



**MICHAEL GYSI**

THE POWER OF ASKING FOR HELP

**LEADERSHIP MOMENTS PODCAST TRANSCRIPT**



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**EPISODE 39**



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[Start of Transcription]

**MICHAEL:** (00:00) In a work environment people are scared to let other people know that they don't know something and to ask for help because they think they're showing a lack of knowledge which they might be perceived to have or they perceive that they should have.

[music]

**MURRAY:** (00:19) 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.

[music]

(00:35) Today I talk with a good friend of mine, Michael Gysi. Michael was in the insurance business but was forced to stop work close to 10 years ago when he was diagnosed with inclusion body myositis, a rare progressive muscle disorder. Listen to Michael share how he coped with the diagnosis and the difference that admitting that he needed help made to him and the people around him. Michael inspires his friends and family every day with how he goes about life. I hope you find some inspiration today from his leadership moments. Enjoy.

Welcome to the Leadership Moments Podcast.

**MICHAEL:** (01:09) Thank you Murray.

**MURRAY:** (01:11) So Michael, your background was the financial services industry, insurance?

**MICHAEL:** (01:17) Yes.

**MURRAY:** (01:18) What was your profession, so to speak? What was your part in that?

**MICHAEL:** (01:21) In that whole financial industry I had two major roles. One, was as an underwriter and then I got the opportunity to go into learning and development and write material to help others a) understand the industry that they were in, b) to understand what their role was, how to perfect their role, then encourage them to look further and understand what their management's role was as well.



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**MURRAY:** (01:59) So it was very much developing people to build their career, understand and build their career.

**MICHAEL:** (02:04) Yeah.

**MURRAY:** (02:05) What was it that attracted you to that?

**MICHAEL:** (02:07) As an underwriter people would ask me how to do things and then I heard them on the phone saying, "Oh, I can't do that because the manual says so," or "I have to refer that to management." And I pulled them aside and said, "Don't say that. You're belittling your own knowledge. Say you'll come back to them and talk to people but also understand why you can't so that if you can't do it you tell them, 'I can't do this because of these reasons.' It makes you sound knowledgeable and it increases your persona, I suppose, with that person that you're talking to."

**MURRAY:** (02:49) So there's a piece in that about actually helping people and showing them that they've got to own stuff rather than, I suppose, look for – I don't know if its excuses but just find an easy way out.

**MICHAEL:** (03:03) It is, but it's also understanding what they're doing. If they understand what they're doing they actually might enjoy what they're doing more.

**MURRAY:** (03:12) Yeah.

**MICHAEL:** (03:13) The worst thing is not understanding and then saying, "Well I don't like this job because I don't enjoy it." And you don't enjoy it because you don't understand it. If you understand it you might enjoy it.

**MURRAY:** (03:25) That's a good point and I wonder if for all the people listening and the people there leading teams, if there's any people in there who don't understand what they're doing and how important it is, where it all fits because some people say, "Oh I haven't got the right team members. They don't have the right attitude," or whatever but I wonder if they actually understood what they were doing, how that might change it. It's a good point.

So coming back to your career, it came to a bit of a grinding halt.

**MICHAEL:** (03:54) Yes.

**MURRAY:** (03:55) Maybe just explain what happened.

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**MICHAEL:** (03:59) Jane, my wife, noticed that my muscles in my legs were shrinking. So she said, "Go and do something about it." So I went to the gym and it didn't improve. So I went to a doctor. I ended up seeing a rheumatologist who did a muscle biopsy and he told me I have a muscle disease called inclusion body myositis. That disease not only affected my legs but it affected my hands, my arms and with that I also had a lot of pain in the legs and in my arms.

**MURRAY:** (04:39) So that's a pretty massive thing to learn. How did you manage that? How did you cope with that?

**MICHAEL:** (04:47) When we left the rheumatologist I said to him, "So what do I do now?" And he said, "Sit back, smell the roses and enjoy life." So Jane and I came home and we just sort of sat around and talked about it a bit and I suppose that's what I've tried to do, is to just make sure that I enjoy myself. And I knew it was a progressive disease so I would do what I could while I could and then when I couldn't, I would find something else or find a newer way around that.

