

Keep It Local Maine

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It's about leaders or managers actually doing less, not more. And really focusing more on the culture of the organization. And creating a platform for a truth that authenticity to surface. Because you know, you think about it. In any organization, if people feel safe, safe to just be their authentic selves, say what they think, be who they are, be at peace as they are, just think about how transformational that one template can be. It really changes everything. (07:02-07:46)

Like our performance as a company has improved pretty dramatically in the year following this approach. But that's, to me, the outcome of something bigger and more important. Which is really just celebrating - I mean, I don't want to overdo it - but humanity. The sacredness of each person honoring everybody as they are. It's actually kind of getting back to a simpler approach. And when you just honor everybody as they are and don't feel like you have to fix, control, change, regulate, direct everybody, think about how much easier life gets. (11:27-12:14)

Todd: Hello, and welcome to the, Keep It Local Maine podcast, where we tell the stories of local business owners and Maine residents, and learn more about what, who, and what inspires them, their challenges, successes, and more. My name is Todd Regoulinsky.

Kimberly: And I am Kimberly Regoulinsky.

Todd: And we are the publishers of Keep It Local Maine, a local magazine that helps showcase local businesses to the people in and around their communities.

Thank you for tuning into our weekly podcast that you can subscribe to on Pod Bean, Apple podcasts, and Spotify. You can learn more about us at keepitlocalmaine.com, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram through the links in the show notes.

Kimberly: This episode is sponsored by Fabian Oil, a family owned and operated business that offers heating oil and propane delivery services and repairs. Fabian has been serving central and Northern Maine with propane and oil for over 30 years as a local main business, they cherish the relationships they have formed by serving the people of their communities. In 2019, Fabian entered the Southern Maine region with a heating oil acquisition, and they have recently brought propane to the market. They are aggressive and would love to be your supplier. Give them a call at (207) 793-2044. Or visit fabianoil.com.

Todd: In this episode, we'll be talking with author and speaker, Kevin Hancock. Kevin is an award-winning author, speaker, and CEO of Hancock Lumber company. A family-owned Maine business in operation since 1848 that is a six-time recipient of the *Best Places to Work in Maine* award, the *Governor's Award for Business Excellence*, the *MITC Exporter of the Year* award, and the *Pro Sales National Dealer of the Year*.

Kevin's first book, [Not For Sale: Finding Center in the Land of Crazy Horse](#), won three national book awards. His second book, [The Seventh Power: One CEO's Journey Into the Business of Shared Leadership](#), was released in February 2020.

He is an advocate of strengthening the voices of all individuals within a company or a community, through listening, empowering, and sharing leadership.

Kimberly: Welcome to the show. Kevin, we are so excited to have you here today.

Kevin: Well, super happy to be with you both. Thanks so much for having me.

02:20 **Kimberly:** I am so excited because I love learning about leadership, and I've watched your Ted Talks many times, and just every time I watch it, I just feel so inspired. So it's super exciting to have you with us today. And one of the questions I had is, people search their whole life looking for their purpose. And you found yours through a painful event. Can you tell us about that?

Kevin: I can. Yeah. So well first, I'm the CEO of [Hancock Lumber](#) since 2010. And kind of peak of the housing market collapse, which was a super difficult time for our industry, I began to have trouble speaking. Long story short, and it turned out I'd acquire a rare neurological voice disorder called spasmodic dysphonia. No known cause, no known cure. But from a leadership standpoint, the issue was I was trying to help lead our company through a super difficult time and suddenly I couldn't really talk. And I never thought about it this way before, but if you're a leader - or CEO in my case - your tool is your voice. And I suddenly couldn't use it, and it really made me wonder I was even going to be able to keep doing my job.

But essentially what happened was I had to quite quickly come up with a new approach to leading that involved not talking very much. And that led me down a simple trail at that point. If you're not going to talk a lot, you're going to listen a lot. And so I really ended up kind of flipping my approach leadership, from talking to listening, and from being on that stage, to sharing the stage. And in time, what I saw is pretty much everything about our company got better, and everything about how it felt to do my job got easier. I've just since, now for a decade, been doubling down again on this idea of leaders dispersing power, sharing leadership, and giving voices to others. And I came to see in time the partial restrictions of my own voice as an opportunity to strengthen the voices of others. And today, I'm just really into an organizational approach in which everybody leads, and everybody speaks for the company. But I got there completely by accident. And as you said, I got there essentially through a disorder, a health disorder.

