

Doug Smith: 0:07

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 today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We also recorded this live from thereturncom studio. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm 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. 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 if you'd 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. Well, leader, in today's episode you're going to hear my conversation with Jeff McManus, and he was going to love this. If you're unfamiliar with Jeff, just let me tell you a little bit about him. Jeff McManus grows things as the landscape leader at the University of Mississippi. He grows plants, he grows people and he grows fresh ideas. In his side hustle, Jeff speaks and works with problem solvers all across the country who understand that doing more with less is a key to being productive and profitable. Taking his team, affectionately known as weeders, and cultivating them into leaders has reaped acres of rewards in the form of national recognition by the USA Today, Princeton Review, Newsweek and the New York Times. Building on that momentum, Jeff has designed a professional development course that allows other organizations to duplicate the success of working smarter, not harder, called Landscape University. Jeff graduated from Auburn University in horticulture. He is also a professional certified grounds manager and a certified arborist. I don't know how to say that. Jeff knows that great leaders grow leaders and, as a professional speaker and member of the National Speaking Association, his message focuses on enriching, entertaining and inspiring industry leaders looking to grow their teams performance. In our conversation, you're going to hear Jeff share his process for growing weeders into leaders. I was blown away with the intentionality of his leadership development. I just know you're going to love this conversation. 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 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 at www.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 SIPC. Beratung Advisors, lpl Financial and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also want to thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers. They're a jeweler owned by my friend and mentor, John Henne. My wife Laura and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an incredible experience. Not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage. We just love that. If you're in need of a good jeweler, check out HenneJewelers.com. I also want to 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 Reiturn.com to learn more. That's R-E-I-T-U-R-Ncom. Investing involves risk. Please consult the return offering circular if you're

interested in investing. And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's how to turn leaders into leaders with Jeff McManus. Welcome to the L3 Leadership Podcast. I'm very excited to have you on the show today and you are the first landscaper or someone that's been responsible for landscaping that I've ever had on the podcast. But I've listened to you and I'm so excited to introduce you to our audience and I thought why don't we just start off with you just telling people kind of the scope of what you've been responsible for in the landscaping space?

Jeff McManus: 4:03

Well, thank you for having me, Doug. It's a great honor to be here. I'm currently a W-2 employee at the University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, and we have a beautiful thousand-acre campus here that it just. If you don't want to go to school here, don't come here, because, well, we've got you. As soon as you come on campus, you're going to want to go to school here, and so we use landscaping as a recruiting tool to capture the hearts and minds of not only great students but parents, because they're going to be spending a hundred grand over the next four years with us and we're going to be selling right at the gate, right as soon as they come in. We want you to go, man, this is it. So I've been very lucky to live the passion of Dr Robert Kayatt, who had the dream to make Ole Miss one of the great American universities, and so I've been able to do that and had a lot of fun doing that over the last 20 years since 2000. Before that, I did a little bit in the resort business, in the five-star business, so that sort of set my tone for high-end, top-end, quality properties.

Doug Smith: 5:11

Okay, and you talked about a thousand acres just out of curiosity, so people get an understanding. What does it take? What did the structure of what it looked like? How many people did you ever see to actually care for and make a thousand acres look beautiful?

Jeff McManus: 5:22

Well, we don't have enough people, I'll tell you that, and so we have about 35 people. Most campuses this size have over 100 people, and so Ole Miss is known for always being the little school in the big conference, and so we're always out of our weight league. But we have some of the best people in the world who love what they do and just they're amazing. So that's how come we're able to do more with less and being able to win national awards and so forth. And it takes a, it takes leading by example, it takes an eye for detail, and it takes adapting and overcoming all the circumstances. See, I've got to have people out there who can think in the field I can't cover a thousand acres, Doug and so I need them to be empowered to make the right decisions right. I need them to be able to know when to leave it alone, pull it out, trim it. I've got to have leaders out there. So that's where we come, for, you know, leaders and the leaders.

Doug Smith: 6:26

Yeah, and we'll dive into how you've led that so well in a moment. I do want you to talk about just because you're my first landscaping guest ever. You know, landscaping is something that you don't often think about and I guess, unless you recognize how bad it is. But but as I've

heard you talk in other podcasts just not only organizationally, but even in our homes why why is landscaping important?

Jeff McManus: 6:47

Well, it's the first thing we experience, right, and the realtors, realtors will tell you that we, we determine landscaping, that curb appeal. We can up a property. Five to some people say 25% can be increased by that curb appeal. I know when I'll ride by a property and my wife she's like, no, that's not a real good one. Or or, if we're looking for a fixer up, or we may go, yes, that's a good one because it needs some love. But it's the same way with college campuses. 62% of prospective students who come to visit a campus for the very first time will decide in the first few moments, the first few minutes, if they're going to that university. That's a \$100,000 decision and they haven't even met anybody in the science department, the math department. Curb appeal. We are, we, as human beings, we judge by looks. We we don't like to say that because of other things, but we go to the produce area. We don't pick out the brown bananas, we look for the good bananas, right, and so in some things we use appearance a lot and we want to know if we feel safe. We're always looking in our environment. Do we feel safe here and when, when the plantings are in order, the mulch looks pristine, there's edging, it's just tight and right, right and it just looks good. Some, as a daddy's, are going like, if they're taking care of the little things, doug, they're going to take care of our children, right. So that's why we try to do it here at Ole Miss. We want, we want parents to have that peace of mind and sense of security when they drive in.

