

## Enterprise Radio

**First, for the first time I understood what it was like to not feel fully heard. And second, at Pine Ridge I came to realize there are lots of ways to lose your voice in this world or to not feel authentically heard. And then third, which was this big leadership idea. When I started looking at history, it really hit me that throughout history, leaders had probably done more to restrict, and intimidate, and hinder others than to liberate them and empower them. And that's really when it hit me that the partial loss of my own voice was actually a blessing in disguise and an invitation to lead differently and see if I could help create an organization in our company than perhaps beyond where everybody felt heard and everybody felt respected, trusted, empowered, and important. (02:59-04:28)**

**I think simply put, it's look at the traditional leadership model that governs much of the planet today. It's really an organizationally centric model where the power of decision-making and control has been pulled into the center, the corporate-cratic headquarters of the organization. And the individuals who are a part of that organization have traditionally been encouraged either overtly or covertly to sacrifice a bit of their own voice and identity for the purpose of serving the center, in a power to the center model. But if you look globally today at engagement level, people's enthusiasm for their place of work or their confidence in their government shows statistically that their confidence was very low. And I believe that's because we're moving into a period in human history where increasingly individuals are wanting to serve their own voice and strengthen their own souls. But organizations are a bit behind that curve. In fact, they're still very self-centered. To me, the idea to flip the script on the traditional model of organizational structure. And instead of collecting power in, the goal is to disburse it and push it out, and create a culture where everybody shares the responsibilities and the opportunities for leadership. (04:45-07:04)**

**A company is going to put a high priority on being profitable and having excellent customer service, of course. But to me, profitability really should be an outcome, not the goal. If an organization takes exceptional care of the people that work there, those people will figure out how to take world class care of customers, and that will produce high quality results for the company. But those corporate results are really the outcome of adding that value to the lives of the people who work at the company. (10:16-11:02)**

You're listening to EPN the podcast network. Welcome to Enterprise Radio, the signature show of EPN, the entrepreneur podcast network. Your channel for exclusive interviews with entrepreneurs, small business owners, and some of the world's top executives who share business strategies and insights that can all help you build your business leading to your business success. And now, broadcasting from anywhere between Brazil, South America, to Los Angeles, California, it is your host Eric Dye.

**Eric:** And this is Eric Dye. And once again, welcome to Enterprise Radio, a part of EPN, the Entrepreneur Podcast Network. Today we are speaking with Mr. Kevin Hancock, an award-winning author, public speaker, and CEO of one of America's oldest family businesses, [Hancock Lumber](#). Mr. Hancock is an advocate of strengthening voices of all individuals within a company or community through listening and shared leadership. Mr. Hancock, a pleasure to have you today with us on the program.

**Kevin:** Thank you, Eric. It's a pleasure to be with you.

**Eric:** Likewise, our pleasure as well. Certainly looking forward to hearing from you and thanks for your time today. So Mr. Hancock, you've been the CEO of Hancock Lumber for 25 years, that certainly speaks volumes. However, it is in the past decade that you feel there has been a shift in your leadership style and thinking. Can you give us a bit of context for this shift and what sparked the changed?

[01:29] **Kevin:** Sure. In 2010 I acquired a rare voice disorder known as [spasmodic dysphonia](#). Which meant speaking, something I had done a lot of and taken for granted, became a bit more difficult. And I had to think about how I might lead very differently in a way that had me doing a lot less talking. And then a couple of years later, I started traveling from Maine to the [Pine Ridge Indian Reservation](#) in South Dakota, which is one of the biggest and statistically poorest of all the Sioux reservations on the Plains. And there I encountered an entire community that didn't feel heard, felt forgotten and left behind. That's the combination of two events really put three learnings into my life.

