

Awakin

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One of the ideas that I really talk about in that book is the idea that awareness and connectivity, in and of itself, is a powerful act. So when I would go to Pine Ridge and come back, people would ask me what I did there. And at first, I really struggled to provide an answer. But finally I just came clean and said, I don't really do anything there, which I don't. I just travel around the reservation and spent time with people that I know there. And this is a place where for decades, generations, people from away have gone there to fix, save, change the people that live there. And that doesn't work, of course, because change comes from within. And I really would see power in going there for no other reason than to be aware and connected. (32:45-33:47)

So at Pine Ridge, one of their core values is wisdom. And the Lakota believe that wisdom is primarily acquired through experience by living a life. And for those who have lived the longest have had the most experiences and have therefore acquired large quantities of wisdom. And elders, therefore, are highly respected within the community. If you go to a public gathering and a younger person stands up to speak, they will first ask permission to speak for the elders. And I remember a few years ago when I took my mom with me to Pine Ridge, and we had a really lovely experience. And it was fun for me to see that immediately upon arrival, she was put in front of me in a place of honor, even though she never been there, because she was the elder. And so it really made me think about how our culture, mainstream culture, could engage elders differently. (43:04-44:35)

Welcome to Awakin Calls. Every Saturday we host a conversation with an individual whose inner journey inspires us, and whose work is transforming our world in large and small ways. Awakin Calls are an all-volunteer run offering of service space. A global platform founded on the simple principle that by changing ourselves, we change the world, to create a more compassionate and service-oriented society. Thank you for joining us.

Welcome again to our weekly Awakin Call. Today in conversation with Kevin Hancock. As an all-volunteer offering, each Awakin Call is a conversational space that is co-created by many invisible hands. In a few minutes our moderator, Josie, will begin by engaging in initial dialogue with our speaker, Kevin Hancock. Josie is actually a doctor and she's an associate professor of strategy and innovation. Doctor in the PhD sense, is an associate professor of strategy innovation at Saint Mary's College of California. She is a former Fulbright senior research scholar who earned her PhD in strategy and international management at London Business School in the UK, and also a Master's in management science and engineering at Stanford University.

Beyond the academic achievement, Josie is also an amazing poet and artist, who brings her amazing spirit to all the stations that she goes to, creative and spiritual. So thank you, Josie,

for hosting the call. And I just wanted to let everyone know that in about half an hour everyone else on the call will be able to join the Q&A and circle of sharing. And so in order to enjoy the Q&A, you just have to press *6 on your phone and then we'll be able to call on you. Or you can also email us at askservicebased.org to submit a question or comment via our webcast form. So Josie, I'll hand it off to you.

[02:20] **Josie:** Namaste everybody. It's my pleasure to introduce our speaker this morning. Kevin Hancock is an award-winning author, public speaker, and CEO of one of America's oldest family businesses. He has published a book that's titled, Not For Sale: Finding Center in the Land of Crazy Horse, in 2015. And he has a new book, The Seventh Power, which will be released shortly.

Kevin is the recipient of Muskie Access to Justice award, the Habitat for Humanity Spirit of Humanity award, the Boy Scouts of America Distinguished Citizen award and Timber Processing Magazine's Person of the Year award. He's a former history teacher, a lifetime youth basketball coach, he graduated from Lake Region High School and Bowdoin College. He lives in Casco, Maine with his wife, Alison, and two adult daughters, Abby and Sydney.

A little bit about the Hancock Lumber company. It grows trees, manufactures lumber for global distribution, and it operates retail stores in Maine and New Hampshire. It has approximately 415 employees, it's a four-time recipient of Best Places to Work in Maine award, in the past also received awards for Maine Family Business of the year and the Governor's Award for Business Excellence, the MITC Exporter of the Year award, and the Pro Sales National Dealer of the Year award. It's a company that dates back to 1848, so Kevin's the sixth generation of the leadership of this company.

I'd like to begin by asking Kevin to introduce himself, because in my experience very often the introduction that I've just done is much more about all the different roles, but we want to be seen in our own identity. And Kevin, in preparing for this interview when I saw some of the things about you online, you make a distinction between roles and identity, and I would like you to introduce yourself as you would like to be seen this morning.

Kevin: Well, good morning. And thank you for that Josie. And what a lovely question. I think coming to know ourselves is such a lovely yet posterior process that's really never-ending. And I think I would just say in response to your question, that earlier in my life I do think I saw myself more through my external roles. But then I had a couple of events come into my life, most significantly a voice disorder called spasmodic dysphonia that I acquired, that made speaking often difficult and it forced me to sit still and listen a bit more. And when I sat and listened, I began to hear what I talk about as 'whispers'. It really was the voice in my own soul. And that was the beginning of trying to learn how to turn inward a bit more and to work on myself and come to know myself separate from public roles that I played.

[06:45] **Josie:** Thank you for that. One of the things that touched me the most, so for the other listeners, if you're listening through the internet, you can go to Kevin's website, kevinhancock.com, and read more about his work and see some other things, even as you're listening here. But one of the things that touched me the most as I was preparing for this conversation was a note of apology that you penned. If it's okay with you, could we begin

with that? If you could read it to us and tell us the context in which you came to that moment when you wrote that.

