

Doug Smith ([00:05](#)):

Hey leader, and welcome to episode number 312 of the L3 leadership podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. If you're new to the podcast. Welcome. I'm so glad that you're here. And I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber, know that you can also watch all of our conversations over on YouTube as well. So make sure you're subscribed there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and we've made an impact on your life, it would mean the world to me. If you would leave us a rating and review on apple podcast or Spotify or whatever app you listen to podcast through, and that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders.

Doug Smith ([00:45](#)):

So thank you in advance for that. Well, in today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Mark Miller. I was looking forward to this for a long time, and finally got to sit down with mark and, oh my goodness. As this filled with wisdom, you are gonna love, love, love this interview for those who may be unfamiliar with Mark. Let me just tell you a little bit about him. Mark started over 40 years ago, working as an hourly employee at a local Chick-fil-A since then he's worked all across the business and currently serves as vice president of high performance leadership for the last 20 years. Mark has traveled the United States and the world focusing much of his time on serving leaders by helping them grow themselves, their teams and their organizations. He's also written books and his most recent one is called smart leadership where he shares research based smart choices that the best leaders make to scale their influence and results.

Doug Smith ([01:30](#)):

And if you've never met read a Mark Miller book, I can't occur you enough to they're all pure gold. And again, this interview is amazing. You're gonna hear mark talk about the lessons that he's learned in leadership and over 40 years at Chick-fil-A, we'll talk about his new book, smart leadership. You'll hear his advice for aspiring authors and so much more. And of course we end by taking him through the lightning route. You're gonna love this episode, but before we get into that, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 leadership podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors, the financial advisors at Beratung Advisors, help educate and empower clients to make an informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website@beratungadvisors.com. That's beratungadvisors.com, securities and investment products and services offered through LPL financial member, FINRA, and S I P C tongue advisors, LPL financial and L3 leadership are separate entities.

Doug Smith ([02:28](#)):

I also wanna thank our sponsor. Henne jewelers their jeweler owned by my friend and mentor John Henne and my wife, Laura, and I got our engagement and wedding rings through he jewelers. And we just loved our experience. Not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for a marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out, hennejewelers.com. And with all that being said, let's dive in. Here's my conversation with Mark Miller.

Doug Smith ([02:59](#)):

Well, Hey Mark Miller. It is an honor to finally get to interview you. I've been following your journey and reading your leadership material for years and years, and been wanting to interview for years and years. So the time has finally coming. I can't wait for not only for me to learn from you, but our audience as well. And I really wanted to, uwe wanna cover a few things today. I wanna talk a little bit about your journey at Chick-fil-A and you've learned along the way. And then I certainly wanna spend some time talking about your new book, which I just finished last week. Smart leadership, phenomenal. So all of your books are phenomenal. If, if you haven't read a Mark Miller book, you need to, if you're in leadership, it should be required reading everywhere. So we'll talk about that. And at the end, we can fly through the lightning round as well, but let's start at Chick-fil-A. So you start working at Chick-fil-A 40 years ago, which is crazy. And my understanding is you were the 16th corporate employee. And so can you walk us through the journey of you actually growing and scaling with the company? Cuz I'm imagining there's not too many people that were around that time that still are today.

Mark Miller ([03:53](#)):

Yeah. Most of 'em are dead by now. Yeah. Wow. Yeah. So here here's, here's the short version of, of a really, really long story. And it was, it was over 40 years ago. We won't get into all the details, but I started as a team member in one of our local restaurants and I was awful. I was awful!

Mark Miller ([04:14](#)):

I mean I've never been particularly good with my hands and, and that job really showcased my inadequacies and it got so bad. I felt like I was gonna be fired any day. So I did what made sense to me as a kid. I quit cause I thought it looked better on my resume to have quit than to have been fired. And then in a of genius, I decided, Hey, maybe I could work at the corporate headquarters, which of course makes no sense. And certainly should not be a reflection on any of the professionals at the corporate headquarters. But I, I, I couldn't work in the restaurant. And so I went to the home office. I walked in, I told the receptionist, I wanted the job in the warehouse. She told me to have a seat just a few minutes later, Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A came out, took me into his office to conduct this interview.

Mark Miller ([05:11](#)):

Which again, sounds crazy to kind of give him the punch line. You know, why would the CEO be? And the founder be interviewing this punk to work in the warehouse house? Well, the truth is I was interviewing to be the 16th corporate employee. And when you've only got 15 people, I'm assuming the head guy or the head gal, they're doing the interviewing. And so Truett said, I hear you wanna work in the warehouse. And I said, yes, I do. And he said, why do you wanna work in the warehouse? And I said, because I don't have any skills. I assume I could pack boxes.

Mark Miller ([05:47](#)):

I said, I thought it'd be inappropriate to ask for a job in marketing or human resources, but, but I can pack boxes. And then he said, who have you been talking to? And I remember thinking that's a really odd and difficult question. So I said, who've I been talking to about what sir? He said, who've you been talking to about working in our warehouse? And I said, no one. And he said, well, somebody quit yesterday. So I guess you can have the job. Wow. So my interview consisted of those two questions. I tell people it was a combination of God's grace and true its lack of discernment that he gave me that job in the warehouse. And that was actually 40, 43 years ago. Wow. That he gave me that job. And I've actually had trouble holding down a job ever since I've worked all over the business over all of those years. And in the early days, I think it had more to do with let the kid do it, let the kid do it again. I didn't

have any particular skills, but I actually got to start several of the departments and functions at Chick-fil-A. I started our corporate communications group. I started our quality and customer satisfaction group. And over the years I, I started several department and functions before I'd move on to something else.

