

Kevin Hancock
Chief Executive Network Leadership Conference
Keynote Transcription



KEVIN HANCOCK

Chairman, Hancock Lumber; Author, *The Business of Shared Leadership*

Host: Today, I'm pleased to welcome our final keynote speaker, Kevin Hancock. Kevin is the seventh generation leading a \$700 million family owned lumber company in Maine. And as he'll tell you, for the first few decades of his career, he led up as his predecessors did, as a strong command and control leader, making most of the decisions himself. But then, out of nowhere, a rare disease attacked his vocal cords, and he partially lost his voice.

HOST: After a lot of struggle, he was forced to adapt if he was to continue to lead his company or even work at all. The result of that struggle was nothing less than a complete transformation of his leadership style, his business, and his entire life for the better. He'll tell you the rest, but I do have to say that when I first heard Kevin's story, I was compelled to make sure we brought it to you to share at the biggest event that we have each year. His family firm Hancock Lumber is a 10 time recipient of Maine's Best Place to Work Award. The company is also a recipient of the Maine Family Business of the Year Award, the Governor's Award for Business Excellence, the Pro Sales National Dealer of the Year Award, and the Maine Retailer of the Year Award. Kevin is also the recipient of the Ed Muskie, Access to Justice Award, the Habitat for Humanity Spirit of Humanity Award, and the Maine Development Foundation Ken Curtis Leadership Award.

HOST: Kevin is the author of three books, including *The Seventh Power: One CEO's Journey into the Business of Share Leadership*, which chronicles his transformation, and each of you has a copy of that book. Please help me welcome Kevin Hancock to the stage.

Kevin Hancock: Hello, thank you, and good morning. One word summarizes for me what it feels like to stand here today, and that word is grateful. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here. I hold the belief that the place of work offers humanity its best, fullest chance. I've been in pursuit of the idea that if we just slightly tweak the way we think about work for the people who do it, that it can become the most powerful platform on earth to help heal a hurting world. So to be able to share these thoughts, in a room with some of the top CEOs on earth makes me grateful. And like you, I never forget where I came from. So the first talk I ever gave on this topic was approximately 10 years ago, back in Maine, at the Harrison Public Library. Now, if you haven't been to Harrison, I'll put it this way, it's a beautiful place with beautiful people, but in terms of the size of the town, it does not have a traffic light. At that first talk, nine people came. So your table came. I was talking about adding more meaning to the place of work for those who do it, and get this. All nine people at my first talk were retired.

KEVIN HANCOCK: I wanna dedicate this talk to storytelling, and its importance. I believe storytelling is perhaps the most underrated, under-considered leadership and chief executive skill of the 21st century. We're in a competition for ideas. And for those of us who believe in capitalism, who believe in our companies, who believe in our mission, who believe in the goodness of what we do, we've got to wind that into compelling stories. The days of people having to follow us are over. We've got to tell stories that make people want to join forces with us and that which we believe in. So this talk is dedicated to storytelling. And here we go. So it was the day before Halloween, October 2012, and I, a Lumber company CEO from Maine, found myself standing alone at the Wounded Knee Massacre site on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in the southwest corner of South Dakota.

KEVIN HANCOCK: A short while later, a well worn car pulled up at Pine Ridge. They call it a res car because you cannot get a permit to drive it in the state of South Dakota. You can only drive

it on the res. And a lovely old jewelry maker rolled down her window and with a warm smile, said, "What brings you here?" I reciprocated her smile. We shook hands. And I said, "That is a great question." All I knew at the time was that I was searching. I was searching for my voice in a place where almost nobody felt authentically heard. That same year back in Maine, I stood up in a room about this size just outside of Portland. The room was filled with our biggest customers. These were the leading contractors, developers, builders in Southern Maine. And I was so nervous. I was sweating 'cause I knew what I was about to say, and they had not heard it before. I stood up in front of that room full of customers and I took a deep breath and said, "You know, that old saying, the customer comes first? Well, I don't actually believe that's true anymore." Our entire sales team was in the back of the room hearing this for the first time, and I had their attention. They were like, "Okay, where is he gonna go with this?" So I went on to explain myself. I said, "Here's what I've come to believe. I've come to believe that the people who are gonna take care of the customer should come first."