Kevin: Sure. In 2010 I acquired the voice disorder that I referenced, and shortly thereafter in 2012, I began traveling from Maine to the [Pine Ridge Indian Reservation](#) in the Southwest corner of South Dakota. A place that I've now been 15 times. And the combination of two events created two realizations for me. The first was that there are lots of ways to lose your voice in this world. And the second was that leaders have often done more to restrict the voices of others than to liberate them. And at Pine Ridge, I saw the irony in the fact that I was searching for my own voice, if you will, in a city where almost nobody felt heard, or the entire tribe felt forgotten and marginalized.

So one day during one of my visits to Pine Ridge, I was driving in the Black Hills and I was reflecting on a conversation I had with a friend of mine at Pine Ridge, who had said that to his knowledge the U.S. government never officially apologized for breaking the treaty of 1868, or for the cultural and economic oppression that followed. And suddenly this simple idea came to me, and I just pulled the car over and said to myself, why can't I write an apology? And I wrote one then and there and ended up sharing it in my book. And this is the apology that I wrote:

To the Lakota people and all the First Nation tribes of the Northern Plains,

My name is Kevin Hancock, and I'd like to apologize. I want to learn the history of your people, and I'm aware of the devastating impact of America's Western expansion had upon you. I apologize that we put our needs above yours. I apologize we slaughtered the buffalo with which you co-existed. I apologize that we broke our treaties. I apologize that we took your land under the guise of our own industriousness. And as if we had God's blessing, I apologize that we saw your race and culture as inferior and treated you as such.

I have also learned about the neglect and federal mismanagement of your reservations in the 20th century, and for this, too, I would like to apologize. I apologize that we restricted your constitutional right to free speech and religion. I apologize that we restricted your rights to gather and to bear arms. I apologize that we sold off your property without your consent or just compensation. I apologize that we sent your children off to unforgiving boarding schools to be remade.

Finally, I see in modern-day life at Pine Ridge, and I would like to apologize for the conditions, a century of oppression and mistreatment helped create. I wish we could go back and rewrite history. I wish we could start over and do it differently. I wish we could have seen there was room for everyone. I wish we had not overreached. I hope you will accept this apology, and that we can now join together in the Lakota tradition that says all people are one people. An apology from one person may seem small, it changes nothing in many ways. At the same time, this is how I feel, and I do not believe I'm alone. I believe there are hundreds of millions of people across America who are also sorry. I hope this apology contributes to the process of healing, letting go, and moving on. Having met your people, I believe in your future.

[13:03] **Josie:** Thank you. I literally have to take a moment and take a deep sigh and breath as I hear you read that. It's such a powerful statement and resonates on so many levels. When you say that you're not alone and there are millions of other people who share that in America, but also around the world, the Lakota belief that you refer to that says all people are one people, is very similar to the Hindu belief of rationale. Which basically is that the entire planet is one family. And it also reminded me of a forgiveness or apology ceremony that a young man told me about earlier this year with – he's all of 35 years old and lives in Punjab, not too far from the Pakistan and India border - and as a history buff, he had read about the violence during the partition of the country. And now almost 70 years later, he said that Punjab on the Pakistan side and on the Indian side has the same culture, same language, same traditions. How was it that we were turned into these savages who participated in such violence? Who's going to apologize? And then he on Facebook announced an apology ceremony, and to his surprise, hundreds of people showed up and apologized. And said it was very therapeutic for them to do that.

For me, it's the strongest that I heard your voice in studying about you online. One of the things that you've taken on is the role of an advocate for strengthening the voices of all individuals within a company or a community, such as the Pine Ridge community through listening, empowerment, and shared leadership. And this, to me, embodied deep knowledge of history, listening, empowering, and leadership, because your voice is the strongest in this apology, and resonates with many others who feel the same way but haven't yet had that moment to articulate it. So thank you so much for writing it, for sharing it, for reading it.

I want to now ask you about, because we have listeners from around the world, a little bit of description about your life in Casco, Maine. And then how did you end up going to Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota? And the stark differences between the two places and you literally being the human bridge in some ways. So, if you could describe that for us, that would be helpful.

Kevin: Sure. One of the things I've thought a lot about is the idea that we all come from a tribe. We're all born into a certain moment in time, place, culture, community. And that entry point, if you will, pulls on us all to act a certain way, to be a certain type of person. But ultimately, each soul is here living a life on earth to find their own true voice, authentic to who they are, and to release it and share it with the world.

So my background, I grew up in a very small town in Maine, and our family had been in the lumber business for many generations dating back prior to the beginning even of the American civil war. And I was part of the sixth generation of my family to work for our company. My dad had died young, and I had become leader of the company at a pretty young age. And in 2007 the national mortgage markets in America collapsed, and this put a great deal of stress on the construction industry. And our company was in the middle of that. And at the peak of trying to help our company fight through that, I began to have trouble speaking. When I went to talk, all the muscles in my throat would spasm and squeeze and contract, and my voice could get very broken and choppy and weak, and it aid speaking very difficult. Then that process forced me to think differently about leadership. And it forced me to share the stage, if you will, much more broadly.

