

Doug Smith: 0:17

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 the new Bergo Realty 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 and it's made an impact on your life, it would mean the world to me. If you leave a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts through, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders, so thank you in advance for that All.

Doug Smith: 0:58

Leader, in this week's episode, you're going to hear my conversation with Leon Ford, and if you do not know Leon, you are in for a treat. I've been hearing about him for years that I need to meet with him, and I had the opportunity to have lunch with him in fall last year, and having lunch with him was one of the top five highlights of my year. He's that powerful and his story is that powerful. But I don't want to ruin anything, because he's going to share a lot of his story in this conversation and so I'll let you get to know Leon. But here's what I can promise you you're going to be inspired, you're going to be challenged, you're going to fall in love with Leon. He is incredible. But before we dive into his story, just a few announcements.

Doug Smith: 1:33

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Doug Smith: 2:07

I also want to thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers. They're a jeweler earned 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 great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in and gays, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage, and we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out HenneJewelers.com. And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's my conversation with Leon Ford. Well, Leon Ford, welcome to the L3 Leadership Podcast. It made it such a joy to get to know you. We had lunch maybe two months ago, and I was telling many people since that that was one of the highlights of my year in 2023. And it's just such an honor to get to know you. And obviously, after meeting you and hearing your story, I'm like everyone on the planet needs to hear this, and so really look forward to the conversation, brother.

Leon Ford: 2:58

Oh man, thank you, Doug, and you know your leadership and everything you're doing with L3 is very inspirational, so I'm happy to be a part of the family. Man, let's go, let's go.

Doug Smith: 3:10

Well, let's dive in, and again, I've kind of shared, but you have an incredible story which has actually been documented in a book that you came out with last year called *An Unspeakable Hope*, and the tagline is brutality, forgiveness and building a better future for my son, and so that's what I'll then go out there for listeners, and why don't you just kind of unpack that for us with your story?

Leon Ford: 3:31

Absolutely so. When I was 19 years old I was shot five times by Pittsburgh police officer. Once in my neck, two times in my chest, once in my arm and once in my hip and one of the bullets I went through my chest actually paralyzed me. So can't see it now because you know we're like chest up, but I'm actually sitting in a wheelchair right now. So I lost my ability to walk and so that speaks to the brutality aspect. I became an activist, you know, did a lot of organizing locally and nationally, but along my journey, you know, found forgiveness, you know, and I'm sure will unpack that, you know, within this interview. But you know I was able to, you know, open my heart up to forgive, and now I work with police officers. I've trained police officers and co-founded a foundation alongside the former police chief here in Pittsburgh.

Doug Smith: 4:47

Wow, what's the foundation called?

Leon Ford: 4:48

It's called the hear foundation and the name of the foundation comes from this idea that we don't have all the answers you know, and so we're actively listening to community, to their needs, and not just you know, the community, but also what are the needs of our police officers?

Doug Smith: 5:11

Yeah, Well, we'll unpack that a little bit later, but you just kind of shared an overview of your story, which is incredible. But you know that was quite a journey and so you know, I want to kind of dive in. You know, after you got shot, you know you sounded so nonchalantly like I eventually forgave. You know, did the next day you wake up and say, oh, it's no big deal? You know, hey, I forgive you, it's all good. Like, what was that journey to forgiveness? Like, did you, did you deal with bitterness? Did you deal with frustration, depression, like, walk us through you know, the months and years after that happened?

Leon Ford: 5:46

Oh, yeah, it was, you know, certainly years of depression, years of resentment, years of anger, years of hatred. You know I, you know there were moments where I felt completely consumed by hatred. Now I remember vividly, you know, waking up in the hospital and looking up the article about me being shot and it said black teen shot by a white police officer. And I remember going to read the comments and the comments were extremely racist, you know, racial comments about me, about my family, you know, and it was heartbreaking. And so in that moment I told myself that I not only hated police officers but I hated white people. Wow. And However, my nurses and my doctors were so nice to me, they took such good care of me and I credit them, along with my sixth grade teacher, Ms Shank, who came to visit me, for helping to soften my heart, and they didn't know it at the time, but I felt this deep hatred to all white people and I said to myself, well, I hate all white people, but Ms Shank, you know, and I hate all white people, but you know my nurses and my doctors, and so you know that experience really helped keep my heart open and eventually I was, you know, open to, you know, going to the Pittsburgh friends meeting and building a relationship with the Quakers here in Pittsburgh, which, you know, when I went, it was predominantly white people. And then I would meet some, you know, police officers who, you know, saw my humanity and they would, you know, talk to me and they would say, man, this is, you know, wrong, would you experience, and things like that. And so, you know, I took a liking to those people when I realized that, you

