



HANS MELO & JASON BECK
RESEARCHERS, THE POTENTIAL PROJECT TEAM
LEADERSHIP- WHAT THE RESEARCHERS SAY

LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



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EPISODE 29



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JASON: (00:00) Any time someone influences another person that is leadership and so if someone is influencing me it's because they're touching some sort of value that I hold on deeply and it's aligning with that value that enables to have high motivation to go forward.

HANS: (00:16) Certainly I think leaders and people that influence us allow us to have this kind of long term vision where we want to go and what are the steps required to get there.

[music]

MURRAY: (00:28) Welcome to my podcast. I'm Murray Wright and this is Leadership Moments, real people stories about the people and the moments that have influenced and shaped their leadership.

In this episode I talk with two researchers from the Potential Project team, Hans Melo in Toronto and Jason Beck in Los Angeles. I wanted to know more about the research that underpins the leadership theories and practices of today. We had a great talk about mindfulness, resilience, what the research is looking at in the future and of course, Hans and Jason's leadership moments. There is a lot of interesting stuff in this episode, so it's a bit longer than usual, but I would encourage you to set aside a bit more time than normal or listen to it in two parts. I hope you enjoy.

Jason and Hans, welcome to the Leadership Moments Podcast. Great to have you here. You work with the Potential Project and you are researching there. Can you tell me what sort of research it is you're doing. Maybe Jason, you go first.

JASON: (01:34) Yes. So I am currently researching leadership development for my PhD and looking at how the workplace in the organization can be designed in ways that facilitate leadership development, not just so it's on the responsibility of the leader, but how we can set up structures to enable people to have the right resources to actually develop and then I bring my organizational psychology lens to Potential Project focusing on how we can cultivate mindfulness in a mind for performance for leaders and the research we're doing is collecting a lot of information from participants who go through our many training programs and as well as doing research for the books that we publish on leadership and we go up, find a network of individuals for which has been very thankful through the Harvard Business Review articles. People sign up and we're able to have a nice big participant pool to send out



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surveys and gather information about the needs of leaders.

MURRAY: (02:34) Brilliant. And Hans.

HANS: (02:36) Ours is slightly different. So my background is more from the neuroscience side of things and so my research before was along the lines of decision making, financial decision making in a different... So the influences that affect it and so when I came into this world, you know, decisions are very very important in leadership and management and so on, so just trying to get some insights sort of from the neuroscience perspective, what's going on in the brain when we make certain decisions and so my role really is more trying to put things into perspective and get some insights into leadership from that angle.

MURRAY: (03:17) Fantastic. And I pick up... Jason in particular, you are talking about the mindfulness piece. What does the research show us about the mindfulness and how it helps us as leaders?

JASON: (03:29) We know from a lot of research going on within just general organizational psychology that those individuals that have higher mindfulness can basically gather more information from the environment to help in decision making and be able to reduce errors in their work because they have more information to work with and from the leadership perspective, leaders have to have two different roles. They have to be able to succeed in performing in their own tasks and they also have to manage, support each individual direct report or follower that they have. And those can be conflicting at times and they can overlap in such a way that the stress of unfinished business or the work that doesn't go the way we want to go will seep into how we manage and help our followers and if a leader can have the presence of mind to reduce their own suffering, their own stress in a moment so that they could actually be a source of service to their followers are those who excel most in the organization and enable those organizations to thrive. Mindfulness helps that.

MURRAY: (04:35) I'm picking up on this piece. You describe it beautifully as the suffering and the conflicted decisions. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

JASON: (04:44) A lot of research indicates for let's say satisfaction at the workplace deal with how do individuals respond to negative events and when we get sucked into a negative event and start creating all these reasons, all these biases come up to say, "Oh, I'm the reason," or "Everyone else is the only reason," we can't make correct decisions going forward and it can lead to a lot unnecessary suffering. And when



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individuals have higher mindfulness they are able to dissociate themselves and their identity from certain events and take maybe a more objective point of view than they first could have and they are able to create decisions based off of more of a true understanding of an event and more perspectives of individuals.

MURRAY: (05:30) Yeah. Great. Great. Is that about... Is that partly then controlling that stress response in the brain, in the amygdala etc.?