In time, I came to see it as a bit of an invitation to strengthen the voices of others. I was in a leadership position, and I started doing a bit less and saying a bit less. And sharing those

responsibilities more broadly was actually strengthening the company and creating an environment where everyone could participate in the process of leading.

A couple of years later when the economy stabilized, I was looking at National Geographic magazine, and it was in this issue this article about the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, which is one of the most historic and traditionally disenfranchised of all the Sioux reservations on the Northern Plains. The title of the article was, [In the Spirit of Crazy Horse, The Rebirth of a Sioux Nation](#). And I read that article, and it was as if every character past and present who had been a part of that story kind of came out of that magazine and gave me this really big hug. And as soon as I finished, I leaned over to my wife and pointed to the cover and said, *"I'm going to go there. I want to see what life is like for the people who live there."*

And one trip led to another, and I've been there I think 15 times. And at Pine Ridge, I saw really firsthand the consequences of what I've come to think about as overreaching. Which is those who have the most power going too far and taking too much from communities that have less power. And events that I had thought of as really history, the winning of the west in the 19th century, those events were still being reconciled in this remote community on the Northern Plains. And again, it really helped reinforce the combination of both events, my voice and spending time at Pine Ridge, there's this notion that leaders have often done more to restrict the voices of others than to strengthen them. And that my voice disorder, which I had originally only thought of as a liability or a pain in the neck, if you will, was actually a blessing to stop and to know myself better first. And then to do what I could, to help celebrate its strength and the voices of others.

[22:39] **Josie:** You said something about the experience of feeling that every character in the story in National Geographic was giving you a hug, and the pull was so strong that after reading the article, you decided you had to go there. And then when you went there, there was this sense of wanting to return, and you've kept returning. Could you, I know these things are intuitive and you feel them and you follow the intuition. But if you can articulate some of what resonated with you that led to this connection, and then to come to the appreciation that people in power are taking too much.

Kevin: Right. So a few weeks before I went to Pine Ridge, I had been to a psychologist, an evolutionary biologist from Palo Alto by the name of Deborah Dooley and she had done a reading for me of my natal chart in the form of evolutionary astrology. And found that belief system very intriguing. The idea was that souls have multiple incarnations across time for the purpose of learning and growing and evolving. And then every soul brings into a lifetime a karmic pattern. You can think of it as an arrow being shot across a chart of the sky. And where the arrow enters that represents the energies that you're bringing with you from a past life or lives that you're trying to learn to outgrow. And where the arrow is headed is an indicator of the new skills or learning or awarenesses that one is trying to acquire.

In summary, my energy was loaded up with Aries energy. And this woman, who had never met me, was really describing the essence of my own soul in a way that so deep, I really couldn't believe how well she seemed to know me. I had been very well known earlier in my life as an orator, a public speaker, someone who used their voice, but who was also very dogmatic under pressure and tended to get louder or use my position or my title to carry the day when there was disagreement or dialog. So I was someone that really led from a more traditional approach of a strong spoken leader. And then suddenly my voice was taken away,

a piece of it. And what really happened is, my new voice was being given to me in the disguise of my speaking voice being taken away.

And then specifically to Pine Ridge, I just think in some way I can't explain, but don't feel a need to justify that I in some past life may well have had a connection there to that community. And perhaps in a way, even that it does no harm to that community and that going back there with a softer voice to create connectivity and understanding, it was just irresistible for me. And so regardless of the reason, I just could not stop going back and spending time. It was very generative for me.

[27:34] **Josie:** Thank you. I just want to get the chronological story collected in my own head. You mentioned losing your voice and the disease that you know, that would in my mind, be borderline traumatic to not be able to speak. The National Geographic article that you read, was that after you had the disease or before, and the connection between losing the voice and this desire to engage with discovering the evolutionary connection with Deborah Dooley?

Kevin: So in 2007, I had my entrance to evolutionary astrology and the reading, and that began the process of getting me to look inward for growth and inward for meaning purpose, not externally. And then in 2010, three years later, I acquired my voice disorder. And then in 2012, when the economy had stabilized and my voice order had been with me for a couple of years, I had this growing feeling that it was time to serve myself a little bit more. I had been very much into my roles, and I had a lot of what you would call leadership roles for our company and the community, and a lot of my energy had gone to protecting and helping others caring for the tribe, if you will. But I had this growing sensation that I needed to start putting more energy into myself, separate from the roles I played. I wasn't sure how I was going to do that, but from a very young age I'd always had a love affair with the American west. And particularly American history in the second half of the 19th century, when our nation's western expansion and Manifest Destiny had run into the Plains Indians. And when I saw that National Geographic article, I just had come to a point in my life where I felt much better about serving myself, and following my own voice, and buying into the idea that that we strengthen the world from within that, that we create change socially by creating change within ourselves. So I was really receptive to, someone might call it being spontaneous, but to listening to my own voice and when something struck me, I was learning to follow at it. And so that's really the mindset that put me in a position to be able to just take the leap and take off or a place like Pine Ridge.

