

Doug Smith ([00:07](#)):

Hey leader and welcome to another episode 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 in today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We're also recording live from the new reiturn.com studio. 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. I know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you're subscribed there as well. And 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 if you would 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 grow our audience and reach more leaders. So thank you in advance for that.

Doug Smith ([00:51](#)):

Well leader in today's episode, you're gonna hear my conversation with Mark Miller. This is Mark's second time on the podcast. We had him back in episode number 312, and as you'll hear, uh, since then, that has become the most downloaded episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast. So Mark is currently at the top of the download board, and so I was anxious to share that with him. He's added value to so many leaders and I'm so grateful for his voice. If you're 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. He has worked all across the business since then and currently serves as the vice president of High Performance Leadership at Chick-fil-A. For the last 20 years, mark has traveled the United States and the world focusing much of his time on serving leaders in helping them grow themselves, their teams, and their organizations.

Doug Smith ([01:37](#)):

And we had Mark back on, cuz he has a brand new book out that every leader needs to read. And it's called Culture Rules. And we literally talk about all things culture, which I think every leader needs to focus on. And so I think you're gonna love this conversation with Mark. But before we dive in, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Barung Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Barung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at [beratungadvisors.com](#). 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 S I P C, Beratung Advisors, LPL Financial, and L3 leadership are separate entities.

Doug Smith ([02:25](#)):

I also wanna thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers. They're jeweler owned 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 [hennyjewelers.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? Well now for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit [return.com](#) to learn more. That's R E I T U R n.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 Mark Miller. Mark Miller, welcome back to the L3 Leadership

Podcast. So glad that you're here. Uh, as I just told you, uh, before we jumped on to the recording, uh, you are officially the most downloaded podcast episode of the L three Leadership podcast. So clearly you made a connection with our audience and adding value to leaders. So thank you so much and welcome back.

Mark Miller ([03:30](#)):

Well, thanks for inviting me back. It's, it's good to see you again.

Doug Smith ([03:34](#)):

Yeah. So today we wanna talk all about culture. You have a brand new book out called Culture Rules, and I just wanna dive right in and, and just open-endedly, you know, why did you write this book and what do you want leaders to get out of it?

Mark Miller ([03:46](#)):

Well, for those that may not have heard our last episode, as I recall, I gave a little bit of backstory. And so I wanna provide that again, real briefly here. My team here at Chick-fil-A has been trying for the last 25 years to, to try and figure out how to help leaders grow their capacity. And I'm not just talking about personal physical capacity. I mean yes. And we really want to help them grow their leadership capacity. And so the strategy for now many, many years has been to try to identify issues that are emergent, things that are maybe a few years in the future. And every now and then will be so bold is to to tackle an issue that we think is just over the horizon. But we, we place a strategic bet that if we could serve our leaders well in, in a particular topic area, that it, that it would, um, it would serve them their business, their communities, their team, and you know, leaders around the world.

Mark Miller ([04:50](#)):

And so we've been placing those strategic bets now for many, many years. A few years ago, as we were involved in that process, thinking about what we would work on in the future, the topic of culture emerged. We had begun to pick up what some might consider weak signals. We were, we were hearing it, uh, come up more often. We were getting more unsolicited questions and honestly, we felt like a lot of leaders were struggling with culture, maybe, maybe more than the historical norm. And so we said, what if we could help leaders, uh, in this area? And then of course, covid hit. And so we're very thankful coming out of the pandemic that we've got a an informed, uh, point of view on culture because I, I tell you what, what we believe the pandemic did. I mean, there were obviously many consequences and an unintended, you know, uh, side effects from, from the pandemic, but it put real stress on culture.

Mark Miller ([05:56](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And it, it, it did one of several things. It either showcased the strength of your culture, exposed your gaps, and for a lot of people it was a mixed bag. And, uh, you know, we, we know organizations that really rose to the occasion and we know others that went, oh no, you know, what's going on here? Well, I don't think Covid destroyed their culture. I think it exposed the culture that existed prior to the pandemic. And so, uh, we're very, very thankful, as I said, to have a point of view coming out of the pandemic. Cause a lot of leaders, you know, we thought we had weak signals three or four or five years ago on this topic. It is the most, uh, discussed topic. When I'm with leaders, even before we publish the book, they wanna talk about culture.