Doug Smith: 8:28

Yeah, I'm curious. You know we're talking about landscaping. What do you wish people knew about landscaping, or what it takes to actually pull off a pristine campus that they may not know?

Jeff McManus: 8:36

Well it's, it's a lot of manual labor, right? I didn't realize my friends gave me started joking with me when I was in college. I was a marketing major and I changed over to horticulture and they said you do realize you're, you're majoring in manual labor now, right, and so we kind of joke around. But it's a lot of, you know, good people who like to. The good thing about our work is you can see it and, and so you've got to be out there and be willing to, you know, be in the weather and you got to be out there and take on poison ivy and you know the gross things that happen. You know, unfortunately, squirrels get run over and you got to deal with it. But we're the kind of behind the scenes people who make that magic happen and it looks good.

Doug Smith: 9:21

We're going to talk about your leadership and how you got there, but you've mentioned that you've had multiple national awards. I'm looking here at USA Today has given you national awards, the Princeton Review News Week and the New York Times. Can you talk about one of the awards and just what it takes to get those? But I love I heard how you celebrate those with your team as well. Can you talk about their awards and how you've sell?

Jeff McManus: 9:40

Yeah, and I I am. You know these national awards. We actually call them national championships here because we're at a college campus. So we, we bragged that we've won five national championships in landscaping, and so yeah, and so that's a big deal. We look, we have our staff look at each other and go, look, that person across from you is a national champion. And it's like, you know, we're just normal people but we're at a national level at how we compete, and so it's, it's a lot of fun to be recognized. These they do polls, they do surveys, and they don't really tell you how they pick them, they just they'll pick them, and so it's a, it's just a big honor to get named. And then, of course, when that happens, Doug, we want to celebrate that victory. Right, we always looking for excuses to have a luncheon, to buy food or something. So we, we had a huge celebration and and you know, Doug, you know how you go into a basketball arena or or football stadium and you'll see the national championship banners hanging up in the rafters, right, Well, we took a, we took a, we took that and stole it. And so if you go to our truck shed, Doug, our big old truck shed, we parked this, we put those banners up hanging in our truck shed and so during our ceremony we had them rolled up. And so once we got everybody together and we were taking pictures, and then I got on the microphone kind of made you know, you know kind of pump stuff like, hey, we won the national. And then the mechanics go there and cut the string and the banners just kind of rolled down. I mean, dude, it gave me chill bumps 2016,. You know, USA Today National Champions, right, so it's just kind of it's just fun to do that. And then, Doug, you, you're going to love this. I got to see where. Where did I do it? Oh, here it is, Doug, you're going to love this. I got to show you this. You're going to appreciate this. Can you see that? Yes, oh wait a minute, I've got it upside down. National championship rings, doug. Come on. How many, how many landscapers do you know, have national championship rings, right?

Doug Smith: 11:47

That's so awesome man.

Jeff McManus: 11:48

Yeah. So we got all the, all the ones that we've won all the years and you know it just got. It's just so cool. And I saw one of the guys who retired the other day and he had his national championship ring on. Man, he was proud. I mean this, just this sends the message that we are champions. We're not, we're not just cutting grass, we're not just pulling weeds, we're helping recruit great students to a great university to change the world. So this, that's the message, that's how we celebrate.

Doug Smith: 12:18

I love that. Well, jeff, you're certainly not the end of your leadership journey, but you know one not your national champion. You've led a national championship team. I want to go back before we dive into how you've led those teams. I always like asking leaders when did you first recognize that you were a leader and had leadership potential?

Jeff McManus: 12:36

The first time I realized I was a leader, I was. I was at a camp. I was about 18, 19 years old and, for all growing up through junior, high and high school, I was always used to being a camper, right and being the one the coaches talked to. And then, all of a sudden, I'm out of high school, I'm in my first year of college and I'm at a camp and they put me in charge of eight nine year olds. And I had these 10 little eight nine year olds looking at me and all of a sudden I'm going holy cow, no preparation, they didn't tell me anything. And I'm supposed to read these things to these kids, I'm supposed to lead them, you know, through this every night before they go to bed, and do this every morning, and then I'm in charge of them all day long. And that's when my, my spectrum sort of shifted is you're not just the one taking it in now and following, you're the one helping, guide and direct.

Doug Smith: 13:29

And with that, so you recognize your leader. I'm assuming at some point you recognize that to be a good leader you're going to have to grow and develop what. What have you done over the years that and what do you do currently to grow and develop as a leader, to always get better?

Jeff McManus: 13:41

Well, growth is I mean what I do in the plant industry. How do you know when a plant is no longer growing it does? What, doug, what does it do?

Doug Smith: 13:52

Oh, man don't ask me anything, you know what a plant does.

Jeff McManus: 13:55

Okay, it dies, it dies. Right, I'm sure you've had a few of those in your yard. Okay, but right, it quits growing, it dies. And the same thing with with me and everybody here If we're not growing and really pushing out of our comfort zone, we get a little, we get a little blacks and we get complacent and we might even get a little lazy. So so what I'm constantly doing now I'm at a point in my career I'm very fortunate I've got some great leaders in my organization, but I get to spend a lot of time helping develop the new leaders who are coming on board, our new. I mean we have a very young staff, so a lot of these guys never went to Boy Scouts, never had any kind of training, never grew up, didn't do a lot of sports, and so I'm getting the opportunity to grow them. So that forces me to put that down in writing and come up with a program. We have a lead by example program that we walk these folks through. And it forces me, doug, to have to really get crystal clear on what leadership is and what it is that we're wanting from our team.