know, sometimes we experience things in life that makes us, you know, judge an entire group of people which is, you know, sometimes, you know it could be justified to that person experiencing that pain. And so, you know, now, as I, you know, navigate life, I'm very intentional about, you know, showing up with kindness, with grace and wisdom when I interact with people, because you never know what their experience has been and how they may feel about a group that you represent. It may not be you, you know, but you know trauma is trauma, man, and you know, people have experienced, you know, different trauma on different levels, and so those experiences really helped me become more compassionate.

Leon Ford: 9:07

But it took years, bro, like I'm talking. I'm talking five or six years of, you know of this dance between hope and despair. And the hope led me to want to, you know, embrace people and build relationships. But then that despair, you know that's where that hatred came, you know, and the resentment, and it was like a pendulum, bro. It was like you know, some days I would be talking about healing and hope and inspiration, and in other days I was just in such a dark place that I didn't even, you know, I didn't even want to live, you know. You know I struggled with, you know, those, you know, negative thoughts of not even wanting to be alive, bro. So it was tough.

Doug Smith: 10:04

Yeah, and I would love to and I'm so sorry that you had to go through that. But on the other end of that, you know, one day you were better, the other day there was hope. And I feel like there's so many people listening to this. You know we all, we say all the time at light of life that the average adult, by the time they reach adulthood, has had at least one traumatic experience. And you know, for light of life, oftentimes the men and women walking through our doors have experienced three or four by the time they're 18. And then multiple thereafter. And just with the mental health crisis in our nation, I mean, I feel like so many people have experienced so many things and I feel like they walk that same line that you were walking and I feel like if they feed the bitterness end, then they're going to get on one path. If they feed the hope end, what advice would you have for someone, regardless of what they've experienced, who's walking that line? What would you tell that person listening today?

Leon Ford: 10:53

Well one. I would encourage them to stay as close as possible to the people who are bringing light into their lives. Right, you know I talk a lot about mentorship. You know, and I was able to seek out, you know, positive mentors who would pour into me wisdom. You know, spirituality, love, compassion, understanding. They would make space for me and encourage me. I really needed that. I would read, you know, literature that was encouraging and inspirational. I would be mindful of the music that I listened to. You know I would only listen to positive music and positive podcasts. I would stay away from, you know, any negative music. You know people, you know who you know had a more of a negative perspective of life, people who were doing the wrong things. And you know it's interesting because I would simultaneously grow as a leader as I was healing from the inside out.

Leon Ford: 12:10

I also go to therapy. You know, talking to someone professional, you know, was very instrumental in my growth. And I would also say that talking to professionals helped my relationships right, even with loved ones, because once, you know, I began going to therapy, my brother became my brother and my sister became my sister. My cousins were just my cousins. You know, my parents were my parents. They weren't my therapist. You know, and oftentimes you know we lean on friends. It's interesting, I have friends right now who lean on me to have conversations that they would have with a therapist but they say they would never go to therapy. And so the benefit of you know, finding a good therapist and having those

conversations is that you get to really enjoy those relationships, you know, on a deeper level, without you know sharing that trauma. You know, and you know you could work through that trauma with your therapist instead of unpacking them with your loved ones who's now carrying it with them wherever they go. You know I've become a better friend. I've become a better leader, more thoughtful, more compassionate and understanding.

Doug Smith: 13:41

I love that and you know, one of our core values at L3 is community. We always say that no leader should ever do life alone, but in community, and who you spend time with, as you just said, is extremely important, regardless of what you've gone through. If you surround yourself with negative people who are bitter, that's the path you're gonna go. If you surround yourself with positive people who fill you with hope and encouragement, that's the direction you're gonna go. And you know I always tell people that the community you need is one in which you're fully known, fully loved and fully challenged. And fully known is just, you could be yourself, share anything. Fully loved is you're gonna be loved unconditionally, regardless.

Doug Smith: 14:13

But the third part and I want you to share a story here is fully challenged, and I basically tell people you know sometimes we need a hug and a pat on the back, but other times we need slapped in the face. And I know you had a circumstance come up where you went on a social media rant and I believe a few mentors who loved you fully and know you fully also challenged you fully and that ended up changing your life. Can you share that story? Absolutely?

