

Doug Smith ([00:08](#)):

What's up, leader, and welcome to episode number 360 of the L3Leadership 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](#). We're also recording this episode live from the new [return.com](#) studio, which you'll hear more about in just a moment. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I am so glad that you're here, and I hope that you enjoy our content and become a subscriber. Know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you're subscribed there as well at L3 Leadership. And as always, if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's made an impact on your life, it would mean the world to me.

Doug Smith ([00:47](#)):

If you leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify, or whatever app you listen to podcast through, that really does help us to reach more leaders, which is our whole goal here at L three Leadership. So thank you in advance for that. Well Leader In today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Al Lopez. If you're unfamiliar with Al, let me just tell you a little bit about him. Al is the co-founder and CEO of Best Christian Workplaces, which provide research-based measurement tools and strategic advisory services with a single vision to help Christian led organization set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world. At best, Christian Workplaces, Al has pioneered the broadest ever employee engagement survey of Christian workers. To date the survey has involved more than 1000 Christian led organizations with employees completing over 300,000 survey questionnaires.

Doug Smith ([01:32](#)):

And at Light of Life Rescue Mission where I work, uh, in my day job, we have used best Christian workplaces for 14 years. And this has been such a huge tool for our leadership team and our entire organization just as far as us actually being able to assess the, the engagement of our teams, uh, to actually be able to assess the health of our culture. It has been a game changer and we look forward to doing it every single year. Uh, if you're not using them as a tool, I really encourage you, and hopefully after you listen to this interview, you'll, you'll be prompted to. But really, I'm telling you leaders, this could be a game changer for your organization, so make sure that you check them out. And I would also say this, they are focused on Christian organizations, but I would say you could still benefit even if you're not a Christian organization, um, again, a Christian organization or not.

Doug Smith ([02:14](#)):

This will really give you an overall assessment of the health of your organization and culture. So I hope that you'll check it out. And throughout our conversation, you'll hear Al talk about how the assessment he created helps organizations assess, measure, and improve their health culture and engagement. You'll hear him talk about what factors play the biggest role in the health of an organization and his best tips on implementing the key factors that make up a flourishing organization. I think you're gonna love this interview with Al. But before we dive in, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast is sponsored by [BeratungAdvisors](#). The financial advisors at [Beratung Advisors](#) help educate and empower clients to make 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](#).

Doug Smith ([03:00](#)):

That's B E R A T U N G advisors.com. Securities and investment products and services offered through LPL Financial member of FINRA and SPIC, Beratung Advisors, LPLFinancial, and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also wanna thank our sponsor, Henne jewelers, they're a jeweler by my friend and mentor John Henne and my wife Laura. And I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an incredible experience. And not only do they have a 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 marriage, and we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out hennejewelers.com. And I also wanna thank our new sponsor, reiturn.com and leader. Let me just ask you this. Have you ever had an interest in investing in real estate?

Doug Smith ([03:42](#)):

Well, now for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit return.com to learn more. That's reiturn.com. Investing involves risk. Please consult a return offering circular if you're interested in investing. And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's my conversation with Al Lopuz. Hey, Al Lopuz. Uh, I've been looking forward to this for a long, long time. Uh, you created an organization called the Best Christian Workplace, and, uh, it's an organization that's helped us at, or the Rescue Mission. I work at Light of Life in Pittsburgh. Uh, we've been using the assessment tool that you've created, uh, for 14 years. I didn't know we were using it that long. We had a meeting earlier today and you informed me of that. And, uh, it's just been such a, a huge tool and I'll, I'll let you explain what it is, but yeah, why don't you give us a little background about, uh, best Christian workplace and, and what you all do.

Al Lopuz ([04:30](#)):

Well, first of all, Doug, let me say it's a really a pleasure to be here on the podcast. Thanks for inviting me, and yeah, luck. Look forward to our time together. Well, you know, best Christian Workplaces Institute, or as we call it, best Christian Workplaces. Uh, you know, I just love to tell the story of its creation. And, you know, I often describe it as divine providence called, and I answered the phone. And, uh, but, uh, we provide, uh, employee engagement, uh, and organizational culture consulting to Christian led organizations. So, you know, a little background, uh, you know, the r really, you know, and for, for leaders, the vision started for me in college soon after coming to Faith. And I was a member of a team of Christians ministering to high school students, uh, part of young life ministry. And what's, what really formed in my mind was the unity, the cohesion, the sense of common purpose, the love that we had for one another, and those that we served was really significant.

Al Lopuz ([05:32](#)):

And it was like nothing I had ever experienced in my life before that. And I loved how members of the body with different gifts were able to work together for a common purpose. And what was the outcome? Well, people were attracted to our group, and they would ask us, you know, you guys are different. What makes you different? And, and, uh, then they would say, I want what you have. And so I really experienced, uh, the, the attractive nature of a body of Christians that are flourishing working together. And so after graduating from Penn State, I heard the still small voice of God, uh, call me into Christian business. And for 30 years, I served, uh, in the world of human resources, mostly re human resource consulting and, and, uh, served a, served with a global human resource consulting firm for 21 of those years.