Doug Smith: 15:06

We, I would just go there. How do you define leadership?

Jeff McManus: 15:11

Well, leadership is in my world a lot of times, is getting people excited about what they're doing and getting them so they're empowered to do it right, set the vision and set the direction. And, of course, I just want to go back to that last question. I read a lot of books. I mean, I learned from the greats A lot of them you've had on your, your podcast, but I read constantly on. I'm listening

to audio books even more because they're just quicker and I'm in the truck I can listen to those. But yeah, it's. It's all about inspiring others to be a part of that vision and that they're they feel empowered to do great, great things.

Doug Smith: 15:53

And talking about leadership development, you've written two books one which I think is one of the greatest leadership book titles I've ever heard, growing weeders into leaders. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. And then the book cultivate. I'll just leave this open end before we dive into some of the more leadership development content. Why did you write these books and what do you want leaders to get out of them?

Jeff McManus: 16:12

Well, I wrote the books for a couple of reasons. One, I wanted to get our story out. We went from a really negative culture, terrible culture, toxic, and I think a lot of people face that. The more I go around and benchmark with my fellow leaders and talk to other industries, you see that people are, they're stepping into roles where they're having to, you know, turn that culture around. So that was a big part is to give people a roadmap on what we did and to share a little bit of our success, from going from the worst place, the last place in the in the world, to national championships with the same crew, and so that was a big part is to inspire people and to help them get better. Also, doug, I've been asked to speak more and tell the story as we've won the national championships and it's like, hey, how can I, how can I help people that may not hear me speak, but it also gives me, you know, places to speak, because I do have that book.

Doug Smith: 17:09

Did you come up with a title, since I was at a conference and what was her name?

Jeff McManus: 17:18

I would love to give her cooters. Her last name was Shaw, but she said leader, weeders in the leaders, and that's where the title came from. She it was. She was inspired.

Doug Smith: 17:27

Yes, you talked about turning around a culture. Can you, can you give us some more context specifically, around you? Come in ole miss. Culture wasn't what it needed to be. What did you? What was reality Right? One of the leaders objectives is to find reality. What did reality look like? And then, how did you turn that around?

Jeff McManus: 17:43

Yeah, we're a state institution and unfortunately the grounds department was where it was described to me as where the the rejects and the people who didn't work in facilities, who didn't work out well, they were transferred to grounds and into that area and so just sort of out of out of sight, out of mind, because 1000 acres you can kind of go out on campus and you can get lost, Doug like Hide from people. You're just not a lot of accountability there. And so production suffered from that. Like we were getting work orders, internal work orders, from our customers saying please come cut the grass at our building. Well, in our, in my arena, no one should ever

have to tell me to come cut the grass Right, that we should be proactively doing that. So we had to win I had to win the hearts and minds of our staff and some I mean I had some great ones who were immediately drawn to that, that being the best of the best, they love that vision of what we were trying to do. And then I had a few who who realized that they were. No, they were going to be held accountable and and it was going to be hard to keep doing what they'd done in the past. So they self selected out. So we looked at that as a good, as a win. We've built on that ever since. I tell you, the culture and if you don't stay on the culture, if you don't continually grow it, the weeds will take over. I mean, we had a great culture and then, like, we took our foot off the accelerator COVID and man, I'm telling you, a lot of weeds, drama, rumors, negativity, all that stuff crept back in because we weren't doing some of the things we were doing pre COVID.

Doug Smith: 19:34

Yeah. So if you had to give us a few plays in the playbook, so to speak, of things that you actually did? So I'm a new leader, I'm stepping into that role what would you tell me? Things that you actually did, communication wise, sharing the vision, standard setting what did you do to actually start to make some of those changes?

Jeff McManus: 19:50

Yeah, that's. There was a lot to that question because we put that on a diagram and there's probably about 30 things we did, but I'll tell you the big ones for me. The probably the big one for me was to start being proactive in planting what I wanted. Doug, I had to start planting, like if I wanted to grow corn, I got to plant corn right, it makes sense. And so I started wanting leaders to lead by example. I needed people who, who had initiative, who adapted and overcome, and I had to start planning that. One way we did that is every month. We started meeting in small groups and we call it L2L leader to leader and we would watch a video usually some inspiring, inspiring type leader John Maxwell, Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins, some, lots of those guys, Les Brown and we would watch it for 10 minutes. 10 minutes is perfect and we hopefully have a handout that goes with it and they're filling in the blanks. So we're keeping them engaged. But then I want to know what their takeaway is, and I want to. I'll ask them question. My job is to facilitate and to build trust and so they can hear them talk, hear themselves talk about leadership. That one exercise helped solidify our culture into a growth and development, positive culture, more than anything in the world. I had this one drama nator who was really good at I don't know if you ever worked with a drama nator, Doug, but they're not. They're not, you know, they cause a lot of issues and he came to me after about six months of us doing this and he says I just want to let you know. I found another job closer to home and I was like, yes, you know, and I was like happy that he's got it was good for him, good for us, cause he was a real instigator. Behind my back they passed the flag. The drama nator always passes the flag to the next person. Three months later that person said, hey, I'm going to, I'm going to go to another job. But all those people that were in the middle that were sort of leaning toward hit those negative directions as we kept doing this, Doug, they came over to the positive side. My guys call it. They came over to the light. Right, they, they. It was a real good culture. So, leader to leader, Doug was by far the number one tool that we use to help change the culture.