HANS: (05:38) I think a lot of what's happening with mindfulness is that it allows people to bring a different point of view certainly to their attention and bring their awareness to just sort of what's actually happening at the very moment rather than being caught up in all your thoughts and your different biases and all of these things that keep popping up in your mind. But if you allow yourself to just be present, then you can adopt a different point of view and so what that does effectively is it changes your perspective and in terms of what's actually happening in the brain we see a decrease in your reactivity and so what mindfulness is doing is allowing you to take a different perspective where you can actually observe the stress and just maybe not react to it right away but just observe and be. And what that does is just unchains a number of things so it certainly reduces mind-wandering, reactivity, increases your resilience to stray into different emotional aspects and ultimately it affects your decision making, so you are able to make better decision, to be present, to listen to others and there is just a number of benefits and effects that are going to come from this.

MURRAY: (06:58) And Hans you're talking there about better decision making. You talk about being present and listening to others. Is that what you're finding in your research is what actually makes the better decisions or is there anything more to it?

HANS: (07:12) Yeah. I mean there is a number of labs, so certainly some of the work I've done in the past of people like Richard Davidson in Madison Wisconsin, have found a number of different effects. So in decision making certainly people are better able to concentrate and make better decisions. A lot of the angle that last couple of years has been looked on is, "Why do people make more ethical decisions?" And it turns out that people do. It's in that their shift of focus goes from just yourself to what's maybe better for everyone and in the context of an organization I think that is certainly huge.

MURRAY: (07:53) And we're sitting here we're talking about mindfulness. How do we define mindfulness?



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JASON: (07:59) From the western science perspective it's been defined a few different ways. One of the fathers of mindfulness Jon Kabat-Zinn bringing it over to the Harvard medical area. He was defining it as a non-judgmental state of mind and acceptance of events. So it's an experience where you can be non-judgmental of what's happening in the present moment, aware of the present moment and accepting it.

MURRAY: (08:26) Yeah. I think that's a key part, that non-judgmental acceptance. That's probably the hard part as well.

JASON: (08:3) Yeah, and especially from leaders what we see when leaders get into those positions, they're used to delegating things to be done and followers are more complicated than just, "I will receive a delegation and then go forward and complete the task for you." The most powerful leader can assess their followers to know what followers need different types of support. Jason over here, Jason might need to get some support because he's been having some tough time happening at home and he's too challenged. He needs some coaching whereas Karen... Karen has those skills and she is now excelling and she needs a challenging assignment. The best leaders can assess the situation, accept that things have gone wrong, accept that individuals are in different places and offer the right type of support.

MURRAY: (09:24) What's happening in the leader at that moment that allows them to pick up on those needs, etc.?

HANS: (09:31) Yeah. Some very very interesting work has been elucidating this question comes from Norman Farb. So it revolves around the idea of mind-wandering versus presence. So just to give you some background here, some people define mind-wandering as, you know, you had a train of thought and it just keeps going on and going on. So that's one thing the mind naturally does and some people actually refer to that as the default state. Right?

MURRAY: (10:03) Yeah.

HANS: (10:03) But on the other hand we have an experiential side that's maybe more related to what we're actually experiencing. So if you're eating an apple it will be like maybe the taste of the apple and if you breathe in air it's just the essence of just breathing and experiencing your body for example.

MURRAY: (10:21) Yeah.



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HANS: (10:22) So these two types of let's say just being on experience they can be quite different and so what Norman Farb did, he actually trained a number of people to be doing one versus the other and he actually put them in the brain scanner, in the fMRI scanner. What the results show was that when people were mind-wandering you have this area of the brain, so midline in the brain prefrontal cortex, becoming active, but this is also the area that is associated with self-related thoughts. However, when people switch to the other way of experiencing or being and just being present, feeling your body, the sensation that are rising, activity in the region of self-centeredness, if you will, was actually decreased and activity in these other areas of the brain so insula, some other sensory areas, started to become more active. So quite literally your thinking mind begins to shut down and you just allow yourself to be present. So not only are we able to be present, but we also change our point of view from the self-reference to just what is actually happening. So that's one very very interesting and very related work from research in neuroscience that has come out.

MURRAY: (11:49) Fantastic. That's really good.

I want to leave the... I still want to stay with the research, but as you know when I do the podcast I've got my three central questions. What is going on that... I or you or anyone is influenced by someone. What is happening in the brain? What's in neuroscience behind that?

JASON: (12:10) Any time someone influences another person that is leadership. Their leaders are those who are in a formal position with followers or as leadership. Everyone is enacting that. Everyone is constantly... Whether a low-level intern or you are a parent or you are a child, people are always enacting influence and persuasion over others for some goal and what happens when someone is doing that is they're trying to connect the right way, I guess I would say. One way to look at it is through the lens of a transformational leadership, a transformational influence.