**MURRAY:** (05:24) Because I remember you were diagnosed and you started walking with a cane.

**MICHAEL:** (05:30) Yeah.

**MURRAY:** (05:31) Where are you at now? So as you say progressive 2010, we're now beginning of 2019.

**MICHAEL:** (05:38) Yeah. One thing about walking with an aid from being someone who has been able to walk and do things without any assistance, it's a big thing to suddenly go using a walking stick and thinking, "People are looking at me." There's a point where you have to say, "Get over yourself." So, the stick was fine and then I couldn't use the walking stick, so I have to use now a forearm walker. So that helps me walk around the house and at one point I was able to use it in the street. But that became difficult because the road slopes to the side, so having to then keep trying to pull the walker up to the middle of the road. That became harder because my arms were losing strength and then anyway when I got to the coffeeshop I couldn't sit in their chairs anyway. So, I got a mobility scooter. So I just scoot up there, have my coffee. I bring my own chair and then I come home and I use my forearm walker around the home.



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**MURRAY:** (06:43) I love that bit where you talk about, "Get over yourself."

**MICHAEL:** (06:47) Yeah.

**MURRAY:** (06:47) And we touched a bit on this I think pre-recording was the... I use the word 'denial' but I certainly saw you fighting the whole stick thing and what not. What changed?

**MICHAEL:** (07:02) I accepted my own limitations. Yeah. I'm not one who has ever tried to draw attention to myself, so using a stick or a forearm walker, even the mobility scooter or wheelchair in public... I felt I was drawing attention to myself.

**MURRAY:** (07:22) Yeah.

**MICHAEL:** (07:23) Once I realized I needed those aids and I wasn't really drawing attention to myself, people don't even give you a second glance sometimes.

**MURRAY:** (07:36) [laughter] You're not special.

**MICHAEL:** (07:37) You're not special. No I'm not special. And it was at that point wherein I realized, "They're not really interested in what you're doing Michael. Get over yourself," that it's easier now to tell people and to ask people for help.

**MURRAY:** (07:55) I love that because I wonder how many of us able-bodied people, if we just got over ourselves and admitted we needed help and didn't know, would actually have an easier and more productive time of it.

**MICHAEL:** (08:12) And that's the scene. If you're in a work environment people are scared to let other people know that they don't know something and to ask for help because they think they're being... They're showing a lack of knowledge which they might be perceived to have or they perceive that they should have.

**MURRAY:** (08:35) And you hear more and more people saying they actually respect a leader more when they do ask for help and admit they don't know. So it's something... it keeps coming up in talking with people having that vulnerability and allowing that to... allowing yourself to be vulnerable.

**MICHAEL:** (08:55) Some managers are leaders some managers aren't.



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**MURRAY:** (09:00) I hope you're enjoying the show. I just wanted to take a moment to remind you that you'll find great leadership questions from our guests at [www.murraywright.com.au/leadership-questions](http://www.murraywright.com.au/leadership-questions) or follow the link in the Show Notes and while you're there why not share your favorite questions?

And now, back to our guest.

First question is, who has influenced you the most?

**MICHAEL:** (09:25) Probably the first branch manager I ever had. Jeff Byrd and he was an RAF pilot during the Second World War. He did things that I thought, "You're the sort of manager that I would like to emulate if I get to that..."

**MURRAY:** (09:43) There you go. Yeah.

**MICHAEL:** (09:44) "... position." He had to retrench 35 people in one hit and for weeks he was like a bear with a sore head, but after he gave them all the bad news, he said, "If any of you want to stay in the industry, see me and I will do what I can to get you a role somewhere."

**MURRAY:** (10:09) Okay. So he did that. What was it that you admired then? What was in that you wanted to emulate? What connected with you?