Al Lopuz ([06:23](#)):

And I experienced what that gave me a window into looking into so many different organizational cultures, hundreds of organizations, and some had great cultures and some not so much. And it really became an interest of mine to, to see, well, what are the unique factors that make good cultures versus those that aren't? And towards the end of, of that career, you know, I I started working with statewide business magazines in Washington and Oregon. Uh, I live in the Seattle area now. And, uh, they asked me to help determine who the best companies were to work for. And one of the services that we provided as a firm was, uh, an organizational, uh, engagement survey. So that helped me to kind of get some foundation and background as we worked with literally hundreds of companies from Boeing and Starbucks and those kinds of companies to even smaller ones, um, uh, back at that time.

Al Lopus ([07:19](#)):

But, you know, Doug, um, what happened was, uh, I read Bob Buford's book halftime when I was about 45, and I just felt God calling me to do something different. So at age 50, I took what was considered early retirement for my firm. And, but just a month before, um, I received a call from Helen Lee representing Christianity Today magazine, and she asked me if I could help them do a survey to determine who the best Christian workplaces were. And so in, in the fall of 2002, uh, we surveyed 87 organizations in April, 2003, now, 20 years ago. Uh, we identify the top 40 Christian workplaces in the cover story of Christianity today. And that was kind of the, the booming start of the best Christian workplaces. So now in 20 years, we've served over 1500 Christian organizations Wow. Including churches, Christian mission, parachurch organizations, Christian education and Christian led businesses. And it's just been a, a great experience. And so, so I think about much like my college experience, going back to that, our vision is that best, that is that Christian workplaces actually set the standard is the best, most effective places to work in the world. So that's a little bit of the, the background and kind of the, the, the vision of, uh, where we are now and how we got there. Yeah.

Doug Smith ([08:50](#)):

Yeah. I love that. Uh, I first heard of you, I know this was a big moment for your, for your company, but, uh, I always go to the Global Leadership Summit that Bill Hebel started for years, and, and I remember he actually did an entire talk on the impact, uh, of that your organization had on his through the, the, uh, assessment. And so can you talk about the assessment, what it is, what do you all measure, and how does that impact organizations?

Al Lopus ([09:12](#)):

Yeah, Doug, 2013 in August was when Bill spent 15 minutes talking about the, uh, transformation of their culture at Willow Creek. And then he talked about it again the next year, mentioning us both times. And, you know, when you have 120,000 Christian leaders, uh, hearing about the best Christian workplaces for the first time, that that made a big difference in our work. But what we did there, and what we do now is, uh, we have a, uh, an assessment tool, an employee engagement survey. It's 56 questions for Christian organizations. It covers a waterfront of topics. And, and we basically ask organizations to have their employees complete that survey. And we're able to then, based on that survey, uh, give them guidance on the, on the current health of their culture, but then also identify specific areas that, uh, that they're able to improve in. And what we've done is we've, we've, we've also, uh, worked with Seattle Pacific University's PhD program in industrial organizational psychology. So we have a sci scientific underpinning of the assessment. Hmm. And based on surveying hundreds of thousands of employees and Christian organizations we're, we are able to do, uh, through a factor analysis and identify eight keys that actually drive or boost employee engagement and wellbeing in

Christian workplaces. So, so, uh, and we've written a book about it, you know, the, the Road to Flourishing

Doug Smith ([10:48](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah. Phenomenal book. Yeah. Phenomenal book. Yeah. And, and so yeah, let's, let's talk about that because the book is basically, you know, the outcome of you doing this for 20 years and what you found, uh, actually creates an engaging and flourishing culture within an organization. So, I, I, you, you drop eight keys in the, or eight keys to flourishing in the book. Uh, I would love to talk about all of them, but yeah. Can you give a little more background into the key characteristics? Yeah.

Al Lopus ([11:14](#)):

So, so we, we kind of identified our, our dependent variable, our key, uh, flourish questions, and what are the keys that actually drive engagement in Christian led organizations? So there, there are eight of 'em, I'll just mention them. They're fantastic teams. They, they actually, it, it preaches as they say in churches because there's an acronym, um, you know, f fantastic teams I for life giving work, outstanding talent, uplifting growth, rewarding compensation, inspirational leadership, sustainable strategy, healthy communication. All of these are keys to employee engagement and to into flourishing workplaces, uh, in, in Christian organizations. And, and, you know, so we've also done a, a statistical analysis on which of these are, are most important. And, and it kind of varies by sector, but for most organizations, uh, inspirational leadership is the key, is the primary driver of, uh, of, uh, employee engagement in Christian workplaces. And I like to think of inspirational leadership as leadership. That's God, God breathe. That's the inspirational part, is it's God, breathe it. Uh, it, it includes Christian character competence and, uh, and, and clearly focuses on, on the integrity and trust that leaders, uh, are able to have and build in an organization.