Kimberly: It's so inspiring. I love what you said. There was, on your website, I was reading. It said, "Leadership in the 21st century must be about dispersing power and giving others a stronger voice. Followers must become leaders in order to create change within every human. Spirit is sacred by design, organizations must learn to free the human spirit rather than constrict, control, and direct it." I just, I love that. That's so powerful. And so in that, what are some basic steps that business owners that have employees, or CEOs can take to move toward that?

06:21 **Kevin:** Yeah, so really simple conceptually, but maybe hard to do for people who aren't used to it. It really, to me, is all about restraint. So it's about the idea of those who have the most power by virtue of their title or position, not using it. Not using it and creating space and time for others to lead, others to share their voice. So it's really about - which is counter-intuitive - it's about leaders or managers actually doing less, not more. And really focusing more on the culture of the organization. And creating a platform for a truth that authenticity to surface. Because you know, you think about it. In any organization, if people feel safe, safe to just be their authentic selves, say what they think, be

who they are, be at peace as they are, just think about how transformational that one template can be. It really changes everything.

And I also, I might just quickly add. Really, to me, it's about thinking about the higher calling of, in this case, the higher calling. Like, what's its purpose? That's really led me to rethink that question. And to me, a great company has multiple purposes. But the first one is to be meaningful and valuable to the people who work there. I've really adopted what I've come to talk about as an employee-centric view of the company. The first job of the company is to be a place where the people who work there really are taking value. Not just economic value, but spirit, humanistic, real, deep value.

Kimberly: I love that. So powerful.

08:45 **Todd:** Yeah. Have you noticed now in some of the other CEOs or other people who you've met, I've imagined you've talked to, about dispersing leadership, dispersing kind of power? How do you see that as being harder for those people? Because as for you, you kind of didn't have a ton of choices. In changing your style, how do you think it's harder for other people who they don't necessarily have to do it that way?

Kevin: Right. That's so true. I really have come to see by a voice as a gift or blessing, actually, from my own soul, if you will. So I got this big boost or push to a new way of thinking that is different from the traditional, top-down power, to center, higher-arch driven way of thinking. So I think it is a bit more difficult for those who haven't been forced into it.

But if you take a big step back and kind of look at the highest themes of the 21st century of the kind of the dawning of the Aquarian age, if you will. I think they're all about dispersed power. I think we've been living for centuries in a social bottle, which is about power to the center. The Capitol, the Empire. But really in this day and age, the internet and dispersed information, dispersed energy production. And if you watch voices around the world, I think you're seeing that since the age of the individual, I guess is what I would say. Which really means the individual coming into his or her own power. And realizing that I am, in and of myself, an empire in the best sense of the word. I'm important. I'm sacred. I'm worthy. And this doesn't mean that organizations aren't still going to be critical? Humans have to collaborate. But it's going to change the meaning, the purpose of those organizations. Those organizations, as I said, are going to first exist to serve the people who belong to them.

And then the organization ends up thriving as the result of a higher calling. Like our performance as a company has improved pretty dramatically in the year following this approach. But that's, to me, the outcome of something bigger and more important. Which is really just celebrating - I mean, I don't want to overdo it - but humanity. The sacredness of each person honoring everybody as they are. It's actually kind of getting back to a simpler approach. And when you just honor everybody as they are, and don't feel like you have to fix, control, change, regulate, direct everybody. Think about how much easier life gets.

Todd: Yeah, and I like how that approach also inherently kind of incorporates some type of perspective. Like you have the individual, but it's the perspective of how the individual then fits into the larger picture as well, rather than just a total focus on the individual. It also then kind of readjusts the perspective of everything else around that as well.

So another question that I had for you is, how does it feel now that you have found that purpose?

12:48 **Kevin:** Well, I think it's two-fold. That was such a great question. First, I do think it's simplifying, I guess is the first thing I would say. And it really brings focus, because you kind of know what you're about. And yet at the same time, I think it's so humbling. Because you're never really done, of course, finding purpose and finding meaning and growing.

So once you get a taste for clarity, I think it just makes you even hungrier to want to stay at a humble, centered place, where you can keep growing. And the mystery of what's next gets more exciting. You know, if someone had asked me in 2008 what was going to happen to me in 2010, and given me a thousand guesses, I wouldn't have come up with this.