Josie: Thank you. Being mindful of the time when others will join in, I want to use the remainder of the time to ask you the two questions about your two books. If you can give us the essence of, or something meaningful out of *Not For Sale: Finding Center in the Land of the Crazy Horse*, that would be relevant for our audience here. And then talk about the new book that you're writing, *The Seventh Power*, that would give the listeners a window into what's been very important to you.

[32:05] **Kevin:** Sure. So for me, I think the first book, *Not For Sale*, is really about the idea that we're all here living a life on earth, trying to find our own true voice, and that it's a common human journey but that tribalism and division, if you will, can break a lot of the natural paths we would like to follow. And particularly within that thought, one of the ideas that I really talk about in that book is the idea that awareness and connectivity, in and of

itself, is a powerful act. So when I would go to Pine Ridge and come back, people would ask me what I did there. And at first I really struggled to provide an answer. But finally I just came clean and said, I don't really do anything there, which I don't. I just travel around the reservation and spent time with people that I know there. And this is a place where for decades, generations, people from away have gone there to fix, save, change the people that live there. And that doesn't work, of course, because change comes from within. And I really would see power in going there for no other reason than to be aware and connected. I see you. I know what happened. And I think you're important. So that's kind of a theme from the first block.

The second book, which is coming out at some point next year, currently titled, *The Seventh Power in the Age of Shared Leadership*, builds on this idea that in nature, power is dispersed. If I went into the forest and went to look for the tree that was king of all the other trees, I would not be able to find it. In nature, power lives everywhere. And because humans are a part of nature, humans ultimately aspire to organize in the same way. But for centuries, our big institutions; the family, the school, the place of worship, the place of work, and the place of government, have spun a story designed to convince us that power lives out there somewhere else with someone else in the Capitol with the chief executive, with the principal, or the king or the Baron, or the President. And the reason that modern organizations are struggling to be effective and have high levels of engagement, is because we're entering the Aquarian age. Which is an age where people are coming into coming back to their own personal power. But organizations are still trying to centralize and collect power in the bureaucratic halls of the capital. So this book looks at specific strategies that leaders could use to push power out, to make the center smaller, and to make leadership something that everybody does.

[36:03] **Josie:** Thank you. I really like the concept that leadership is something that everybody does. And I know you described at one point in one of your talks elsewhere, how when you went to the Pine Ridge reservation, or historically when they went to look for a leader to negotiate the treaties with, they did not have the concept of a leader. And then they have rituals associated with a young person coming of age or how to treat the elderly, that sort of embody that communal wisdom of community as a whole being powerful and having individuals have voice in community. So if you can describe the couple of rituals of how a young man is supposed to find their purpose, or how the elderly are treated at Pine Ridge, that would make it come alive for us who haven't been there.

Kevin: Yeah. So, I'm so glad you mentioned that. So after I started traveling to Pine Ridge a number of times and listening and reading and learning, I got looking at how their community was structured before and after the reservation era. So before western expansion and conquest and colonization, the Plains tribes had a model of leadership that was very dispersed and the capitol within their communities was super hard to find. So the great father in Washington, the President, would send negotiators onto the Plains in the second half of the 19th century to make treaties with the tribes. And the negotiators would show up and essentially say, "Take me to your leader". But nobody in those communities really knew what that meant for surely no one spoke for everyone, and followership was a voluntary act. Everyone made their own choice with respect to a treaty, or to go to war, or whatever it might be.

And the Lakota have seven sacred rights that were brought to them long ago by the white buffalo calf woman. And one of those rights is the vision quest, And in the vision quest rite,

young people coming of age or adults at a transformational moment in their lives, would leave the community and journey out into the wilderness for the purpose of seeking a vision. The Lakota term is, *hanjbléčheyA*, which translated means, 'to cry for a vision'. It's something you had to leave your community to do. You had to go into the wilderness alone to do this. And the idea was to gain insight into the essence of your own true voice and path. And if you were fortunate enough to receive a vision, you came back to the tribe, stood before the circle, shared what you learned, and then were bound to live your life in accordance with that vision. And the idea reminded me of that iconic line from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, "the strength of the pack is the wolf". And the idea that if every individual was strong, then the community would be strong.

But then flash forward to the reservation era where places like Pine Ridge became the poorest places in America statistically, economically. And now you had a highly centralized, bureaucratic model, where leadership was done from Washington by the Department of the Interior through the Bureau of Indian Affairs centrally. When the native tribes were rounded up and put on the reservations, their instructions were simply to stay there and someone else would bring them their food and bring them their housing and bring them their rations. And that model became extremely bureaucratic and centralized and hierarchal. And in that structure, these communities struggled economically and socially in many statistical ways. So you saw one model where power was dispersed, and the community thrived, and everybody lead. And another model where power had been taken away, if you will, to a remote capital, and in that model the system collapsed.