Doug Smith ([07:02](#)):

So would you say, you know, from someone who thought they had no skill sets to obviously over the 40 years, would you say, it sounds like your main skill set is really just developing something and handing it off and then focusing on something else? Is that kind of the sweet spot you found yourself in?

Mark Miller ([07:15](#)):

No, I think early on it was a, there were a lot of professional people who had expertise and I didn't have expertise and, and I would do whatever they wanted me to do. Yeah. And so I think I fell into that role early, but then later on again, I've, I've started and sustained a few functions. I was in I let our training group for about 12 years. It wasn't, it was kind of a an expansion of what the group had done historically, but it was, it was, it was not a startup kind of situation.

Doug Smith ([07:49](#)):

And, and during that training period, is that when you got passionate about leadership development, I mean, clearly you have a passion for developing leaders.

Mark Miller ([07:56](#)):

Yes. we, we found ourselves with a, with what I would call a a big opportunity about 20 plus years ago, we realized that our leadership bench was not nearly strong enough. And I don't know if any of your audience would find themselves in that situation, but, but what we believe to be true is that when an organiz has a problem to solve or an opportunity to seize, you generally give it to a leader and we had problems to solve and opportunities to seize. And we looked over our shoulder and said, uhoh, and you know, we hope this person can lead in a few years. We hope this person is gonna become a great leader. And so of course, what's you do in those situations is you just double down and give more work to your existing leaders, which is perhaps a short term answer, but it's a long term disaster.

Mark Miller ([08:52](#)):

Wow. And so I was asked to try and figure out how do we accelerate leadership development? And I put together a team of really smart people. And, and that really started my deep dive in leadership that continues today more than more than 20 years in the journey. So that, that was, it was born if need. It was again, one of those things, okay, I'll work on that. If that's what we need. You know, I was leading my team and leading a, a function, but I was not thinking at that point about the whole organization. In fact, nobody was, which is why we had this issue. See, when we were smaller, our leadership development process was really immersion and osmosis and, and you can make an argument for that a really small organization. I mean, that's, that's how I learned a lot about leadership was sitting around the table with really good leaders.

Mark Miller ([09:42](#)):

When you've got 16 employees, we had lunch around one table and I got to sit there with the CEO. I'm just a kid in the warehouse, but I got to sit there at the table with the CEO and the CFO and, and all the senior leaders. Again, there were aren't many of us and, and I did learn a lot that way, but by the time we got to the year, 2000, we had tens of thousands of people in the organization. When you think about

the restaurants as well, who never sat around a table like that. And they certainly didn't know Truett Cathy. And so we said, we have got to, we've gotta find day more systematic way to raise up leaders. And again, that's, that's really what started this journey for me.

Doug Smith ([10:23](#)):

Yeah. So, so talk to those leaders, you know, you mentioned, you know, there's leaders, I, I guarantee you there's leaders listening to this that would say I'm looking around and I see the exact same thing. I don't have the leaders that I need to, to do what we are, what call to do as an organization. You know, what, what have you found over the period of time that you guys have instilled systems and processes when it comes to identifying and developing leaders?

Mark Miller ([10:44](#)):

Yeah. So I'll, I'll give you this quick, cuz I'm gonna make this sound easy. You know, I love Q and a, but I hate Q and a cuz we probably need a half a day to talk about the answer to that. I mean, we've been working on it for 20 years and we're still working on it. So please don't mistake the brevity of my response with the magnitude of that question. Sure. But, but our summary on that is you first have to define it because what we realized is when we said leadership, everybody noded and everybody had their own definition of leadership and some of them were, were almost incompatible. It it's not that anybody was wrong. At the time 20 years ago we found over 6,000 published definitions of leadership. Well, you don't build a leadership culture if everybody has their own working definition.

Mark Miller ([11:34](#)):

So the first thing we tell organization is, is you have to define it and then you have to teach it because for somebody to know let's just pick something random that a leader's supposed to cast vision. Well, it's fine for you to know that, but do you know how to do that? Right. There's a skill set. So you gotta define it. You gotta teach it. You've gotta create opportunities for leaders to practice it in, in the, in the final analysis. Most leaders learn most of what they know about leadership from leading. I mean, it does help you to know the three keys to delegation or it does help, you know, here's the checklist for a good vision, right? It helps to know those things, but you don't really own it and internalize it until you do it. And we have a tendency we did have, and I think we still fight it is when we have that problem to solve or that opportunity to seize.

Mark Miller ([12:29](#)):

If you're not real careful, it's easy to give it to an existing leader. Cause they're, they're a known quantity. They've probably got a really good batting average. You probably trust them. And what we we're trying to develop the discipline of hitting pauses when we have a problem to solve or an opportunity to seize and go, is there an emerging leader that would benefit from this assignment so good and it can really turbocharge a leader's development. So that third step is to practice it. The fourth step is to measure it. And this is a, a long conversation, but the gist of it is nothing improves without measurement. And if you want to create a leadership, coal, which is what I think these, these five steps I'm giving you will enable you to do, you actually need to measure your progress. And so the first challenge when somebody hears that is they go, well, that's probably hard.

Mark Miller ([13:27](#)):

Well, okay. But you're paid for hard. So, so just get past, it might be hard. And, and a couple things I tell people one don't look for a single metric because we spend a lot of time trying to figure out, is there a

single metric to, to quantify and assess our leadership culture? We couldn't figure it out. So it's probably a family of metrics and it may be a dynamic set of metrics that it changes with the needs of the business. Let me give you one, one example, cause I don't know how far you wanna go down this rabbit hole, but if you're just starting to build a leadership culture, one of the metrics, as crazy as this sounds is what percentage of our leaders have been trained on our leadership point of view. And you need to get that to a hundred percent and then guess what, after you do, you don't really need that metric because I'm gonna assume that you're gonna build a system that trains new leaders, but in that ramp up stage, that's probably an important metric on your scorecard.