MURRAY: (12:48) Yeah.

JASON: (12:49) And that is when you are using the value structure of someone else to show how values are connected to certain goals and so if someone is influencing me it's because they're touching some sort of value that I hold on deeply and it's aligning with that value that enables me to have high motivation to go forward.

MURRAY: (13:09) Yeah. That makes sense when you say it like that. That's really good. Hans, anything to add to that?



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HANS: (13:15) Maybe just a couple of thoughts. So maybe related to decision making. We of course have short-term goals and long-term goals. Right? So a short term goal would be related to maybe eating and just deriving pleasure from, you know, having ice cream or something. Right? Those kinds of mechanisms in the brain are fairly well understood, however, the mechanisms for long term goals are a lot harder to define and to study certainly in terms of the brain. But we as scientists would sort of believe is that we take small steps, so small rewards that serve as confirmation to ourselves that we are moving in the same, in the right direction. Right? But certainly, I think leaders and people that influence us, allow us to have this kind of long-term vision towards where we want to go and what are the steps required to get there.

MURRAY: (14:12) That's about the vision and yeah, how to get there. Fantastic.

So let me ask you, Hans, maybe you first. Who has influenced you the most?

HANS: (14:23) It's very hard for me to say just one person.

MURRAY: (14:26) Yeah.

HANS: (14:27) Typically I can maybe just think of three. So the physicist Richard Feynman. So growing up I used to watch his videos and read some of his books and material and I just found it fascinating, very engaging on questions about how things work and, you know, nature and physics and it's almost playful. I just found it very very inspiring in the sense that it really awakened my curiosity for how things work, not just in nature, but yeah, as a way of thinking.

MURRAY: (15:00) Yes.

HANS: (15:01) And after that, Thich Nhat Hanh and Roshi Joan Halifax sort of go on the same boat which other... For a different perspective and I guess it's closer to sort of a mindfulness. Mindfulness and, you know, kindness but not as a passive sort of bystander or just for yourself and your own wellbeing, but as a vehicle towards change. Right? So they call it, what is it? Active Buddhism some people might say.

MURRAY: (15:34) Yeah.

HANS: (15:34) But essentially the idea of... You know, we practice mindfulness and we build resilience but we do this with a purpose, right, to essentially benefit others and everyone in a sense. So those three people have had a huge influence on me.



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MURRAY: (15:52) Yeah. Beautiful. I love that piece about, that we have a purpose and I think so often in leadership one of the bigger parts is actually helping people connect with that purpose and be clear about it.

HANS: (16:02) Right.

MURRAY: (16:03) Jason, how about you?

JASON: (16:05) So many people I can talk about in this kind of thing. We all do the same structure as Hans and discuss three most important although chronological first off my parents. My mom taught me the art of creativity at a very young age being the art at your fingertips kind of teacher that would come in and teach about art and that shaped the way that I viewed the world. My dad taught me how to have a certain type of work ethic to apply to myself in any domain to understand how to strive to be your own version of best. The second I would say, Alan Watts, who is a Buddhist philosopher. I started to read a lot of his books when I was in high school and that helped shape the way that I viewed the world and incorporate both perspectives on Eastern and Western that I did not get in my formal education.

MURRAY: (16:54) Yeah.

JASON: (16:55) And lastly I'd say more recently is the entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk. He is an entrepreneur for a media agency and he basically documents his life and he preaches about how one should go about attaining the things they want to attain whether it's being an entrepreneur or be the best parent you can possibly be. His attitude has definitely shaped the way that I actually even view leadership research and also the way he preaches about self-awareness and kindness resonates deeply.

MURRAY: (17:26) Yeah. I'm interested from both of you that there's this Eastern piece coming through with Buddhism, etc I think that links back to the...

HANS: (17:33) Yeah, kind of merging the two.

MURRAY: (17:36) Yeah, and it links back to that mindfulness. Great. Thank you.

So research and we're talking about leadership, mindfulness. What's the piece about resilience in the brain and what does the research tell us about that?



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HANS: (17:53) Yeah. So that is one of my favorite topics actually.

MURRAY: (17:56) Great!

HANS: (17:58) I think resilience is one of the things that we need the most and we take for granted and we don't know how to train it. We don't know how to improve it. We hear about it all the time and yet it's very elusive. Right?

MURRAY: (18:15) Yeah. What is it? How do you define it, Hans, because...