First, for the first time I understood what it was like to not feel fully heard. And second, at Pine Ridge I came to realize there are lots of ways to lose your voice in this world or to not feel authentically heard. And then third, which was this big leadership idea. When I started looking at history, it really hit me that throughout history, leaders had probably done more to restrict, and intimidate, and hinder others than to liberate them and empower them. And that's really when it hit me that the partial loss of my own voice was actually a blessing in disguise and an invitation to lead differently, and see if I could help create an organization in our company than perhaps beyond where everybody felt heard and everybody felt respected, trusted, empowered, and important.

**Eric:** I'd say that's quite a story and really appreciate your sharing that. And what brought on the shift, it certainly makes total sense, no doubt. How does mainstream view of leadership vary from the new leadership model that you've been working on?

[04:43] **Kevin:** Oh well, that's a great question. I think simply put, it's look at the traditional leadership model that governs much of the planet today. It's really an organizationally centric model where the power of decision-making and control has been pulled into the center, the corporate-cratia headquarters of the organization. And the individuals who are a part of that organization have traditionally been encouraged either overtly or covertly to sacrifice a bit of their own voice and identity for the purpose of serving the center, in a power to the center model. But if you look globally today at engagement level, people's enthusiasm for their place of work or their confidence in their government shows statistically that their confidence was very low. And I believe that's because we're moving into a period in human history where increasingly individuals are wanting to serve their own voice and strengthen their own souls. But organizations are a bit behind that curve. In fact, they're still very self-centered. To me, the idea to flip the script on the traditional model of organizational structure. And instead of collecting power in, the goal is to disburse it and push it out and create a culture where everybody shares the responsibilities and the opportunities for leadership.

**Eric:** Great thought on the subject once again. Thanks for that. Now, what do you see as the biggest hurdles in making the transition to this new model of leadership, where power is pushed out individuals rather than gathered toward the power center, and what will be the tipping point for the change?

**Kevin:** So I think two things come to mind there. The first is, as a planet of humans, we've got to stop and think a little bit about what we're doing. The world is moving fast, 24/7, on the go, but I just don't think we've taken time to think about what we're doing. So for example, from a leadership standpoint, in business I think we've got to stop and think about what the purpose of work is in the 21st century. That's really a big question, but I don't think it's been thought about or talked about enough. And to me, I can't contemplate the purpose work without first considering the purpose of life. Because in the

21<sup>st</sup> century, I think work should enhance the lives of the people who do it. And perhaps because of my own experiences with my voice and my time at Pine Ridge, I've really come to believe that the purpose of life is for each individual to find or share their own authentic true voice, to self-actualize. And therefore to me, the purpose of work should be to create an environment that helps and supports everyone in that life pursuit of really coming in to know who you are and to have the confidence to express yourself and be yourself. In order for that to be actualized, however, it really is leaders who first have to change. Because we've really got to think about the mission of work. And if the mission of work is to serve the people who work, then leaders have got to start to think about their jobs differently. And we've got to really get beyond things like ego and pursuit of bigger, better, more, and start to put a bigger mission at the top of an organizations reason for existing. A company is going to put a high priority on being profitable and having excellent customer service, of course. But to me, profitability really should be an outcome, not the goal. If an organization takes exceptional care of the people that work there, those people will figure out how to take world class care of customers, and that will produce high quality results for the company. But those corporate results are really the outcome of adding that value to the lives of the people who work at the company.

[11:03] **Eric:** Certainly some great points and good information there today. We're joined by Mr. Kevin Hancock, an award-winning author, public speaker, and CEO of one of America's oldest family businesses, Hancock Lumber, here on Enterprise Radio, a part of EPN, the Entrepreneur Podcast Network. Now Mr. Hancock, what makes the difference at Hancock Lumber? Meaning, what do you attribute to having been named a best places to work in Maine now for five years running, and setting records on every major business metric? Get into some of those details.

**Kevin:** I think that for any organization it's the culture that makes the difference. There is an old saying in business that people have seen which simply is, "Our people make the difference". But as much as I love people, I don't actually believe that's true. Because I think great people are actually everywhere. I think that the planet is filled with great people. So why then would one group thrive when perhaps another struggles to survive. It's not necessarily the people in that group, because those people are great to begin with innately. It's the culture. And history plays this out time and time again.