Doug Smith: 22:14

I'm curious. I mean, my life was transformed in a similar way. I interned at a church and I'll never forget the youth pastor there that was the boss handed me a John Maxwell CD Again. Just, I don't have time to share my whole story, but graduated with very low GPA, never thought I'd amount to anything with my life, et cetera. And so he hands me the CD. I never heard of personal development before. He said listen to this. I, you know, I ended up putting it in blew my mind, transformed my entire life. I called him, I transcribed the whole lesson by hand, cause I didn't know it came with notes and I said give me everything you got. And for me the light bulb went off. And I remember I got so passionate about personal growth and development that I used to have parties in my house with kids getting drunk and high. And I remember having them all over and say, guys, we're not getting drunk and high tonight, like we're going to watch something that's going to change your life. And I put in the 21 year of Feudal Laws of leadership on DVD and they all rolled their eyes and left. I share that cause. You know, for me it took one time the light bulb went off the line of work you're in, I'm just how you said. All those people went. I'm just curious, as far as the investing in other people, how many, like what percentage of the people that you invested in, did the light bulb go off and they ended up turning into phenomenal leaders? Cause I think we underestimate the power of just simply investing and providing content to people.

Jeff McManus: 23:31

I would say a good 50% of our team turned and a lot of them now, some honestly back when we started doing leader to leader. There's several of them I would have. I kind of wish they would leave, you know, they were just not. They were leaders, but they were negative leaders. But when I started proactively feeding them John Maxwell, zig, zig or Les Brown it planted seeds in them that grew. I actually even took our staff. You asked me some of the things we did. I took our staff down to the local library and showed them how to check out books and how to check out CDs. This was back in the day. I had one of my most challenging negative persons. He wasn't really a leader, but we consider everybody a leader and he started listening to leadership CD books. And I asked him. I saw him two or three years after. I knew you know we had gone to the library. I said are you still listening? He goes oh yeah, I'm listening to. I think it was Pat O'Reilly or somebody like that, who was the coach for the Chicago Bulls with Jordan.

Doug Smith: 24:38

I think that's who he was with Phil Knight. No, no, no, no Phil Knight, just Nike Phil Jackson.

Jeff McManus: 24:42

Phil Jackson. He was listening to Phil's book and I'm telling you that guy became one of my best mentors. And today, I mean, he tells me he goes. I realize I may be mentoring the person who's gonna be my boss, you know, in a year or two he goes but I have a passion to mentor these young students and these young people who come work for us. And that was the wind, that was the light bulb moment to see his heart soften and come to be, to see his role as a true mentor.

Doug Smith: 25:16

This is huge and you have a chapter in the book of leaders into leaders called find hidden leaders, and you made a statement just a few minutes ago that you view everyone as leaders.

Is that because you believe they have a seed of leadership potential in them? And if you just water it as you were just sharing that, hey, you never know who you're investing and what they could be. If you just is that kind of your philosophy, when it comes to leadership development.

Jeff McManus: 25:39

Yes, you think about, doug, the people who've made a difference in your life, right? Those, some people. Some of those may have been coaches, somebody who spoke into your life, who encouraged you to do the right thing, maybe when you didn't want to. And so that's one of the things is hey, where are these guys getting fed? They're getting fed with, probably, country music, rock music, all that nothing negative there but where are they getting mental food? Where are they getting their soul fed? And so that's where we would try to provide that supplement and say, look, we're gonna give you an opportunity, even now, as I create these leadership programs for our staff to help develop and give them the opportunity to get raises and to better themselves. That's the purpose is, hey, I believe in you, I'm gonna reach out my hand. Are you gonna reach out yours? And I'm gonna lift you up to the next level if you're willing to put forth the effort right. And so we're seeing, right now, I've got eight people out of our 35, eight people going through our next leadership class, which is I for detail. And so it's before, doug, I mean, it was one or two people. Now I got eight in this one class, so I'm very excited about it.

Doug Smith: 26:58

Yeah, can you talk about communication? I've heard you you actually and I would love for you to share the story I believe you created I don't wanna mess up the name, but it was like the landscaping creed or a creed just for your team. I believe you had daily huddles where you'd continually cast vision and pour into them. Can you talk about some of those structures, Because I think, as leaders, we often underestimate how much we need to communicate for it to actually get into people's hearts.

Jeff McManus: 27:24

Well, you're absolutely right, we also underestimate the value of bringing people in who share our message and can maybe say the same thing as we say, but they say it a different way and it kinda clicks for our team and it's that one experience that tips them over to the light and to being a leader, and so we invited. I was at a chamber commerce event here in Oxford and I ran into a guy named Terry Johnson and he was a speaker who went into high schools and talked about leadership. But I asked him, I said, Terry, could you come speak to our guys? And he's a former Green Beret. He's a big old guy, I mean he's in his fifties now but he still thinks he can take on the world. Right, he's just amazing. Well, we're showing him landscape, university and all this training that we're doing and he goes. Man, I love this stuff, he goes. But y'all are missing something and we're kinda like we're kinda looking around. What are we missing? You're missing a landscape creed and we're going. Terry, you're right, we don't know what a landscape creed is. He goes in the green berets and our special forces. We have a creed that we memorized and, Doug, I've looked at that creed. It's a solid page long. He quoted it by memory and I'm telling you, Doug, we got goosebumps and only thing missing was the star spangled banner playing in the background and a few fireworks going off, because it was inspiring. I