HANS: (18:19) Yeah. For me it's very simple. It's your ability to bounce back from negative experiences.

MURRAY: (18:26) Right. Yeah.

HANS: (18:27) And it goes for anything, you know, your personal life, at work. There are some very interesting components of it. So we know from a number of studies that there is a sort of genetic aspect to it, so to some extent some of it might be determined by your genetic makeup. Right?

MURRAY: (18:47) Yeah.

HANS: (18:48) But what is really interesting is that it turns out that most of resilience and most of our ability to come back from adversity is not from our genetics but by how we deal with it. So there was a couple of famous studies now... I can't remember the name of the authors, but they essentially looked at children who had grown up in very troubled environments, you know, like very poor neighborhoods, on the abuse and psychological stress and they found that while most of them struggle for their entire lives basically and they require support in some. There was a subset of them that not only did okay but they actually thrived. They did much better than your normal individuals living in perfectly healthy environments and so on. So what is actually going on and why are these people able to thrive and do very well even in the face of so much adversity? And so this is... I mean going back to the '50s and '60s when people started looking into this and they showed that there were a number of factors that played a huge role into it. Certainly the attitude towards life and how they saw these challenges. But these individuals, even though they are a minority within the population, it turns out that they embody a lot of skills that can actually be learned. So for example, our ability to experience positive emotions. So by, you know, experiencing joy and even a smile, being thankful to others, showing gratitude



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essentially. All of these things help us cope better when things turn for the worst because it is relatively easy to see why we have sort of these negative emotions. Right? So maybe for survival purposes, but positive emotions, right? It is a lot harder to say okay so maybe it is just so that we have a reward mechanism that drives that. But if we can experience different kinds of positive emotions, joy and happiness, gratefulness and many others which I am not very clear why we haven't and so there is a lot of work by Barbara Fredrickson around this idea of the use of or the purpose of positive emotions and one of the main things she argues is that positive emotions build resilience.

MURRAY: (21:39) That feeds into the positive psychology movement I suppose.

HANS: (21:43) Exactly

MURRAY: (21:43) It's about taking that positive lens on things and finding the positive in situations.

HANS: (21:49) Yeah.

MURRAY: (21:50) And Jason, is there anything from your side to add to that, around the resilience?

JASON: (21:55) Yeah. I think to add to that I agree with Hans' definition. It's also aligned with how behavioral researchers see it. One way that I kind of have worked with leaders to take the research and you apply it to their life is to understand resilience in terms of the HERO framework. And so for the HERO framework, this is based off of research that's called Positive Psychological Capital. So we know social capital, financial capital but there's also psychological capital and this is straight from the Positive Psychology research as well.

MURRAY: (22:30) Yeah.

JASON: (22:30) And you can framework it in terms of HERO. So we have Hope, Hope being the way that you can strive for to create plans that work around obstacles, so how many paths are you creating towards accomplishing a goal. You can give as many paths as possible. The more paths the better and also identifying what obstacles could come up ahead and that will increase your Hope. And then we have optimism... Sorry! Self Efficacy or confidence for the E, so that's H-E and confidence is really as simple as writing down what skills you have done in the past and have led to accomplishments. And then R is for Resilience which is basically synergistically the



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whole combination of the HERO construct. And then Optimism, O, which is... People usually think of Optimism in terms of, "Oh, I'm going to be optimistic and think of everything in rose colored glasses versus being a pessimist." It's way more complex than that. There are two types of Optimism that we can kind of take as leaders to help us move forward. One is being... How do you explain certain situations that go right or wrong? If you take an optimistic explanatory style? It means that when something goes right you are attributing it to your own skill and effort and attributing also the effort of others. A pessimistic explanatory style would be one in which when something goes wrong you think it's all on you and you don't understand the many different environmental factors that went into this situation or you only blame others when you see their identity wrapped up in this event or this reaction to an event. So that's a really important thing is Optimistic explanatory style to understand how actions and results are tying into your actions and not your identity and that kind of also relates to mindfulness. In fact mindfulness has had a strong relationship with this resilience research. When you have a high mindfulness you are able to detach your identity of these positive or negative events to understand how that relates to your effort and not your own identity.

MURRAY: (24:46) That's interesting and for me what comes out of that just at the end is you talk about your own view on the thing. It's that negative self-talk that can really tear us down and get in our way whether negative about ourselves or others.

