

What matters Most

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So I've really changed my thinking on what it means to give back to society. And I think what it means, is actually turning inward and focusing on bringing forth your very best authentic self. It's that whole idea of knowing what makes you light up. And following that light. And that is when we give the most back to the world around us. So done correctly in the 21st century, I would say that being selfish is selfless. That it's time for everyone to really serve themselves and make themselves strong as the pathway to be inspirational and valuable and supportive to others. (21:14-22:10)

Simply, I think - and this is somewhat in a Lakota or Sioux or indigenous perspective – that seeking is the biggest step in finding. And I think today, if to the extent people are not finding their own voice or their own identity or their own passions, it's just because they aren't looking hard enough. I think it's really about making yourself a bigger priority and believing that you can only become exponentially more valuable to others by primarily focusing on your own voice. (23:46-24:37)

This is the What Matters Most podcast. 100% listener supported program. And now here is your host, Paul Samuel Dolman.

Paul: Welcome back to What Matters Most. Gosh, I hope everybody is staying centered and peaceful amidst this wild time of a pandemic and the earth hurdling through space. As usual, here we are in polarity. Wow. What an incredible adventure and experience. And so we're just trying to bring some wisdom down the mountain.

And today we got really lucky with a fabulous guest. He wrote a really good book, I really loved this. You could pick it up and put it down. There's so much wisdom in it. It's called [The Seventh Power: One CEOs Journey into the Business of Shared Leadership](#). It's an honor to finally welcome to the family officially, Mr. Kevin Hancock. Thanks for coming on.

Kevin: Paul, it's my pleasure. Thanks so much for having me on your show.

Paul: I wanted to ask you first, because we are in the middle of this time. What are your thoughts on the pandemic and the Coronavirus?

[00:01:05] **Kevin:** Yeah, right. Well, it's such an event of a magnitude and complexity that we really haven't dealt with before. And I think that type of event causes us individually and collectively to take a step back and pause. Which in the long run, can be a really healthy thing. So I would say I kind of see that as two components on its own.

So first is the maybe short-term safety concerns and economic recovery. But that perhaps more importantly, the long-term implications and messages of this challenge in terms of how we as a society want to evolve. That's where the big opportunity is, I believe.

02:12 Paul: Well said. And how, I was curious reading your book, how would your leadership model and that approach over the last four months, what would it have looked like that's different than the way you have done it?

Kevin: Yeah. Well, I can tell you exactly what that looks like, because we've been open and running the entire time as an essential industry here in Maine. So, I would soft of explain it this way. My book is really about the concept of shared leadership. It's about those who have power dispersing it, and strengthening the voices of others. So the idea is a company or community where everybody leads.

Now think about this virus challenge and ask the question, who has to lead in response to this virus. And the answer of course is, everyone. The only way to take this on and defeat it is for every single American to participate, and lead and do their part.

So I know that the government at the state level, at the federal level, gets a lot of attention. And they obviously have a role to play. But I think this is really an example of a complex problem that can only be solved by everybody's leadership, not just the leadership of a few. So my view on dispersed power and shared leadership is really, I think, exemplified by this very challenge that we're all coping with right now.

Paul: I love this, and because it is collective. And before we get into the book, I'd have to think that this collective model kind of comes out of your time at the Pine Ridge reservation, because it's very similar to the way Native Americans approach leadership.

04:20 Kevin: Yeah, it sure does. It really, for me, comes out of two experiences. About a decade ago, first, I acquired a bit of a rare voice disorder. You can probably hear it in my voice as we speak. And that disorder really made speaking at times a bit difficult for me, and forced me to share responsibility much more broadly within the company, and really to invite everyone at our company to help be the voice of the company.

Then to your question. A few years later, Paul, I began traveling from Maine out to South Dakota, to the [Pine Ridge Indian reservation](#), which is the largest and one of the most remote, historic, and financially challenged or poorest of all the reservations on the Northern Plains. And there I found an entire community - here is the connection - that didn't feel fully heard, felt as if a piece of their voice had been taken. And really those who had more power at the time, these reservations were created, it had abused that power, had overreached and taken advantage of these communities. And we're still paying the price for that today.