KEVIN HANCOCK: And that if a company were able to take World-class care of its employees, those employees I believed would then take World-class care of those customers, and the company in return would experience high levels of success. So now to use a piece of main slang, I don't know if you know this term or not. If you're from Maine or a Ben, you might've heard it. What I'm fond of saying now is that at Hancock Lumber, the customer comes a wicked close second, we are really into our customers. They're a big deal to us. We're excited about them. We pay attention. We hustle. We appreciate them. But when we split hairs, they do not come first. The people who work at our company come first. I wanna share one key concept here before moving forward, and I call it see, do, get, and it goes like this. It's simple. What we see determines what we do and what we do determines what we get. So if we wanna get something different than we're already experiencing as leaders, as executives, or as humans, we must first come to see some part of the world anew.

KEVIN HANCOCK: In my second book, the Seventh Power: Once CEO's journey into the Business of Shared Leadership, my wife Allison and I travel at one point in that book to London to have breakfast with a Colombian born advertising executive by the name of Jose Miguel Sokoloff, who helped and his country's 40 year civil war using Christmas trees and soccer balls. And if you want to know more about that story, you're gonna have to read the book. But he said something to me over breakfast that I'll never forget. He said, "Kevin, we all adhere to a belief system. Otherwise we don't have a strategy for dealing with a complex world." And my belief system about work is rooted in three dates, 1848, big jump forward 2010, and then 2012, 1848, that's the year our company, Hancock Lumber began doing business.

KEVIN HANCOCK: I'm part of the sixth generation of my family to work for our company, and we have 700 employees across 16 sites in Maine and New Hampshire. And we're integrated in the forest products industry. So we own Timberland and we grow trees. We have sawmills that manufacture lumber that we distribute throughout North America and the world. And then at Maine and New Hampshire, we operate contractor focused lumberyards. Of all the businesses, we're in the wildest one. That makes no sense when you think about it. Is tree growing. The primary species of tree that grows on our land is the eastern white pine. Does anybody happen to know how long it takes to grow an eastern white pine tree in Maine? 80 to a 100 years. So think about this. We've been in business since 1848 and we've had two crops. It makes no sense. We pay foresters to go out and check on seedlings this tall, that maybe 80 to a 100 years from now would be a mature harvestable resource. I have a friend on the other side of town who owns a farm and a farm stand, and she grows pumpkins and corn and potatoes. And I say to her, "You mean you plant those things

in the spring and harvest them in the fall? What a great idea."

KEVIN HANCOCK: So 1848, six generations, lot of history, lot of legacy, lot of opportunity and responsibility to 2010. In 2007, as you all know, the national housing and mortgage markets collapsed. Our industry went into free fall. The peak of which for us was 2010. Our sales in a 36 month period fell by 50% without losing a customer. That's how much smaller the market got and how quickly it got smaller, lots of pressure, lots of stress, everything was suddenly at stake. At the peak of that economic collapse, disconnected to me in the moment, but a 100% connected. In hindsight, I quite suddenly began to have trouble speaking. And as mothers would do, my mother was the first to notice. But soon everyone noticed, and boy did I notice when I went to talk, it felt like all the muscles in my throat would spasm and squeeze and contract. It felt like someone put a seatbelt around my throat and pulled it. Every time I tried to say something and suddenly pushing out a few short words had become this athletic task that I tried to avoid.