Doug Smith ([12:34](#)):

Yeah. That's so interesting. And you know, we were talking a little bit earlier, so your data basically backs up, you know, the, the famous cliché John Maxwell, uh, quota that everything rises and falls on leadership. You found that to be true. I'm curious. You know, we live in a world where, you know, and, and, and Maxwell has even said things like this, you know, in the eighties it was all about management, and it went to, you know, one leader, and now it's much more of a team leadership. When you, when you say inspirational leadership for an organization, is it, is it the primary leader? Is it like, hey, the CEO, the executive director, or is it the leadership team? I'm just curious. I,

Al Lopus ([13:05](#)):

I would say it's the leadership team. So, you know, the definition of culture, the way I look at it, it's kind of the way we do things around here. And, you know, for a long time people realize, well, how, how things are done, uh, in an organization really is influenced by those that have the most authority now. Uh, so for smaller organizations, yeah, it might be just the, the senior leader, but for larger organizations, I mean, even even 30 to 50 employee, it's, it's, it's more of the team. And the team has the impact on the culture, uh, in an organization. So, so I'm, I'm generally, I'll say in particularly larger organizations, it's just not the top leader, but it's the, the leadership team working together to actually create the culture that exists. Whether it's a good culture or not so good culture, it's the leaders who are, are really influencing and creating it.

Doug Smith ([13:56](#)):

Yeah. That's so good. Um, I, I wanna go back to those characteristics in a moment, but a little bit more about the assessment, and I'll just share, you know, my experience with the leaders listening. Um, again, we've been doing this at Light of Life for 14 years. I've probably been involved with that process for, you know, 10 of those years. Um, but what I love about this one is it's anonymous, so it goes up to all staff. So, uh, I know a lot of times employees can actually fear giving feedback as, oh, what if, what if they know it's me? But it's completely anonymous. But then in the results, you can actually see a breakdown. Um, you can see a breakdown by departments, which I love. And again, it doesn't give up anybody as far as an individual, but you can see how each department is functioning, each team is functioning.

Doug Smith ([14:33](#)):

Uh, you can see how males, females, you have all these different demographics that really give you real key insight into what areas are really flourishing in your organization and those that aren't. And, uh, and as a tool, I just think that's, that's so, so powerful for a leadership team to actually, for me, it, it's a reality check, right? A leader's job is, is to define reality. And for me, this tool defines the reality of how, uh, your culture is actually doing. So I'm just curious, you know, um, <laugh>, there's, there's been times where we've been really pleased with the results. There's been other times where, you know, our heart sinks into our stomach and it's like, oh, man. Uh, can you, can you just share your experience with, uh, I think you share a story in the book that when you were interacting with the person, with the team, with the lowest score in history, can you talk about that and, and can organizations actually turn around a culture?

Al Lopus ([15:17](#)):

Yeah. So I love this story, and you're absolutely right. Uh, so this, it's a real organization. I, you know, I, I protect the innocent, they're, uh, <laugh>, uh, giving it a, uh, an anonymous name. But yeah, so this, this organization, they had two key leaders. We were at a conference, uh, I think it was a Christian Leadership Alliance conference. They, they said, you know, al we need some help with our culture. We know it's not good. And this was early on in the best Christian workplace, uh, experience. And so I said, we'd love to help you. Sure. So, so the way we do this is we do an employee engagement survey. We ask your employees to complete this synonymous survey, and then we'll talk with you about the results. And, and I got the results back and it was like, oh, no, <laugh>, this is not good <laugh>, this is bad <laugh>.

Al Lopus ([16:07](#)):

And I thought, oh, you know, then, then, you know, while I have the gift of exhortation, um, I also realize it's how you, you know, communicate such news that makes a difference. And, and, uh, so I'm talking with these two leaders, the executive vice president, and uh, uh, senior director of human resources. And I'm saying, okay, so, well, you're right. Um, you know, things are not very good. Oh, oh. And they were saying, yes, okay, well, we know that, you know, and I said, but they said, how bad is it? You know? And I said, well, you know, you're, you're clearly in the lower quartile of all organizations that we've surveyed. And, and kind of, I was just kind of laying that out as a, well, let's just see what their reaction is. Oh, oh, lower quartile. Well, yeah, that's not so good, but, but really, um, tell us now how bad is it? Well, I said, well, you're in the lower five percentile, <laugh> <laugh>, and then finally it's like, well, you're really one of the lowest scores in, uh, in the history of the survey. So

Doug Smith ([17:11](#)):

That's a fun day.

Al Lopus ([17:12](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So, so I was, so, I was so, um, you know, pleased that, uh, they took the news and they said, okay, well let's, let's do what needs to be done to change this? And so we did focus groups, uh, we call 'em discovery groups with all of the employees. We got the background information, and we started to put in place, um, you know, keys that would help improve the health of their culture. And, and this was a, you know, a, a toxic, uh, culture situation. And, and yet, um, you know, Doug, with coaching, they were able to move their culture forward. Now, the, the, now here we are, 18 years later, they have a flourishing workplace culture. Wow. And, and even with the, the same leaders. And I know that's, that's a, a key thought that, uh, that you're thinking about. Even with the same leaders, they were able to move that culture by putting things in place, uh, uh, and they were able to create a, uh, a, a really healthy culture within a couple of years.