Mark Miller ([14:29](#)):

Now, five years, 10 years, somewhere down into the future, you may want to metric that says, how many leaders do we have currently on the bench who are ready for their next opportunity? Hmm. See, we evaluate emerging leaders on ready now, ready in one to two years, ready in three to five years, cuz you're trying to take these people on a developmental journey. Yeah. And so one potential metric is how many ready now leaders do you have in the wing? So I'm, I'm using that only to illustrate their infinite number of, of metrics that you could use. But we think if, if you want to stay on validate the, the efficacy of this process, you're gonna need to measure it. I mean, what's important in your life in business that you don't really measure. Yeah. Right. You're not gonna, you're not gonna quit looking at your bank statement. You're not gonna stop looking at your P and L if you're in business, well, you said you gotta measure it. It's important, customer satisfaction, you know, whatever turnover, retention, we look at those things, cuz it's important, then you wanna steward it well. So, and then the final is that you have to model it. If the existing leaders don't model the behaviors that you're advocating, you're just dead in the water. You you'll never create a leadership culture because that erodes trust and credibility, not just in your leadership point of view, but in your leaders.

Mark Miller ([16:02](#)):

So you gotta define it. You gotta teach it, you gotta practice it. You gotta measure it and you gotta model it and that'll help you create a leadership culture. Now, if you want a deep dive on that I wrote a book on that called leaders made here. And let me say a word about books because books may come up a couple times here. Yeah. in this talk, I've given away all the profits that I've received for the last 20 years. And that is my plan going forward. So it gives me a little more freedom to say, Hey, this might help you. It's not a side hustle. Chick-Fil-A pays my salary. And I'm very thankful for that. And so we're able to create resources, that'll serve the world. And then if we sell resources, we get to serve the world by giving that money away.

Doug Smith ([16:47](#)):

Amazing. I'm just outta curiosity. What are some of your classes that you give to, what are you passionate about?

Mark Miller ([16:53](#)):

Goodness gracious. I, this might shock you. I give it to several global leadership organizations. Wow. I think everything rises and falls on leadership. Come on. And, and so my wife and I do that, we support a large aids relief organization in east Africa. We support a long standing organization in China that works with orphans and widows. And so we've just got several tentacles out there where we, where we give those, give those funds.

Doug Smith ([17:27](#)):

Yeah. Mark. One thing that you mentioned that I, I, I'm curious about, you talked about emerging leaders and you, it sounded like you have a system. I think you said ready now, ready? One to three years, three to five years. How do, how do you quantify that? Or how do you define, you know, a, a emerging leaders readiness. I'm just curious what those categories are and, and what are the characteristics of them?

Mark Miller ([17:46](#)):

Well, so let me, let me again, put a on this, cuz we're having a short conversation about a huge topic. We have changed this several times over the last 20 years because we're always trying to make it better. But to your specific question, it is a qualitative assessment primarily, but we want it to be behaviorally grounded. So we do leadership reviews every year of existing current leaders in place. And so, and we do this at the leadership team level. And so a leadership team will sit and talk about their leaders. And so somebody you'll think, say, I think Pam is a four on a five point scale, and then we start asking questions. Well, okay. Why do you think she's a four? Why is she not a five? And then we'll say, you know, we've got a point of view on leadership. Give us an example of how she, how she sees the future. Give us an example of how she engages and develops a others. Give us an example of how she reinvents continuously. And, and one, this can go either way based on their answers. We go, man, you're, you're grading too hard. She sounds like a five. Or we may say, we don't think she's a four, cuz you gave us a blank stare on three of those. So we're gonna, we're gonna call collectively as a group, lower her rating. And so it's, it's subjective, behaviorally based.

Doug Smith ([19:21](#)):

So good. Anything else there?

Mark Miller ([19:24](#)):

That, well, there's a lot more there.

Doug Smith ([19:26](#)):

We Probably could go. So good. So you, you saw Chick-fil-A, you know, go from, I mean, I can't imagine of where it was 43 years ago when you started to where it is today. I'm just curious, were there two or three pivotal moments in the, the organization's history that you would say that moment was an absolute game changer? That moment, any of those you wanna share with us?

Mark Miller ([19:49](#)):

Yes and no. So, so I'll give you a pivotal moment. That was really important as a factor in our success, but not while we're successful. So the moment was in 1982, a business was really struggling. Interest rates were really high sales were soft. We were under some financial stress and strain. We just built a, a new headquarters building and our executive committee went off to try and create the plan, right? The recovery plan. How are we gonna get things back on track? I mean, some you you're too young to remember this interest rates were over 20%. That's crazy. I mean, it was a crazy time in America. And so the executive committee went off to figure out what's the plan. And at that meeting, somebody asked the, the seemingly simple question, why are we doing all this?

Doug Smith ([20:59](#)):

Hmm.

Mark Miller ([21:00](#)):

Which led to a very lengthy, lengthy discussion. And I, out of that came our corporate purpose. And so they came back after this two or three day retreat with a single statement that I think was one of those defining moments. They said, look, we're not sure what the future holds, but we needed to be really clear on why we're doing what we're doing. And what they came back with is our corporate purpose is to glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that's entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on everyone who comes in contact with Chick-fil-A and they said, we'll have to figure the rest of it out. So it's, it's really, it was the forerunner to Simon Sinek, start with why these guys in 1982 said, we need to get real clarity on why we're doing this. And so that was a defining moment, but here's why I think we've been successful.