Doug Smith ([06:43](#)):

Wow. And, and my my understanding is you, this isn't just your thoughts on culture. You and your team put a ton of research into this. Can you just for leaders to understand Yeah. The research that went into this, can you share about that? Yeah.

Mark Miller ([06:55](#)):

Yes, I'd be delighted to. And just thanks for asking, just cuz another word of context. We have all the work we've done. This is our 12th project over the last 25 years. And in fact, it's resulted in 12 books. And we, we work really, really, really hard not to just publish our personal bias. Now, I can't say we've eliminated all of our personal bias, but we don't start there. We start with the same question on every project. What is universally true about this topic? And, and we, we always search for that. We always strive to find that because we think then you have broad application. Uh, if, if you do it well, you could in fact, uh, discover or unearth timeless truth that that would serve leaders for, for generations. And so, uh, we started this project that very, very same way. And we ended up talking to either talking to focus group or surveying over 6,000 folks in 10 countries. Wow. Uh, senior leaders, mid-level leaders and frontline leaders. We did interviews with a who's who list of leaders from some of the most amazing companies around the world. I mean, I, if, if your audience were to look at the list of the companies we interviewed, um, they would probably know 75% of the names of the companies that we interviewed. So we did a lot of work to figure out what is true about the topic of organizational culture.

Doug Smith ([08:30](#)):

Yeah. And I guess I would've started at the very basics, but, you know, we talked a lot about culture, but sometimes that can be hard to define. How do you define culture when it comes to organizational leadership?

Mark Miller ([08:39](#)):

Well, let, let me affirm your, your observation. That is one of the challenges is there's no universally accepted definition that we could find. There are many, many, many definitions. And so we thought we would just add to the mix and, and create our own. We felt like it was an informed point of view based on all that we had done. And we wanna acknowledge that culture is an unseen force, which gives most leaders no sense of joy or revelation. I mean, you, you know, it's unseen, which actually for a lot of people adds to the angst. Okay. Like, what do you do with something? How do you steward? How do you manage, how do you monitor something you can't see? Well, the good news is we, we believe we have identified the elemental components, right? Mm-hmm. You can't see air, but you, you can name the molecules, right?

Mark Miller ([09:31](#)):

You know what, you know what creates it. And so we would say it is an unseen force, but it's the cumulative effect of what people see, what people hear, what people experience, and what people believe. It's the cumulative effect of what people see, hear, experience, and believe. And when we landed at, at that definition, we were very encouraged because who has the greatest control over what people see here? Experience and believe it's leaders? Hmm. It's leaders. And so we felt like we were onto something once we were able to give, um, give what is often seen as squishy to give it more form and more structure.

Doug Smith ([10:21](#)):

Yeah. And I'm curious, you know, for, for leaders listening to this, how can they actually assess their culture? They may be listening to this and, and say, well, one why is culture, I guess I'll just start there. Why is culture even important for organizations and why should leaders care?

Mark Miller ([10:33](#)):

Okay. Um, well, it's important because it affects everything. It, it affects decisions, it affects performance, it affects retention, it affects sales, it affects profits. I mean, it, it, you know, Drucker, Peter Drucker, the late management and leadership thinker that some of your audience may be familiar with, I would say the greatest leadership thinker of the last 2000 years. He said, culture eats strategy for breakfast, but you work on it. Cause you know, it's important. And I will say this, you reference the research. The research confirmed that 72% of the leaders in the United States, 70% globally say it's the most powerful tool at their disposal to drive performance. Seven out of 10 leaders already know that. So if any of your folks do pick up the book, you'll notice there's not a lot of ink devoted to making the case for culture. Because we said we think that word count can be better used on helping leaders create a high performance culture. Let's don't try to convince leaders of something that they, that they already know intuitively, experientially, intellectually, they know it's critical. And there was nothing that they listed as a more powerful driver of performance. But now here's, let me, let me let the other shoe fall before you ask your follow up question. We asked those same leaders to rank their priorities. Hmm. Creating and maintaining culture came in at number 12 in the us Wow.