Al Lopus ([18:17](#)):

And it does take time. I mean, it, it takes time because people are, especially if, if it's been a bad culture over a number of years, you know, to actually have employees believe that, that something positive is gonna happen, take some time. But they worked at it. They improved, uh, their communication patterns, they improved their strategy work, they improved their planning, they improved, um, uh, just a whole number of things that, uh, that improved their situation. So, yeah, that's, that, that, uh, is a, a warm story. And I just remember sitting at lunch, you know, three years later celebrating the, the improvement of their, uh, of their culture.

Doug Smith ([18:58](#)):

Well, yeah. And, and one kudos to you. Cuz without your tool and without you creating this, they would've never been aware, and the toxicity would've just continued. So, thank God for this tool, but kudos to them. I mean, the, the courage that it takes one to look reality in the face and say, this is reality. We have a toxic culture. I'm willing to change, but then two, to actually stick with it. Yeah. And, and that leads to my next question. I'm, I'm curious, these leaders were able to turn around the organization you previously mentioned, you know, inspirational leadership is, is more often than not the, the, the biggest factor in a flourishing culture. How often, when you see whether it's organizations or departments that are toxic or not doing well, when it comes to flourishing, how often does it just need, you just need a new leader in that position versus how often can leaders actually turn it around?

Al Lopus ([19:47](#)):

That's, uh, uh, yeah, that's an interesting question. And, and it's not an easy question. And so whenever, when you ever ask a consultant or a consultant says, that's an interesting question, that usually means the question is better than the answer. But, uh, now here's, here's what we found. Um, you know, we find it's really all about the level of trust that a leader has. So we work with new leaders, and so they're building trust. We work with leaders who want to change and can change so they can build trust, and then some leaders must leave. And that's when, uh, trust cannot be rebuilt with the team that they're leading. And, uh, how often is that? You know, it's, it's not, and, you know, again, we can look at results and, and, um, we can say, well, this team is not doing well. But the first thing is not to say that's because of bad leadership.

Al Lopus ([20:51](#)):

Uh, really you can dig in and find, well, you know, there's misperceptions, there's misunderstandings, there's whatever, you know, is causing some, uh, some unhealth in that area. But, uh, but that's the first

place that, uh, we encourage organizations to really look at, okay, so maybe the leader needs some help and some guidance. They have the core capabilities and competencies to lead, but they just need some tools to help them do that. Um, so that's the first place we start. And then, and then, yes, <laugh>, unfortunately, we've seen many situations where, uh, a leader has broken trust to the degree that, uh, and maybe they don't have the competence to, uh, to step forward. And that's, yes. Uh, time for the leader to really think about a new, a new situation.

Doug Smith ([21:41](#)):

Well, as a consultant, I would say that answer was better than the question. Uh, I didn't know where you were gonna go with that. So, and, and I love that. I was, I was telling you how my, my mentor and our executive director Drell was always encouraging me, you know, be curious mm-hmm. <affirmative>, and I think you said, you know, the group that, that turned around their organization, they had study groups. I mean, it just sounds like they dove in and said, yeah, let's really hear, let's be curious and really see what the core issues are. And it sounds like clearly they were able to serve. So I think rather than just jumping into action based on assumption, coming with a, a, a, um, a posture of humility. Yeah. And curiosity can go a really long way.

Al Lopus ([22:17](#)):

And also, another, I'll just say to your listeners, Doug, um, appreciative inquiry is a tool that we've adopted. And, and that's where we're asking questions in a positive future-oriented way. There's a whole science, uh, David Cooper, Cooper writer up in Cleveland with, uh, uh, the university there and, uh, has created that. And, and we craft our questions, uh, using the appreciative inquiry re, um, approach that case Western Reserve. And, and that helps get at, people don't want to be, um, addressed, uh, with negativity. They, they wanna have hope and moving forward. So we ask positive forward, uh, leaning questions because the question and the quality, the question will lead you going forward, or it will lead you going down into, into unhealth. So asking positive forward questions is, uh, is the approach we take.

Doug Smith ([23:18](#)):

So good. Um, I just wanna, I wanna wrap up a little bit about the assessment mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, and ask you a question. So, uh, for those listening, and again, really encourage you to check out best Christian workplaces, just Google them, you'll find them, uh, if you're interested in this, and again, if you wanna email me at Doug Smith at L three leadership, I can connect you with, with Alan as team. Um, but basically, and again, correct me if I'm wrong, but basically you get a score back from the, the, the actual assessments, and then there's a score of a one to five basis. And if you get a four above, you're certified Yeah. As the best Christian workplace. If you have a 4.25 or above, you're actually flourishing, which, uh, we've never gotten. We've been best Christian workplace for a long time, so it's like that is, I cannot wait. We're, we'll take you out al and celebrate when we hit that 4.25. There we go. That, that's what you measure. And so, you know, you can always see where you are year to year, which I love. But one thing it all you also measure is employee engagement. Can you talk a little bit about that? We talked about the flourishing culture, and we'll get back into that, but how do you measure employee engagement, and why is that important?

Al Lopus ([24:15](#)):

So, so, you know, the, the science around this has, uh, has really transitioned, uh, used to be morale, you know, what's, what's the morale of the staff? And then it got to be, well, how satisfied is the staff?