Leon Ford: 14:38

So, after George Floyd was murdered, I remember our former mayor, Bill Puduto, and the former police chief, Scott Schubert. They had a press conference on the news and you know something about this press conference triggered me and I went to Twitter, which is now X and I kind of went on this rant. I did, I went on it, not kind of yeah, that's funny I went on a rant and called them racists, you know, called the mayor racist, called the chief racist. I said they didn't care about black people and all these things. The interesting thing about that is there was, like this instant gratification to be divisive, because each of those tweets got hundreds of retweets, right, and so I was kind of encouraged to dive deeper into that darkness, right.

Leon Ford: 15:50

However, two people reached out to me. One was John Henney of Henney Jewelers, who was, you know, near and dear to my heart and he's like one of my closest mentors, and he basically said hey, you know, do you really think, you know, Bill was racist, you know. And I was like, yeah, you know, no-transcript. He challenged me on that. I don't think he's racist and I would love for you to sit down with him. Have you ever sat down with him? And I had not. And John basically facilitated a meeting between Bill Puduto Dan Gilman was there and myself and we just hit it off. I mean, Bill, just he just texted me today his article that he wrote. But you know we're friends. You know, make a long story shorter.

Leon Ford: 17:02

John challenged me and I've become friends with, you know, someone that I completely tried to destroy on social media. And the same thing with Laura. You know she reached out to me have you ever sat down with the chief? And at that point I had not and she facilitated a lunch with our former chief, Scott Schubert and I and we became friends and out of that friendship we were able to, you know, several months later, you know, we begin having conversations about collaborating on a project and that project

eventually became the here foundation that we co-founded together, and our first year we raised over \$2 million. Last year we gave out over \$300,000 across, I believe, 18 different organizations, and so you know, I won an event. You know my mentors, you know they brought me into the light and a lot of good came out of me being open to sitting down with people I thought you know negatively about.

Doug Smith: 18:19

Yeah, and I want you to. I do instead of I want to. I want you to take us to those meetings, whether it was lunch or coffee or whatever. You know when you're one, you know. When John said, do you really think that you need to have a meeting? Like what were you feeling going into the meeting? Like, was there fear, was there anger? And then when you actually sat down, like what was? What was that experience like? To get to the point where it went from your racist hey, now we're buddies and let's do something together.

Leon Ford: 18:49

Yeah, one. I trust both, you know, John and Laura. You know I trust them too with my life, and so I knew, you know this, these meetings were being facilitated by people who genuinely cared about me. There was no ulterior motive, it wasn't political, there wasn't going to be cameras and all these things, and I believe that, you know, Bill Puduto, Dan Gilman and Scott Schubert felt the same way. So trust was at the root of the, the meeting or exchange. And so, going to the meeting with Bill and Dan, I had this level of like openness. You know, I didn't. I didn't have any expectations, but I was open to the idea that they may not be racist. You know, I was open to the idea that they could be good people.

Leon Ford: 19:58

I believe that openness came partly from my trust and, John, you know, and I remember sitting down and saying, you know, I didn't really have a desire to talk about the past. You know, this wasn't a meeting where I just wanted to say you know, this is how I felt. You know, when I was shot and things like that, you know I I said, you know I remember saying you know, I want to talk about the future. You know, I want to talk about how we can, you know, do good things and prevent this from happening again. And they had this very similar perspective and we talked about solutions. That was, I mean, that's it Like we. You know it's beautiful we dove right into solutions and they acknowledged my pain, you know, and they share. You know some things about. You know the decisions you know they have to make as leaders and you know how complicated it is and you know how, when you, when they try to appease this group, they pissed this group off and you know all the political things and they, you know, broke it down to me in a way that you know, I really understood, you know, and I wouldn't say we came out of that group like hugging each other, but it was, it was the follow up, it was a step Right, you know the openness, you know text messages and phone calls, you know that really helped us, you know, build that bond, you know.