KEVIN HANCOCK: Turned out I'd acquired a rare neurological voice disorder called spasmodic dysphonia with no known cause and no known cure, but a story for another day. Side story end in the book. I cured it. There is no way I could have given this talk in 2010, '11, '12, or '13. I could not have sat in that chair and had that lovely lady in the chair beside hear me. I was reduced to a whisper and my voice, which I soon realized as a CEO was my primary tool was no longer available. And there I was trying to help our sixth-generation lumber company through the complete collapse of the housing market without my voice and with no resource or mentor or anything to fall back on. So, I was reeling. When it's hard to talk, you quickly develop strategies for doing less of it. And mine was to answer a question with a question, thereby putting the responsibility for speaking right back on the other person. Now mind you, at the time I was not thinking about leadership. I was not even dreaming about being on this stage. I was in survival mode. But someone would come up to me at work in the age-old scene with a question or a problem because I was the CEO, the boss, the owner, prior to my voice condition. What would I have done? I would've given an answer, a directive, an instruction, and now I couldn't.

KEVIN HANCOCK: So now here's what I started doing. I would take a deep breath and say, "Gee, that is a good question. What do you think we should do about it?" She or he would tell me what she or he thought, and then I'd take another deep breath and say, "Okay, that sounds good. Let's do that." And off she or he would go with her or his solution to the problem that she or he had identified. And that was literally how I led the company during through its darkest hours in my lifetime. Now, I was a little slow on the uptake, but after hundreds of these exchanges, something magical and powerful struck me. People already knew what to do. It turned out they hardly ever actually needed a top-down CEO centric directive. What did they really need? Why were they asking? What they really needed was the encouragement, the trust, and the workplace safety, cultural safety to follow their own voice. 2012, in 2012, our company had become stable. I could see it was going to be okay, and I had started following a new voice.

KEVIN HANCOCK: That one. I've measured this. It's about 24-inch journey from my head to my heart. I was following a new voice. And I started to separate my identity as Kevin from my role as CEO of Hancock Lumber Company. And I was listening to myself in a different way. I had always had a love affair with the American West. Hunting, hiking, vacationing, and history. I found myself reading during that period more and more about the second half of America's 19th century, when our nation's manifest destiny and Western expansion ran into the Plains Indian tribes. That summer in August, I was getting on a plane with my wife, Allison, in Portland, Maine, and I picked up a

copy of National Geographic, and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation was the cover story. There was a young Sioux boy riding a horse bareback across a rolling plane, and the title read, In the Spirit of Crazy Horse, the Rebirth of a Sioux Nation. And I read that article. And it struck me like nothing I'd ever read before on a soul's level. And I immediately said to my wife, Allison, before the plane took off, I said, "I'm gonna go there."

KEVIN HANCOCK: I wanna see what life's like for the people who live there." Now, this was a funny moment. Allison had her own magazine going. I had made what was just gonna turn out to be maybe the most transformative statement of my adult life. And Allison, who was deep in her magazine, just patted me on the leg and said, "Okay, honey, that's nice. You should do that." And that fall off I went. I made my first trip to Pine Ridge and then I went back and then I went back again. And I was there in August for the 30th time. Has anybody here ever been to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation? Not uncommon. It's located in the southwest corner of South Dakota below Rapid City and the Black Hills and it sits right on top of the Nebraska Panhandle. It is the biggest, the poorest, the most traditionally combative and disenfranchised of all the Sioux reservations on the Northern Plains. It's home to some of the most famous war chiefs and medicine men in American history, names like Red Cloud, Crazy Oris, Black Elk, and others. And I've had friends there describe their community's modern journey through American history as from first to worst.

KEVIN HANCOCK: Before the quote unquote "winning of the West", the Sioux were one of the Plains most powerful communities. They traveled as they pleased, highly self-sufficient with the seasons and the buffalo. And today, statistically, it's the poorest place in America. If you Google median income by county, the two poorest counties in America are the two that make up the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. When the mortgage markets collapsed in '07 through '010, we had a national crisis when unemployment hit 10%. At Pine Ridge today, it's 80%. The lowest life expectancies in the Western hemisphere can be found in Haiti. Second is the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, right in the middle of this country in South Dakota. But for the purposes of this story, here's the connection.

