think about it. Just feel it, okay? And go.

Okay, I put this up there because I want you to know, want you to feel what that feels like. You see that word, this idea of failing.

Each of us has a relationship to the concept of failure. I do. I've avoided failure. I spent years avoid failure. So, trust me. I know what that feels like. Because we get taught to avoid failure. We get taught, at least I was taught, and at least in my experience of leaders, they've been taught as well to avoid failing in school, to avoid failing at sports, to avoid failing in life. We don't want to fail. Yet at the same time cliches abound.

Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again. I mean that all sounds great. It sounds fantastic. Yeah success is Not final, you know, failure is not fatal.

But that's not how we often feel around failure. I've been doing that exercise for years and I'll tell you what, most people don't like the idea of failure. They struggle with the idea of putting themselves in a position to fail. And that's really important because when you begin your leadership journey you're going to have to fail. But we don't want to fail. We avoid failure.

So, for you the takeaway here is you have to start to renegotiate your relationship to failure. Which is not easy. I'm not even remotely saying it's easy. You're going to have in order to renegotiate you're going to have to fail.

But feeling for that greater purpose will make it okay. And fail in small pieces just, in little bits, little small steps of failure. Not big failure. Just try a little thing and that's okay.

But that'll start to renegotiate that relationship and that will empower you to take more risk in the pursuit of that greater conservation purpose. The last thing I want to talk about is working with others. Leadership starts with you, but you have to engage other people, or it doesn't work. But here are some big tips that I've learned along the way. One is be curious. I spend way more time listening to people, and that's step two, than I do trying to convince them of my point of view.

And you got to find common purpose you got to listen to people and if you get into debating like what we should do, it never seems to work. What you need to do is elevate the conversation to what are we similar in, and then we talk about what we're similar in, and then talk about the differences and how we get there.

In that whole process you're going to manage yourself. That's the flexibility I talked about. Maybe instead of being the talker you got to be a listener. Or maybe instead of being the person who yells and amps things up you got to be the person calms things down.

And ultimately when in doubt, take action and learn. I remember one time I was in a conversation with someone, we were on the opposite ends of conservation and I could feel that we were debating and I stopped the conversation I said hey, well, what's so tell me about you and I kept asking and I kept inquiring and keep trying to understand this individual. And finally, I found it but you know we had kids and when we started talking,



he's like, you know, I want to have the best place for my kids to grow up. I was like, oh my God, me too.

So we had common ground. Then from there we started talking about our differences and why we were the same and then pretty soon we found really a lot of common ground and a lot of shared values. At the end of the conversation, I'll never forget because he looked at me and he said you know what? He's like, maybe your perspective isn't that bad at all.

Doesn't mean I changed his perspective but all of a sudden, I opened that possibility. That's what leadership does. Leadership creates possibility for yourself, for others. And when you create possibility, then the future's wide open. Take that action. I'll tell you what, I believe in each and every one of you because I have met people in this world who are absolutely amazing. And my belief is is most everyone I meet is amazing. You're amazing. So take all this with you. It is all in your hands. Go forward, take risks, renegotiate that relationship with failure. I've done it, many people have done it. And I know you can do it. Because when you get to that point where it's hard, I want you to think of this. You're like, Oh, this is going to be tough. But you know what?

We do hard things because they are hard. And failure's okay, and I'll be fine at the end. And you will be. And because of you, conservation will be fine in the end. You'll make this world an amazing place. So, I want to say Thank You. I appreciate all that you've done, and I know that I appreciate without having met you, appreciate all that you're going to do. Because I believe in the beauty of humanity. And all the amazing people. Thank you.