So when I put the two experiences together, my own voice experience, and then my time at Pine Ridge, I really concluded, unfortunately, that across time leaders had probably done more limit and restrict the voices of others, than to liberate or empower them. And that's what got me really thinking about a new model that did just the opposite. That strengthened the voices of others, and shared the opportunities and responsibilities of leadership.

Paul: And on a basic, metaphysical note, and you've done ceremony, I'm guessing. Do you feel there's anything here that ties into the fact that your voice was so radically affected?

Kevin: Yes. I sure do. I've been to Pine Ridge now over 20 times, and I've taken two Lakota names, and been in ceremonies there. And I have lots of friends there. And I guess what I say that really strikes me, is I think that there are lots of values that community holds with respect to its understanding of oneness or connectivity with all the universe, kind of an approach to nature and embracing others, that it's becoming more and more apparent our planet really needs. And I think this is actually quite exciting, that some of these indigenous communities, that their efforts to survive, if you will, and keep their culture and values and identity intact, that I think it had a purpose. too. And I think they have preserved some information that this planet really needs to go back and re-examine, and think about, and focus on, if it wants to get itself on its highest and best course for humanity, for the long-term in a sustainable way.

Paul: And again, the planet will cruise on in every species without us perfectly. We're not here as any gift. That's in my opinion. We're no more valuable than the birds or the elephants, or even the microbes. It's all one living organism, like the Native America's said. We didn't weave the web of life.

We're just merely a part of it. So we have to come into coherence in harmony with this beautiful, one life here, the universe.

Kevin: That's so well said, Paul, such an important point. The Sioux understand that humans are a part of nature, not above it. And how you do that would have huge implications, how you acted or operated as individual or as a society. And I think it is really important for humanity to get re-grounded in the understanding that we are a manifestation of nature. We're part of nature, not above it or separate from it.

09:27 **Paul:** In your travels, have you ever done any Ayahuasca or peyote or anything, and kind of broken through to see the unified connection of all things?

Kevin: Well, not particularly that way. But when I travel out to Pine Ridge and spend time on the Northern Plains, I spend a lot of time alone in the wilderness, if you will, just on hikes and walks. And the bigness of nature there on the Plains. I'm surrounded by trees here in Maine, to a land that, depending on where you are, is largely treeless, and the bigness of it. It has a very profound impact on me. And I have felt that there, in the wilderness, alone in nature with my own thoughts, that it does become very clear the connectivity between all living things. You can see it, you can feel it. It just becomes very clear in a way that's hard to see in our internet wired, bigger, better, go, go, go world of work that we tend to live in.

Paul: So true for me, too. And in an odd way, it's a gift. The pandemic has slowed everything down, forced us to do things we said were impossible. And so many people, in the quiet, have discovered the essence of what you've described so eloquently.

11:09 **Kevin:** Yeah, I agree. It's really interesting to think about what are the messages or opportunities of COVID-19, and what caused it to spread so fast and affect the entire planet in such a short period of time. And while it's certainly multi-causational, one of the things I think that allowed it to move so quickly is then to your point, we have gotten accustomed to moving so quickly, that viral simply traveled with humans at the pace that humans were traveling. And we're pushing the envelope on bigger, better, more, to unsustainable levels.

I think about the poor airline industry as an example right now, that's under such economic pressure. But think about how our airplanes got pushed. So first we figured out how to put the absolute maximum number of seats on a plane with no regard to say nothing about health, but comfort of the human passenger. And then we booked turnaround times on those planes that would've made it literally impossible to actually clean them between flights. And so I think what we've really got to

revisit is that age old question of, how much is enough. And the bigger, better, more, which has some beneficial attributes, but it needs to be balanced. It can only take us so far, and taken to excess, it's not sustainable.

So now we pull that back into the world of capitalism, and creating, and the work, I think is going to be the big question that determines whether or not this COVID-19 period created something positive or whether or not nothing was learned.

Paul: Ah, so right on. Because it's an invitation and opportunity. But if you don't take, almost like if the doctor gives you the cure and the medicine and you don't take it, it's not going to work. He can only give you the medicine, he can't force you to take it.

Have you always been a seeker, even growing up? Were you always seeking more?