Mark Miller ([12:08](#)):

And so that became our challenge. How do you help leaders close this knowing, doing gap? Because if, if, if it's your 12th priority, it's no wonder that most cultures are in shambles.

Doug Smith ([12:26](#)):

Wow. Yeah. So clearly I don't, I, I agree with you. We don't need to convince leaders that the culture is important, but like you said, we don't prioritize it or focus on, and I think the starting point for many leaders is how do I actually assess the health of our culture? How do I actually measure it?

Mark Miller ([12:42](#)):

Okay, well, I'm, I'm gonna dodge the question for just a moment. I'll, I'll come back to it. Keep me honest here. You can't assess it until you decide what you want it to be. Assess against what, so, uh, again, I don't want to give away too much here, and I wanna, I wanna honor you in the process and let you ask your questions. But I wanna, I wanna frame this, we, we distilled all this down to three rules. We said we want to help leaders close this knowing doing gap. And we came up with three rules. And, and I need to tell you about the first rule because the first rule is to aspire. You have to share your hopes and dreams for your culture. Now, it's crazy that you would have to start there. And our team debated, like, do we have to say that?

Mark Miller ([13:32](#)):

Well, we met far too many leaders who couldn't articulate their hopes and dreams for their culture. Now, some of 'em would say, well, it's in my head, it's in my heart. And, and my response is, it's great to start there, but you can't create it by yourself. So you have to share it with others. And, and you've gotta be able to share it in a way that is clear and it's simple and it's repeatable. Cause some people can explain it and an hour later you're still trying to say, okay, let me try to get the essence of that. Right. Again, back to drunker one more time. When asked about the, uh, the challenge of creating mission

statements, that was the language that was posed to him many years ago. He said, if you can't put it on a t-shirt, you don't have it yet. Hmm.

Mark Miller ([14:18](#)):

Well, what I think he's saying is clear, simple, repeatable, right? You can write volumes about it later. You can, you can illuminate and, and ex expand and illustrate. But, but can you state it succinctly? What is the essence of your aspiration? So to your question of measurement, well, now you know what you're measuring against. If you wanna be customer centric, you can measure that. If, uh, I'll give you an example. Uh, Satya Nadella, when he took over at Microsoft for Steve Ballmer, he, he set a new aspiration. He said he wanted them to move from being know-it-alls to being LearnIT alls wow. From know-it-alls to learn it alls. And again, there's a rich backstory. I wrote about some of it, uh, in the book, but there's a rich backstory. Uh, Ballmer had been great at, at extracting profits from the business, but he had not been great on creating a preferred future. And that's what basically cost him his job. And so Nadella understood that and said, we've gotta change our mindset. So with a new aspiration, I'm, I'm getting to your question. We wanna move from, from know-it-alls to learn it alls. He said, our primary metric to your question is gonna be growth mindset. They used the, the work that Carol Dweck had done on that concept and said, we're gonna, we're gonna try to help everyone in the organization develop a growth mindset. And you can measure that. So the metric is aligned with the aspiration.

Doug Smith ([15:56](#)):

Yeah, I think it's so interesting that you said so many leaders, you know, you would think it was common sense to actually have a vision and actually share that, but so many leaders don't. Um, do you have any advice for leaders on obviously making it simple, repeatable, I think that's great, but as far as the actual process of getting this on paper, you know, is that a team retreat? Is it getting away? And then how, how often should they communicate that to their, their organization?

Mark Miller ([16:18](#)):

Okay, so I heard two, two really good questions there. So here's my, here's my encouragement to leaders. Don't get hung up in the semantics or the language trap. And here, here's what I mean by that. Anybody that, any of your audience that's done any study reading or paying attention, they know that some people define mission. The s the way that other people define vision. And some people define vision the way other people define purpose. And you can find really smart people, uh, people I look up to, coaches, mentors, peers who define those terms very differently. Don't get caught up in that. So you need to decide what are your hopes and dreams, and then which of the mechanisms at your disposal will be most helpful? Do you want vision? Do you want mission? Do you want purpose? Because you can parse those out as different things.