Leon Ford: 21:42

And the same thing with Scott. I would say, you know I was a little bit more aloof going into the meeting with Scott and that was just because he was a police officer, right, you know him, you know being a chief of police, his badge, you know, I'm like man. I don't trust any police officers, but it was interesting because I didn't meet. I didn't have a meeting with Chief Schubert, I had a meeting with Scott and that made the biggest difference in the world, you know, and he shared his story, I shared my story. He shared his love for Pittsburgh and for his father, who was a Pittsburgh police officer, and how he looked up to his father and that's what inspired him to become a police officer. I mean, we had so many similarities in our stories and I think that is what really opened up my heart. You know, to. You know, get to a place where I consider, you know, Scott, a friend and was open to, you know, collaborating with them around the here foundation.

Doug Smith: 23:04

Yeah, there's so much I want to unpack there. The first question that comes in my mind is just what did you learn through this journey about judging or judging others? You know, I feel like we live in a culture where that's all we do, right? It's like whether it's judging someone and we're judging all these people. We don't know, we don't know their intentions. We're judging them based on one little snippet of their life or one decision, Like I'm just curious, what have you learned about judging and what advice would you give to people who may judge often and get the retweets and get excited and you know yeah, yeah, I would encourage people not to fall victim to the instant gratification of division.

Leon Ford: 23:39

It's easy to choose a side and, you know, feel good because you're getting retweets or comments by people who think similarly as you. And you know it takes real leadership to think outside of the box and to lean into solutions, right, and so you know, I'd encourage people to become more open-minded, to ask questions, to use their curiosity, right. A lot of times people credit my courage for some of the decisions I make as a leader, but I would say, and I believe, that it's more curiosity than courage, right, because I'm genuinely curious to understand what someone else's lived experiences may have been, to let them to see the world the way they see the world. I understand, you know I see the world, you know, through a different lens than you may see the world, doug, based on where I grew up, who I grew up with. Different parts of my experience that I hold on to.

Leon Ford: 24:57

This part of me, that I hold on to that social norms may say is wrong, right, but the conditioning was so strong in my upbringing that it's hard for me to let go of these beliefs and I challenged myself on them, beliefs, you know, every time I find myself leaning into that belief, I'm like, hey, you know, I have to check myself because of self-awareness, right, and so I would also encourage people to give themselves grace. Right, and not grace at a point you become complacent in your beliefs, but grace to understand that it takes time to unpack and unlearn many things that we learned through our social conditioning, and so give yourself grace, but also be intentional about unlearning and relearning different things about society, so that you don't find yourself judging people.

Doug Smith: 26:02

That's so good. You know our executive director at Light of Life, Joe Gilliams, a mentor in my life and as I stepped into a new role under him. He just said lead with curiosity. And he said let me give you three beautiful words to lead with. Help me understand, don't go in trying to do all, just hey. Help me understand what you do, help me understand your perspective and man, that's been so beautiful and just with you. Know what you've been sharing and the meetings that you had. You know I heard Mr Rogers said once that there isn't a person on the planet that you couldn't learn to love if you just heard their story. Do you agree with that?

Leon Ford: 26:39

Absolutely, you know, even so I explore and I play with this idea of generous curiosity.

Leon Ford: 26:50

And so, to that point, just imagine if we let our curiosity take us to look at the five-year-old you know version of, you know, a world leader who may have caused a lot of destruction, right, that five-year-old version you know may have had a Tunk of Truck or some type of doll and was a typical kid, right? So what happened in between being a five-year-old with a doll or a truck or a teddy bear to you know, growing up, to you know, take a life, right. And I think if we became more curious to unpack, you know,

the conditioning of what had to happen in between those two points of life. One, we could understand the thinking of, you know, these people who grow up to be violent. And two, we can maybe catch, you know, save their hearts, right, or save their minds before they get to a point of committing a violent act.

Leon Ford: 28:09

But it takes curiosity. Too often we are reactive, you know, and we see people acting out, you know, in the media, or we see, you know, people going to prison for different things and we lock them away, you know. And my perspective is more, how could we be preventative, right? How can we show up and get people what they need before their hearts become hardened or before they lose hope in the world?

Doug Smith: 28:46

Yeah, that's so good. Another one unpack is just unforgiveness, and forgive me if I don't remember something up my head, but I believe, though the police officer that shot you, he kept his job correct Is he. Did you ever meet with him in reconcile, and I can-

Leon Ford: 29:00

Yeah, yep, yep, yep. So I met with the officer who shot me. Well, I think that was maybe two years ago, wow, and everybody thought I was crazy. Yeah, yeah, but it was really curiosity, right, like to your mentor's point. You know, can you help me understand, you know, and not in a sense of like you know, this need for some type of retribution or accountability or anything like that, but I genuinely wanted to understand. You know how and why. You know, how did this happen? Why did this happen?