mean, this guy believed it, you could tell it. And he's telling us you need one of these. Well, I did what any other, you know, any good leader would do, Doug, I did nothing, right? I'm like kind of bobbleheading. Yeah, you're right, but man, he planted a seed inside of me that I couldn't. I couldn't put it, I couldn't deny it, and it kept growing and it took me about three years but we started doing our own creed. We figured out how to do our own creed and so every Monday morning now in our meeting, we do our landscape creed and we say it together. Most everybody on our staff, except for our new folks, have it memorized. They know it by heart, and so it's one of those things that now we everything we do we tie it to the creed when we hire people. Our staff are involved in those hiring processes and they say, hey, tell us how you lead by example, Tell us how you at a time in your former place, how you've had to adapt and overcome. So we even created a hall of fame where our retired people are now voted into a hall of fame, and you got to be voted in. Yeah, it's great, we're doing. We're doing it. You ought to come down to it, Doug. It's going to be in September, we're going to do it. And we got two inductees going in. One's going in as a is lead by example, and the other is going in as professional integrity, and so they were voted on by our staff, and so we'll shrine them, so to speak, as as one of the great leaders in our organization, and their picture will be up on the wall for for all eternity to see them as the landscape hall of fame.

Doug Smith: 30:42

This is incredible. Can you talk more about a landscape university? You know, even within the own organization where I help lead, you know people. Development is on everyone's radar and organizations over and over again. I talk to leaders all the time. I just don't have time to develop my people. I need resources. It's just an overwhelming task of people. What have you done that's made it simple and easy? Talk more about landscape university.

Jeff McManus: 31:03

Yeah, and I and I so relate to that because we're busy putting out fires and taking care of day to day. But here's the thing If we don't put on the calendar for things that are important, we'll never do them. It took us four years to create landscape university and we're still 10 years later. We launched it in 2013. We're still modifying it, making it better, but it's a really from day one, what we want our new employee, what that experience to be, and we map it out, we plan it out, we have orientation, and so they're going to go through certain classes. We made videos so that they understand the vision of cultivating greatness. We're here, we're. A part of what we do is cultivate greatness. Well, we have our football coaches, our chancellors, telling them how they affect their job, and so they start seeing this bigger picture of what they do. So landscape university gets us going in the right path and then, as they get that behind them and they've got orientation, they go to level 200. And we want them to be successful in their skills. So we're we're teaching them how to put in pine straw. We're teaching them how to drive carts safely. All these are spelled out in a real simple format. We didn't make it super complicated. Then they take a quiz after every test and, doug, you remember when we were growing up in grade school the teacher put our name up on the board and then she would put a star by our name when we did something really good or completed something.

Doug Smith: 32:37

That never happened to me.

Jeff McManus: 32:39

I don't believe that, Doug.

Doug Smith: 32:41

I saw it for other students, yeah.

Jeff McManus: 32:43

So but it's that internal pressure of like, I want to do that, I want to get that done, and I'm telling you that's been great accountability, our team, I mean just seeing that. And then we give them a magnet Doug, I'd love to take my computer back there. I'd show you all the magnets that are stuck on their locker where they have gotten level 100 completed, level 200 completed, and so it's an internal certification and after they do a certain amount of those, they can actually qualify to get a raise in their current position. So it's a. We were just so frustrated because, man, these are our standards and we're not doing that and we've got to get everybody on the same page. And landscape university has really helped unify us and get our quality up to the and keep it up at that standard we expect at Ole Miss.

Doug Smith: 33:36

You may have just answered what I want to ask, but I want to ask again in case you have more insight on it. You just, I think so many leaders want their staff to be owners. Right, we hire people, but we want them to see what we see as leaders. We want to empower them to think as you were mentioning earlier. We want them to think like leaders when they're walking through the campus. We want them to notice when things aren't right, et cetera. When it comes to standards, accountability, et cetera. Has it simply just been landscape university that has enabled people to be empowered to become owners, or are there other things that contribute to that?

Jeff McManus: 34:10

Well, leader to leader class really contributes that, because I'm teaching all of those classes. But landscape university empowers people because they know what's one thing that we never want to see out on campus that's a dead plant. A dead plant is a really, really big no-no. So we want our team to be empowered. If you see that, what do you do? Do you just ignore it, ride by it? No, we want you pulling it up right. Simple little thing, but it matters. We don't want flyers stuck to stop signs. It's just not. It looks litter and just looks unclean. So we don't want people to ride by that and ignore it, take it all. So one of the ways that we help describe it is we put it in dollars. If it's less than \$100, you can do it. You don't need to ask anybody. If it's less than \$5,000, the supervisors can do it without asking anybody. And then I've empowered my team. They can do things up to \$30,000 without checking with me, but they usually do. But try to empower on those types of decisions.

Doug Smith: 35:20

Yeah, you talked about the power bringing other people in to say things in a way that we may not be able to say them, or we do say them, but they just say differently. Another way I've heard you talk about how you train your team is by actually sending them out to see other organizations, and I know you've mentioned the Ritz Carlton Chick-fil-A. Can you talk about the importance of actually going and visiting other places and then maybe a thing or two that you've learned from some of the companies that you admire?