Mark Miller ([17:16](#)):

Maybe you want all three, but again, the more you add, the more complex it is. Maybe you want to use ethos. Um, as, uh, Netflix has done, they want to create an ethos of freedom and responsibility, right? So you can, I'm, I'm one of our Chick-Fil-A operators. I met with, uh, he had an ethos. He didn't, he, he said, I wanna keep it really simple. I don't have mission, purpose, vision, values, but I've got an ethos. And he could describe it pretty well. And that's what his whole leadership team and his whole organization had gathered around. The ethos is the spirit of the organization. What is that? What does that look like? You can use values. I mean, these are all mechanisms at your disposal. So my, my encouragement to leaders is don't get hung up on the semantics. Figure out what kind of organizational

culture you want, and then choose the, the tools, techniques, mechanisms that best enable you to communicate.

Mark Miller ([18:14](#)):

So that's the first thing. Your second question was how frequently? Well, I think that's a, that's a really good question. And I have been challenged on that at a, at a profound level during one of my interviews with a senior leader from Netflix. And I ask, how often do you talk about culture? And he looked at me with this kind of quizzical look like I didn't even know what he was thinking. It was like <laugh>. He was, it was, he was looking at me really strange. And he said, what do you mean? He said, what do you mean have a blanket? Well, I thought it was a pretty simple question. I said, how often do you think you talk about culture? And he said, every day.

Doug Smith ([19:05](#)):

Wow.

Mark Miller ([19:06](#)):

He said, every leader at Netflix talks about the culture or some aspect of the culture every day.

Doug Smith ([19:14](#)):

That's amazing.

Mark Miller ([19:16](#)):

Yeah. I had another leader challenge, I had another leader challenge me even further. He said, you should talk about some aspect of the vision was the language he chose about the aspiration in every meeting. He said, and if you haven't talked about it, by the end of the meeting, you should close the meeting linking what you just talked about to the vision. And he said, and if what you just talked about done link to the vision, then you gotta ask yourself, why aren't we talking about this?

Doug Smith ([19:47](#)):

Wow.

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

So I'm trying to up my game to talk about vision a lot more. I've even taken it a step further and I try to reference it in the majority of the emails I sent.

Doug Smith ([19:59](#)):

Come on.

Mark Miller ([20:00](#)):

Wow. I do, I'm trying, I'm working hard. I wanna do, I mean, this is a global best practice. The, the, the thriving high performance cultures leaders are talking about facets and pieces and parts of the aspiration almost continuously.

Doug Smith ([20:17](#)):

So every meeting, every day, every email. I love it. I'm,

Mark Miller ([20:21](#)):

I'm trying, I'm trying.

Doug Smith ([20:24](#)):

Mark, you know, in, in your research you gotta spend time with some phenomenal companies. I obviously, you were surprised by how many leaders didn't have a clear vision that, that they communicate. Were there other factors that were consistent in organizations that maybe didn't have the best culture that you saw that the leaders didn't do or did do that were that had negative effects?

Mark Miller ([20:46](#)):

You know, there, there are a lot of toxins out there. And we wrote, we wrote about, I don't know, six or eight or 10 of them in the book. And if you, if you don't deal with the toxins, they metastasize and they become maladies and they will literally kill an organization. And we talked about some organizations that did not survive. Cause they let their culture destroy them. Right? They, they rotted, you know, from the inside out. Um, yeah, I, i, if I had to put a bow on it, I think it would, it would go back to lack of focus and intentionality. That's the common thing that leaders, wow, let let this happen on their watch. Again, you can't build culture by yourself, but the, the leaders and the senior leader, you are the champion and the guardian of the culture.

Doug Smith ([21:46](#)):

Wow. You, um, you mentioned Netflix already. You mentioned Microsoft. Were there any others that were your personal favorites organizations that you met with that maybe you had an aha moment similar to the everyday culture moment? Were there other ahas and profound impacts like that?