**MICHAEL:** (10:20) The staff aren't just staff. You spend so much time in the one place with other people and he saw the value in those people. He met all the young people... When I first started he would have a morning tea with them and just talk to them about what they were doing. Everybody had respect for him, the young ones. And that was in the days when, you know, everybody was Mister Byrd, Mister whatever and when he retired I still referred to him as Mister Byrd and he said, "Michael, I think it's about time you called me Jeffrey." [laughter] And that was hard. It really was. And it wasn't because I was used to calling him... It's just because I had that much respect for him and I don't think I've ever had a manager since that I've had that same respect for.

**MURRAY:** (11:15) I think the piece that you talk about here is that people are valuable. They're an asset, so look after them and that individual connection is so important.

**MICHAEL:** (11:27) The other thing is though; today's society is more mobile. Because



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of that you have to utilize the staff that you've got and value them whilst you've got them but also if they move, if you leave on good terms, they may come back.

**MURRAY:** (11:48) They come back.

**MICHAEL:** (11:48) And besides that in today's society you may end up working for that person so you want to end up on their good side. [laughter]

**MURRAY:** (11:54) [laughter] I think that's a really good point too as well. And there's a piece in there. Sometimes we can get caught up in, "Well they're only here for a few years, they'll leave or a few months," and we don't invest the time, whereas... It's a catch 22. If you don't invest the time you don't have a chance of keeping them.

**MICHAEL:** (12:10) That's right.

**MURRAY:** (12:11) And it just feeds on itself. Now there's a piece in you... I want to ask you about. You are a very difficult person to talk to about yourself because you never talk about yourself and you know, amongst our group of friends we send you into a place where we don't know anything and you can come out and tell the life stories of the waiter, the person who's running the place, whatever. You have this way of building a connection and asking these questions. Where does that come from?

**MICHAEL:** (12:49) It's an interest, in other people. Generally, people like to talk about themselves. It's easy to start a conversation with someone and find out whether you see a tattoo on them and you say, "That's an interesting tattoo. Does it mean anything?" Or they've got an unusual name. There's always something that you can talk to someone about and then you go on and you can find out a lot of the information and I'm interested in other people, their backgrounds, their culture because I like to learn about other things.

**MURRAY:** (13:31) I love that and that's a classic out of the Dale Carnegie "How to Win Friends and Influence People".

**MICHAEL:** (13:36) Oh okay.

**MURRAY:** (13:38) So it's interesting and I was reading another book "The Power of Thinking Big" exactly the same process on thinking. So if you take a moment, reflect

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on that and probably more so in a work context. Where has that helped you succeed and get your job done, by being interested in other people and taking the time to learn?

**MICHAEL:** (14:02) That's a good question and I think when you're trying to develop someone you have to find out about their knowledge and their skills. You also have to find out what they want and where do they want to go. If they're happy plodding along doing what they're doing, they don't have any ambition, fine! You know that. But then there's other people that want to achieve things. So you can actually put them on courses or recommend that they go on a course which is going to develop their own skills and knowledge and help them achieve that role as long as management can see the value in that person themselves. And that's part of the job, getting management to see the value in that person and promoting their skills and knowledge.

**MURRAY:** (14:58) Let's get on to the second question, your 'aha' moment. So what was your 'aha' moment or one of your 'aha' moments when you suddenly understood what this thing, leadership, was all about?

**MICHAEL:** (15:16) I think it was an employee. He said to me, "I want to know what you do." And I thought, "Okay." So I took the time to sit down and try and teach him. Unfortunately, he was not the sort of person who did what he said he wanted to do. I sent him away with some stuff. I said, "Now go and have a look at these and come back and tell me what you need." Five minutes later he's back and I said, "You finished." He goes, "Yeah. Yeah." I said, "So you're happy with all of these?" "Yup." I said, "Okay. What about this one? What about this question? This question? This question?" He goes, "I was going to ask you about that. Yeah I did think about that. I wasn't..." He wasn't interested in learning what I did. He wanted to be where I was but not have the knowledge or the skills and he did leave and he had an absolute, terrible exit interview and he looked at... He called me into an office and he showed it to me and he said, "What do you think?" And I looked and I said, "How do I tell him it's actually true?" And I said, "I agree with everything it says." And his jaw dropped. He said, "It was cruel the way that it's being said." "You've got to look at it this way." And I went through every point with him. I said, "Take this with you. Put it in your drawer. When you think you're becoming too big for your own boots, look at it." Anyway I got a phone call from his next employer asking me what I had done to them because within a week of him being there, she had all the males and females actually saying, "If he doesn't go, we will." It was just his whole attitude.