13:58 **Kimberly:** This is powerful. So how does that, you were talking about how there's almost this excitement to see what's next. How does that open your eyes and really motivate you for each day?

Kevin: I think simply put, I just get up in the morning and I see the good in everybody. Like we have in our company 550 people who are part of it. And they aren't, first of all, employees. They're human beings, who happen as part of their life to have a job at our company. And I think the first step is to see them as human beings, not as employees. But when you start accepting everybody as they are, and seeing and honoring the authenticity of each individual, you just see the good in everybody.

And it's really true across our company and most companies. People want to do the right things, they want to grow, they want to create value for others. And it's simpler. It's very simplifying to just meet people where they are, as opposed to feel like because you're the boss or the CEO, you have some unique right to mold people into something that you want them to be. That's really just, that's hard. That's stressful. And that won't work. So letting go of that is just really empowering.

Kimberly: That's awesome.

15:42 **Todd:** So you found your purpose through your experience with your voice issues. Do you think it's possible for other people to find their calling and purpose through difficult times or times of pain?

Kevin: I do. I have a dear friend from California who's a psychologist, an evolutionary astrologist, which is a great story for another day. But she calls planet earth, 'the planet of wounds and fear'. And when you think about it, one commonality that connects every human is, everybody suffers. Everybody has loss. It is inescapable to be human and not have setbacks, pain and suffering. Amidst all the joy and wonder of being alive. But pain and suffering and difficulty come for us all.

And I also think that it would make humanity a much simpler place if we all just acknowledge that. Despite the differences we see, everybody will experience pain and suffering in different forms. And what's its purpose? Its purpose is really lessons and growth and forces us to really look within ourselves. And if you look and you want to find meaning in setback, it's pretty much always there. It's really about being willing to look for it. Because I would say the same time, if you don't want to see it, you're going to be able to not see it as well. But yeah, this is how we grow, we grow from difficulty.

Kimberly: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Wow. That's yeah, that's a lot of wisdom right there.

Kevin: But when you think about it that way, it doesn't necessarily make difficulty less difficult. But it does put a little bit of a different perspective on it. It's like, how can I take this? Scientifically tough thing in my life and grow from it. Where's the lesson, or the message, or the opportunity, if you want

to extract it. And that's really, I think, how you defeat pain. You don't ever make those hard things go away, but you can really defeat them by growing from them.

18:34 **Todd:** Obviously this is a path that you've gone through. Do you have any kind of insights or suggestions of how people can find the upside in those experiences, or even just how you might have processed that?

Kevin: Yeah. The one thing I would say there is, you have to look inward. Those answers to your unique pains or challenges only live inside you. And in a really kind of distracting, external world with all the chaos we live in and the noise and constant distractions, I think this one of the real challenges of our age is can we still take that breath and look within ourselves where the real journey resides?

Kimberly: For sure. Yeah. So I have to ask this. I love, like I said, learning about leadership and I always want to become a better leader. What would you say are our five qualities that every great leader should have? If you had to just say, you know, these are really important five qualities, what would they be?

19:54 **Kevin:** That's such a great question. And I think different people could build lots of different, great lists. But I would say perhaps that number one, humility. Number two, which is probably related to number one or builds off it, recognition. It's not about you. Number three, respect for others as they are. Number four, see the higher purpose of what you're doing on a human scale. And number five, it's to see leadership as something to be shared and dispersed, not collected, hoarded, or possessed.

Todd: That's a lot to chew on. So you have brought a voice to the voiceless. How does that continue to motivate you as a leader?

Kevin: Well, I just think when you look around the world, I think that this is possibly the root of all social disharmony. I have a line on the bottom of every email I send that simply asks this question, "What if everybody on earth felt trusted, respected, valued, heard, and safe, what might change?" And I think it's possible that everything might change. That all of that social tension we see is a result of people not being helped to feel heard and safe as they are.

So my answer to your question of what inspires me about this is two-fold. There's so much work to do on that plane. But second, everyone can change the world because you really change it one human at a time. And every single time any of us help someone else feel heard, trusted, respected, and safe, that's how humanity advances. It happens one person at a time.

Kimberly: I got goosebumps just sitting here. I've had goosebumps this whole time. I'm like, this is just so good. It's so powerful. If we could all wrap our heads around that, I mean, it's true. It's just how powerful would that be? We have an opportunity to really make effective change based on that. What would you say is one of the biggest lessons or wins that you've experienced as a leader?