You think about Germany after WWII just as one example. So that country was really randomly divided down the middle between west and east. And west Germany went on for the next multiple decades to really lead the planet forward in economic activity and entrepreneurship and invention and innovation. While east Germany hung on with machine guns, and guard dogs, and barbed wire, until it collapsed under its own weight. But what was the difference between two countries? It wasn't that all of the "good Germans" ended up in the west, and the "worst" German ended up in the east. Germany was filled with great people on both sides. It was culture that makes the difference. And at its simplest level, the culture either empowers the individual human spirit, disperses power and shares leadership opportunity, or it fights it, thwarts it, negates it, and collects power in a bureaucratic center somewhere. It's the culture that makes the difference.

[14:00] **Eric:** It certainly does. And we hear it often on the program, culture certainly makes a difference and I really appreciate you're also pointing that out. Now, lastly, while your management teams and employees at Hancock Lumber are working to implement these leadership transformations and empowering all of your employees, you set out on a series of adventures to deepen your learning. Where did you travel and what did you learn?

**Kevin:** Sure. Well, first of all, I did mostly work. I just want to make that clear. I spent a lot of time at the company, but I did start going out of my way to get out of my lane, is how I came to think about it. There's a bit of a business adage that encourages managers to stay in their lane. And I don't think that's great advice. Obviously, we've got to focus on our core activity. But it's a big world full of ideas, and it's important for all of us to get out and immerse ourselves in it.

And what really triggered this for me was spending time on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, a place I've now been 50 times, and all of the learning that I've acquired there about that community and culture that was key in a way, that I felt like a better person and therefore a better leader and was allowing me to bring back ideas that were helping our company. So since that time, I've really doubled down on making an effort to get out of my industry and even get out beyond business as a whole and get immersed in some different places. I spent quite a bit of time on the Navajo reservation learning about the tradition of Navajo peacemaking. I recently was in Kyiv learning about the Holodomor, which was the forced starvation of Ukrainian farmers in the 1930's. I spent some time in London with a gentleman by the name of Jose Miguel Sokoloff, who was a Colombian advertising executive who helped come up with a campaign of ideas that helped end the Colombian civil war.

I just look at them as opportunities to learn. We're very broad on this planet, but we've got to get out of our lanes and connect with those opportunities. I also think finally that if you look at the biggest social challenges facing the planet today, increasingly people are realizing that government alone cannot solve those problems. That bigger, broader groups are going to have to get beyond their core business and care about what their mission is by taking on some of the world's biggest challenges. And I think the best way to do that is to start by getting more broadly connected to the planet as a whole. And the idea really then is if you go back and review far enough, there's actually really one single human drive that we're all working towards the same terms of trying to improve the world we live in. So I think businesses need to start thinking more broadly about the impact they have and the roles they can play.

**Eric:** Well, Mr. Hancock, it certainly has been our pleasure to have you, and thanks for sharing insight and expertise in the regards to leadership, as well as your journey and experiences with us. It certainly is making a difference there in your neck of the woods and nationally, and I have no doubt internationally as well. Where can listeners get further information on you and also be in touch with you?

**Kevin:** Yeah, you could find our company, Hancock Lumber, at [hancocklumber.com](http://hancocklumber.com). Or you can find me and some of the activities I talked about on my personal website, which is [KevinDHancock.com](http://KevinDHancock.com).

**Eric:** And that certainly works. And we'll links within the show notes of this broadcast. Again, Mr. Hancock, all the best. And thanks for joining us here today on Enterprise Radio.

**Kevin:** Thank you, my pleasure.

**Eric:** And the pleasure certainly was ours. We've been speaking with Mr. Kevin Hancock, an award-winning author, public speaker, and CEO of one of America's oldest family businesses, Hancock Lumber. And for further details, visit [kevinhdhancock.com](http://kevinhdhancock.com).