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**MURRAY:** (17:03) So what was your 'aha' moment in that? What is it that you take away from it?

**MICHAEL:** (17:08) That not everybody is actually wanting to put the time and the effort into their own development and it's up to the manager to understand those people that do and to get people that want it to do it and management has to listen to their employees as well. Because management is not always right.

**MURRAY:** (17:34) Come on, Michael. No. That's serious.

**MICHAEL:** (17:35) I'm sorry. I know...

**MURRAY:** (17:37) You can't this. [laughter]

**MICHAEL:** (17:38) Yeah. I know. I know. Management's always right but sometimes they can get some additional information and assistance from their own employees to help them do their role even better.

**MURRAY:** (17:51) I think there are some lovely points in there. I think one is, we can all get sucked up into putting a lot of effort into the people who make a lot of noise and we're ignoring the people who just go on and do the work and actually have got the full potential. So we've got to make sure we give the right attention to the right people.

**MICHAEL:** (18:10) Exactly.

**MURRAY:** (18:11) And then I think that piece about asking questions and listening. We don't do enough of that. In our previous podcast we talked with Oscar Trimboli who talked about the cost of not listening in today's world in business. So important and as you say you get a lot of good and useful information if we're humble enough to acknowledge it and maybe acknowledge where we got things wrong.

Today you've talked about you're enjoying every day and getting the most out of it and I think there's a piece in there, adjusting to your circumstances and doing what you can and not getting worried about all the stuff you can't influence.

**MICHAEL:** (19:00) That's right.



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**MURRAY:** (19:02) Is there anywhere... So how do you see yourself as a leader now in your family, in the community?

**MICHAEL:** (19:12) With the family it's trying to give knowledge, I suppose, to my children and enjoying the time with them and also my grandson and learning things with my grandson as well. Sometimes you hear about people who, they don't like their parents, they don't respect their parents and the greatest compliment I was paid I think was by my daughter. She said she would like to bring up her son like we brought her and her brother up, that I never really yelled at them that they can remember anyway. I'm sure I did.

**MURRAY:** (20:03) [laughter]

**MICHAEL:** (20:05) But there were instances that punishment wasn't necessary, just a talk. You can't do that with a five or six-year-old but you can start that process. But even in a community... I'm on my scooter and I might be sitting down and having a cup of coffee and people will come up and they'll say, "Excuse me. Can I talk to you about this... you know." "Yeah, yeah. Fine! Let's talk about it. What would you like to know?" And I talk to them and then other people will ask me about my disease and what it is and why I've got it and things like that and I'll tell them and they get a better understanding about what is wrong with me. And these are people I don't know.

**MURRAY:** (20:49) There's a piece in that about just by being present and engaging that you contribute and make a difference to someone's day. There's a whole thing... In leadership often we talk about those big big things. I watched the video from Simon Sinek – and actually I'll put a link to it in the Show Notes for this show – and he just talks about how leadership is all the little things you just do each day.

**MICHAEL:** (21:15) Yeah.

**MURRAY:** (21:16) And I have to say from your circle of friends the leadership you give to us is just by how you manage your situation. How you turn up. You never complain although you're no doubt in extreme pain and discomfort. You travel the world and while it sets an example for us and we say, "Gee we've got nothing to complain about." So I thank you for that...