Leon Ford: 29:49

Because, from my perspective you know, the two of us we're the ones that you know had this moment on the side of the road and if we were able to unpack what happened without, you know, attorneys of involved, you know, my perspective is like we have the answers right, we have the solution To you know, to see, you know, what type of training could be done.

Leon Ford: 30:21

You know what type of awareness can we create, you know, within community Again, to prevent this from happening again. And so, you know, I've met with, over the years, several different police officers who knew the officer who shot me and they kind of help, you know, facilitate it, you know. And so there was a pastor there and and a Commander, who's now a chief for Duquesne University, and we, we got to talk, you know, we got to talk about solutions, we got to talk about his experience after the shooting game in mind, and it was a very interesting discussion because In many ways I never considered and you know, my pain wouldn't allow me to consider what he may have went through, and so hearing it from him was Very out opening.

Doug Smith: 31:28

Wow, and I'm assuming that you've come to a place where you've forgiven him, if you're willing to meet him. What have you learned about forgiveness through this whole process, because I'm sure many people are dealing with unforgiveness listening to this.

Leon Ford: 31:41

Yeah, I forget. This is a choice, right, but it's also not Like, it's not a threshold that you cross, it's not a finished line. You don't wake up one day forgive and and how you made it. It's. It is a pendulum, bro. It swings back and forth and and and you know, to this day. You know I have some days I wake up frustrated and angry. I'm a human, right, and, and so I think Oftentimes people Look at examples of

forgiveness and they see those examples, they see the public figure of those examples, right, so people may see me smiling.

Leon Ford: 32:30

You know it was. You know you know they to talk about dr King, right, you know they share stories about dr King, but you know there's not a lot of examples of people sharing. You know about the behind the scenes of that process, right, and so I'd encourage people one To consider forgiveness for them, right, it's not for the other person. Forgiveness is more Connected to quality of life for me, and so what I asked you was can you imagine my life if, every time I saw a police officer, I was triggered? Yeah, and you know, and it triggered the hatred and resentment in me. I would not have a good quality of life. I could be at the park with my son having a great time and see a police officer. They completely have a bad day and I didn't want anyone to have that amount of power over my happiness. I had to take my power back by just letting go, and it's not my. You know responsibility to like. You know Be stuck on, like what accountability looks like and all these things you know, and so I let it go. The other thing is, you know, give yourself up for the rest of your life, so I let it go. The other thing is, you know, give yourself grace. You know you can work towards letting it go. You could.

Leon Ford: 34:01

You know I encourage people to choose forgiveness. You know, every day, you know, and it's like the light man, it's like you're choosing up to walk in the light every day when, but some days, you know your energy may be low and you know you may be in pain or you may have watched a movie or there may be something that triggers you and it's okay to feel those emotions fully, right, so that doesn't mean you haven't forgiven, and I think it's very important to feel those emotions fully Because it's kind of like a baby man. You ever see a baby cry. Oh yeah, they let it all out, man, until they don't even have any more left and they probably forget about what they were crying about and just move forward.

Leon Ford: 34:59

As adults, man, we hold on to things. We suppress our emotions. You know Men and women do it, you know, and you know we try to just get through life Without ever, you know, feeling those feelings fully, and so I encourage people to feel fully, acknowledge those emotions and then let it go. And when you let it go, you know that's where the real forgiveness happens. But then, you know again, give yourself grace. If you're ever triggered and you feel like man, I, you know, I hate this person today, you know, give yourself grace and say yo, it's okay, I feel like this today, but I won't feel like this tomorrow, wow.

Doug Smith: 35:47

I'm trying to think about a word, this question. But you know we live in a world where justice is important and we're talking about judgment too. So there's situations that happen where it's like, okay, justice has to be served, someone needs to get what they deserve. But then there's also, like the love, forgiveness and grace side. How do you balance whether you know it's your situation or you see another situation of something tragic that happens? Maybe it's police and whatever whatever the situation is, how do you personally balance, like the need for we need to make this right, justice needs to be served, people need to go what they deserve versus man. We need to love each other, forgive each other and reconcile, like how, how do you balance that tension?