Mark Miller ([21:56](#)):

And many in your audience will be familiar with Jim Collins. He's a friend of ours spoken at our events on several occasions. And we've had our senior leaders visit with him out in Boulder, just a, a great guy. And he talks about the flywheel, the reason that we've been successful, it, it's every single push by every team member and every operator in every restaurant every day, you combine that with every push by every corporate staff member every day. And this thing has just, it's just gained momentum and it's just gained speed. And I, I think it would be it'd be wrong to say it was this push or that push. Now I think the corporate purpose was a big push, but there've been millions of pushes. We're go, our team members are gonna serve millions of guests today, millions of customers today. And they're gonna do it with honor dignity and respect. And every one of those pushes that flywheel. And so I think that's why we're successful is, is we're we're pushing the flywheel every single day.

Doug Smith ([23:10](#)):

This fun question just came to my mind as your show that I don't know why 43 years of Chick-fil-A. If you had to make an estimate of how many Chick-fil-A sandwiches you've consumed in 43 years, what would you throw? What would you throw that number at?

Mark Miller ([23:23](#)):

Oh man, give me a calculator. I've eaten a lot of 'em because one of my responsibilities during that season, I already mentioned that we started the quality department. And we were the first ones to establish our quality requirements for the restaurants. And so we tasted a lot of chicken sandwiches doing that. And then I was also a director in field operations, working with business consultants and operators. And we just said, every time we're in a restaurant, we're gonna eat food. Even if we're not going there to eat food, because we think it's the right thing to do. We're in the restaurant business. Right. And so pretty much every two Chick-fil-A restaurant I've been in almost for 43 years, I eat food.

Doug Smith ([24:10](#)):

That's beautiful. You got to spend time with Truett Cathy employee number, you know, 16. I'm just curious, you know, legendary leader, there's a lot of legendary leaders in your organization. What are the top two or three things you've learned from his life in and business career?

Mark Miller ([24:25](#)):

Wow. I think generosity, not many, some people may know this about Truett, but I mean, he, he didn't, he didn't give for show. In fact, nobody knows how much money he's given away in his lifetime, but he, I believe was the most generous person I've ever met. Wow. And that rubs off on you. And I think I'm more generous today because I had somebody I really loved and respected who modeled that for me and in countless ways, countless ways, not just with his money, but with his time and his attention. His in, in the early years I worked with Truett more than I did in the latter years. But even into his nineties, when he and I would interact, he would ask about my family and he, he had ask about 'em by name. Wow. And at that point we had thousands of employees, right.

Mark Miller ([25:26](#)):

It's like, so just very generous, very generous. So that that'd be the first thing. I think the other thing is we talk about the fact that the best leaders value, results and relationships, and that, that creates in many situations, some tension it again, going back to Jim Colin, he talks about the genius of the, and if you can find things that appear to be in conflict and embrace, 'em both, there's real power there's energy, even in the friction. And Truett is the best leader I've ever known at valuing results and relationships. He's gonna ask me about my family. And he expected me to do really good work.

Doug Smith ([26:10](#)):

Wow.

Mark Miller ([26:11](#)):

I mean, he had there, there were just many, many examples over the years where he valued results and relationships. A lot of leaders fall into this trap and, and they defer to their natural bias because most leaders have a natural bias. They're either more results oriented or more relationship oriented and Truett have had a, a, a bias, but he valued both. And that's what we encourage our leaders to do independent of your bias, the best leaders, value, results, and relationships, and Truett was a master at that.

Doug Smith ([26:43](#)):

That's beautiful. I wanna dive into your book, smart leadership. So you've written many, many books as you mentioned, why'd you write this and what do you want leaders to get out of it?

Mark Miller ([26:52](#)):

Wow. Okay. There, people have often asked me, I'm going, I'm gonna give you a question that you didn't ask that people often ask getting into this. Yeah. People say, what do all these books have in common? Because by the way, this one is different. If anybody has read any of my previous books, they've all been fables. This is more, this is a traditional leadership book. I've got a new publisher, they wanted a traditional book. And I said, I'll try right. We'll just call it an experiment. But all the books have one thing in common. They're all based on need. We do our very best to identify current or near term need because you have to start a book project oftentimes several years in advance. So it's a little bit about where do we think the puck is going? And then I have to be honest, sometimes it's do we think the puck should go as we try to you know, practice a little thought leadership here, but this book came as as many, many of the others out of this realization that more and more leaders appeared to be struggling, struggling mightily.

Mark Miller ([28:04](#)):

And this was pre pandemic. And we said, what could we do to serve leaders who are struggling? So there's an important distinction. We don't need to camp out here, but somebody said, well, this book teach me to lead. I said, Nope, this book's for lit.

Doug Smith ([28:20](#)):

Yeah.

Mark Miller ([28:21](#)):

They said, really? I see, I got a bunch of books. That'll teach it a lead. This is for a leader. Who's struggling. Think about a pitcher, a major league pitcher. Who's having trouble hitting the strike zone. They don't need to learn to pitch. They gotta tweak something, adjust something, get their mind, right. They gotta find the strike zone again. Their value's already been established. Their role's already been established. They're not trying to decide, am I gonna be a catcher or an outfielder? They're a pitcher. So somebody's already paying 'em, but, but they're not, they're not performing at their, their highest level. And so we saw all these leaders struggling, really a lot of leaders, maybe I'm just hanging out with the wrong leaders, but I saw a bunch of leaders struggling. And so we started on this and then the pandemic came and you could say a hundred times as many leaders were struggling.