Mark Miller ([22:02](#)):

I mean, there were, there were scores of those <laugh>. I mean, we worked on this for several years and wow. I mean, you can imagine the data that came from those 6,000 surveys and interviews. Uh, yeah. I mean, hundreds and hundreds of pages of, of data and reports. Cuz we cut it by country. We cut it by, uh, level, you know, we cut it by tenure, we cut it by industry type. And it was, there were, there were many, many, many insights. I'm trying to think if there's anything else that rises to the occasion. Um, yeah, I, again, this was probably, I'm not sure if it qualifies as a, as an insight, but the intentionality as, as a theme, it's like leaders animate culture or not. And every organization has a culture. See, this is the thing that some, I'm not sure how this got lost in translation for leaders. Every organization has a culture. It's either by design or default. The problem is we haven't found any great cultures that were in accident

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

<laugh>.

Mark Miller ([23:19](#)):

They're designed, they're designed by leaders. And so that was kind of a progressive revelation. It might have been an intuitive thing in the beginning, but research, interview, focus group, quant study, you know, desk research. It just became more and more and more obvious that this is clearly on the leader.

Yeah. Clearly. And, and people have accused me of thinking that everything's on the leader. Well, most everything is right. Either, either their action or lack thereof. Everything rises and falls on leadership. And, um, so I don't know, it was just the preponderance of the evidence was overwhelming. When leaders are intentional, when leaders are focused, you can create a great culture. And when they're not, you kind of get what you get.

Doug Smith ([24:20](#)):

Yeah. On that note, I'm, I'm curious your input on this. So let's say a leader. If, if an organization has an unhealthy culture or a negative culture, uh, how often can the leader that is actually in place, maybe that has allowed this or unintentionally created that culture, uh, how, how long can they actually turn it around? How long does that often take? Or does it literally in most cases, take a new leader to reset and change a culture?

Mark Miller ([24:48](#)):

You know, I don't know that we have any data to support that. So I wanna be really clear. We've talked a lot about the data. Yeah. I'll give you my opinion on that. Yeah. Um, and it's, it's, it's a deep and profound observation. You ready

Doug Smith ([25:02](#)):

<laugh>? I can't wait.

Mark Miller ([25:04](#)):

It, it depends. It depends. <laugh>. Okay. It depends. Cause I mean, the leader controls the levers that create the culture. And above all else, the leader controls their own behavior. And the number one way, the, I mentioned the first rule, the second rule is to amplify, you've got to constantly reinforce the aspiration. Well, the number one thing we discovered to reinforce the aspiration is the behavior of the leader. Wow. People always watch the leader role modeling is the number one people watch whether you want 'em to or not. It's the number one way to impact the behavior of an organization. It's what are the behaviors the leader is engaged in, not what are the behaviors the leader talks about, but what is the leader actually doing? Hmm. And so, um, I think they're, they're an infinite number of turnaround stories. So I do wanna say leaders can, leaders can, um, revive a a dying culture.

Mark Miller ([26:24](#)):

But they've gotta be intentional. They've gotta be, they've gotta be strategic. They've gotta have that aspiration that they're going back to. And, and yes, I think, I think leaders can fix it often unless they've got some internal wiring or, or something. I mean, if their ego's too big, I mean, we're, I'm working on a separate project and the number one, uh, impediment to leadership effectiveness globally is ego. Wow. Uh, we've got data on that. That's the next book. But that, that's probably another blinding flash of the obvious. But, um, you ask people about the number one thing that keeps their boss from being more effective and globally the answer is ego. And it's at all levels. Frontline supervisors for mid-level, mid-level for ceo, it's like, what's, what's keeps your boss from being more effective as a leader? They all say ego number one. So you might have an ego that says, what's wrong with this culture?

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

I built this culture <laugh>. Uh, there is by the way, a reality gap that we see globally. We've now seen this in several of our studies. Leaders tend to think things are about 40 points better than they really

are. <laugh>. If you believe the, if you believe the frontline people, wow. Even like, is this a great place to work? Leaders are gonna score that typically 40 points ahead of the frontline workers. Wow. So there is a, there is a reality challenge that leaders have to continue to work on, which is why, back to your very first question, why listening is so important.