[41:44] **Josie:** Thank you. There are two things else that I want to hear from you, and then I will have the listeners join in. So listeners *6 is what you press to join the conversation and send in your questions. You can also send it online. But I know that in the Indian culture, where I'm from, the high regard for the elderly. And I feel really at this stage of 55 years old that my mother who's 80 and living in India, that I pay the price of being a migrant because now I have to travel so far away to care for her. So I want to hear from you, your experience of how the elderly are treated at Pine Ridge. And the other thing that resonated with me, in India we are obsessed with gold, and I love your description of the Lakota's language. So if you can share those two things as the questions come in.

Kevin: Two great questions. Thank you. So at Pine Ridge, one of their core values is wisdom. And the Lakota believe that wisdom is primarily acquired through experience by living a life. And for those who have lived the longest have had the most experiences and have therefore acquired large quantities of wisdom. And elders, therefore, are highly respected within the community. If you go to a public gathering and a younger person stands up to speak, they will first ask permission to speak for the elders. And I remember a few years ago when I took my mom with me to Pine Ridge, and we had a really lovely experience. And it was fun for me to see that immediately upon arrival, she was put in front of me in a place of honor, even though she never been there, because she was the elder. And so it really made me think about how our culture, mainstream culture, could engage elders differently.

And your second question about gold. The quest for gold is what really aided the downfall of the tribes on the Northern Plains. In 1873, I believe it was, General Custer led a military expedition to the Black Hills where gold was "discovered". It was the intension of the mission to discover it and to relay that word to Chicago, knowing that would bring thousands

and thousands of prospectors and settlers to the region. And the Lakota referred to gold as the 'yellow metal that makes the white people crazy'.

And I always chuckle when I see that, when I think of that. But it also is more than just funny, of course, because it speaks to this whole idea of greed and overreaching, and how easy it is for those who have the power to go too far and take too much. Which ultimately implodes back upon everybody. And if overreaching was the most common outcome of leadership, historically, then restraint – the opposite of overreaching - needs to be a hallmark of leadership. Which is having the power, but not using it.

Josie: Thank you. I chuckled as I learned about that, too. Because in India, the women value gold a lot. And I was given gold jewelry for my wedding. And to me, it is the yellow metal that makes Indian women go crazy, too. And I like to give it away. My aunt actually was worried why I was giving away my possessions. She worried if I was suicidal or something. And I would say, "I just don't care for it. I don't have a life where I can use it." So if other cousins can use it, let them have it.

Thank you for sharing that. Before I ask to start the Q&A session, if there's something that I haven't asked you that you would like to share with our listeners.

[47:17] **Kevin:** I think just in summary, it's the idea that when we serve ourselves strength in our tribes, and that correctly, being selfish that we're all here to bring out the best we are. And that we need to spend more time looking inward working on ourselves, and a little less time perhaps looking externally and worrying about what everybody else is doing. I think that famous thought of Gandhi's, "be the change you wish to see in the world", is super accurate and relevant for the world we live in today. And always will be accurate and relevant.

This has been such a rich call, rich conversation. Thank you so much Josie and Kevin. And I wanted to also remind the callers that if you have a question, just press *6 to get into the queue. And we already have a couple of people in the queue, actually. So, let me go to this next caller.

Caller 1: Hi, Kevin. My name is Gaietry, I'm calling from India. And so I have two questions. One question was that I was curious how your colleagues and staff at work reacted to your changed leadership style after you lost your voice? And maybe you could give us an example of a key moment or event when others in the community felt empowered to lead and they saw that they could also make an impact? And my second question is also, I'm curious how your family relationships changed once you received this insight that it's good to strengthen others' voices, because the family is a pretty good model for practicing effective leadership?

[49:46] **Kevin:** Thank you for both of those questions, and hello. So I think first at a work people were probably skeptical, initially. I think when change begins to occur within an organization, people are looking to see if it's going to stick or if it's simply a fad, or idea of the year or quarter. So I think initially there was some apprehension, And also, I think the ideas I began talking about are really so different from the traditional model of leadership in our country, particularly on the east coast, in these very hard-charging communities like Boston or New York, where there is a lot of economic activity. The traditional idea has

always been for a leaders to get up earlier, stay later, work harder, go to more meetings, take more control, go deeper and deeper in the organization. And I began advocating something completely different. Which was for our leaders to actually start doing less, and to broadening their own lives, and to creating space and time and patience for everyone in the organization to talk.

And we really started pushing on the idea of revisiting even the purpose of listening. The purpose is in listening, not to persuade or change someone else's mind. It was just to hear authentically how others are feeling. And judgment was not a goal that we were gonna take on. We didn't want everybody to think the same way or to see the same thing. That truth isn't meant to be singular. It's a collage, and no two humans are likely ever to see the entire planet the same way, and we want it to embrace that.