Jeff McManus: 35:45

Well, I'll give credit to Dr Robert Kayat who recruited me here. He was the chancellor and he really encouraged me to take some of my leaders to other college campuses. We were way behind, Doug. Our standards were terrible. I mean, we were sad and we had people who wanted to do it well, but they needed to see it. They needed to picture it like I had been to Disney World. I had been working at Top End Resorts. I knew what five-star looked like. My staff had not been to Disney. So when I say we want to look like the Disney World of college campuses, they might shake their head but they didn't know what that looked like. So he encouraged us to go. So, even though it wasn't convenient it was never a good time, I would. First I started by loading up our leaders. We went to other universities. I mean, we went across the SEC and spent a week looking at other campuses the good, the bad, the ugly but every time we got back in that van we talked about what we saw. I had an issue with one of my employees, one of my leaders, who would go to lunch but he would leave grass, grass, clippings everywhere on the sidewalks in the street and he says well, we'll get it after lunch. You know we'll come back and get it. We're like, oh man, you don't know who I was going to visit in the next hour while you're at lunch. Well, when we went to this one particular university, he looked at the grass and it was terrible. It was all matted up and, man, that made an impression on him. I never once had to tell him or even encourage him to clean up before lunch breaks and to make a first impression. That stuck into his mind for the next 20 years and until he retired and he remembered it the day he retired we talked about it and how that made an impression on him. So, taking people to conferences, but we would go to conferences, but we'd make sure we go see three or four college campuses on the way and sometimes we'd interact with their leadership. Sometimes we didn't, we didn't have time to, but those were big takeaways. And now we have a college two hours away. On a rainy day I might call up the director there and say, hey, we're going to come visit your campus. We just want to ride around for a couple hours, see your problem, see your solutions and come back. And we've come up with some great solutions because we're interacting, and I guess they call it in our industry benchmarking, and so that's what we're doing. It's benchmarking, yeah.

Doug Smith: 38:14

Yeah, what are one or two of your favorite organizations that you look up to in a Mayanist?

Jeff McManus: 38:17

Oh man, that's, yeah, chick-fil-a. I'm a huge Dan Cathy fan, Truett Cathy fan, all the Cathys. You know Mark Miller and what he's done, and so we try to emulate a lot of what we do. We read their information and then we try to emulate what they're doing. The United States military we love that because they have figured out how to motivate people with a purpose with very little

pay. And then, of course, the Ritz Carlton. Ritz Carlton's in the service industry, and for years they were the industry standard, still one of the top and the best. We looked at Disney as well. I worked a little bit near Disney for years and yeah, just those great companies who seem to have large staffs, but their staffs are bought in and they're doing a high end service. I mean, you talk about Chick-fil-A. They got their. 70% of their employees are between the ages of 16 and 21, 70%. And yet when you ask about top customer service, you know in the world, chick-fil-a is in that top five, right, everybody talks about Chick-fil-A. It's my pleasure, right, and that they stole that from Ritz Carlton, but it was a great steal, right. They made it their own.

Doug Smith: 39:35

Yeah, yeah, I want to transition topics a little bit, but before I do just I'll leave this open ended. Anything else leadership-wise that you would encourage leaders with today, as it relates to your experience at Ole Miss?

Jeff McManus: 39:47

I think for me is like I've been in this position for 23 years and there can be a tendency to get complacent, lazy. You've won national championships. Why are you putting so much more effort? Why are you out there speaking? Why are you doing these things? And I would say you got to know what your life purpose is. Right. Your life purpose is, you know, cultivate greatness with leaders, right. Well, as part of my life purpose is I want to help other leaders cultivate greatness with their leaders, and so that life purpose for me, you know, is a real driver for me, and so that's what I'd say know your life purpose.

Doug Smith: 40:26

Okay, I think that's beautiful and, speaking of that, you know one thing that and I don't know if you were doing this all along but one thing that you've started to transition to is the speaking and running space. Clearly, you've written two books. You do speaking, you do leadership coaching. Is that something that was always on your radar or is that something that, as you just led so well, other leaders started inquiring and you all of a sudden said, hey, maybe there's just some more purpose that I didn't know about? What did that look like for you?

Jeff McManus: 40:52

Well, I think all my teachers in grade school would be shocked that I'm a writer, because that I was. I wasn't the smart kid and I wasn't the one who was doing all the things. I struggled, and so what I have found is is you hire really good editors to correct all your misspellings and all everything else, but you got to have the stories and I have a passion to see people grow and develop and help organizations even get to that next level or two, and so I think that passion is more I think has more to do with it than anything else it overflows when I go home. All my, my wife and our sons are four great boys. They're all gone right. So I have some time. Her and I do our dinners and things, and then she kind of is doing her thing and I don't. I'm not a big TV watcher. I'll watch a little bit, but like I want to do some, some writing or or or working on some class content. So it's always it's just a drive. It goes back to that purpose of knowing what you're here for and what you're supposed to be doing.

Doug Smith: 41:57

Yeah, so anytime I talk to someone who's written books and as a speaker, I know a lot of people listening to this aspire to it. A lot of leaders I believe every leader has a book in them that can reach a lot of people. Since you've been in that space outside of it sounds like hiring a great editor to make sure it's written properly. Any other advice from what you've learned that you give to people who want to write a book or become a speaker?