Mark Miller ([29:09](#)):

But we think that what we saw before the pandemic was just exacerbated by it. Leaders are struggling with what we call quick sand busyness, distractions, complexity, I mean, make your own list. In fact, I shared that list with, of some leaders early on and they said, well, yeah, I hear all that, but mine's different. I said, okay, what? What's holding you back. And they said, fear, fatigue. Aimlessness. So my point is, make a long list. Anything that's keeping you from reaching your full potential as a leader, anything that's impeding your impact. We're gonna put it into this one big toxic mix, and we're gonna call it quick sand. And so we said, okay, the research team came together and said, we're gonna figure like what's causing all this quick sand. Well, we quickly discovered that there are leaders that have this seeming knack for staying outta quick sand.

Mark Miller ([30:18](#)):

And if they get in it, they get out really quick. And so we said, let's go study them because we thought quick sand was the problem. And then what we ultimately decided is the leaders who stay in the quick sand are their own problem, because you can get out. I mean, you think about it the way we framed it. You really only have three choices when you get in quick sand. One is you can just give up, you can just quit. And I think that's a big part of this great resignation. We're hearing about a lot of people just saying, this is too hard and I'm quitting. Now, those that don't resign, they may actually die. Now, even if they don't physically die, their hopes and their dreams are extinguished in the quick sand, cuz it's just so hard. Well, the second group, which I think is the majority of leaders that I know they are trying to learn to swim in the quick sand.

Mark Miller ([31:10](#)):

Now you actually can do that, but there are two fundamental problems. One you're, you're never gonna win a gold medal swimming in quick sand, right? You can't lead at your highest level and it's exhausting. And if you do too long, you're probably gonna end up in that other category of a leader that just quits. So the only viable option is option three, at least from my perspective, we said, we've gotta figure out

how to help leaders get out of the quick sand. And so that's actually what the book is about. Helping leaders get to that solid, dry ground where they can do what they know how to do.

Doug Smith ([31:47](#)):

Yeah. And you lay out four choices in the book of, of how to get out, which I love. There's a few things I wanna focus on that I loved in the book. You did focus a lot on talking about the, the importance of investing in yourself through coaches and consultants. And you've talked about how you've done that personally and how, how life changing that's been to you. Why, why should leaders pay for coaching? Why leaders get consultants in their life in business to help them get out

Mark Miller ([32:08](#)):

Quick hand. So this thank you. That's a great question. This goes to that first choice. Yeah. Which is to confront reality. And the truth is it's hard to confront reality. It's sometimes hard to discern reality cuz we're too close to it. Right? And we're in quick sand. And so fresh eyes is the concept. As we talk about it in the book and there are a lot of ways you can do that. Including coaches, consultants peer groups, I'm, I'm in a group that's been meeting for 20, I guess 23 years now, twice a month. Wow. Talking about leadership every other Monday night for three hours. And we're, we're doing that Monday night again. And so any number of ways, I don't know if I mentioned mentors, coaches, consultants, mentors, peer groups, a lot of ways you can do this, but these are men and women who can see things that you can't see and are willing to tell you, they may or may not have the answers, but think about great athletes, great musicians, men and women at the top of their game, they have coaches, coaches can see things you can't see.

Mark Miller ([33:17](#)):

It's hard for an NBA player. See their form when they're shooting a free throw. But, but a coach can see that and say, Hey, that elbow is starting to move up a little bit. That's why you're pulling to the left. Oh thanks coach boom. Here we go. So they can add value that it's just really hard to do for yourself.

Doug Smith ([33:35](#)):

Yeah. Along those lines, you, you mentioned mentors and you know, I'm so grateful for mentors. I had earlier on in my journey, they would bring in leaders from the community to share leadership with us. And they'd say, Hey, you know, if you heard mark today and you connected with him, you should ask him out to coffee, ask him to mentor you. And, and you actually lay out this process in your book. When I was reading, I'm like, yes, every leader needs to read this cuz this is how you connect with people. And you shared a story about talking. There's a section on talking to strangers and I, I believe his name's Dr. De bono. Can you just talk about what is your approach? And again, you have a bigger platform now, but throughout your career, what has been your approach to pursuing mentorship and, and even conversations with leaders that you maybe didn't think you can get a conversation with?

Mark Miller ([34:11](#)):

Yeah. So I think for me, those may be two slightly different things. So let me take 'em one at a time for a mentor, I think a lot of people that don't have a mentor they've, they've set their sites too high and they want the best in the world at something that's the first problem. They've also set their sites too high because they want somebody to help them with their fitness, their faith, their finances, their family, their career, and their education and their study methods. It's like, no, no. So you aim too high and you aim too broad. So what I tell folks to do is find somebody that's a little bit further ahead than you are.

That's the, and, and they're willing to help you in a specific area, which is why you may need several mentors in your life at any given time.

Mark Miller ([34:58](#)):

And I think that's fine again, the, the man or woman that can do all of that. I, I don't even know if they exist. So I encourage people don't aim too high and, and focus what, what you want to learn and, and the area in which you want to grow. Now, the last part of that is I do know people, people I know in love, thought leaders who say a mentoring relationship up as a lifetime relationship. Yeah. I, I don't set the bar that high either. I'll ask somebody if I can buy their lunch or I can buy their dinner. And if there's some chemistry there and if there's some connection there, I'd say, Hey, would it be okay if we had another meeting?