KEVIN HANCOCK: At Pine Ridge, I met an entire community that had no voice. The combination of my own voice condition and my time at Pine Ridge led to five personal transformative learnings. My new sea. From spasmodic dysphonia, I actually now knew what it was like to not feel fully heard because I spent years not being able to say what I actually wanted to say. And so, I actually knew what that felt like in the most unexpected ways. Second, at Pine Ridge, I realized there were lots of ways for humans to lose a piece of their authentic voice in this world, that it was actually common, not rare. Third, at a Lumber company in Maine, all of this actually got me contemplating that unanswerable yet irresistible question. What's the meaning or purpose of a human life on earth? And in this context, I said, perhaps it's to self-actualize. Maybe that is the one thing all humans have in common, is we're just here doing the best we can on a planet where life eats life and everything dies to find our own, never to be repeated, authentic voice to know it, to live it, to love it, and to gift it to the trajectory of humanity. Maybe that's the purpose of a human life on Earth. And then I said to myself, "Well, if that's the purpose of a human life on Earth, what impact has leadership, modern leadership, historically had on helping others self-actualize?"

KEVIN HANCOCK: And we all can draw our own conclusions, but mine was this. While humanity has had some amazing leaders who have seen this, that on average in totality across history, leadership had done more to limit direct manage coach, exploit and utilize the voices of others than to release them. That's the conclusion I drew. And then this fifth recognition hit me

perhaps my own voice condition, which I'd only previously ever thought of as a hindrance, a liability, or quite literally a pain in the neck was actually a gift and a blessing and an invitation to do what? To lead differently in a way that gave other people power, that gave other people voice. And that is what sent me forevermore down the path of trying to create, what I now talk about is an employee-centric company, where the first purpose of work is to make work meaningful for those who do it. Human organizations at their highest level should all share the same first goal or mission, and that is to advance humanity. What's the purpose of a human organization that isn't humanity advancing? And I've thought a lot about how humanity advances, and here's the conclusion I've drawn. It advances one human at a time, starting with the people right in front of us. It's a local inside job.

KEVIN HANCOCK: So, let's look at some data. Let's talk about how work's going on this planet for the people who do it. I call this what Gallup knows in America, 165 million people work, and as of this year, which is about average, only 33% of them will say it's meaningful or engaging. Globally, the data gets worse. Globally, 3.5 billion people work, and only 23% of them will describe it as meaningful or engaging. This month in America, 3.3 million people are going to quit, not retire, not transfer, quit. In December, 3.3 million people are gonna quit. In January, 3.3 million people are gonna quit, and in February 3.3 million people are gonna quit. Gallup reported in their 2024 global workplace survey that 49% of all American workers experienced a high degree of stress at work yesterday. 47% of all US workers described their overall life wellness as suffering or struggling. Gallup estimates the economic cost of this disengagement, and it's in the many trillions of dollars. I'm more interested in the human cost. What's the human cost of meaningless disengaging work?

KEVIN HANCOCK: I peg a career at 70,000 hours. What's the cost of those 70,000 hours not being personally uplifting. That data to me is not okay. It's not sustainable. The whole planet talks left and right about sustainability, and yet it forgets the people right in front of us in terms of thinking about the sustainability of what they're doing. It's not okay, it's not sustainable, it's not optimal, and it's not necessary. Here's my next key simple structural thought. Companies and their leaders get whatever they consistently prioritize. Companies and their leaders get whatever they consistently prioritize. If humans are not thriving within an organization, it is only an outcome of its prioritized place. Let me tell you what Gallup also knows. You've heard this yesterday and today, but you haven't heard the whole story. Gallup can boil down their decades of data into the following formula.

KEVIN HANCOCK: If you wrote one thing down, I would consider writing this down. Number one, Gallup knows that the key to sustained corporate success is customer engagement. We've heard that here today and yesterday. Second though, let's go deeper. What's the key to customer engagement? According to Gallup, the number one driver of customer engagement is employee engagement. What's the number one driver of employee engagement? This is so simple. This is Gallup, not me. The number one driver of employee engagement it's such a low hurdle, is one meaningful conversation per week with your supervisor. That's all it takes, but here's the fourth key component. What's the definition of meaningful?