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

Yeah. Uh, you talked about listening to us. Can you talk about just the importance of listening and maybe some practices that are good for leaders? Yeah, sure.

Mark Miller ([28:09](#)):

Yeah. Well, we talked about, one form of listening is metrics, but I, I would never, uh, put all of my faith in metrics alone. I think metrics are part of, of a, a suite of listening. Uh, tools, mechanisms, and strategies. One is just one-on-one conversations. And I know that sounds like bizarre. And some of your listeners may be leading really big organizations or have really large teams and go, what do you mean one-on-one conversations? Yeah. Uh, Howard Bihar, the former, uh, I guess he was the president of Starbucks, took him from about 16 stores to whatever, 16,000. I gotta spend a little time with him. And he said, you can put all this stuff on paper and you can put it all on the posters and you can put, you know, put it on cups and you can put it everywhere. Right. Put it on a t-shirt.

Mark Miller ([29:03](#)):

He said, it doesn't get real until you have real conversations one-on-one. That's when it gets real when you're talking to people about this stuff and listening to these people. So one strategy is one-on-one conversation. Another, again, you know, turn it up just a little bit, are focus groups. And again, some people are big fans, some aren't fans at all. But put eight or 10 people in a room and talk about your culture. It's fascinating. Um, going to the field. If you have a, an organization that has decentralized locations, spend time in the field, you'll, you'll be shocked at what you'll learn. Every time I go to the restaurant, I've been doing this for almost 45 years. Every time I go in the restaurants, I learn something. Leaders learn something when they get close to the customer. Uh, and of course, I haven't even mentioned listening to the customer because you think, well if this is about culture, is this all internal listening?

Mark Miller ([30:04](#)):

Well, cu customers know your culture too, cuz they're the recipients of your culture. So are you listening to customers? Are you spending time with them? So yeah, I just think they're many, many ways that leaders can listen. You just gotta commit to listen and then you gotta respond. You gotta respond based on what you hear. That third rule is to adapt. You have aspire, amplify and adapt. And adapt means to constantly be working on how to enhance your culture. And so if you see toxins, you have to attack those immediately. If you don't see toxins, you need to think about ways you could double down on your strengths. That's a way to enhance your culture. And then third, you can add new capabilities. And people often overlook that. We did that about 15 years ago. We, it was, the decision was made by senior leaders that we needed to be more innovative.

Mark Miller ([31:02](#)):

Now, we weren't strangers to innovation. I mean, Truett Kathy invented the chicken sandwich, right? But if you looked at our history of innovation, it was, it was somewhat sporadic and it would tend to pop up here and there. And we said, what if we were more innovative as a culture? And so we set that as a

new aspiration. We went about amplifying that. And here we are 15 years later and I would argue we're much more innovative today. But you, you've always gotta be doing something with what you're hearing that listening only matters if you respond.

Doug Smith ([31:38](#)):

No, I think that's so good. It's, it's funny, you know, as I work with leaders in leadership teams, how many times that people actually on the front lines don't actually think the leaders will actually listen. And if they do listen, that they'll actually do something with what they heard. Uh, I've just been blown away by, I don't, I, it's probably a lack of trust in leadership that they'll actually do something. And the whole ego thing. When does that come out, by the way, for those listening? Give 'em a little trail.

Mark Miller ([32:00](#)):

Oh, that's the 2024 book.

Doug Smith ([32:03](#)):

Okay. So we got another year, but hopefully we can have a conversation around that. Um, under the whole umbrella of the amplify section of the book, uh, you, you already mentioned it. You know, we should be communicating every day, every meeting as many times as we can. Uh, one of the forms that you talk a lot about is storytelling. And I thought that was really, really good. Can you just share your thoughts on storytellers and how leaders can become better at this?

Mark Miller ([32:24](#)):

Sure. Um, storytelling has been around for tens of thousands of years and there's a reason that it persists. It takes new and different forms, but stories connect with the head and the heart. They engage, they inspire. Um, there, there's just a power that, that researchers have been trying to figure out forever about why are stories so powerful. Now there's brain science involved. Again, I I'm not qualified to talk about all that, but I think every leader understands the power of story. What I find very few leaders have done is commit to become a better storyteller. And I think you do that by reading great storytellers. I think you can read books about storytelling. I think you practice storytelling. You can hire you a coach to help you as a communicator. Um, and on and on and on and on. And one year, a few years back, that was the focus of my annual development plan.