13:51 **Kevin:** You know, I love how you asked that. And I would say probably not as much as I authentically should have. I think growing up, I kind of followed in the tracks of my ancestors. Our company up here in Maine, [Hancock Lumber](#), is a six-generation family business. So it goes back to 1848, before the first cannonball was fired in the Civil War. And I think early on, I just kind of managed and led the way I saw those before me manage and lead. And I'm not critical about that in any way, but it really took a bit of a midlife awakening that was triggered by my voice condition to get me to stop and slow down a bit, and think more intentionally about who I was, what kind of leader I wanted to be, and what kind of 21st century company I wanted to try to help create.

Paul: And how big of an influence on you did the great Joseph Campbell have? Because he was my first teacher where I thought, oh my God, this guy, this is it. And still, when I go back and read it, it's oh, now I get it.

Kevin: Yeah. So he had a profound impact on me after the fact, which made it even more powerful. So I was telling someone maybe five or six years ago about my experience with losing a piece of my own voice, what Joseph Campbell would call the 'initiation period'. And my travels out to Pine Ridge to essentially recover my voice on a spiritual level, which Joseph Campbell would have talked about is the separation or the great Odyssey. And then came that third phase which he often described as being the most difficult. Which is the return in which you come back home and charged with the responsibility of trying to impart or share the learning you've acquired for the betterment or advancement of humanity as a whole.

So I'd actually gone on the journey, if you will, before I ever heard Joseph Campbell. And then when someone listened to my story and said, "Oh my goodness, that is Joseph Campbell's hero's journey." When I went to read his stuff, it blew me away how closely my own experience mirrored what he had written about decades ago. So I've since got into read every book he's got, that's had a huge influence on my life. And he obviously was a super intuitive man who was onto some wisdom the entire planet can benefit from, all of humanity can benefit from.

Paul: Yes, because those structural pillars are true. The archetypes are true. And when you were talking about the re-entry, I could hear his voice say, 'The hero always comes out of the forest or down the mountain with gold. And when he gives it to the followers, it turns to ashes.' One of the great motifs of mythology. And why were you out in South Dakota at Pine Ridge of all places?

17:33 **Kevin:** Yeah. So that's a great question, too. I have kind of two answers to that. First, I had grown up having a love affair with the American west. We traveled west on vacation once when I was young, and then I went back out one summer from college and Yellowstone National Park. And I also

used to teach history, and I got really interested in the second half of the nineteenth century in American history when our Western expansion and Manifest Destiny ran into the Plains Indians. So I'd always had a super interest in that part of the country but had been kind of busy and buried in work.

But after I acquired my voice condition and was really starting to reassess some things, in August of 2012, National Geographic printed an edition of which the cover story was about the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. And I happened to pick up that edition, read the article, was struck super deeply by it, and just decided literally on the cuff when I finished that I was going to go there, that I wanted to see what life was like for the people who lived there.

And so one trip led to what now is over 20. But what really triggered for me that I was in my mid-forties at the time, was I just decided I was going to follow my own voice. That I was really learning how to listen to what was speaking to me and to not follow the kind of the stereotype, the voice of what I thought a corporate CEO should do. But to follow my own voice and see what kind of CEO, and more importantly human individual, I was wanting to become.

Paul: And why is that such an anomaly for so many? You are obviously a rare bird. Most people blindly stay on the same track like a Babbitt, and do the same thing over and over again. The great novel. Do you feel that you were different, one, culturally? Why is it so hard for us, especially men who are white and in power, to make that kind of shift? What's your take?

20:10 Kevin: Well, I think that a lot of it is the oh men that is in the making of the man sacrifice saying to provide. So you're indoctrinated into the art of sacrifice. It's almost like implicit that you're supposed to put your own aspirations aside to have your job, have your paycheck, have your benefits, have your home, provide for your family. And I'm not dismissing, of course, the importance of all of those things. Obviously, those things are important. But so too, of course, is every individual human's right and obligation to follow their own voice, to serve themselves, and to have their own identity that is authentic and powerful. So I've really changed my thinking on what it means to give back to society. And I think what it means, is actually turning inward and focusing on bringing forth your very best authentic self. It's that whole idea of knowing what makes you light up. And following that light. And that is when we give the most back to the world around us. So done correctly in the 21st century, I would say that being selfish is selfless. That it's time for everyone to really serve themselves and make themselves strong as the pathway to be inspirational and valuable and supportive to others.