So these ideas were really very different, and I think it took a while, therefore, for it to take hold. But after I have really stuck with this and doubled down on it for a period of years, we're at a point now where I'm not even driving this anymore. Our whole organization has just embraced this new vision of leadership. And it also, not to go on too long about this, but it also really led to thinking differently about a big question which is, what's the purpose of work in the modern age, what is the purpose of work? And I've come to believe that you shouldn't consider the purpose of work without first considering the purpose of life. Because work should enhance life, not the other way around. And if the purpose of life is for individual souls to self-actualize, then the purpose of work should be to help people who work do that. So that was the model we really have become focused on.

And then at home I was super lucky, because my wife and our children were very supportive. I think they saw how much energy this initiative with Pine Ridge was giving me, and this vision of leadership that my voice and Pine Ridge were helping to create. And I think really particularly with our own daughters, it helped them understand that they should have their own lives, follow their own voice, and that this traditional idea of the dad as a head of the household was really a model that we were able to move beyond, and that a family could very much be an enterprise of shared leadership as well. Where we do have a collective relationship, but the purpose of it is to really support each individual in their quest to find their voice.

Caller 1: Thank you. Yeah, that's very heartening to hear.

Yeah. Thank you, so much wisdom here. I feel like all of your responses, Kevin, we can unpack them even more. And so, I also have a couple of questions. And just to remind the people on the call that you can press *6 to get in the queue, or also submit your questions via askservicebased.org

And so one of my questions goes about your journey of leadership. Which sounds like it started initially with the astrologist. I think that's what you were in 2008. But then of course, as you you started losing your voice. And then later on in 2012, you started to realize that you needed to also focus on your own well-being. So I work with a lot of young people that are working in social change, and one of their biggest challenges is prioritizing - or not necessarily prioritizing - but realizing that their own well-being is also important. They feel that there is this need to sacrifice their well-being and prioritize the work that they're doing

around certain issues and doing in certain communities. And I liked how you kind of broke apart that self-ish and self-less, and that ultimately, we're all here to bring out the best of who we are. But how would you, especially since you have daughters as well, what kind of advice or guidance would you have for young people working in social change who do feel that focusing on personal well-being either is selfish or it's hard to see the connection between self and external?

Kevin: Right. That's a great question. And I have lived on both sides of that question. I lived a long time feeling like that I should put myself second, and the organization first. But I think one way young people might think about this subject in a way that would stick, is I think we all understand the idea of sustainability. And on an individual level, we all have to operate in a way that first brings health, and happiness, and energy, and wholeness, and vitality into our own life. And I think that we're entering an age of what I've seen people start to write about as an age of localism. Where it's simply being the person you want to be in your day to day, minute to minute activity, is actually the most powerful gift you can give the planet.

We're all going to belong to organizations. And those organizations are going to have initiatives and take time, take energy, and try to create change. And that's good and healthy, but it's not as powerful as centering yourself and sharing that energy of wholeness with the people you bump into every day. And I do think the idea of working on oneself is the best way to be of maximum value to others, is a bit of an inverted paradigm. But I think young people in large numbers are going to come to see the truth in it, and are going to embrace that idea, and that it is going to change the world for the better.

Josie: Thank you. I have to thank you for that, I'll share that with people that I work with, the young leaders. And also I'm sitting with a lot of what you've been sharing about shared leadership. And then you've shared that truth is it meant to be singular, it's a collage, and how it's been that slow process to allow for this shared leadership model to emerge in your own company.

I guess it's a two-part question, or two kinds of questions, and I invite you to respond to whichever you feel comfortable responding to. But if you could describe practices or insights you've gleaned about this slow process of bringing a company or a community around shared leadership. I know that there's no blueprint that you can apply to every community in every company, but if you were going to shift a company culture or a community culture for service, like the healthcare system in the United States, away from what it is today to shared leadership, what are some underlying values and practices that are helpful?

[01:01:35] **Kevin:** That's a great question as well. Thanks. Thank you for that. I think that there are some critical ingredients, and I think one of them is re-restrained on the part of the leaders judging the perspectives of others. So I think one of the critical moments in the process of creating a culture of shared leadership is what the leaders do that someone else doesn't exactly agree with. And my view, more often than not, is for the leader not to feel the need to respond to what everybody says, and to think differently about the purpose of listening. It's not to determine right or wrong, it's to help everyone feel authentically heard.

If I had one wish for our organization, it would be that everyone felt safe to say what they actually thought. Think about how powerful that would be. And I think that what people feel

safe where they currently are, with the views they currently have, that creates a platform where more people can now consider new possibilities and be open to new ideas. When judgment comes into thinking, people tend to become defensive about their position. So that's a big piece of it to me.

And then the other big piece, I think, and health care - which you referenced - is I think a potential great example. It's to really focus on the internal organization, the people within the company. So everybody in business has probably heard the expression, "the customer comes first". I don't actually believe that's true. We started saying at our company that the customer comes a very close second. So we really like our customers and they're super important and want to be a value to them. But at our company, we think the people who are going to take care of the customer come first. And so we've adopted what I think of as an employee-centric mission. The purpose of the company is to add value to the lives of the people who work there. And if we're able to do that, they will figure out how to take world-class care of the customer, and the company will be taken care of as well.