Mark Miller ([33:35](#)):

And I'm looking for storytelling conferences and I'm looking for storytelling books. And I hired a coach to work on storytelling. Cause I wanna get better at being a storyteller. So again, it's, it's a little bit of the knowing doing gap. I bet if you surveyed every one of your listeners and says, is storytelling important for leaders? Probably 95% of would say yes. Then you say, okay, how many of you are a master storyteller? Well, that number's gonna be small. You say, great, that's fine. You're still on the journey. How many of you have that in your development plan for next year to become a better storyteller? I think you gotta work on it. It's a skill. It's a skill.

Doug Smith ([34:11](#)):

I think that's such a great challenge to leaders. And I, I don't know if you would've gone to this, I think I heard John Maxwell talk about this one once. Isn't there like a, a national storytellers competition in Nashville? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, have you gone to this? Mm-hmm.

Mark Miller ([34:22](#)):

<affirmative>? I have not been to that, but I am aware of it. Okay.

Doug Smith ([34:24](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I hope to

Mark Miller ([34:25](#)):

Get to it someday. I hope to get to it someday. Yeah.

Doug Smith ([34:28](#)):

I love that you put that as part of your annual growth plan. I mean, I would never think to put that as an area to grow in, but, uh, challenge noted. So thank you for that. Um, just as we wrap up talking about the book, I am curious, you know, obviously you've worked at Chick-fil-A for over 40 years. Uh, when it comes to onboarding people on into your culture, what advice do you have for leaders? Cuz I think a lot of organizations miss this on actually onboarding and getting people engaged. Any thoughts there?

Mark Miller ([34:53](#)):

Well, sure. Uh, probably a lot that, that's the kind of question we, we need an hour to talk about. Um, some, some of your listeners will know the name. Howard, uh, not Howard, um, um, Ritz Carlton, former head of Ritz Carlton.

Doug Smith ([35:09](#)):

Oh, um, hors Schultz.

Mark Miller ([35:11](#)):

Schul. Horse. Horse. I was saying I was Horse Schultz. I was thinking about Howard Schultz. We talked about Starbucks earlier. Yeah. Um, he, he has had a huge influence on Chick-fil-A by the way. He is a friend and consultant and he's helped us with hospitality. He and, uh, Dan are buddies and he challenged us 25 years ago, he said, um, the first 40 hours of someone's employment is the most important 40 hours in their entire career. And it was like he said, yeah, you need to, you need, you need to be very thoughtful, very strategic, very planful, everything from don't have 'em come in and they can't find their desk or they don't have a computer or they don't know any, like, no, who's gonna greet 'em? What's their agenda for the first week? Who are they gonna spend time with? What, you know, they're like that first 40 hours.

Mark Miller ([36:08](#)):

Now, is that literal? I don't know, but it's a pretty good benchmark. What are you gonna do with somebody in their first week? How intentional, how strategic, what messages do you want to embed in that person's head and heart in the beginning? Do you want to talk about the culture? Do you wanna show them the culture? Do you wanna model the culture? Um, I know one of our leaders here on the very first day, he chose to take all his new employees to a restaurant because he said you're gonna work in that building, but Chick-fil-a's out here

Doug Smith ([36:47](#)):

Wow.

Mark Miller ([36:48](#)):

And took 'em to the restaurant because he was trying to create that first impression. I think it matters. I'll tell you one more thing. Uh, Dan, uh, as our former president and CEO Dan Kathy, he actually did orientation for all new operators, probably for 20 years himself. Wow. As the CEO and the president. He spent a day with them. I don't mean he just said, hi y'all. He spent a day with all those new people for again, maybe for 20 years. That's crazy. I just think, I think you've gotta, you've gotta elevate the priority of that opportunity. Can you influence them for the next 5, 10, 15, 20 years as a, as an employee? Sure you can, but, but horse challenged us and convinced us, let's make that first 40 hours as high impact as possible.