JASON: (25:01) Exactly. The first step to that for leaders would be, just notice what's going on. Don't try to change... I know that we have a tendency to initiate take and change and then berate oneself for not enacting that change. But just notice and become aware of that self-talk and how you are identifying yourself in it versus critiquing behaviors that are separate from your identity. Then you can start doing something with it because that's all data. But just make sure the data is something you're going to work with and you're not wrapping it up into, "I am bad," versus "I did something that led to a poor result."

MURRAY: (25:41) Yeah. Alright. Good stuff.

So my second question I have is your 'aha' moment around leadership, you know, when you... Suddenly you understood what leadership was all about. Maybe that's been the context of your research, I don't know, but I'd be interested to hear what has been your 'aha' moment or one of your 'aha' moments?

JASON: (26:02) I can take the first try at this. For me it happened well before I started to get into research on leadership sciences. This actually occurred when I was playing



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the sport of baseball in my high school when I was... Before college and I had a little bit of a chip on my shoulder about my skill level and I believed that I was way better than I thoroughly was and I had this one coach who would talk about things like discipline and success and greatness. All these great terms that we like to think of as leaders will motivate people. I was more of a follower that was actually working against the grain and I was witnessing that our head coach was not a powerful leader. He was one who... He was more of what we call a transactional leader. If you do something good for me then I will reward you. If you do something bad then I will punish you, transactional, and it didn't work for us and I had to think a lot about what part did I play? What part did the leader play? And I started to realize that the follower also has just as much of an impact as the leader. When I got into research I finally found the language to explain the feelings of the experience of that poor leadership and poor followership. I learned about transformational leadership, how a leader can connect to the values of their followers, can connect to a big picture in goals, can offer that unique support for each individual and what happens when a leader sacrifices their own self-serving goals and starts examining the goals of all the individuals and create one large picture that connects to each person and how that can make an impact.

MURRAY: (27:59) I think the other piece in that for me is, you talk about how the follower also has a role and responsibility in it. I always come back to Covey's Circle of Influence and concern and just let's make sure we work on what we can work on and influence and take ownership of that.

Hans, how about you? What was your 'aha' moment?

HANS: (28:22) Yeah. Interesting. My 'aha' moment may be different from Jason and yet I guess the conclusion is very similar. So I guess for me is, I had the opportunity once to meet with a sort of high level executive for a pharmaceutical company and I must say going into it I was really biased. Maybe I had a, you know, negative sort of expectation of the person I was going to meet for no particular reason really. I was aware of my bias but it was there nevertheless. But then when I started talking to him I realized two things. The first, he was very aware of his own suffering and what I mean by that is his own personal struggles in his life and in his company and all that, but he was also very highly attuned to the suffering of others around him, you know, his co-workers, the leadership under him and all of this. What really struck me was his sense of purpose. Right? So you would think that for a high level executive, you know, maybe



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the purpose is to bring more business or increase revenue, the bottom line for the company, but to my surprise that was not it at all. In fact those words or topics barely came up in our conversation. What did come up was, "You know, I have thousands of people that depend on basically me..."

MURRAY: (30:06) Wow! Yeah.

HANS: (30:07) "... and it is not my job to take care of their problems, but it is my job to listen to them and to do everything I can so that they can better address those problems." You know, just sort of paraphrase but that's how he came across.

MURRAY: (30:20) Yeah. Yeah.

HANS: (30:21) And so to me the leader, the leadership component was, you know, seeing... Recognising your suffering and seeing the suffering in others in the same way. Right? And so awarding your...

MURRAY: (30:33) I'm interested in your language there, Hans, the suffering piece. What are you trying to convey with that?

HANS: (30:39) Yeah. So I guess just... This executive he was going through some personal struggles and was essentially seeking help. His struggles, you know, family relationship, the passing of a close one. Then the way he related it was like, you know, "Everyone in the company is potentially going through something similar and I don't know, I can't know every single person but I need to create an environment where we are aware that these things are happening and it needs to be a supportive environment."

MURRAY: (31:22) Yeah.

HANS: (31:23) You know, because whether it is financial distress or emotional or what have you essentially whether you are, you know, early stage employee or a high level executive, in that regard you are very much the same. Right? And I think we just need recognition of that and it really stuck with me.

MURRAY: (31:45) So what was it? I suppose, what was your 'aha' moment around that? What was it you take away from it?



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HANS: (31:52) Just the idea that a leader could see, you know, the struggles of others as his own and recognize his own struggles in others.

MURRAY: (32:05) Yeah. Would I be right in saying that empathy piece, this really great empathy. The ability to have empathy for others and stand in their shoes?