23:02 **Kevin:** I'd say the biggest lesson is less is more. That having the ability to not act on everything you see, and trust that the team, the entire group, is capable, fully capable, more than capable, of handling pretty much everything that comes their way. That for me has been the biggest lesson I think, that really leadership is about less, not more.

23:44 **Todd:** Yeah. There was a quote that I came across the other day that's totally in line with that. And it was, "Do as little as needed, not as much as possible." It was one of those things that I thought

originally, you know, oh, gee, that's easier said than done. And then you read who the quote is by, it's a trainer, a coach, for a 23-time Olympic gold medalist. But you know, it sounds easy, but then you're like, oh wait, this person was very incredibly successful. There must be something to this.

Kevin: What a great quote.

Todd: Yea. But it totally goes in that whole 'less is more' thing. You know, you're trying to do all these things, when it really does boil down to something simple. And I like how you said that earlier about how everybody can change the world, because we can do that in each interaction that we have. And that's why I think it's so powerful because it gives us all work to do it. It doesn't put it off somewhere else. Like we each have responsibility. And it's something that we can each actually take action on instead of feeling helpless in that we can actually, even if it's a simple thing, a lot of simple things can add up to something really big.

Kevin: Yes, lovely.

24:55 **Todd:** So this is a question I'm always anxious to hear the answer to, but who or what inspires you either professionally or personally?

Kevin: So lots of people. But one that's coming to mind this morning, I've really been inspired by the writing and teaching and actions of Gandhi. Someone everyone's aware of. I have one of his most powerful quotes right on my desk in my office, which when simply said is, 'become the change you wish to see in the world'. That's such a paradigm changing view. All of us would probably like to see the world be something a bit different than what it is, but how to go about that can feel overwhelming. Unless you go at it like Gandhi suggested, which is just become that change. Don't worry about creating change in others, create it within yourself. And that is really, I think, the only way to create meaningful change. The one person I can try to get right is me. And I can say from experience, just getting myself right is pretty close to a full-time job. Like, I've got to work at it all the time. So I would say Gandhi today.

Todd: Yeah, I will co-sign on the full-time job of getting yourself right.

Kimberly: Yes. I completely agree with that.

Todd: Sometimes I feel like I put in a little OT each week on that, quite honestly. Without great results, but at least I feel like I put in a little bit of work.

26:56 **Kimberly:** So one question we like to ask because we love Maine - we love everything Maine - is, what is it that you particularly love about Maine?

Kevin: Yeah, there are so many things. But I guess at the end of the day I would say the people that live in state. It's just such an authentic, integral, hardworking, lovely, feisty yet neighborly, community. I think anyone who really knows Maine knows there really isn't another community quite like ours, and we're lovely imperfect. And yet, so many great attributes at the same time. So for me, it's the people.

Kimberly: Yeah. So many great quotes in that. I love that. I'm like, okay, I'm going to quote Kevin on this. Yeah. 'Lovably imperfect'. That is, I've never heard it put that way, but that is so true. And feisty. You know, I love that passionate, feisty spirit that we have here.

Kevin: We're feisty in like in the best sense of the world.

Todd: Yeah, that fits. As someone who moved here from away, yeah, I agree. I like that one.

Well Kevin, thank you so much for taking time out of your day and speaking with us. I think this has been a great episode, and I think a lot of people are going to probably listen to this a couple of times. I know Kim's probably going to listen to it four or five times. But this is a lot of fun for us, very inspiring for us. And we will be sure to have links to your website and to where they can find your books, and just all the social media information, all that'll be in the show notes. So be sure to visit that and to check out the books. We'll probably even put in a link to the Ted Talk that you did, because I know Kim would be mad if I didn't. So thank you once again for this time and it's been great.

Kimberly: It really has been an honor. I feel just so inspired and just motivated. And just, again, just like some of the things you said, it just starts with you, and just powerful. I mean, I think this is something that every single person and every single leader needs to hear. And you're a world changer. So thank you for what you're doing, and thank you for being with us. It's been great.

Kevin: Well Kim and Todd, thank you both so much. I really enjoyed being here with you. And when you think about it, we have a bit of a shared mission, because what you're doing with the show is giving a voice to lots of people across Maine. And I appreciate that opportunity, and I appreciate you. So I loved it. Thank you.

Kimberly: Thank you so much. Have a great day.