KEVIN HANCOCK: Five or more minutes about you, not about your company, not about your performance. We'll do all that. It's important, but the definition of meaningful is five or more minutes focused on you as a human. So, Hancock Lumber for 12 years has been in pursuit of that mission on the screen. And pursuing it and achieving it has been surprisingly simple. Here are five

changes we made to pivot and pursue that objective. Number one, I, as the CEO changed, I changed. I redirected my ego. I looked inward for the first time in my career prior to my voice condition and call it my awakening, I thought leadership was about paying attention to what everybody else was doing. After my voice condition and awakening, leadership for me is 90% about what I'm doing. And when I made that pivot, my life got so much easier because focusing on me was actionable, being the change, I wanted to see was actionable.

KEVIN HANCOCK: And I wanted to beat someone who was gonna disperse power, shared leadership and give others a stronger voice. Second change we made, we literally rebooted our mission, and this became our first mission to enhance the lives of the people who work here. Third, because we had a new mission, we needed a new metric to align with that mission, and we made employee engagement our new top metric. Employee engagement is of course measurable, and we found a third-party company to help us in every single year we get great data around the human experience at work. The fourth change was transformational. We recalibrated how we thought about listening in two ways. First, who were we gonna listen to? And second for what purpose? So, we made a conscious effort to create organizational structure that listened more consistently to the employees within the organization. We didn't listen last to customers. We still love listening to them. We still love listening to shareholders. But we pivoted and made a bigger focus on listening to employees and we changed the purpose of why we were listening. The new purpose was for understanding, not judgement. And this took all the pressure off in a Hancock huddle today, the most common thing you'll hear me say when someone shares an authentic thought is this. Thanks for sharing that.

KEVIN HANCOCK: Thanks for sharing that. And when people hear thanks for sharing that hundreds, and then thousands of times what happens, they share more, and they say what they actually think. So now the truth has been released. I call this the answers to the test. And they know why do they know? Because they live in the value stream every minute of every day. So, they know where the opportunities are to celebrate the company and improve it. And then finally, this was the fifth change. We agreed that we weren't ever again gonna change our mission. That for the rest of my life, this is what this company's going to pursue. And 12 years in focused pursuit of any singular mission is gonna move a long way down that track. My fight song on this subject is Didos. I will go down with this ship. I found my voice and I pushed every chip I had to the center of the table and said, "This is what we're doing and we're not ever changing."

KEVIN HANCOCK: So let me now quickly share with you five outcomes, things that came out of that journey. First, we've now been an 11-time best place to work in Maine. 95% of our employees take our survey and our engagement score every year runs between 86% and 90%. This is 700 largely blue-collar lumber company jobs. And our team is essentially two and a half times engaged Gallup's national average. Second outcome, I didn't see this coming, but our organization became tighter, not looser. This was not a '60s San Francisco commune we were creating. We became more disciplined, more aligned, more accurate, less rework, tighter commitment to best practices.

KEVIN HANCOCK: When voices were heard, the alignment sharpened. Third thing we experienced, and this does make sense to me, in hindsight, we began making better decisions. Have you ever made a less than great decision? I've made a pile of 'em. I can't literally can't believe I've survived them, but cause of that, I know the cost of unwinding poor decisions, put a price on making better decisions, and we're still very human and make a lot of mistakes, but in total, we make better decisions. Fourth thing we experienced, and I hear this time and time again in employee

focus group, is people telling us that coming to work at Hancock Lumber was energy giving.

KEVIN HANCOCK: I literally didn't know this was possible. The old model of I need to sleep at night and rest on the weekend to be able to fight the fight again on Monday and time after time in focus groups today, people say coming to work energizes them, that they go home with more energy than when they came, energy giving. And 5th, statistically financially, our company began to soar. I'll share this true data point with you just in testimony to the idea. Our company made more money from 2012-2020, than we had from 1848-2011, and we'd been good enough to hang around from 1848-2011, it wasn't like we were slackers. The performance of the company took off. Now, of course, performances never singularly created. I'm not trying to make that point, but what I hoped would happen happened. Our company ended up soaring to heights we never would've imagined on the wings of thriving humans at work.