Paul: Because we are at our most powerful when we are totally connected and completely authentic in the way we move through the world.

Kevin: Exactly. And then this really, too, starts to take on in a business setting, the revisiting of the notion that it's work at all costs. So I talk a lot now, the phrase I use is 'putting the work back in its place' where it's important, we're committed, it's meaningful to us, but it's not all consuming.

And as humanities productivity in the place of work continues to grow, sure, we can use some of that freed up capacity. In our case here in Maine at Hancock Lumber, to make more lumber. But how about use some of that capacity to just plain work less. At creating more balance and diversity in people's lives. And I saw that I wanted that for myself. And then as I started to achieve it, I totally didn't feel right about just having that for myself. I wanted to try to create more of that for everybody at our company.

23:36 Paul: How does the listener get in touch with the whispers within?

Kevin: What a lovely question. I think that, well, I've come to say this, Paul. Simply, I think - and this is somewhat in a Lakota or Sioux or indigenous perspective – that seeking is the biggest step in finding. And I think today, if to the extent people are not finding their own voice or their own identity or their own passions, it's just because they aren't looking hard enough. I think it's really about making yourself a bigger priority and believing that you can only become exponentially more valuable to others by primarily focusing on your own voice. And what my own voice condition forced me to do for the first time in a long time, was to actually sit still and be quiet. And I first learned to hear others better. But in time, the voice that I really started to hear was my own Voice. That voice that lives in the heart, not the head.

Paul: Do you have a meditation practice? I know you love nature, but do you also sit?

Kevin: I do a bit of both. I try to do throughout the day, just some, for me if I really focus on my breathing, it pulls my consciousness up within me. And I do a lot of that throughout the day. And then the other big opportunity for me, as I mentioned, is whenever I'm out in the wilderness alone, I just am able to go to a different place. A really cool place, in terms of reflection and connectivity and understanding.

And the other point I'd like to make there, is a lot of the most meaningful understandings I've had for my work at Hancock Lumber, have come not while I'm at Hancock Lumber, but when I'm not at Hancock Lumber. *And I think the notion we can only grow by being at work is not totally accurate.*

26:24 Paul: What is the seventh power?

Kevin: I'm glad you asked that. It is again, a Lakota Sioux concept that comes from their sacred medicine wheel, which is their most valued symbol. It's a circle. And that medicine wheel on the surface represents what they talk about is the six great power. It's the power of the west, north, east, south, sky, and earth. But on an early trip to Pine Ridge, I had a young man, wise beyond his years, show me the very center of the wheel, the seventh power also existed. And that seventh power is you. It's me. It's the individual human spirit. And to the extent that everything that exists is made up of the sacred energy of the universe - however you choose to define that sacred spirit - that it is around us. It does surround us. But it is also within us. And wherever you are on your journey, you are at the center.

So the seventh power is really about recognizing and tapping back into the sacred innate power of the individual human spirit. And what I was just going to add, Paul, is what I'm up to do in this book is help individuals bring that power alive within themselves in their own life lives, but also to make that seventh power the dominant power within an organization like a company. Which is what gets back to the idea of power dispersal and shared leadership.

Paul: It's true. We're stronger together and it works better than if it's just a hierarchy. The circle is more enduring than the pyramid.

Kevin: Agreed, Kev.

Paul: What would you tell your 22-year-old self if he happened to be listening to this show right now?

Kevin: I would love that. I would tell my 22-year-old self to strap in because it's going to be a hell of a ride. And to relax because it's all gonna be okay. I had a dream a while back where an angel-like

figure appeared and offered to bring me back in time, like 15 years, which would have been before my voice condition. And I got so nervous in the dream, Paul. And I said to the angel, "No, I don't want to back up, because if I do, I might not get this voice disorder again." And the voice condition, point being, ended up giving me so much more than it took. So I think I would tell my 20-year-old self that whatever happens to you is exactly what's supposed to be happening to you, and there's purpose and value and meaning in all of it, if you're willing to search for it.