**MICHAEL:** (21:42) That's all right.

**MURRAY:** (21:43) And the leadership you give us.



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**MICHAEL:** (21:45) That's all right. But I can't change it and I accept what I have and accept that it's going to get worse. But I'm not going to just sit around and do nothing. There are too many people out there that are interesting to talk to even in your travels. I mean I've spoken to Inuits and learned about their culture. It's only a little bit but I've learned about it. And the one thing, getting back onto the management that... I know, I just thought about it. I would go to a branch and it quickly got around that I was there and people would come and talk to me about issues that they had and someone said, "You're the only person from head office that comes here and makes a point of talking to all the staff and I hate what that did to my ego. Well, but it also meant that I was doing my job because I was able to help people accomplish things in their own roles. There's a terminology. I think it's called management by walking about and that's so important because management lose touch...

**MURRAY:** (22:58) Yeah.

**MICHAEL:** (22:59) With their staff without doing that.

**MURRAY:** (23:01) And again I think the challenge nowadays is doing that in a much more virtual world because there are people who actually never see people face-to-face or very rarely. A big challenge.

**MICHAEL:** (23:13) Yeah, but technology allows us to do that.

**MURRAY:** (23:16) Technology is... Yes I think it is a conduit to that connection but it also diminishes the connection. You can't beat sitting face-to-face and I think the experience is...

**MICHAEL:** (23:28) Seeing the whites of the eyes of a person.

**MURRAY:** (23:29) Yeah. Exactly.

**MICHAEL:** (23:31) And getting their true sense.

**MURRAY:** (23:32) Third, final question is failure. As you look back in your professional life could you point to a failure that was significant and that then really shaped and changed how you approached your leadership.

**MICHAEL:** (23:53) I think the one failure was that guy that I spoke about.

**MURRAY:** (23:57) Right.



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**MICHAEL:** (23:58) Where I thought he wanted to learn but he didn't and then he did some other things and I thought, "You are so wrapped up in yourself. You don't see what's going on around you and all you're interested in is doing what other people want to do." So that was one and I think the other one was, somebody had done something wrong and I suggested where his brains might have been but I did it in front of other people and I sat down and I thought, "Michael that is so wrong." So the next day I called him and all the staff that I said it in front of and apologized and I said, "I was wrong." And everyone said, "No. No. No. You're right."

**MURRAY:** (24:46) [laughter]

**MICHAEL:** (24:48) I said, "No I wasn't. I was wrong to say it."

**MURRAY:** (24:50) No. Yeah.

**MICHAEL:** (24:51) And this guy said, "If you hadn't said it that way I probably wouldn't have paid attention. But you were right in saying it." And I said, "Maybe so, but I should never have said it in front of everybody else and for that I apologize." So I think being able to recognize as a manager when you've done something wrong and admit it is very very important even if it's with the people that report to you, admit that you've done something wrong. So a lot of it is taking responsibility for your actions and if you have to apologize because you've done an action which is wrong, be humble enough to do it. Don't think that because you've said it and you're the manager that you are right because you're not. I think that gave me a lot and thinking back it probably gave me a bit of more respect from those people who I worked with than if I hadn't said it.

**MURRAY:** (25:55) Absolutely. I think the other piece in that is make sure you say you're sorry quickly.

**MICHAEL:** (25:59) Oh yeah.

**MURRAY:** (26:00) Don't wait until a year later or whatever.

**MICHAEL:** (26:03) It's got to be immediate. You can't... It doesn't mean anything if you say it six months, 12 months down the track.

**MURRAY:** (26:12) Yeah. Nice.

So your condition, a bit of a shift really. You're making the most of it.



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**MICHAEL:** (26:17) Yeah.

**MURRAY:** (26:19) Often you hear people with a disability talk about what that disability has given them. You know, if they didn't have it they would have gone through life and then they get it and well, they've got something new, something that enriches their life. Is there anything that comes to you from that or not?

**MICHAEL:** (26:45) That's a difficult question. I would have gone through life doing what I did before. I wouldn't have had the opportunity, I suppose, to meet people and learn about some new cultures.