And, and now the science has come to engagement, and we kind of think of engagement as the level of energy and passion that people bring to their work. You know, are they bringing their whole selves to work? And so, so if people are bringing passion and energy to their jobs and to their work, we believe that they're engaged. And when you've got, you know, a lot of engaged employees, you're gonna, you're going to make great pro progress, uh, as an organization. So, so, uh, the way, you know, there's, we ask four bottom line questions. We call them engagement indicators. You know, what I recommend my workplace to others is a great place to work when my, am I, you know, satisfied or proud to work in the organization, uh, do I think it's a, a great workplace?

Al Lopus ([25:17](#)):

And am I willing to put in the energy, extra energy beyond, uh, my normal job to make sure the organization's successful? So, I mean, those are kind of core questions that we ask that, that get at engagement. And then of course, the rest of the questions help define, these are the drivers that, that create overall engagement. You know, I, I, you know, Doug, we've, we've talked a lot about, uh, in the past, the great resignation, you know, the post post covid great resignation. Uh, there's been even our discussion earlier today about turnover and so on. But I, I believe that the, the antidote to the great resignation, to the high levels of turnover that organizations face is actually a flourishing workplace culture. And, and the financial impact, reducing the level of churn and turnover in Christian workplaces is huge. And, um, and so, um, the culture is the answer. And having a flourishing workplace culture will, will, uh, improve the health of your culture.

Doug Smith ([26:18](#)):

Yeah. And last thing, last thing I just wanna throw out there on the, the assessment. I, I don't know how recently you added this, but you've also added, uh, questions in the assessment around diversity, equity, and inclusion as well, and how much your organization values that, which obviously is very, very important as well. Can you talk about that at all, and how that's worked out?

Al Lopus ([26:34](#)):

You know, absolutely. Because, you know, again, what, what is one of the biggest issues that we have in the body of Christ and in our country, and that is the whole diversity issue, are, are we, and I've just done a podcast myself on, on, on, you know, racial equity and, and, um, reconciliation. And, and I believe, again, in the body of Christ, we should have the best relationships across, uh, genders, across races. Uh, and, and I believe in my bones, you know, and, and again, uh, we're all given gifts, uh, spiritual gifts, skills, unique, uh, background and experiences that it's the body of Christ that should be the, on the front line of, of organizations that work in a diverse, um, uh, in a diverse way. I also believe cor in my bones that it's diversity that brings, uh, innovation and, and effectiveness as an organization.

Al Lopus ([27:39](#)):

You know, I, uh, you know, like you, I've, I've done all of the, the Myers Briggs and the Enneagrams and all of these, and, uh, and I remember sitting around a room, uh, actually in my previous role as a consulting leader. And, and everybody was kind of the same as me. And I'm, I realized I'm just, we're only looking at things from a very, very narrow angle. And if we're gonna really be effective, we need a broad range, a diverse view of, of, uh, of views. And when, when I've seen over and over again when we have diversity, we bring diversity to the workplace, then we we're able to create more effective solutions to the problems we face.

Doug Smith ([28:22](#)):

Yeah. Well, thank you for doing that. Um, before we go into the lightning round, I want to kind of go through the road to flourishing and just go through those eight characteristics. And, you know, you said you've been able to serve 1500 organizations, which is incredible, and obviously your team has as well. But you know, I'm sure you've gotten to see all kind of, uh, ways that flourishing organizations flourish in each of these categories. So I'm just, you know, as we go through these, if I say, you know, fantastic teams, I would just love to hear you say here, you know, here's something I've seen that makes up fantastic teams Yeah. Or that I've seen a great organization do. Um, and so let's just start with that one, fantastic teams. What have you seen that's, uh, really, really great out there? Well,

Al Lopus ([29:00](#)):

Uh, again, when teams are working together and they're able to work across departments, and they're able to resolve conflict, and they, they focus on excellence. These are, these are fantastic teams. I mean, uh, don't we all wanna be on a team like that? So that's, that's what I think about fantastic teams

Doug Smith ([29:16](#)):

Life giving work.

Al Lopus ([29:18](#)):

Yeah. So the, the, what people wanna do, what Gen X, gen, gen Z, you know, people want work that's gonna help give them life, that meaning and purpose in their jobs. You know, where they, they're doing work that that's designed for them, you know, where their gifts, their skills, are able to actually be part of the work they're doing, where they're in an environment where there's some fun and, uh, where, uh, they're able to exercise the gifts that they're given without, uh, micromanagement. So life giving work is, uh, is what, that is

Doug Smith ([29:53](#)):

Outstanding talent.

Al Lopus ([29:55](#)):

Don't we wanna work on teams that are gonna win, you know mm-hmm. <affirmative>, where you've got, uh, where you know you're able to attract, uh, you're able to retain, you're able to promote and reward the best talent. You know, uh, we all wanna be on teams that, that are gonna win. And that takes outstanding talent to do that

Doug Smith ([30:16](#)):

Uplifting growth.

Al Lopus ([30:18](#)):

Well, I oftentimes have heard the joke, uh, you know, oh, you're gonna spend all that money on development. What if people leave? And then the re response is, well, yeah, but what if people stay the same and, and they stay, you know, <laugh>, we need, we need, you know, we need people, and we need organizations that are gonna invest in the development of people going forward so that they can grow. Uh, because, you know, when we, we do the same one year as the next, you know, we're falling

behind. And, and, and also part of uplifting growth is the fact that the frontline leader is the key to, uh, to a organization effectiveness.