But in that model, profit becomes more of an outcome than an objective. Making money in business is important because it helps create a sustainable platform for the organization, but it's not the mission of the organization. And again, work should enhance life. And in life we've all contemplated the idea that life is more than acquiring material possessions. And so work has to also be about more than acquiring material possessions.

And the healthcare, for me, the way that would manifest is the hospital would put a tremendous amount of power in the hands of the people who are closest to the patient. So for example, I think if I were part of a hospital leadership team, I would gather the nurses and I would start asking questions. Like, "Does anyone see any opportunities to improve the experience?" And just follow the nurses. Because anyone who lives in the value stream knows where the waste is, and they know where the opportunities lie. And by focusing on making life better for the nurses, you are also making life better for the patient and improving the company.

[01:06:57] That's amazing. I'm wondering if you've had an exponential rise in the number of applications from people that want to work with your company?

Kevin: So we have 500 people today that are a part of our team and like in most of America right now, unemployment is super low. And the demographics in Maine are a bit challenging in terms of the available workforce. But this week with 500 positions, we have two openings, and they won't stay open more than a week. So yeah, it does. I think in the modern world, individuals are mobile. If you don't like a company, you can find a new one. And I think increasingly individuals are not going to settle for being part of organizations that don't serve the meaning of life and don't help them self-actualize it. And conversely, I think an organization that is focused on the individual is going to have a huge advantage against organizations that don't.

[01:008:32] I have two follow-up questions, but I don't want to take up the whole space. So, Josie or Gaiety, feel free to jump in if there's a question emerging for you, and of course all the other callers on the call. But you know, when you said that in this model, profit becomes more of an outcome rather than an objective. I'm curious to know if and how that changes the

profit other company? And maybe it doesn't, but that's a very let's say radical model, I think, for the traditional corporate world to sign on to. And I guess that's where that slow process of inner transformation plays a huge role. So that there's that internal motivation and calling to shift in that direction.

Kevin: Right. To me, there is a direct correlation saying the mission of your organization as to be valuable to the people that work there. Again, thinking locally, you can work valuable for the people who do it, is I think the best way to end up producing great results for the company. But again, this is important, the purpose of focusing on the people within the company is not to become more profitable, that's just going to happen. But it's not the reason for doing it. People who work spend a tremendous amount of time and energy working. And the old idea that we would sacrifice our work time so that we could live on the weekend or vacation, or retirement, is an unacceptable bargain. It doesn't make sense. It just does not make sense. And work needs to be meaningful in spiritual ways, not just economic ways, to the people who do it.

[01:11:28] One of the inner thoughts to one of my earlier questions about sort of essential principles and values for creating this model shared leadership, you talked about judgment and the role of perhaps the leader or person facilitating conversations to put their judgment aside. Because the purpose of this is not to discern between right and wrong, but just to create a safe space for people to share and feel seen and heard. But that process, especially if you're in that traditional leader mentality of putting your judgment just aside can be challenging. I'm curious to know what that process was like for you as you also changed in your leadership?

Kevin: Right. So I'm glad you asked that question, because it's important for me to say that I do not think I would have changed in a dramatic way without my voice disorder. I think I would've just probably kept going in my traditional leadership paradigm. But my voice condition forced me to change and I needed a jolt. And I believe that it was a gift from my own soul, or the sacred energy of the universe came my way for a reason. And I was lucky enough in time to pick up on and then double down on the gift that my voice restriction brought me. But early on, I was not thinking about any of that. I was trying to protect my voice.

So someone would come to me with a question or a problem because I was the “boss” or one of the bosses. And earlier in my career, I would have used that as an opportunity to pontificate and give answers and direction. But because I really couldn't, especially in the early stages of figuring out how to deal with the disorder, I just started answering questions with questions. So someone would come to me with a problem, and I'd say something like “That does sound like a problem, good question, what do you think we should do about it?” And I was not taking that approach because I saw leadership innovation in it, I was just protecting my voice. But then that person would tell me what he or she thought we should do, and virtually every time it made sense. And of course it would, because real life, the world is filled with people who care about what they do and have good instincts and judgment about what to do. So that person then would tell me what he or she thought they might do about that problem. And I would simply say something like, “That sounds good. Let's do that.” And off that person would go with his or her solution to this problem.

And again, over time I saw people already knew what to do, and they already had great answers and they didn't need a CEO-centric, handed down solution giving it to them. They

just needed a little encouragement and support to trust owning the stakes and to do what they already knew would be helpful. And all of that really came to me because it was forced on me because of my voice. But then eventually I started to see the magic in it, the irony in it, the gift in it. And that's when I started doubling down on it.

[01:16:18] Wow. Which book did you write that talks about all of this?

Kevin: So they both do a bit. The only book that's out now is *Not For Sale: Finding Center in the Land of Crazy Horse*. And that book, I think it's really important for us because it was about the process of becoming aware and realizing that leadership is meant to be dispersed, and that great people are everywhere.