**MURRAY:** (27:02) The roads that you travel.

**MICHAEL:** (27:03) Yeah. But I think probably understanding that a) these people are a lot worse off than me, b) there are some very kind people out there who will do things for you even without you asking. And it's the simple things like if you're in a wheelchair and someone's pushing you, you have trouble with some of these doors. Someone will stop and open that door. So they're very kind. Then it's also people need to ask for help and I admit it. I need to ask for help. It might be from friends getting up from a table or going up one or two steps. It might be from my family or friends picking me up off the floor when I've had a fall.

**MURRAY:** (27:55) You've had a few of them?

**MICHAEL:** (27:56) I've had a few of those.

**MURRAY:** (27:57) [laughter] Spectacular falls?

**MICHAEL:** (27:58) But I can't do it on my own and I have to ask for help. But then it means an awful lot to them and I don't know how much, if they know how much it means to me about what people have done for me. And I'm probably guilty of not having asked for help enough. Looking back I should have probably asked for more help. And would have helped me in my business when I was working? Possibly, but now I realize if I need help, to ask. And most people will be only too happy to help you. And then there's the person who... You're standing at a set of traffic lights, holding on to your walking stick because you got to be very careful and they'll just barrel past you and really don't care. "You're in their way." "Get out of my way." "Pop, I got to across the road before you do." And there are those people in life unfortunately, but by and large I think most people want to help but they need to know how they can help and to ask. People need to be asked for help.



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**MURRAY:** (29:14) I think that's the beautiful thing there for everyone. People want to help but they need to know how they can help.

**MICHAEL:** (29:21) Helping me with my disability, that's great, but then it's also... You can relate that back to management. If you are a manager and have someone you say, "If you need help, you ask me and you ask me when you need it not after you've actually needed it but when you need it."

**MURRAY:** (29:41) Yeah. Beautiful.

I'm winding up and people might want to connect with you to find out more about the disease. They might just want to connect with you to say hello. How could they do that? How would they do that?

**MICHAEL:** (29:56) They can use my email if they like, [michaelwgysi@gmail.com](mailto:michaelwgysi@gmail.com).

**MURRAY:** (30:05) Okay.

**MICHAEL:** (30:06) That one is not used often so if I see an influx I'll know what it's about.

**MURRAY:** (30:11) You'll know what it's about? Great.

And one last thing before I let you go. I really appreciate your time and your honesty today. We talked earlier about how you are the expert at connecting with people and getting their history and I, from all my guests, I always ask them, what's your favorite question? And we've got on the website, there's the Leadership Questions and we've got them all listed there. What's your favorite question or questions?

**MICHAEL:** (30:38) I don't have a favorite question because to start the conversation it has to be unique for the circumstance. Sitting at an airport next to somebody who is reading a paper and you can start by saying, "That's an interesting article." And you can go on from there and find out who they are, where they work, where they're going, if they're going on a holiday, if they're going on business. In an elevator, "What floor are you going to?" "Oh that's such and such a company. Do you work there? Are you visiting? La, la, la." And each question is unique and you have to tailor that question for the circumstances.

**MURRAY:** (31:20) Thank you for your time. Thank you for your wisdom and insights and sharing a bit about you on just how... And your leadership moments.



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**MICHAEL:** (31:31) Pleasure. I enjoyed it.

**MURRAY:** (31:33) That's it for today. Thanks to Michael for sharing. Quite a bit to reflect on. The big things that came out of that for me was admitting when we need help and the difference it can make for everyone. Also the power of taking a genuine interest in people and finding the time to ask them how things are going in life, not just work. I'm sure the by doing that with complete strangers Michael actually gives them a lift, a gift for the day. So some questions. Where do you need to get over yourself and ask for help? Who can you give a lift to today? Give them that gift by taking a genuine interest in them. Thanks for listening until the next time.

[music]

That's it for this episode. Thanks for listening. Head to [www.murraywright.com](http://www.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.

[End of Transcription]



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