

Kevin - Wind Cave

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02:03 **Kevin:** So my time at [Pine Ridge](#) has made me think about drawing bigger circles in our lives, and how we think about who's in our circle. So on one level, when I go to Pine Ridge, I'm a *wašiču*, a white person. And the people that are there are Oglala, or Lakota, or Sioux. But if you draw a bigger circle, we're all human and we're all part of the same tribe. And so you can draw small circles and see everybody as being different, or you can draw a really big circle and see everybody is being related and connected and part of the same tribe.

03:37 So one idea I've thought a lot about while I'm out here just walking or sitting or thinking, is first the idea that in nature power is dispersed. It lives in all things. But that does not mean that outcomes are guaranteed. Because I think one of the other rules you see in nature when you look around, is that you have to be alert. You have to be alive, awake, engaged, and focused. And there are consequences in nature to not doing those things. And so it's a tricky idea that nature does disperse power, but it doesn't guarantee outcomes. And it does not strive to create equality. We've all got to look within ourselves for our own source of power and use it to be as strong and healthy and focused as we can be to create the future that we want to create, to create the outcomes that we want to create.

05:55 **Kevin:** So one thing I've thought a lot about is the idea within a tribe, which could be a company, or a town, or a reservation, it could be any community you want to think about. And the idea is this, culture matters. It makes a big difference. There's this whole saying that you hear a lot in business, 'our people make the difference', and I've actually come to believe that's not really true.

I think culture makes the difference and great people are everywhere. And if you look historically at the world we live in, you see this. So take for example Germany after World War II. So you have a country that was randomly divided down the middle between a west and an east. And one side of that divide, the west side, went on to really prosper and flourish and grow and create a lot of value that the

whole planet benefited from. And the other side, the Eastern side, struggled and held on with machine guns, and barbed wire, and fences, and dictates from above until it collapsed under its own weight.

But what was the difference between the two Germanys? It wasn't like randomly all, what would you even say, "good Germans" ended up on one side of the line and the "not good Germans" ended up on the other. It was the culture that made the difference. One culture promoted freedom and entrepreneurial spirit and independent voices, and the other culture promoted something that was very different. And you see that in North and South Korea today. I think the South Korean economy today is like 40 times bigger than the North Korean economy. At one side of that line people are free, and the other side people are restricted.

But it's not the people that are on the north side or the south side. It's the culture that is different on both sides of that line. And I see that when I think about Pine Ridge, when I think about the Sioux tribes before the reservation era, when they prospered, when they were strong and self-sufficient and independent and took care of themselves and traveled as they pleased following the seasons and the Buffalo. That was their culture that was guiding them. And today, if you look at the reservations and the ways in which they're challenged say economically, socially. In a lot of ways, again, that's the culture that was imposed upon them by someone who came from a way who had the upper hand, who had more power and created that change.

But yeah, it's not the people. It's so easy to look at a community that struggles, whether it's a company or a reservation or a country, and say, well, that's the people. But it's the culture that makes a difference. And that's really made me think about leadership, the essence of leadership and the responsibility people have who are in positions of leadership to get the culture right. And at the end of the day, you can make it as complicated as you want. But to me, it's become super simple. At the end of the day, you can either be about pushing power out, and celebrating the diversity of perspectives and voices and making people strong. Or you can collect power in, in kind of a bureaucratic autocratic way that makes the center strong.

And the combination for me of my voice issues, what I saw at Pine Ridge, and what I saw in nature, made it really simple for me. It was a really simple choice. I want to be someone that tries to push power out. And I want to be someone that tries to do things that strengthen the voices of others, not restrict them.

10:32 So taking all that back into [Hancock Lumber](#). It starts, I think, by thinking about what you want, the mission of your tribe or community or organization to be. We made a decision at our company that the mission of Hancock Lumber was going to be to try to add value to the lives of the people that work there. That was going to be the primary mission, the number one goal. So sure, we're gonna grow trees. We're going to make lumber. We're going to ship building materials. We're going to do all of that, but that's not the mission of the company. The mission of the company we've decided is to try to enhance the lives of the people that work there. And I think the mission matters. Like, what is it that you're going to try to do? And I think it's important to think about a company or a business in a much bigger context than just financial.

So sure, we're going to try to grow sales, and sure we're going to try to be profitable. Those things are super important to create a healthy company. But for me, profit is not the goal. It's like fuel that can power the mission. When a company's profitable, it can do a lot more good stuff than when a company is not profitable. But making money for the sake of making money, that's not actually a good business goal. To me, it doesn't really make sense. The goal is to help improve the quality of the lives of people, of the people who work there.

So we've actually taken on a long-standing business statement and challenged it. So you know the statement, "the customer comes first". So I've started saying, we've started saying Hancock Lumber, "the customer doesn't come first". And I've actually said that in front of our customers. I took a really deep breath and said that in front of our customers. What we've started saying instead is, "the customer comes a super close second." Or to use a Maine slang term, "the customer comes a wicked close second." The people who are going to take care of the customer are going to come first. And our philosophy is that if we do right by the people who are working at the company, they will figure out how to take world-class care of the customer.