HANS: (32:17) Oh absolutely. I think it goes... Yes, certainly empathy, but it goes a little bit beyond empathy because... At least from a perspective of empathy is the ability to recognize the pain of others. Right?

MURRAY: (32:32) Yeah.

HANS: (32:33) His was a little bit beyond this like, "How can I help?" So it maybe, might touch more on the compassion side.

MURRAY: (32:40) Yeah. Yeah.

HANS: (32:41) And it just kind of naturally came. It's almost like a hidden ability or body that we all have, you know, again it coming really back to Buddhist love.

MURRAY: (32:53) Yes. Yeah, and then the mindfulness to connect with that.

So conscious of time, but I could go on for hours. What does the future look like and what does the research telling us about the brain, the neuroscience and the future? Where are you going with your research and what is interesting for you?

JASON: (33:13) For me the future in the workplace research is looking at many different things because it's just been booming with... It's a very hot topic in the organizational psychology world of mindfulness research and I'll take two different positions. One is... One thing that I'm very interested in is, what are the personality differences to learn such a thing like the mindfulness practice for leaders? Do some leaders, maybe those who have high openness to experience, high creative leaders, strategic big picture thinker leaders, do they need to be trained a different way for mindfulness than say those who are more executive executing, task oriented leaders and how do they operate differently? And this extends to all training programs, leadership development, billion dollar industry growing. Why is it that so many participants fail to learn the right competencies in these trainings. One thing in the research that we're looking at going forward is how do we train people differently depending on personality? How do we identify personality traits that are actually manageable and be able to apply that learning to a training program? Another side



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of research that is going to be for the future, we're looking at longitudinal data over the course of many many periods of how leaders develop over the course of say six months. Many organizations have viewed leadership development as, "Let's go take this 360 development survey. Here's the report. Oh, you have a 15 minute debrief conversation by the way and now you're done." Well we know now from the beginning of this amazing research and statistical analysis that can break down longitudinal research of leadership development. Let's measure someone right before the training, the beginning, when they receive their feedback on 360s, when they have a coaching session, when they have the follow-up and how did the resilience change or confidence. All these things change over the course and we know just at their beginning case of this longitudinal data of how the long term changes. The minute that a leader gets their feedback they have such a dip in confidence and that's usually moderated by how vulnerable was the leader in their rating? How vulnerable was their followers? And what happens after their coaching session it rises up even more. Maybe, this is one guess, but the research like I said is very young. It's possible that there might be some sort of a phenomenon where leaders need to actually have their ego checked.

MURRAY: (35:55) Yeah. Yeah. Cut them down and build them up again.

JASON: (35:59) It's an idea. Maybe there is a way to sit and accept that breaking down, that dip. But it didn't have to have that extra unnecessary suffering, that one could actually... A leader can perform mindfulness more often and be able to withstand that confidence dip and even actually use that to bolster them forward like an arrow being pulled back farther can launch forward even more, greater distances and those leaders who maybe give in and say, "No. No. No. No. No. Those followers they don't know what they're talking about." They're not going to learn more from those leadership development experiences because they aren't accepting the feedback.

MURRAY: (36:40) I'm interested relating that back to part of the research you said you were doing earlier, Jason, and this is around the environment that people are in because I think... I was talking about this with a colleague yesterday. You know, we do... As you say you do the leadership programs, the 360s and there's this whole process, which can go on for months. How do we measure those results? Does it work? And I think the organization culture, the actual larger leadership piece in the organization has such an impact on the outcomes that aren't always considered.

JASON: (37:14) Right. And also we're measuring someone pre/post let's say and then we say, "Oh, this program didn't work." You're not considering who you chose



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to be in this program and what is happening on the individual level that causes someone not to change. Maybe it's not the program. Maybe it's the resources that you're giving to these individuals before they even start. This is known as a leadership developmental readiness. How do we... This is something that organizations need to start incorporating. How do we make sure that a leader is ready to develop? Do they have the right personal resources and metacognitive abilities. So can they reflect properly mindfulness being one thing? Another thing of metacognitive ability. Do they have the right relationships in the workplace that help them in terms of a mentoring relationship, reverse mentoring with followers? Do they have the right motivation in terms of what is their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for this type of event and does that need to be altered before the training program? And all these things can allot to a learning environment or a psychologically safe environment for growth.

MURRAY: (38:26) Hans, how about you from your side?