Doug Smith ([31:02](#)):

Yeah. I, I was gonna, I'm curious, you talked about, you know, yeah. Investing in development of your people, uh, and organizations that you've seen really thrive in this area of growth. How much is it they have leaders that are, like you said, they're direct supervisors who are pouring into them and actually being a, a role model, an example to them versus, you know, Hey, we sent them to this leadership program. We give them a book every month. We have, you know, X, Y, z. I'm sure it's a combo, but I'd be curious your thoughts on that.

Al Lopus ([31:28](#)):

The research says, Doug, 70% of on the, of training is on the job. It's, you know, it's through the supervisor, it's through working with somebody that knows how to do. 70% is based on that 10% is based on, on other mentorship, 10 per, uh, 10% what a 20% is. And then 10% is based on going to a workshop or a conference or, or reading a book. So it's on the job training is, is the core to, uh, uplifting growth.

Doug Smith ([31:59](#)):

Next category is one. I'm sure that, uh, as led to some interesting conversations, rewarding compensation.

Al Lopus ([32:05](#)):

Yeah. So, you know, having fair pay and benefits is, um, important for an organization to, to be sustainable and to grow. And, and in Christian organizations, this is oftentimes just not talked about. And so, I recommend every organization have a compensation philosophy that they talk about that you may not be paying at competitive levels with, uh, with, for, um, for marketplace companies. But, uh, but if you define what your compensation philosophy is, and, uh, communicate that and keep it, uh, keep it present and, uh, and, and active, then you'll be better off. It's the lowest, it's the lowest indicator, uh, it's got the lowest weight of the eight, uh, is rewarding compensation.

Doug Smith ([32:54](#)):

That's fascinating. Uh, we talked a little bit about inspirational leadership, uh, talked about, talked to us about sustainable strategy.

Al Lopus ([33:01](#)):

Yeah. Sustainable strategy is, you know, people, and, and this is really true for millennials. People want to work for an organization where the work they're doing is making a difference. You know, much like a rescue mission work. You know, when you know that you're making a difference in somebody's life, that, that, that is important to you. So that's, and, and so having a strategy that meets the needs of those you serve is, is critical. And, but also part of that is that it's gotta be, uh, uh, throughout the organization where there's common goals, that people understand what the goals are, they're accountable to the goals, and, and they are achieving what the organization hopes to achieve the, and people will say, oh, you know, I just want to have a great workplace and, and, and, and we may not get anything done. And I say, if you, you never have a good workplace, you'll never have a flourishing workplace unless you're able to get things done as a group. And that's what, uh, leadership's job is to

make sure that, that you can get things together as a group and accomplish what you're set out to accomplish.

Doug Smith (34:07):

Hmm. Uh, just a, a, a small rabbit trail, you know, you talked about, obviously I work at a rescue mission. The other thing I love about the assessment tool that you do is you work with, obviously Christian workplaces mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, but you can actually benchmark against other organizations just like yours, for instance. Uh, we're benchmark in our B C W I survey and assessment. Uh, we benchmark ourselves against all the other rescue missions nationally who do the same assessment. So it really gives you a sense of how you're doing. I'm assuming it's the same for churches and other, like nonprofits, but, um,

Al Lopus (34:35):

It's bisector. That's right. Yeah.

Doug Smith (34:37):

Yeah. I love, love, love that. So if, if I haven't tried to, I'm a promoter. If, if you're not sold yet, I don't know if I can do much better <laugh>. But you need, I'm telling you, leader, get this in your organization. The last one I've actually found to be probably the most challenging, you know, you, it's, it's healthy communication. You hear all the time in leadership, like, after you have to say something, once you're sick of saying something, you should say it twice as much after that. And it's like, the more I grow my leadership journey, I'm like, I hate that. But it's true. What have you learned about healthy communication?

Al Lopus (35:05):

I, I have a mentor, um, who said, communication is like communicating to a parade. You know, people are joining and leaving the parade all the time. And as they're walking on the parade in the parade, they're changing their mind. So, so you've got to say these things over and over, you know, as you say, when you've, when you think you're tired of communicating, you're just halfway, you know, I used to, as a Myers-Briggs, N T j, I used to think it was inconsiderate to repeat myself, <laugh>. Cause because I've said something and it's most efficient, I've said it once, I'm not gonna bother you by saying it again. And I realized how wrong that was, and how, yes, you need to communicate over and over, seven times, nine times. Uh, I've heard different numbers, but, uh, uh, that's so critical to have, have constant communication. But the key to healthy communication is seeking suggestions, listening to feedback, acting on those suggestions, and just con completely com, you know, drawing that circle, uh, seek suggestions, humbly, listen to the feedback, and then act on the suggestions and then remind everybody, Hey, the reason we're doing this is because you ask us to do it.

Al Lopus (36:22):

And that's, that's why we're doing it. And now we've done it. And so thanks for your suggestions. We've listened to you and we've, uh, implemented it, and that that will engage your employees.