30:05 Paul: The universe is a benevolent and loving force that is working for our greater good. That's what I hear between the lines. Based on that, I would guess you have no fear of your own linear mortal reality. The fact that you're temporary here, that you're part of the great impermanence.

Kevin: Yeah. Oh, that's a great question, too. On one level, I don't at all, just as you'd assume, have that fear. On another, which is the side of it that's about the opportunity here and now, is that even though I know my soul will endure, my spirit will endure, this says it's may well be in the one and only time it manifests in this specific form. And so for me, it also puts the excitement in to, and the responsibility, to maximize soaking up the experience in this form.

Paul: I love that. Tell the listener a first step or two to move in this direction.

Kevin: Yeah, I would say it is really about prioritizing your self higher on your list of responsibilities. I think that's almost all it takes is to put yourself generally first, but in the context that we've discussed today. Meaning by focusing on your own voice, that is the path to becoming of maximum value to those around you. Now this I think is counter to what we've been taught for centuries, so that doesn't come easy.

And I think it also is a bit scary at first, ultimately liberating, but scary at first because it is on the surface a bit safer focus on what everybody else is doing. It's a bit safer to focus on the external. And so that transition to looking internally, you really have got to transcend our cultural underpinnings, and it does take some courage. But I think anyone that's been thrown down that path or leaped down it, would say it quickly transforms into something that's quite liberating and exciting.

I've come to talk about it as essentially learning to follow that our future is bumping into us all the time, but are we calm and centered enough and aware enough to see it, hear it, and then follow it?

Paul: And what I'm really hearing is not selfishness or narcissism, but self-care first for the long race. And the more whole you are, the more integrated, the more connected, the greater you will be of service with boundaries. But you have to put - it's so cliché to say - your own oxygen mask on first, but you have to get rest. You have to eat well. You have to take quiet time. You have to go into the desert mythologically, metaphorically, and literally. You have to be still and stop and get off the hamster wheel to be the most effective you in this world you'll ever be, this one and only time.

Kevin: Yeah. That's so well said. That's lovely. I'd agree with all of that.

Paul: I love it. I love it. This is fantastic. And what an easy book. And I really want to applaud you for being the new breed of leadership here. It's going to take people like you doing it and teaching it and sharing it for things to change. It can't just be the massage therapist or the Eagle Scout person up on Pine Ridge. It needs to be integrated into mainstream society. And you're doing that.

Kevin: Yeah. I love that point. And I thought a lot about that and talk a lot about it. It's time to bring the sacred into the daily. So we need to bring spirit into the place of work. It used to be you sacrificed

at work so that you could live on the weekend,, or in retirement or at church, or on retreat. And that was fine for the time in which that was prevalent. But again, this is the 21st century, and the two need to come together. The places of work and the places of spirit to become one.

Paul: And that's just integration, and integration creates integrity, which is powerful, deep roots.

Kevin: Yes.

Paul: Well, thank you. This has been as easy as reading your book.

Kevin: Ah, it's a great pleasure to be on your show. And the title, Paul, I think it really captures where humanity is at right now. What matters most. Let's be awake, alert, alive, and intentional, right. That's what your show is all about.

Paul: Well, thank you. That landed. And if I just said to you, I don't always ask it because I don't know why it would be cliché, but what matters most to you in this moment? Not far reaching whatever you've written, but right now, what does your heart telling you?

Kevin: Yeah. It tells me right now, following my voice. I just spent an hour talking about what I'm super passionate about. And today I'm gonna leave this visit feeling stronger than when I started. Because I spent my hour on something I really care about. Which you would not find this hour, nowhere in my CEO job description of a lumber company, would you find this hour. That really is the point.

Paul: And by staying open to the magic and the mystery and the flow, that's what happens.

Kevin: Yes.

Paul: You've got to create space for the magic and the miracles to show up.

Kevin: I love that.

Paul: Thank you, Kevin. You are a gift to the world. This book is fantastic. There's a link on the page if you're listening. And what I love about all of this, and even today, it's so accessible. And you don't need to go to Pine Ridge. I love going to Indian reservations, a lot of good stuff happens there, but you can do it in your home or at the park or wherever you are. Thank you. Thank you for what you're bringing down the mountain and out into the world.

Kevin: Thank you, Paul. Same to you.