I have a little line on the bottom of every email I send that simply says, "Customers will never love a company until employees do." But to me, even then, it's bigger than just trying to make the business be successful. What's the meaning of work? So people who work spend a ton of time working. And people who work put a great deal of energy into that work. And you know this old-fashioned model of I'm going to work so that I can live on the weekends, or I'm going to work so I can live on vacation, I'm going to work so that I can live in retirement. To me, that's such an unnecessary and should be old-fashioned idea. Work itself should matter. And in reasons that are bigger than just economic. There are economic reasons why people work and they're important. But there are non-economic reasons, too, why people want to be a part of a group, a tribe, a team, a cause, and an organization. And I just think the purpose of a company should be that try to add value to the lives of the people that work there. And if you get that one thing right, everything else that company cares about will take care of itself.

15:20 Kevin: First, it's so interesting to me this story. So our company began doing business in 1848. The same decade the great Sioux war chief, Crazy Horse, was born. And that's a long time ago. And so I do think a lot about that. And our company is a family business. It's been owned and managed by the same family from 1848 to today. And I'm part of the sixth generation of my family to work for the company. To me, the company Hancock Lumber is much bigger than the family. And not that the family is not an important part, and the family's really lucky to be connected and we benefit, but the company is bigger than that.

And I look at all of the people that have worked there, that do work there, that could work there in the future. And all of the different customer groups that we work with. And Hancock Lumber is really there to serve them. And I think if the family focuses on serving them sincerely and authentically, and well, then anything the family would care about will be taken care of and in return. And I think, I don't know. I mean, we all have ego. Like, it would be silly for me to say I don't have an ego because I know I have ego. But I've really, I think with my voice and coming out to Pine Ridge and spending time on the Northern Plains, the big change for me is my ego has gotten smaller. It still runs away from me once in a while, but I recognize it and I pull it back and check it.

When I was younger, I was not conscious of this, but I think I really used to think about the success of the company as a way of proving my own worth. And if the company did well, that meant that I was, something important and I just have gotten way beyond that. And I don't see myself in my roles. Being CEO of the company is a role I play, it's not me. It took my voice and my time out here on the Northern Plains to really kind of separate the two. And when I separated the two and saw my own identity, just me without a job, without a title, without a company to run. When I saw my own identity, just like alone by myself, on the Northern Plains, sitting on a rock, it made doing my job so much easier. Because I don't think about it as being mine or about me. And I really go to work now with a new poise about me, where it's like, just try to help make people's lives better. And you're not going to be perfect at that. But if that's your sincere mission and that's what you want your company to be about, you can make some pretty incredible things happen. Even in a lumber company, even in a small place like Maine.

19:11 **Kevin:** So my voice disorder came on in 2010, right at the peak of the housing and mortgage market collapse. And I did not connect the two together at the time, but it's totally connectable to me now. Our company was really fighting for survival, and I felt a lot of responsibility to try to deliver that or protect my tribe or take care of my company, our company. However you want to think about it. And right in the middle of that, I started to have trouble speaking.

So when I would go to talk, all the muscles in my throat would spasm, and squeeze, and contract. And my voice would get super broken and weak and hard to hear. And what's worse, it felt like it took an almost superhuman, athletic effort just to push out just a few short sentences. Talking left me sore and dizzy and not wanting to say very much. And it scared me. I didn't know then what was wrong, and I didn't know what I was going to do. And I laugh about this now, but I was like, well what good can a CEO possibly be who can't talk all the time? Which to me is so ironic, right? Funny to me in hindsight, but initially it really scared me.

And then first my reactions were purely defensive. Like when it's hard to talk, what do you do? You talk less. And how do you go about talking less? You learn to turn a conversation around. So someone would ask me a question and I knew I wasn't going to be able to give much of an answer. So I started saying simple things like, "Well, that's a really good question. What do you think we should do about it?" It worked. And over a period of time, I started to notice the patterns. Which is people had already with them super good ideas about what to do with the problem that they saw. So someone would then explain what they thought we should do. And then I would say, just to protect my voice, "That sounds good. Go do that!" And off that person would go with his or her solution to his or her problem.

Initially that was not a rethinking of modern leadership. That was just like defensive protecting my voice. But as years, a couple years went by, I started to wake up to the fact that something really cool was happening. That all of a sudden, we were on the path to creating a culture where everybody was leading and where everybody was making decisions. And that's really when it hit me, the partial loss of my own speaking voice was actually a gift not a curse. And it was an opportunity, not a problem. And the opportunity was to use the partial loss of my own voice to strengthen the voices of others.

Then I started to get really passionate about what if we could create an organization where everybody led. Where every person felt heard, trusted, empowered, respected. Wouldn't an organization where everybody led outperform what I now think of as an old-fashioned model, we're just a few people at the Capitol hold most of the cards and make most of the choices and get most of the talks. Wouldn't an organization where everybody led be way more dynamic, and agile, and fun, and socially valuable and meaningful for people?