Jeff McManus: 42:17

Yeah, just start. You know, that's one of the best advice, as I heard, is don't overthink it and don't try to make it all right. Don't don't necessarily read your stuff, just throw it out there and put it on paper. You can come back and edit it later. I wrote 85,000 words in my first book. It took me two years and when my editor got a hold of it, she goes you got enough in here for two, maybe three books, jeff. She goes do you mind if I edit it down? And I'm telling you she did a wonderful job. She made it into 25,000 words and I had to trust my editor right, you have different style editors and things but she just took it and put it in the format and made it work. So, yeah, I probably could have finished a year early, right, and I was just didn't think I had enough good content in there. I rewrote and rewrote. Just throw it out there and just move on with it and then you'll come back and massage it. But if you don't write, if you don't, if you don't, it does take a discipline of writing and so, if you can get in that habit John Maxwell talks about, he writes every day at around 5.30 in the morning. It's boring. You see, John Gresham, he writes every morning. He, you know, gotta keep the distraction down. I think he has a writing shed and his computer's not hooked up to the internet out there in the writing shed, and I can see why. So I have a writing in my Sweet Tea Studio at home. That's what I call the Sweet Tea Lodge. In the Sweet Tea Studio I have a writing at corner and that's where I do my writing. So it's a work, but the fun part is when you're finished. That's the fun part.

Doug Smith: 43:58

Yeah, I love that. I'm gonna transition to the lightning round Bunch of fun questions I always ask at the end of every interview and the first question is what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Jeff McManus: 44:09

Well, I saw that on your question and I thought through that and I've been given some great advice. But the one that my dad gave me you know, my dad was always great at these little one-liners and one that always just stuck with me I don't know if it was the greatest I ever got, but it was one that I remembered and we were sitting in traffic after a football game and we just turned and went the opposite way of traffic and we made it home like quickly. He just looked at me and go, always be willing to go against the flow. You know, I was like that's golden. Yeah, at the time I didn't really appreciate it, but it was true. But everybody's all going this way and so, even as leaders, you gotta be willing. Like in my role, nobody told me to write a book, nobody told me to do these programs, but you gotta be willing to turn and go in different direction. And then people are like man, he's a writer, he's gotta figure it out, and it's like no, you just kind of went the other way.

Doug Smith: 45:11

That's why Wow, if you could put a quote on a billboard for everyone to read, what would it say?

Jeff McManus: 45:19

Oh, I think I would have to put a scripture verse up there. I think I would those billboards back in the nineties this is probably before your time, doug, I don't know but you remember those billboards that would quote God and it would say be still God. I just thought those were powerful. I still remember those. I would want it to be clever, something like that, to point people to the light, point people to the truth, and I would probably put John 316 up there.

Doug Smith: 45:47

All right, I would be curious on that end, just being a person of faith on a college campus. A lot of times call and I don't know what would miss, but I know a lot of times college campuses are not necessarily known for their affection towards God. How have you, as a leader, lived out your faith in the workplaces? That been easy, for you difficult. How have you navigated that?

Jeff McManus: 46:07

Well, I think it's how we live our life right. It's more of our actions and our words, and so that's the one thing is caring about people, investing in people, helping people no matter where they are, helping them to be the best them they can be, and so that's how I live out my faith, and every now and then, I use words right, and so we're fortunate that we can do that, still do that, so I do from time to time, but I don't think preaching works as far as in the workplace. I think that's kind of the wrong way to do it. I think it's the more of your example and what drives you. People are attracted to, that Kind of want to make people curious on. What gives you that excitement and joy.

Doug Smith: 46:56

We've talked a lot about books, of just the impact of books, but we haven't gotten specific. Are there one or two books, either in the last year or all time, that have greatly impacted you that you'd say, hey, if you haven't read this, it's?

Jeff McManus: 47:07

a must read. I pulled them off my shelf and these are three of ones that I use a lot. When I speak, I use Daniel Pink's drive, because this is all about motivation and I'm telling you it's so simple. It's a little nerdy, right, but I love this book. Purpose, mastery and autonomy that's what drives people and I'm telling you, when you know that and you use that in your motivation of people, it's simple, so I love that book. John Maxwell turned me on to this one and I don't have one of John's books, but John's a big. I'm a big John Maxwell fan. The leadership challenge, right, and this is the sixth edition. They already got the seventh one, but it's at my house. I love this book. It's the leadership Bible. And then this one made a big impact on my life Change the culture, change the game, and this is I mean, you don't have to. This again is kind of a deep, nerdy book on culture, but learning how to do that and I love the diagrams they use. But how do you get a, build a culture, and how do you just quit focusing on just the results and the action? But you got to focus on people's beliefs. And how do you change their beliefs is, you create

experiences, great, memorable experiences. So that's what leader to leader does for us. We change their experiences, their beliefs change, and then our actions and our results came naturally. So I love that book. It helped spell out to me what we were doing and it made it clear for me how to do that in an organization.

Doug Smith: 48:44

Yeah, you've mentioned your friends with Dan, Cathy. You get to spend time with a lot of great leaders. I'm curious. I'm always looking to collect great questions. When you spend time with a leader that you look up to or admire, want to learn from, do you have a go to question that you always ask?

Jeff McManus: 48:57

Well, I usually ask them what kind of what you ask me is what drives you? What drives you? And when you know what drives them, you can kind of get alignment. Do you have alignment with their values? And just getting around those type of leaders is what do you want to be remembered for when you're no longer here?