Leon Ford: 36:23

Yeah, I was a. You know, forgiveness or unforgiveness is not synonymous with accountability, right, you can still hold someone accountable, right? So if you wrong me, right, and I forgave you, I'm like, yeah, I'm letting this go, that doesn't mean I can't have a conversation with you about how you hurt me. Hmm, right,

it just means that you don't have to control over my happiness, you don't have to control over my peace of mind. Now I will argue that Forgiveness gives you, you know, a level of mental clarity, right to Position yourself, to fight for justice in a way that you know, holding on, you know, to that anger and resentment doesn't afford you the opportunity to.

Leon Ford: 37:23

It's like boxing, right, you know, I used to box man and a lot of people think boxing. You know, it's about pure strength and and just being angry and being a good fighter. No, it's a science to it. But you know what the one you see somebody to get angry and lose their mental clarity, it's over, you know, I mean, they get picked apart, you know, and so I'd encourage people to use forgiveness as a tool to Help them have a sound mind and with that sound mind, they could become more strategic, more intentional, more focused on Solutions. You know I see it all the time with you know activists, and you know you know some activists are so Emotionally connected to the movement that is hard for them To make strategic decisions that I get them closer to the resolution that they're looking for.

Doug Smith: 38:29

Wow, thank you for sharing that. One more topic I want to cover before we go into the lighting round, which is a bunch of fun questions. I always ask, man, I've heard you talking in other interviews about just how you've you've been able to experience a certain pain and a purpose You've mentioned it several times here already of kind of what you're doing today. But I feel like, man, that's one reason I feel like we connected so well. You know, I have a lot of pain in my background and and to live intentionally, make a difference with that pain makes all the difference in the world. So can you just talk about what would your advice be someone who's been through a lot of pain on how they can use that for purpose?

Leon Ford: 39:00

Absolutely. I would encourage someone, right, if anyone listening to this. If you think about one of the most painful experiences of your life and and view it through the lens of solutions, right, like how could this have been different? You know, if I could have leaned on anyone and they could have gave me any type of resource, what would that resource have been? Right? And then you could position yourself right as an expert. You know, and as you position yourself as an expert with the solutions you know, if this is something that you're truly passionate about, you'll feel it in your soul Like, you'll feel the passion, you'll feel the fulfillment and you become an expert.

Leon Ford: 39:54

It's kind of like for my life, almost every experience that I had, even something that you know I was ashamed of, right, like you know, when my father went to prison when I was five and he didn't come home until I was 19 years old. But now I mentor young men and women who have parents who are incarcerated. You know I talked to men who are incarcerated about how to build relationships with their children. You know, on the outside I lost when I was 13, I lost my sister and you know I helped with grief counseling, right, I mean, there's so many aspects of my experience that you know I leveraged to help other people and, you know, for those people who have experienced painful situations, you know I'd encourage them to again be yourself as an expert, be very authentic, right and open-minded when you are sharing your story, when you are looking at your story, because you never know who your story can help.

Doug Smith: 41:10

Come on Well, leon. Thank you for sharing your story. Again, people can get your book and again we'll include links to that in the show notes where you can read about a story and the lessons. There's so

many lessons already to unpack from this, but I just want to say thank you on behalf of the thousands and thousands of people that you've already helped. Thank you for turning your pain into purpose. You could have gone a different direction, you could have made it all for naught, but you're using your life to make a difference and, man, that's why I love you so much and I just can't wait to see how you're using the future.

Leon Ford: 41:37

I love you too, man, and I'm looking forward to seeing you here soon.

Doug Smith: 41:41

Yeah and hey. Before we end we have to jump into the lightning round. So these are fun questions I ask at the end of every interview. The first one is and Leon was not prepped for any of these, so let's go Real authentic answers what is the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Leon Ford: 41:56

Woo, my grandfather. He told me I was depressed and he told me you're experiencing the lowest moment of your life right now, but it's impossible to fall off the floor. The only way to go is up, and how high you climb is up to you.

Doug Smith: 42:13

Come on, grandpa, let's go. That's good stuff, man. If you could put a quote on a billboard for anyone to read, what would it say?

Leon Ford: 42:20

I love you.

Doug Smith: 42:23

Do you have a book other than your own, one or two books that have impacted you in a significant way, that you recommend most often?

Leon Ford: 42:28

Yeah, the Alchemist by Paulo Coelho, so good. And let's see the Seat of the Soul by Gary Zucoff.

Doug Smith: 42:41

I haven't read that one. I'll check it out. You could spend time with a lot of leaders. When you get to spend time with someone that you admire and look up to and want to learn from, do you have a go-to question that you always ask?