Mark Miller ([35:41](#)):

And, and it can literally go just like that. Now you may have long term relationships with these folks. I've I had one mentor for 20 years till he passed away. And that's great, but I've had many, many other mentors that might be a meeting or meetings or six meetings, because see, at some point you're gonna learn what you need from that mentor. And you're probably gonna need another mentor. Same is true of a, a paid coach. I've had paid coaches that I might work with for a while. And at some point they start recycling their content and it's like, okay, I need a new coach. I need, I need to go to another level. I think they, this guy's giving me all these guide and that's fine. And it was, it was mutually beneficial. So I, I don't aim too high. I don't think too broadly.

Mark Miller ([36:27](#)):

And I don't think long term on the mentoring side, on the conversations with strangers. I just think you gotta be bold and be prepared for them to say no. And it's okay. And one of the, one of the things I've done over the years just as a, as a learning methodology is to go to conferences. And I am all about approaching a speaker after they speak and say, can I buy your lunch? Can I buy your dinner? You referenced Dr. Edward de bono that I, that I talk, talk about in the book for those that don't know him at the time he had written 76 books on creativity. He is the world's leader thought leader on the topic of creativity. I'd read several of his books. I taught some of his content. He spoke at this event and I said, Hey, can I buy your breakfast, lunch or dinner while you're in town? And he said, let's go eat. Right, right now.

Doug Smith ([37:23](#)):

Fantastic.

Mark Miller ([37:23](#)):

And we had about a, I don't know, two hour, two and a half hour conversation over lunch. And it cost me a sandwich.

Doug Smith ([37:30](#)):

Wow. A Chick-fil-A sandwich. But I

Mark Miller ([37:32](#)):

Hadn't ask him if I hadn't asked him it would the answer would've been no.

Doug Smith ([37:35](#)):

Yeah. Was it a Chick-fil-A sandwich?

Mark Miller ([37:37](#)):

It was not.

Doug Smith ([37:39](#)):

Okay. Okay. Just thought, I'd see. That would make

Mark Miller ([37:44](#)):

Better, but it was

Doug Smith ([37:44](#)):

Not. Yeah. One of the, the quick send traps that you, you said leaders are finding themselves in is, is they're too busy and they don't have any margin of their life. And, and you talk, you have a whole section on margin. Can you talk about margin in your life? And, and you, you have library trips, I believe. Can you talk a little bit about that and, and what that process is meant to you?

Mark Miller ([38:02](#)):

Yeah. So you might, you might make the case that this was one of the insights from a couple of years of research. I mean, I, I like to think there were several, but we didn't walk into this thinking that one of the keys to leadership effectiveness is margin. And it was a screaming in the literature and the interviews. It was just screaming at us. It's like, no, no, this is a huge, huge deal. And so, as I began to socialize that I literally had leaders look at me like I was crazy. And a couple of 'em told me I was crazy. And you can, and, and that makes sense. I mean, I am crazy, but if you're in quick sand and somebody says, you need margin in your life, they're gonna think you're a fool. And one person articulated it like this. And they said, I don't have time for a vacation. Or that flipped the light bulb on, in my head. Okay. I've not communicated. Well, I said, I don't know if you need a vacation or not, and you may need one. I said, I'm not talking about margin as a vacation. I'm talking about margin as a leadership discipline. And he said, well, what does that mean? I said, okay, when do you, per purposefully, purposefully have time to reflect, to assess, to think, to create and to plan.

Mark Miller ([39:31](#)):

And he looked at me like, well, I said, I think I've got my answer, but how do you lead at the highest level, if you don't have time to reflect, to assess, to think, to create and to plan. Cause who do you, think's doing that? Your team's probably not doing that. Cuz if you're in quick sand, you probably drug them in there too. Somebody's gotta get out. And, and so people say, well, how much, how much time do I need? So I don't know. I, I mean, I really don't know. I will say this, the bigger your dreams, the more responsibility you have, the bigger, your challenges, the bigger your problems. The more time you need in margin. Talk to one guy when he got promoted it to the pre be the president of his company, he doubled the amount of margin in his life. Wow. He said, I felt like I had no choice.

Mark Miller ([40:27](#)):

So people don't, people think it's extracurricular when it is actually core it's core. And so something that it makes a lot of sense. If you've done it, if you've not done it, it sounds insane. And so I encourage

leaders find two hours next week. I say, how do you know I need two hours? I, I don't know that you need two hours. You may need two days. You may need 20 minutes, find two hours next week, put it on your calendar as a meeting with me. So when somebody else wants that time, you look at your calendar and go, oh no, I'm sorry. I've got a meeting. And in that time, pick a topic, pick a challenge, pick a problem, reflect, assess, think, create, and land on how you can better address that opportunity, that issue, or that problem. And I believe you'll find that it becomes your most valuable time every week as a leader will be time that you spend alone. And this goes back throughout history, thousands of years there case study after case study, after case study, if you start looking into the lives of great leaders, I, I haven't found one yet that didn't have margin as a personal dis

Doug Smith ([41:55](#)):

Well, leaders of loving this interview. I'm sure you are too. And again, the book is smart leadership. If you don't have a copy of this, get it. And really, if you've never read Mark's books or taken your leadership team through Mark's books, can't encourage it enough. I wanna move into just some fun questions, lightning round questions before we wrap up and I'm curious, talking, speaking of books, you've written multiple books. Anytime I meet an author, is that success like you have? I, I would just ask, what advice do you have for aspiring authors?

Mark Miller ([42:21](#)):

Well, it's, it's really simple and I've given it to hundreds of aspiring authors and I'm not sure any of them have appreciated it. So I'm just gonna warn you. You gotta get a first draft And, and it it's gonna be, so don't, don't worry about it being awful. The first draft's always awful, but until you get a first draft, you don't have anything.