HANS: (38:29) Yes. I think if I can just add a little bit on what Jason said. I think he's absolutely right. I think we're at a time when a few things are coming together that I think are very very promising so I'm quite optimistic. So for example, people are a lot more open minded in terms of accepting that... Well basically happier companies are more productive, do better, produce healthier systems, healthier individuals. Right? And so when you have that then you are able to bring things like mindfulness and then presuming programs and so on. And the other thing that's great as Jason was saying is that now people actually can't measure these things. Right? If you can't measure something it's very hard to improve on it. But more and more people use more robust measures, better studies and so what this is creating is that we have this new set of ecosystem where people are actually paying attention what works and why rather than just going by your, you know, bias or gut feelings.

MURRAY: (39:34) Yeah.

HANS: (39:35) So we are at a stage where people are starting to realize that we can actually measure this thing, that there are legitimate ways of building a more robust approach to leadership and for many many years they just didn't have a good way of doing it. They will spend all these months on these programs and stay there without knowing whether they worked or not, under what condition they worked and why. So now we're at a time where people are a lot more open minded. I mean even 50 years ago mindfulness... I mean people wouldn't even talk about it and now like really big companies, virtually every single company from Microsoft to Google is bringing it on board. It is not just because it's trendier, because it's a hype because it's the fact that



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you can actually measure different outcomes just across the board and people see benefits.

MURRAY: (40:31) You talked about gut feeling there. I'm quite fascinated with... What's your take on this whole... I think they call it the enteric nervous system and what role that that is playing in our emotions and thinking, etc. Is that coming into your research at all?

HANS: (40:49) Well yeah. I mean I am familiar with some of that research and I think it's very very fascinating. So for one thing, the nervous system encompasses more than just the brain. You have the spinal cord and in the last few years people have realized that we actually have a fairly large number of neurons in our gut and this gut is essentially... I mean these neurons from the gut are actually communicating with our brain. So when people say I have a gut feeling it's more than just a saying. You have actually... Your nervous system from your gut, from your stomach is sending signals to your brain which are then incorporated into your decision making systems for example or your emotional system. So yeah, there is a lot of interesting work around that.

MURRAY: (41:41) It sounds a silly question and you maybe answered it, but all this research, all the work you're doing, why is it so important to leadership, not only for today but the future?

JASON: (41:52) Yeah. I mean why is it so important today and the future? The way that we describe it at Potential Project is that we are living in a time in which we've access to so much information. We have access to all this learning and all this distraction and what happens now is that we live in a place where attention becomes our biggest resource. No longer skills, not only people who go to universities or had the money to go to a university can learn these skills. How do you manage your attention to find out which skills, which actions are right to take? Those choices that we make lead to those actions and lead to our results we want in life. So it all comes down to how does the individual manage the quality of their attention? And the leaders today have the responsibility to manage their attention because they are the ones at the top of an organization that can create an upward spiral to steal the saying of Barbara Fredrickson, to create an upwards spiral of positive emotions, engagement and meaning in the workplace, to turn an organization that's surviving to one that is thriving and managing their quality of attention in a world that is highly pressured to deliver results, information overload with all this information online and constantly distracted. Can they manage that what we call the 'paid reality' and their own attention to drive their organization and those of other people. We know from a



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research perspective that leaders with high mindfulness, their followers have greater performance. I mean this is so important it needs to be said again that a leader's mindfulness relates to the follower's performance outcomes. So the way that leaders manage their attention and develop oneselves can make a huge impact on the organization.

MURRAY: (43:50) Fantastic. Yeah.

And Hans, from your point of view?

HANS: (43:54) Yeah. I mean I agree along with Jason. I think we're at a time where we have a lot of new technologies come in on board. Certainly automation, so things like artificial intelligence are replacing some jobs certainly making our work space change from just manual repetitive tasks to a different kind of task. So we are essentially seeing a new set of economy coming and certainly leadership will have a huge huge role in that. So I think things like bringing in mindfulness for a healthy portion of positive organizations is extremely extremely important today.

MURRAY: (44:42) Thank you.

Now we got that final question. Your biggest mistake and how does that inform your leadership today?

JASON: (44:51) My biggest personal mistake... I would say that one of my biggest mistakes was not taking care of my body when I was in undergraduate university. I did not fully understand the impact that it does to you to correct your health, your nutrition and have a correct fitness life. So how did this impact the way I am at my leadership? One thing that I do for a lot of the leadership coaching that I've done in the past is really understand a full perspective of someone's life, not just, "I need to get these results and become a better leader to help my organization," but "What kind of leadership processes are you doing to your own body, to your own mind, to yourself and how can we correct that as a first step, the first line of offense to help you become a better leader?"