Doug Smith ([37:46](#)):

And uh, just speaking of for us, just a fun story cuz I think I I met with him and interviewed him after we spoke, but I was talking to David SALs about this. I believe horse is the one actually responsible for my pleasure. Were you in the, were you in that meeting when that happened? Well, but he, he didn't, he didn't want you guys to use it. But

Mark Miller ([38:04](#)):

Yeah, they're different. They're different versions of that history. I don't know that I was in the meeting you're referring to. Um, I would argue that Truitt and Ho agreed on that. I heard Truitt say it first. <laugh>, but I think he probably observed it while he was at the Ritz. So there's certainly linkage there. And then Hors helped us create the strategy for how do you create a culture of hospitality. Wow. And so that's been his huge contribution over the years.

Doug Smith ([38:39](#)):

Yeah. Anything else? Just open-ended. You wanna talk about cultural rules or leave us with

Mark Miller ([38:46](#)):

Yeah, I think I'll, I'll leave with a story that I close the book with. Uh, some of your listeners will have seen the Steven Spielberg movie Ready Player One, or perhaps they read Ernest Klein's novel by the same name. And I'm not gonna give away the whole thing for you here, uh, for those that haven't. But it, it's a fascinating story. It takes place in two worlds. It takes place in the real world and a virtual world. And the virtual world is called the Oasis. And the hero of the book is a young man named Wade Watson. And Wade is trying to explain why people go to the Oasis. And he said, people go to the oasis for what they can do there. And they stay because of who they can become.

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

Wow.

Mark Miller ([39:40](#)):

Now I know it's not appropriate for me to have an aspiration for your listeners, but I do, I would love for every one of them to create a culture so compelling. So life giving, so soul enriching that it would attract people and they would come there cause of what they could do. They could get a job, but they would stay because of who they could become. And you can create that kind of culture if you aspire. Amplify and adapt.

Doug Smith ([40:20](#)):

Wow. Well Mark, thank you for the book. Uh, again, thank you for all the books that you put out into the leadership world. You've impacted the world in a very significant way, and I'm very excited. Is book number 13 on Ego 13?

Mark Miller ([40:31](#)):

It's actually not on ego, it's on leadership, but Okay. But we've identified ego as the primary barrier. So we will talk about ego for sure.

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

Okay. We'll include links to everything we talked about in the show notes. So leaders, make sure you pick up a copy for you and your team to go through. Anything else you wanna leave us with as far as

Mark Miller ([40:48](#)):

Just last thought? Uh, there are gonna be people who are gonna have questions. Yes. I mean, you asked some great questions today. Uh, if they wanna reach out to me, my cell number is 6 7 8 6 1 2 8 4 4 1.

Doug Smith ([41:02](#)):

Amazing. And we'll put that in the show notes as well. Leader, if you're driving or anything like that, uh, you can pick that up there. So Mark, thanks again. Hopefully we'll do this again sometime. And, uh, just thanks for everything you do for leaders.

Mark Miller ([41:11](#)):

Thank you Doug.

Doug Smith ([41:13](#)):

Well, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Mark. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did, and you can find ways to connect with Mark and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes. And Leader is always, I want to challenge you that if you want to 10 x your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L three leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups are 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 and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last eight years. And so I believe every leader needs a be in one. And so if you're interested in launching or joining a group, go to L3leadership.org/mastermind or email me at dougsmith@l3leadership.org.

Doug Smith ([41:53](#)):

And as always, I like to end every episode with a quote. And for the third episode in a row, I'll quote Henry Cloud. He said this, he said, let God use the pain of your past to repair your heart for today and tomorrow. Don't be discouraged. You are growing in leader. I hope that's an encouragement to you if you were in a dark season. And if you haven't listened to our episode with John Stalwart yet on the role of pain in a leader's life, we really want to encourage you to go back and listen to that. If you're going through a hard time, well leader, I hope you enjoyed the episode. Know that my wife, Lauren, I love you. We believe in you and I say it every episode, but don't quit. Keep leading. The world desperately needs your leadership.