Speaker 4 ([42:43](#)):

Hmm.

Mark Miller ([42:44](#)):

Maybe you can call it a dream. I tell authors, get a first draft. I'll be writing and telling myself this is awful. And I keep writing. So fun. One fun story about that. Yeah. When I did my first book, 20 years ago, I gave the first draft to my wife And said, take a look. And so first thing she said is this is not half as bad as I thought it would be. She's got the gift, she's got the gift of encouragement. And then the set thing she said is shouldn't you have used some punctuation.

Mark Miller ([43:21](#)):

And I said, that will be the second draft. And I gave her a red marker. And I said, you put in all the punctuation and we'll add it. I don't even put punctuation in a first draft. Wow. I mean, not ex I mean, not much, cuz I'm trying to get stuff on the paper. And I like you. I have talked to scores and scores of authors over the last 30 years and I always ask 'em and the good ones all say, say that to me. They say, you gotta get a first draft. You gotta get a first draft. It doesn't, it it's gonna be bad if you, if you hold your standards too high, you you'll may never finish thing trying to get it right. And trying to get it perfected is get a first draft.

Doug Smith ([44:03](#)):

So I wanna move into the lightning round, a bunch of fun questions that I ask in every interview. And the first is what's the best advice you've received and who gave it to you ever received?

Mark Miller ([44:13](#)):

Okay. Have I got time for a short story real quick, go for it. Short story about that.

Mark Miller ([44:20](#)):

Some people in your audience will have, will have done a tweet chat. I didn't know what a tweet chat was. And so they were explaining it to me. This is for a, a prior book. They said it's like talking to the whole world at one time on Twitter. And I went, well, that sounds fun. And so for those that don't know how it works is there's a host and they put out a question and I answer it. And for five minutes, the Twitter sphere responds to my answer and everybody else's questions. And then you get your second question, five minutes, third, and this goes for an hour. Wow. And things were going by so fast on the screen. It was, it was, it was making my head explode. And we got to the last question and somebody said, what's the best leadership advice you ever received? So I was telling my mom this at the time she was to 80 and she knew this much about Twitter. And she said, at least you had 125 words to respond. And I said, no, mom, that would be characters, not words. And she said, well, that was probably pretty hard. And I said, yeah, it was. And here's what I tweeted that day in the midst of my tweet chat leadership advice I ever received above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.

Speaker 5 ([45:40](#)):

Wow.

Mark Miller ([45:41](#)):

And somebody said, that sounds really good. And I said, well, the wisest man ever lived said that Solomon said that in Proverbs, but I think that's the best leadership advice I've ever received because most leaders don't fail for lack of skills. It's it's leadership character that trips up most leaders. So you gotta guard your heart.

Doug Smith ([46:03](#)):

If you could put a, a, a quote on a billboard for everyone to, to read, what would it say

Mark Miller ([46:08](#)):

Great leaders serve?

Doug Smith ([46:11](#)):

What's the best purchase you've made in last year for a hundred dollars or less?

Mark Miller ([46:18](#)):

Two weeks ago, I bought a \$10 plastic sled that I went sledding with my grandkids.

Doug Smith ([46:30](#)):

Aw, man, that must have been awesome. I, I love seeing grandpas. I, I, I have three kids and watching my dad's side, he's 73 watching him side ride there's there's nothing greater. So other, other than your own, you know, do you have one or two books that dramatically impacted your life that you'd recommend all leaders read?

Mark Miller ([46:51](#)):

Yes. the effective executive my Peter Drucker. In fact, I referenced that in the introduction of smart leadership. And I said, if you've not read Drucker's book, you should put mine down and go read his, it it's kind of the source of denial for, for leadership material, even though he wrote it 50 years ago. So that, that's always my first recommendation, a newer book that is not particularly targeted to leaders that I really love is Brendan Bruce shards book, high performance habits. And it certainly applies to leaders, but it also applies to humans. And I love that book. That that's a really good lot of practical ideas, principle based, lot of research behind it. So I'm a fan of high performance habits.

Doug Smith ([47:40](#)):

What's your greatest leadership pet pee pet peeve

Mark Miller ([47:45](#)):

Effort.

Doug Smith ([47:48](#)):

Say more about that. Yeah,

Mark Miller ([47:49](#)):

I do. We, we, we don't control there's so many times in our lives. We actually don't control the outcomes. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. Sometimes it goes right. Sometimes it goes wrong sometimes something you're, you're experimenting with work, sometimes your prototype fails. So we don't, we don't always control those things, but we, we always control our effort and I just, I just want people to be a hundred percent for me that's a stewardship issue.

Doug Smith ([48:20](#)):

Yeah. you could spend time with a lot of high quality leaders. I'm just curious. Do you have a go-to question or two that you always ask when you get a meeting with a leader You wanna learn from? Yeah,

Mark Miller ([48:32](#)):

Well, I've been collecting questions a long time and in fact there's a question, there's a chapter in the book called ask don't tell. And so I'm a huge fan of questions. I, I really

Mark Miller ([48:47](#)):

Yeah, I, I like to think that I'm gonna customize my list questions when I'm gonna be with a particular leader, but if by random chance and surprise I'm with a leader one of the things I'm gonna ask them is what were the books that were most influential in their formation as a leader? I mean, some people like to say, what do you read eating now? And I think that's interesting, but if somebody's been reading books for 20 or 30 years, I I'm not as concerned about what they're reading now, but which books had the greatest influence and impact on them. And so, so that, that's probably a pretty safe if I've got time for just a few questions that, that, that is gonna be one of them.