KEVIN HANCOCK: I've thought a lot about why. Why this worked for us, and I've come to two conclusions. One is about the moment we're in and the second is bigger and it's universal and it perhaps transcends time itself. The moment we're in 2017, I drove from our home in Maine to the dilapidated Dunkin Donut Center in Providence, Rhode Island to watch the last ever performance of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Daily Circus. I thought it was a highly under-reported historical event. The greatest show on earth for a century and a half was going out of business. The Dunking Donut Center was sold out. Half the audience was former performers from around the world who'd come back to see this final act. I now call it The Night the Tiger Trainer cried, which he did in that show there were no elephants. The greatest star of the greatest show on Earth had been pulled a year prior, why? Over concern for what it might be like to be an elephant in a circus.

KEVIN HANCOCK: Now think about the symbolism there. The well-being of seven pachyderms has trumped the well-being of an entire iconic industry, we are living in the Aquarian age. The Aquarian age is about power dispersal. The Pi Xian age was about empire building. It was about power collection power to the center. The Aquarian age is about reversing that or balancing it power to the individual. And that's why it's so messy on this planet right now. We have a Pi Xian age leadership structure on an Aquarian age planet. Think about the power dispersal that's all around us. The internet, of course, is a massive power dispersing tool, but think beyond that. Think about how power itself being generated locally, windmills, solar panels. Think about remote work. Think about NCAA image, name and likeness, all these macro events or power dispersing events.

KEVIN HANCOCK: But there's something bigger at work here too. And this story ends about 12 miles from where I'm standing. A number of years ago, I was walking in the north edge of Scottsdale in the desert at sunset, contemplating the very subject we're discussing here today. When the organizing concept I'd been searching for, literally plopped into my head in nature, power is dispersed. And I said, "Oh my goodness, that's it." And then I panicked 'cause I didn't have my phone. I didn't have a pan. I was a long way from my car and I have a terrible memory. And so I said, the idea I've been searching for, I lost my voice for been searching for it for years is gonna come and go before I can get back to the car. So I said over and over again in nature, power is dispersed. And I literally kid you not had an out loud conversation at that moment of epiphany with that desert landscape, as the sun sat into the Red Rock Hills, I said to that landscape, I said, "Where's your corporate headquarters? Where's the capitol? Where's the CEO? Where are all the managers and supervisors? How is this place working so magically," I turned to a stand of cactus and I said, "Which one of you is in charge of all the others."

KEVIN HANCOCK: And the answer in each case to me was inarguable. The secret sauce of nature is scattered and diffused. It lives in all of nature's parts and pieces. And we are coming back to the realization that humans are not detached from that. We are a part of it. And we ultimately aspire to organize in that same way. That is not the end of organizations. That is the pathway to better organizations. I call this what the Sioux and the scientists know. The Sioux call it the Mitakuye Oyasin, it's their organizing principle, and translated means this, we are all brothers, we're all sisters. All things are one thing. Today's leading scientists call it the field. And the field is recognition of a single source of energy that is everything. It's all connected. Separateness as we've come to experience it is an illusion. In a reality where everything is connected, this is logic here in my view. Winning is not winning unless everybody's winning. And there's always focus on the economic side of work. You have a job in exchange for income and benefits. And I'm not diminishing the importance of that.

KEVIN HANCOCK: But what about the human side of work? The energy-giving, power-claiming, self-actualizing side of work? These are two of my closest friends at Pine Ridge. To my right is Velora Spider, who's a third-generation female storyteller from Pine Ridge. And to her left is Catherine Grayday, who said to me once, "It's just about being worn down, generation after generation. The cavalry, the missionaries, the boarding schools. You wake up one day and it's all been internalized. When you've been oppressed over generations, it finally takes hold. The oppression takes hold within you. And once it takes hold within you, it's perpetuated from within. And we act out the oppression on ourselves. That's how deeply it's been ingrained." I'll end with this question. It's the question I'm in pursuit of.