The second book, which is currently in New York getting ready to be marketed will probably be out at some point next year. And that's the one that kind of goes more into the specifics of how the self-actualized leader could create a dispersed power leadership model that helps everyone self-actualize, and really fundamentally changes the very nature of the meaning of work and its purpose in the modern age. And I think can position corporations to become highly effective, localized change agents that are making the world better. And doing well for themselves as a result of the focus of making the world better for the people within their company.

[01:18:13] Really powerful. Thank you so much. I think Josie also has a one, last, burning question.

Josie: Okay. It's less a question, more a reflection, and something that I'm just thinking aloud as I speak. Thank you, Kevin, for answering very candidly the question about what do you do when you go to Pine Ridge reservation by saying you just hang out. And just being there and hanging out, I think there's not enough praise available in the world for people to do that, especially not in the business context. But I know for myself in my family life, as well as my life as a strategy consultant, it was just hanging out with my son was when I got the most beautiful gifts of him sharing things spontaneously rather than setting aside quality time when he was not in the mood to talk about it. So hanging out as a parent, as a strategy consultant, the cooler talk that I've picked up from just hanging out at the client side was far more insightful than the formal meetings we arranged. So hanging out was very important in my experience, both personally and professionally.,

At the community level, I understand that the shift from the culture of command and control and centralized leadership, to distributed shared leadership and trust and support for each other. And the opening apology you offered is one way to restore that trust, to recover from the betrayals of the past and to say that once the apology is accepted, they feel empowered on their own, it's not that you have to do anything else to empower them. They don't need a handout, they have everything already.

But at the organizational level, I'm not sure how a CEO can make the equivalent to earn the trust back. The CEOs of corporate America – “fat cat” is a term that's been used - and the discrepancy between the worker and the CEO pay has grown, and inequality in society has grown. But I don't see the people in power offering apologies within the organizational context. So is there other practices that would help shift the culture from that control and

compliance mindset towards [inaudible], what might that be? And to make it more personal, if your saw mill manager or the person operating the saw to make the lumber comes and says, “I’m just hanging out”, how would that go down with the leadership?

Kevin: Those are great thoughts and a great question. With me, it would go over great because that’s how we want our leaders to function. We want our leaders to become harder to find, to surrender a good bit of the leadership responsibility to everyone. So we've talked about that. I think to the larger question, that at the end of the day, the world is going to move in this direction we've been discussing. The path of humanity to realign the most basic laws of nature, which disperse power and share leadership. But it is a very difficult concept, I think, to bring forth. And it's going to take time.

Which makes me think, too, about the question earlier for young people. I think we've got to learn to look a little bit differently at time. So for us, 10 years, or five years in a career might seem like an incredibly long time. But it's scope of universe, or the planet, or even life, it's a super short period of time. The rules of nature are going to carry the day. What comes to humanity and leaders are not going to be able to stop that, but they can accelerate it. And this is the exciting opportunity. The winds of change are blowing, people are coming into their own power, their own voice. Leaders can fight that, and resist that, and slow it down, but that's all they can do. The real power is embracing that path.

Wayne Gretzky, the great goal scorer, once said, “My secret is I don't go to where the puck is, I skate to where it's going.” And I think if more leaders think about the arch of humanity and path that humanity is on and try to get out in front of that, that's what it takes. But it kind of has to happen one soul at a time. The world changes one person at a time. And I can wish for all organizations to change, but really where I've got to put most of my energy is on trying to be that change myself consistently. I've grown to learn that I have a full-time job and it's easy for me to lose my way. And the biggest gift I can give is to try to get myself right. And getting ourselves right is contagious. And I don't really worry about the rest of it too much.

Thank you so much, Kevin. So much wisdom that I'm actually looking forward to sharing back with the young leaders that I work with. So deeply grateful. And we also want to know how we, as the larger service-based community, can support your work?

Kevin: Well, I wanted to say thank you to you, all of you listening, and the organization. Because I think your organization is taking on the mission of strengthening the voices of others and helping people self-actualize. So I feel really blessed to be connected. And as I said earlier, I think connectivity, in and of itself, is powerful. And I follow your organization and I learn from it. And it's just been a fun honor today to share back to your organization. And I'm sure more will come of that in the future. This group of listeners, this community that you have, is on a powerful path and it's going to keep growing and I'm excited to be connected to it. So thank you.

Well, we want to thank you for your time and energy and sharing your voice and wisdom with us on shared leadership, on learning, on time, on the arc of the universe, and where we're headed. I feel like you've given a lot of things to be hopeful about, particularly during these times when the news prints a lot of things that it's hard to be hopeful about. So again, thank

you so much on behalf of the service space ecosystem for your presence today and sharing gems from your personal journey.

Kevin: It's my pleasure. Thank you.

And I just want to invite everyone just to hold a collective minute of silence and gratitude for all that we've received, and to share it out with the world. Thank you everyone. Again, thank you, Kevin and Josie for facilitating this really inspiring conversation. To the callars that joined with us this morning for co-creating this space. We wish everyone a beautiful rest of your day or evening.