MURRAY: (45:46) Yeah. Fantastic.

Hans, for you. Your biggest mistake or failure.

HANS: (45:51) Well, I'm still pretty early in my career, but I would say maybe realizing when you fail and when it's time to move on to something new. I've done experiments



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in the past where you have certain hypotheses and it doesn't show the results you want and so you keep looking at the data and playing with the data and it doesn't work. Right?

MURRAY: (46:12) Yes.

HANS: (46:13) And I think the same just goes for a lot of people. We tend to attach ourselves to outcomes perhaps also in business and when we fail to see what we want, we stick to it. Learn something and fail fast as some people say.

MURRAY: (46:28) Yeah. Yeah. Great. Thank you.

Actually we wrap this up and coming to the end, is there... First of all you guys have talked a lot of references and books and everything. What are the one or two sources of information, if there's a list now, we'd love to learn a bit more about this and what you've been talking about. What would you recommend they read or where would they go to get information?

JASON: (46:53) "The Mind of a Leader". The Potential Project book that was just published out there. It would be a great source I would say

MURRAY: (46:58) Yeah.

JASON: (46:59) I will go with that. Let's say it's a great place to understand mindfulness and leadership. I think I mentioned it earlier like one of my mentors, Gary Vaynerchuk, his popular YouTube show. I think he's fascinating to watch. What does a leader who exercises kindness look like?

MURRAY: (47:15) Yeah. Right.

HANS: (47:16) Yeah. Those are great sources and also the author Daniel Goleman. I think he is very good at explaining ideas and relating to people. Well he's got a very classic book, "Emotional Intelligence" and he was recently just published, the one called "Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body" together with Richard Davidson and I think that is a fantastic book and it talks a lot about the things we touched on today.

MURRAY: (47:47) Beautiful. Thank you. And if people want to reach out and connect with you Jason or Hans, how would they get in touch with you?



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JASON: (47:57) Feel free to drop me a line. My email just jason.beck@potentialproject.com and I check it every single day and am happy to respond to any feedback or opportunities or questions.

MURRAY: (48:11) Good.

HANS: (48:12) Yeah. Email the best. hans.melo@potentialproject.com. I'm always happy to answer questions.

MURRAY: (48:20) Beautiful.

Guys, I really thank you for your time. I've got one more thing I just want to try and squeeze out of you while I've got you. I've got this thing going about getting questions, good questions that help, insight and growth. Is there a question you use for people that's a favorite question or maybe it's a favorite tip or advice for leaders?

JASON: (48:44) [cross talk] I have two questions.

HANS: (48:44) [cross talk] Yeah.

JASON: (48:46) Go ahead, Hans.

HANS: (48:47) I just have one question which is usually what I ask people who I like to work with or in general and it's very simple but it's very deep. "Why are you doing this?"

MURRAY: (48:59) Wow. Yeah. Great. That's a big one and Jason?

JASON: (49:03) There's this idea that Tim Ferriss has about instead of trying to take a tally of your goals you take a tally of your fears and by just acknowledging your challenge or acknowledging your fear that's good enough. You don't need to solve the challenge right then and there. I'm not trying to become a helper right now in a conversation but that can be a 'nice to explore that'. My second one that I think that has been pretty powerful for anyone that's in a working environment, "What does your best day at work feel like?" If you start at an experiential level then you can draw so many golden nuggets from that. It's really... Find out what are this person's strengths? What makes them come alive?

MURRAY: (49:46) That's beautiful. Yeah, and I think it's a great question to ask. Beautiful.



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Hans, Jason, thank you so much. So that's been just brilliant. I really appreciate your time and the insights you've given. Thank you. We'll put all the bits and pieces that you've talked about into the Show Notes. That's it. Thank you.

JASON: (50:08) Thank you.

HANS: (50:08) Thank you. Enjoy your day. Thank you.

MURRAY: (50:10) You too. Thanks very much.

I hope you enjoyed that deep dive into the research that really confirms the difference that being mindful can make. There was a lot in there so check out the Show Notes for more details and references and remember go to the leadership questions page at murraywright.com.au/leadership-questions or follow the link in the Show Notes and add your own favorite questions to the list.

[music]

That's it for this episode. Thanks for listening. Head to murraywright.com for the transcripts, key learnings and resources from today's and past episodes. Once you're there, why not subscribe to the Leadership Moments Podcast. That way, you never have to miss one. Until the next time.

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