Doug Smith (36:34):

Yeah. I love that visual of the parade. I used to, I I was actually very similar to you. I used to <laugh>, uh, when, whether it was speaking engagements or speaking to staff, I used to always think like, I have to have new and fresh content every time. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, like, I cannot recycle any content. And

my friend said, man, you, he, he just had this coin, this phrase, he said, Doug, repetition leads to retention. Yeah. Like, you have to repeat over and over again. So that was so good. Um, that, that's really the overview of the flourishing model. Is there anything else? I wanna go into the lightning round, but anything else you wanna share with best Christian workplaces or the assessment or tool?

Al Lopus ([37:07](#)):

I'd just, I'd encourage our listeners, you know, think of this, um, of, of the culture journey in three steps. First, you, you need to discover where you are, you know, earlier, um, I remember it's like, well, the leader's first job is to communicate, understand, and communicate reality. So discover reality, that's the survey that's doing discover groups. It's, it's understanding, Hey, we've gotta discover where the health of our culture is. And then the second phase is build. Okay, what's the action plan? What are we gonna do to, to actually improve our culture? And then grow is implement those things, discover, build, and grow. And I really recommend an annual cycle like you're doing at Lido life, where, where you're doing that. And even after, we've, again, we've got organizations that have surveyed every year in the last 20 years, and they say to us, we learn in the survey, we learn by asking these questions, uh, something that's happening on the frontline that we would not have discovered for two or three years. And so it just really helps you keep in tune. It keeps, you know, the world is changing, our organizations change. So that, that cycle of, of discover building grow is really, really important.

Doug Smith ([38:21](#)):

Yeah. And so we'll include links to best Christian workplaces, uh, in the show notes, as well as Al's book, the Road of Flourishing. Again, phenomenal book, especially if you're already utilizing this tool, you're going to, uh, I would really encourage you, if this is what, what you're measuring your culture on, take your leadership team through this and make sure that this is on the, the forefront of their minds as they lead, uh, their teams on a daily basis. So, uh, with the time we have left, I wanna dive into the lightning round, which has nothing to do with culture, but, uh, it's just, uh, a bunch of fun questions I ask every interview. And the first is just what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Al Lopus ([38:57](#)):

Yeah. A again, much the same mentor I, that, that communicated with me about the, uh, the communicating to a parade. Uh, that, that might be one of the best advice, uh, I've received. He's given me so much more advice I had. Just encourage every, every person listening, have a mentor, have more than one mentor who is, uh, helping you, uh, along the journey of life.

Doug Smith ([39:21](#)):

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

Al Lopus ([39:26](#)):

You can only give what you have.

Doug Smith ([39:30](#)):

Hmm. What's one or two books that you either give away most often, or that have impacted you the most deeply

Al Lopus ([39:37](#)):

<laugh>? Yeah. Recently I've been giving away the book Traction by

Doug Smith (39:41):

Gina Wicker. Oh, come on. Yeah. You're speaking my love language. <laugh>. Yeah, <laugh>.

Al Lopus (39:45):

We've, uh, we implemented traction, uh, they Eeo s system here at the best Christian workplaces a couple of years ago. It's just helped to transform our effectiveness, uh, as a group. So, uh,

Doug Smith (39:57):

Are you self implementing or have you hired an implementer?

Al Lopus (39:59):

We, uh, we, we've self-implemented. Well, uh, we have worked with, uh, a couple of consultants, uh, for specific things, but, uh, uh, yeah. And, uh, we've, we've really enjoyed it. It's given us an operating system. I was even thinking about that, uh, in our discussion or earlier. Uh, it, it gives us an operating system that we can follow that's effective and, and, and the accountability that comes with it is outstanding. Yeah. Another book i, I recommend often because I'm in these conversations is Transitions by William Bridges. It's not a new book. Hmm. But, uh, people that are going through transitions. And I've gone through one recently myself as I've kind of turned over the c e o role trying to stay out of management of the best Christian workplaces. I'm still the, the co-founder. I'm still, I've got, I carry the vision. It's in my heart. Uh, but, uh, but, uh, yeah, it's a transition.

Doug Smith (40:56):

Well, we can talk about traction after we get off this now. I'm excited. Uh, what do you wish, uh, or what's something that people may not know about you that you wish they knew?

Al Lopus (41:08):

I'm a, pretty much an open book, Doug, but, uh, I'm a closet mystic.

Doug Smith (41:15):

Say more. What does that mean?

Al Lopus (41:17):

I, I, you know, at the beginning of the year, I take three days. I go to a, I go to a, um, a Catholic, uh, facility offsite. I, I, I sit and quiet, I pray. Um, you know, I, I've walked Theo des Santiago a a couple of different routes. Um, I'm, uh, I, I read, uh, St. Johnna, the Cross Teresa Aula, you know, as a Protestant. Uh, you don't hear a lot of people focusing on those, those mystics from the Middle Ages, uh, uh, Julian of Norwich, uh, and so on. But, uh, um, and if you read page eight in the book, you'll see why I probably would say that.