Leon Ford: 42:50

I don't.

Doug Smith: 42:52

OK, what is your biggest leadership pet peeve?

Leon Ford: 42:57

Pet peeve Leaders who know all the answers. They think they got all the answers and they're not open to listening or adapting.

Doug Smith: 43:09

Lead with curiosity, bro, love it. What is something? 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 think everyone should experience before they die?

Leon Ford: 43:18

Skydiving.

Doug Smith: 43:19

All right. How was that?

Leon Ford: 43:22

Oh man, it was. I'm scared of heights, wow, and it was one of those experiences that you know I tricked my mind into, but it opened me up. I was like man, if I could do this, I can do anything, wow.

Doug Smith: 43:40

Would you do it again? Oh yeah, have you been? No, no. It's on the bucket list.

Leon Ford: 43:47

We can go together and film it for you. We could do like an L3 leadership skydiving thing.

Doug Smith: 43:58

Let's go, man. It's like the Tony Robbins Firewalk. Instead of that, we'll just jump out of a plane. Exactly, let's go, man. Stay tuned for that. Listeners, we'll get that video out as soon as it happens.

Leon Ford: 44:10

Well, hold us to this. I'm down. We got to hold Doug to this, I'm in.

Doug Smith: 44:15

I'm in man. I have to make sure my wife's okay with it, but I'm in man. If you could go back, she could come too.

Leon Ford: 44:21

She could come too.

Doug Smith: 44:24

We'll see if that happens. If you could go back and have coffee with yourself at any age and you would have actually listened to yourself, what age would you meet with yourself and what would you be told? That version of Leon.

Leon Ford: 44:37

I would say 14. And I would tell myself to just stay focused on your goals and be patient with yourself.

Doug Smith: 44:50

That's good, and I know you're a very, very young man. But one day, at the end of your life, looking back, what, ultimately, do you want your legacy to be and what do you want to be remembered for?

Leon Ford: 44:59

Yeah, I want to be remembered for just bringing joy into the world and helping as many people as I can help themselves heal. Yeah. So, I don't want to be the one to heal them, you know. I want to be like the spark right, the catalyst that remind them that they are capable of healing themselves. So good.

Doug Smith: 45:27

Open-ended Anything else you want to leave leaders with today as we wrap up.

Leon Ford: 45:33

Yeah. So if you could repeat after me every time I speak, I do a pledge, let's do it. Yeah, so we must give up to go up.

Doug Smith: 45:39

We must give up to go up.

Leon Ford: 45:41

We must give up to grow up.

Doug Smith: 45:43

We must give up to grow up.

Leon Ford: 45:44

We must give up on the way up.

Doug Smith: 45:46

We must give up on the way up.

Leon Ford: 45:48

And give up even more to stay up.

Doug Smith: 45:50

And give up even more to stay up. I cannot teach COVID-19 what I do not know, what I do not know. I cannot lead COVID-19 where I will not go. I am because we are, because we are, because I am. I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper, I am Dustin for greatness Because I attract, because I attract what.

Leon Ford: 46:23

I am what I am an African language. We say a shea, a shea, a shea, a shea, a shea.

Doug Smith: 46:32

Thank you, let's go, man. I'm ready to like run out of the building. I love stuff like that man. I might. I might repeat that with my kids. Thank you for sharing.

Leon Ford: 46:40

I Designed a self-care Tool kit, so I'll send it to you. Oh, come on in the pledges, in that the toolkit and everything.

Doug Smith: 46:50

Well, Leon, it's an honor to call you friend. Thank you for taking the time to be on the podcast and by the time people are listening this, you have already spoken out Three at L3 one day, but thank you for doing that and just thank you, everything that you're doing for people in the planet and making it a better place, man. Thank you, brother, I love you man. I Well. Leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Leon. I hope that you were inspired, I hope that you were challenged and I hope you fell in love with Leon, just like I did, cuz he is incredible and if you'd like to connect with him, you can find links to ways to connect with him and everything that we discussed in the show notes at L3 leadership org forward, slash 414.

Doug Smith: 47:28

And, as always, leader, I liked and every episode with a quote. Now quote Mark train today, who said this. He said always do right. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest. Well, leader, I said every episode, but know that my wife Lauren, I love you, we believe in you and don't quit, keep leading. The world desperately needs your leadership. I'll talk to you next episode.