Doug Smith: 49:18

And that usually causes a pause and a moment of fault on that as well, yeah, I usually end every interview with that question, but since you brought it up, I'll just ask you now what do you want to be remembered for? What do you want your legacy to be?

Jeff McManus: 49:32

He helped grow and cultivate great leaders.

Doug Smith: 49:36

Boom yeah.

Jeff McManus: 49:36

I always say because we're doing leader to leader when the guys here that I passed away one day and we're all retired they go. You know, McManus, he helped me be a better dad and if we had time I would share a story where a guy, where a guy came in and he closes my door. I'm sharing the story anyway, sorry.

Doug Smith: 49:54

And he closed the door and he goes.

Jeff McManus: 49:58

I want to tell you this leader to leader stuff we're doing is amazing. He goes. We're not finding out in the field anymore, we're actually getting along and enjoying one another. And then he stopped and he put his head down and I'm like uh-oh, what happened? And he came back up and he looked at me. He's got water in his eyes and he goes. I just want to let you know that this leader to leader stuff that you're sharing with us changed my marriage. He goes. I was getting ready to divorce my wife because I thought my wife was the problem. He goes, going through

leader to leader, I realized I was responsible for me and that I was the problem. And so you know that guy has gone on and now he's working in another department. He's doing so well. I saw him a year ago and I asked him I said how's your marriage? And he goes man, we're still together, we're doing good. And I was like, man, that's the win, right? That's the legacy, that's the stories I hope I hear in heaven one day.

Doug Smith: 51:03

Doesn't get any better than that. What's your greatest leadership pet peeve?

Jeff McManus: 51:09

Boy, there's a lot of those. But because I work on a college campus and we tend to we just go in the same cycle of right now, just the things that you know people's emergencies is because of lack of planning on their part, and so you're kind of like, okay, we'll help you out again, and so you just pet peeves is not. Pet peeves is not planning, not taking initiative, not having the courage, not having the courage to do things like leader to leader, not having the courage to take your people to the local library to invest in them, not willing to take your people on a field trip so that they can get better. Thinking we're so busy that we can't invest in our people, that's a little pet peeve of mine.

Doug Smith: 51:58

I don't know if you have an actual bucket list or not, but what's something you've done in your life that you believe everyone should experience before they die?

Jeff McManus: 52:07

Wow, that's another. That was another real thoughtful question there. I think, okay, this is funny, you're not going, you're not? I don't know if you're going to like this or not. I think everybody should spend a day on a August in a Southern state, bush hogging.

Doug Smith: 52:30

What? I don't even know what bush hogging is. Tell me more.

Jeff McManus: 52:33

All right. So bush hogging is is like when you drive a tractor and you have a mower on the back but you're cutting grass. That's three feet tall, and so you're, you're in a pasture and you're driving that tractor and it's you that tractor, in the hot sunshine and you're just mowing and mowing all day long and then you hit a yellow jacket's nest which is in the ground, and I think the reason I say that is because that was part of my upbringing the satisfaction you got at the end of the day, knowing what you had done but that you stuck with it, that you were consistent, and I really did not enjoy that growing up. But how much those work habits train me to be successful. Today I give so much credit to my dad because he had us working, he had us doing jobs. I mean things that I was like I don't want to ever do this again. Now I'm I'm so grateful that he taught me how to do it.

Doug Smith: 53:37

You talked about growing up. If you could go back and have coffee with yourself at any age, what? And you would have actually listened to yourself. That's key. What age would you have coffee with yourself and what would you tell that version of Jeff?

Jeff McManus: 53:49

I would have gone back to probably age 18, right out of high school, because you're trying to figure out. I was trying to figure out what I'm going to do with my life. I wanted to. I thought I was going to be a computer salesman or computer repair person or working computers. I took you know, I took computer classes the first year in college and failed miserably. I dropped out of the class. I had no intuition on that. It's like hey, don't be afraid to make mistakes. You're going to make mistakes along the way. That's part of the process. And learn from it. Pivot quickly and just keep on going.

Doug Smith: 54:25

Anything else you want to leave leaders with today.

Jeff McManus: 54:27

Well, I thank you for the opportunity to be here, but you know, the biggest the, the foundation of our leadership, is to lead by example, and people are watching our face, our attitude, how we interact, how we interact with our customers. They're watching us and we set that tempo and that tone for the rest of the team. So I just encourage you to keep thank you one for being a leader, to stepping up to be a leader, but then to keep leading by example.

Doug Smith: 54:59

Well, Jeff, I've loved the conversation. Thank you for dedicating your life to growing leaders into leaders, and I love that. Just the way that God has used you and expanded your platform, that you're certainly developing a lot more people than just the people who are in the landscaping field now, and I hope that God will continue to expand that platform more and more. So thanks again for adding value and hopefully we'll do this again sometime.

Jeff McManus: 55:19

Thanks, Doug, my pleasure.

Doug Smith: 55:21

Well, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Jeff. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him and links to everything that we discussed in the show notes at L3leadership.org 4, slash 387. And leaders, always, I want to challenge you that if you want to 10 extra growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L3 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. So if you're interested in learning more about launching or joining a group, go to L3leadership.org 4 slash masterminds or email me at Doug Smith at L3leadership.org. And, as always, I like to end every episode with a

quote, and I'll quote Gerald Brooks today. I quote him fairly often and he said this. He said what most people perceive as giftedness is really someone who has been disciplined. Come on, I love it. Oh, leader, I hope this episode encouraged you. 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.