Doug Smith (42:04):

Hmm. Well, thanks for sharing that. You get to spend time with a lot of, of leaders. And I'm curious, you know, outside of just the, the consultant questions that you would ask if you get to have dinner, uh, with

a high level leader, do you have a go-to question or two that you always ask when you get to spend time with them?

Al Lopus ([42:18](#)):

I always ask about their background and how they got to where they are, you know? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, I'm always interested in. So, you know, and the way I think of that is how did God bring you to this point? You know, where you're able to do what you're doing. That's, that's fascinating.

Doug Smith ([42:36](#)):

What's your biggest leadership pet peeve?

Al Lopus ([42:43](#)):

My arrogance is my leadership pet peeve. I, I, I just am turned off by arrogance and I see it too many times.

Doug Smith ([42:55](#)):

Hmm. I don't know if you have a bucket list, but, uh, but if you do, uh, what's something you've done in your life that you think everyone should experience before they die?

Al Lopus ([43:05](#)):

Five years ago, I walked the 500 miles on the Camino Santiago, uh, from from France to, uh, Santiago de Camp Costello. And it took me 30 days. I went with 33 days. I went with my daughter at the time, uh, wow. And, um, I was 65, she was 30. And it was just a great experience. I, I, I've talked to a lot of people who have, uh, uh, talked about or, you know, and there's more and more who are discovering it. Uh, I just think was great. When I, when I retired from the CEO role, um, uh, just last June 30, I then went on the Portuguese Camino 170 miles up from Porto up to Santiago again, just to celebrate 20 years of God's faithfulness, and kind of to think about, well, what's the next 20 years gonna look like?

Doug Smith ([43:57](#)):

Wow. I've never heard of either of those, so I'm gonna have to look those up and maybe add 'em to my list. And, and it did spark. So I'm a, I'm a dad of four <laugh>. I have two boys, two girls. And, uh, and I, Andy Stanley and his wife just came out with a new book on parenting, and, and I love it. They have, they have a goal. They said, uh, our goal in parenting was always, we wanna raise kids, uh, who, when they're old enough, they want to spend time with us when they no longer have to. Yeah. And, uh, and I don't know why, but when you said that you did this walk with your daughter when she was 30, I mean, my heart just lit up. I'm like, you know, I have a six year old daughter. I'm like, oh, man. That's like, if, if that, if I could fast forward my life and see that I'd be in heaven. Any, any parenting advice for the parents listening,

Al Lopus ([44:35](#)):

Understand your children's unique gifts and, um, encourage them.

Speaker 3 ([44:43](#)):

Hmm.

Al Lopus ([44:44](#)):

And, and be patient. Yeah.

Doug Smith ([44:47](#)):

If you could go back and have coffee with yourself at any age that you've actually would've listened to yourself, what age would've you had coffee with yourself, and what would you say?

Al Lopus ([44:57](#)):

Um, I would probably go back to a 30 year old. So at at 40, I was, um, a, I was a workaholic, and I would've said to my 30 year old self, don't let yourself get consumed by work.

Doug Smith ([45:15](#)):

Wow. That's powerful. Um, at the end of your life, uh, what do you want your legacy to be? What do you wanna be remembered for?

Al Lopus ([45:23](#)):

Somebody that loves Jesus and, uh, loves others.

Doug Smith ([45:26](#)):

That's so good, eh? Yep. Anything else you wanna leave leaders with?

Al Lopus ([45:33](#)):

I'll say Doug. Um, feedback is a gift. Uh, fe you know, the feedback is the Breakfast of Champions. Uh, I'd encourage any leader, uh, to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to them. That's one Peter five, to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to you. And how do you know if you're actually doing a good job shepherding? Well, you have to ask the sheep. And so, um, you know, the health of the flock that you're, you're entrusted to is your role and responsibility. And so get feedback about the effectiveness of your leadership. It's a gift. It's the Breakfast of Champions.

Doug Smith ([46:12](#)):

Well, thank you for, uh, providing a tool that gives that feedback, uh, very, very grateful for you following God's calling your life. Very grateful for how God is using you and the kingdom. Uh, it's, I know it's changed our organization and there's 15 other org hundred organizations, and I'm sure in the next season, uh, best Christian workplaces, uh, with your successor, it'll go even further. So just thank you for your faithfulness.

Al Lopus ([46:32](#)):

Thank you, Doug. This has really been a pleasure. God bless you. Thank you for your leadership and your, uh, and your podcast. I've enjoyed listening to it myself, and, and I pray that, uh, any leader who's, uh, participating, bro,

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

Man. Thanks, Al. Hey, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Al. 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 l3leadership.org/360. And leaders always, I want to challenge you that if you wanna 10 x your growth this year, you need to either launch or join an L3 leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups are groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable, and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last seven years, and I can't encourage you enough to get in one. So, if you're interested in learning more about launching or joining your own group, go to [L3leadership.org/masterminds](https://l3leadership.org/masterminds) or email me at dougsmith@l3leadership.org. And as always, I'd like to end every episode with a quote. I'll quote Robert Madoo who said this, he said, leaders, God can't transform the person you pretend to be so good. I hope you enjoyed this episode. Know that, Laura and I love you. We believe in you, and we say at every episode, but don't quit. Keep leading. The world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.