KEVIN HANCOCK: What if everybody on Earth felt trusted, respected, valued, and heard? All eight billion of us. Sounds daunting, but just pretend that all eight billion humans felt trusted, respected, valued, and heard. What might change? I think everything would change. And where might that change unfold? Well, at the adult level, it ought to unfold where adults hang out. And on this planet, three and a half billion of them hang out at work. It is their primary organization beyond their immediate family. And giving humans voice at work has the added benefit of dramatically improving corporate performance. It's inarguable. Thriving humans produce thriving human organizations. And this is not new knowledge. Rudyard Kipling, the Jungle Book. The strength of the pack is the wolf. And this is not a huge pivot. You already love humans. You already love the humans at your organization.

KEVIN HANCOCK: You already do amazing things for them. This is not an about face. The slightest change in orientation, sustained can make a massive difference. And that is why I'm so grateful to have had this platform to share these thoughts with you. I don't believe any group of leaders is better positioned to advance humanity than free market chief executives. And so for this audience, I'm grateful. You've been lovely to hear my voice. And thank you.

[applause]

HOST: Kevin, thank you. Thank you so much. Perhaps we could sit in just a couple of questions with the time that we have left here. I just, how do we operationalize this? This is great stuff. But when I'm sitting, I'm thinking, you went through something really dramatic and traumatic and it changed you. If we wanna start making that change and operationalizing it, give us a tip from your experience there at Hancock.

KEVIN HANCOCK: I'll give you one quick tip, and that is getting the data around the employee experience is a great place to start. Our organizations know how to work with data. We are buried with data about our inventory, our machines, our buildings, our fleet, our customers, and our company. So, step one to me is about getting the data around the human experience and then operationally creating structure to sit with employee focus groups and talk about that experience in a way that makes it safe for them to say what they think. So structurally, we're committed when we get our data to make sure that every employee gets a chance to sit in focus group with leadership, to look at the data and help contextualize it. That's just one quick example.

HOST: What are you looking for now? When you hire, especially supervisors, leaders, what's the different set of skills you're looking for? 'Cause I know Maine, it's hard to find people to start with. Now you're looking at a smaller subset. What are you looking for? What's your absolute bar for people that you're bringing in to supervise other people?

KEVIN HANCOCK: Right. You now need to be interested and able to hold meaningful conversations with the humans on your team.

HOST: It's a very high bar.

KEVIN HANCOCK: It's a very high bar. Five or more minutes about you. So what I would say has happened is the bar, we've raised the bar as to who's gonna get to lead, supervise, and manage. It can't always just be the best doer. It's got to be someone who's willing to lead in this human way.

HOST: What'd you learn about yourself finally, at the end of the day? And what advice can you give to the folks that are going back out there to lead people? It's a bumpy time. It's been a bumpy time. You've gone through a tremendously I'd say terrifying experience here, and then you've come out the other side. From what you've experienced. What advice would you give everyone else out here?

KEVIN HANCOCK: Yeah, I got really lucky, and I'm sure you've lived through this. The most difficult things that come our way are often the hidden blessings and opportunities. And the big thing I took from my voice condition was a willingness to prioritize myself. And that was so counterintuitive to everything I'd ever thought about managing and leading. But once I started living in a way that was authentic and would allow my voice to light up. I became a much better leader and manager. And once I felt that for myself, I couldn't have it for myself and not aspire to create an atmosphere where everyone in our company could have an opportunity to experience it. So the big change for me is leadership starts with filling your own cup and separating ego from role separating self, from role light yourself up. Give yourself your best voice, and then do what you can to gift it to those around you.

HOST: Kevin Hancock, I want to thank you so much. Couldn't have thought of a better way to end this conference.

[applause]