Doug Smith ([49:37](#)):

Yeah. Last few questions. If you could go back to your, if you could have coffee with yourself at any age that you think would've made a significant impact, if you could sit down with yourself and tell yourself something at that age, what age would it be? And what would you tell that mark?

Mark Miller ([50:01](#)):

I'm gonna, this is, this is a good question, but I'm gonna tell you something that I was told when I was young, that made all the difference.

Doug Smith ([50:11](#)):

Let's

Mark Miller ([50:11](#)):

Go. And I was probably 19. And it's your capacity to grow, determines your capacity to lead.

Speaker 5 ([50:23](#)):

Hmm.

Mark Miller ([50:24](#)):

Cause that was a candidate to put on the billboard. Right. And, and here's why that's relevant to me. I can't speak to your audience. I was sharing this story with someone one day that, that statement, and they said, well, that's probably easy for you. And I said, well, tell me what you mean by that. And why, and I don't know if members of your audience are familiar with strength finders, where you take this test and this assessment, and it tells you all the things you're good at. Well, one of the 34 is learner. And so this person said, I bet you're a learner and it's surely in your top five. So this is easy for you, right? Your capacity to grow, determines your capacity to lead said, no, I don't. I don't think learner is in my top 30. They said, that's odd. They said, you act like a learner. I said, well, thanks. I made a choice.

Doug Smith ([51:16](#)):

Wow.

Mark Miller ([51:17](#)):

Over 40 years ago, when somebody explained to me, if you want more influence, if you want more opportunity, if you want more impact, you have to choose lifelong learning. And I remember thinking, so that's how the world works. Cause my parents wish I'd had decided that much earlier. I was a lousy student, right? I mean, I just was. But when I said, I want influence, I want opportunity. I want impact. I want responsibility. So I said, I'm gonna be a lifelong learner. Now I'd much rather listen to the radio in the car than a podcast or a book. But I made a choice. Cause the way the world works, I, I, I believed it. Then I believe it more. Now your capacity to grow, determines your capacity to lead. So anytime I get a chance to talk to young leaders, I want them to hear that. And last thought on that somebody even asked me this point blank. They said, so you're telling me if I'm a learner, I'm gonna be promoted. I said, absolutely not.

Doug Smith ([52:19](#)):

Hmm.

Mark Miller ([52:20](#)):

We control our readiness. Wow. Our organizations control our opportunity. It's back to that effort thing. Now, if you're in an organization and you can't get opportunity, you've got another choice to make. Do I need to go to a different organization to get opportunity?

Doug Smith ([52:37](#)):

Yeah.

Mark Miller ([52:39](#)):

But it's like the kid on the bench, if the coach doesn't think he or she is ready, they're not gonna put 'em in the game. So that's a message I try to share with young people, every chance I get and, and old people, because I don't think it's, or too late to say, I'm gonna commit to lifelong learning. And as soon as you do, you're on the path to greater influence and greater impact.

Doug Smith ([53:01](#)):

Yeah. And, and last question would just be on the other end of your life. You know, what do you want your legacy to be? What do you want Mark Miller to be remembered for? And then after you answer that you can just close out with any, any advice that you wanna leave leaders with today.

Mark Miller ([53:15](#)):

Well, I actually hope that when I get to the end of my journey, that those that knew me well will say that I was a good steward, that I was a steward of the opportunity. I was a steward of the influence. I was a steward of the resources. I was a steward of the ideas. Yeah, I think that's a great privilege that we have to, to, to use the thing that have been entrusted to us. And so that's, that's what I'm trying to do.

Doug Smith ([53:52](#)):

Anything else?

Mark Miller ([53:53](#)):

Far as a word yeah. Do what,

Doug Smith ([53:56](#)):

Yep. That's what I was gonna say. Final word,

Mark Miller ([53:59](#)):

Final word. I would encourage listening to try and figure out how you can make a difference in your world because every leader can. Now sometimes leaders, myself included may become a bit discouraged because we have these grandiose plans and visions. And I think that's great. And I think we should, but sometimes we can lose sight of the changes we can make in our world in real time today and tomorrow. Hmm. Every leader has the capacity to change their world. You gotta get out of the quick sand to do it, but, but the choices that we've talked about, we talked about a couple of 'em today. They are your superpower. Yeah. And you can literally change the world.

Doug Smith ([54:55](#)):

Well, Mark, thank you for changing the world the way you have at Chick-fil-A and to leaders all over the world. Thank you for investing and me ingesting in this conversation and everyone that will listen to this and just keep making your mark it's a significant one. And it's been an honor to have a conversation with you today day.

Mark Miller ([55:11](#)):

Glad to be with you.

Doug Smith ([55:14](#)):

Well, Hey leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with mark. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes at l3leadership.org/312. Leader I always wanna challenge you that if you wanna 10 X to growth year, that you need to either launch or join an L3 leadership mastermind group, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last seven years. If you're unfamiliar with what they are, they're just simply groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together on a consistent basis for at least one year in order to help each other, grow, hold each other accountable, go after their goals together and to do life together. So if you're interested in learning more or about masterminds, go to l3leadership.org/masterminds.

Doug Smith ([55:55](#)):

And as always, I like to end every episode with a quote and I'll quote, Mark Miller today. I actually just Googled Mark Miller quote, and this came up and I thought it was so good. He said, if you don't demonstrate leadership character, your skills and your results will be discounted if not dismissed. So powerful leaders, we say it all the time here. Character development is the most important development. Well, I hope again, you enjoyed this episode and you are encouraged by it. Know that Laura and I love you. We believe in you and leader. We say it all the time, but do not quit. Keep leading the world needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.