And that was reinforced for me by what I saw at Pine Ridge. Before the reservation era, this was a community where everyone was encouraged to speak with their own voice, to seek their own truth. That was the essence of the vision quest, right? For example, it's to find your own voice. And if you were fortunate enough sitting on a hill like this one for four days at a time, maybe to find a deeper sense of your own voice. You returned to the tribe, you stood in front of the whole community, and you shared what you learned about yourself. And then you were expected to be you. What you owed to the tribe was to be the best version of yourself that you could be. And that model was super inspiring to me.

It was like that old adage from Rudyard Kipling's, *The Jungle Book*. "The strength of the pack is the Wolf." And what that meant to me, is if every individual felt strong, then the tribe would be strong. And the combination, therefore, of my voice and kind of the old ways of the Sioux compared to the reservation model that was imposed on them, that all combined to totally change what I thought about leadership. And I think we're right at the cusp of a really super, cool, global change.

If you ask me how I feel about the future of this planet, I am super optimistic. Because I think around the globe more and more individuals are waking up to the fact that there's a better way to do things. And that better way lies in celebrating the voice of all people. And encouraging people just to be their authentic selves, and not judging that or trying to change that or put limitations on that. And that's going to make way for a brand-new leadership model.

The old leadership model was about collecting power into the headquarters, the capitol, the main office, the man, call it what you want. And the new leadership model is going to be about deconstructing that and finding ways to make the center smaller, and for the hierarchical leaders to quiet themselves down and actually do less, take a deep breath and do less and create more space for others to do more.

Another way I think about that is, the core word to me that describes the old leadership model often, sadly, is 'overreaching'. Those who have the most power, go too far and take too much. And so therefore to me, the new word of the future is the opposite of overreaching, which is 'restraint', which is to have the power, but not use it. To push it out and share it. And you see that in the story of Pine Ridge. When America was moving west in its Manifest Destiny to go from sea to shining sea, we somehow convinced ourselves that there wasn't room for everyone. And you come out today to the Northern Plains and you cannot miss, if you're paying attention, that irony. There was tons of room for everyone. There is tons of room for everyone. And that whole simple idea that no one has to lose for me to win. And if someone does lose, we all lose. That's the other thing about thinking more globally, is nobody wins when somebody loses. And Pine Ridge is a really good example of that, or a self-centered company that's only thinking about its bottom line would be a good example of that.

27:55 **Kevin:** So when I think about that new leadership path and core concepts that leaders might embrace that are different, the first one I think is really as simple as, quiet down yourself and listen. And listen for no other purpose than to help others around you feel authentically heard. So I think that was the biggest change for me. I listened before, we all listen. But I think before Pine Ridge and before my voice disorder, before spending all the time here on the Plains, I was often listening to correct people or to explain why they should think about something differently. And I totally let go of that.

When I sit with people now at Pine Ridge or at Hancock Lumber, I just listen to understand how they feel and what they see. And I don't have any interest, which is such a, I feel lighter now, literally lighter. I don't have any interest in judging it, or changing it, or fixing it. Because this whole idea that what someone thinks is right or wrong is a really silly idea. It's just at this moment in time, at that point in their life, with the experiences they've had, that's what they're feeling or that's what they're seeing or perceiving. And the whole idea that that's wrong or should be changed, to me is a big part of the problem. Just listening to understand.

And if I could create one ingredient within a company or a tribe or community or a planet, it would be that everybody felt safe to say what they honestly felt. And also, in a way that encourages people to move a little bit from your head to your heart. Like, yeah, what you think in your head, great. But in your heart, what are you feeling they're like, does this job make you happy? Does this job inspire you? Does it excite you? And making it okay for people to speak from their heart, I think is *the thing* that could change the culture of this planet.

31:55 **Kevin:** So for me on the surface, it was a problem or a liability that came into my life in the way of a voice disorder that initially was hard to see as anything but negative. But in time when I started to look at what was happening to me, I could see that it was actually happening for a reason.

I came to see my voice disorder as a gift from my own soul. And specifically as an invitation to look within myself, not externally at what anybody else was doing, but just at me, and to sit still and think more deeply about how I wanted to change or how I might change. And so in hindsight, I can see it super clearly that voice disorder was a trigger that looked like a problem that was actually an invitation to grow, in cool, valuable ways that were positive.

And I just think that's, it's a little bit hard for me to talk about this because I think my problem is super small on the global scale of things people deal with. And it's really important to me that I say that and stay cognizant of that. But here's the bottom line. If you're living a life on earth, you're going to have problems come into your life no matter where you were born or what your station is in life. You are going to have problems and challenges come into your life. And it's really all about how you respond to them and learning to try to see the opportunity in the problem and to think about how you can use that situation to change from within, which is the seventh power. That to me is the seventh power, the power of the individual human spirit and our ability to create change from within.