

TCM - EP 113 - Mark LeBusque: Tools and Tips to Become a Leader with Humanity

Mitch Simon: Welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere where CEOs, leaders and experts at building teams,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: companies,

Mitch Simon: organizations,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: and amazing cultures, share how to lead from anywhere in the world. I'm your co-host on the East Coast Ginny Bianco-Mathis. And I'm your co-host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon, and we invite you to join us to Team Anywhere.

Mitch Simon: I know you have a to-do list, but do you have a to-be list? Mark LeBusque, author of Being Human, and the Little Book of Human underwent an experiment where he decided to focus on how to be versus what to do and the results of course is he got more done with his people. Learn this incredible leadership skillset so that you can be the team that achieves so much from anywhere.

Hello and welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere. I'm your co-host, Mitch Simon on the West Coast and on the East Coast we have our amazing co-host, Dr. Virginia Bianco-Mathis. Ginny, how are you today?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I'm doing good, thank you.

Mitch Simon: Doing good. Great. Well, I understand you've brought us an incredible guest from far, far away today. Could you introduce us our guest?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I certainly can and I am excited to introduce Mark LeBusque who is an author, speaker, and podcaster in the area of leadership with a specialty in the topic of leaders and managers being wait for it human. He was one of Lincoln's top voices in 2021, founder of the Human Manager Academy and a leadership coach, mentor, and facilitator.

He started leadership at Harvard and works out of Australia, which you will soon identify. He has written two books, being Human and The Little Book of Human. Welcome.

Mark LeBesque: Thanks for having me. And yes, you will notice that accent and thanks for picking that up before Mitch, but yeah, lovely to be here.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: So glad to have you. We're gonna start with asking you a question. We've been asking many guests, and that is what have you learned in the past two years with this worldwide social experiment that we seem to be involved in?

Mark LeBesque: What have I learned? Well, one thing being in Melbourne, Australia, we were in the most lockdown city in the world.

So we had, just short of 300 days of pretty hard lockdown. So what did I learn? *One thing I learned was **connection and belonging really matter**, and it's something that's important to me in my work is the deep connection. **We crave deep connection and a strong sense of belonging**. And when you lose that in that physical sense, you start to understand that the little things mean a lot to you.*

*The second one is **be open to any possibility**. I was very much against virtual work, before the pandemic hit and my business model had to change overnight and I had to start to embrace that. So, embrace your adaptability and be open to the possibility. And the third one, I'm gonna quote a great leadership, consultant from the US, Cy Wakeman.*

Who says, ***Your ego is not your amigo***. And my ego was running rampant when I was in the pandemic, particularly about being in the room. So, they were things that I really learned in that time. And I think I learned some things about myself that I, perhaps I didn't want to, wouldn't wanna know about at the time. So, it's been a tough time, but also a great learning experience.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That is fabulous.

Mitch Simon: That was smart. I've never heard the word amigo said with an Australian accent. That was beautiful.

Mark LeBesque: Thank you.

Mitch Simon: Where I live, it's over 50% of the population here speaks Spanish, so yeah. That's awesome.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: All right, so, you're known for your books on being human. What does it mean to be a human leader?

Mark LeBesque: Well, **there's a few things here.** Like when I think about, what it is to be human first, when people ask me to explain and describe it, I talk about *being structurally unstructured, being perfectly imperfect, being lonely and loved, vulnerable, decisive.*

And I'm gonna say at times, a little bit of a tyrant. I think you need to be able to jump around in different management styles, even though you want to be human as much as you can, you need to do some different things there. I talk about at times we need to be *superhuman* as a manager, we need to be a bit of a *pushover*.

We need to be a bit *robotic* as well. So, I think we need to be able to *adapt.* *Spending time* to get to know your people is critical in the space if you're gonna really embrace human leadership. Trusting that people turn up with good intention to do good work, then they don't have to gain your trust.

They really have to lose it. *Making people feel relevant and understanding their contribution,* I think are some of the things. And the last one I'm gonna say here is *holding your nerve* because I know when I practiced my experiment, there were times there because it was a bit different to what the business expected. I had to hold my nerve and stay with it because it's a long game.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah. Let me ask you to share that experiment 'cause I think it's fascinating and it's what led you to writing of the books and then get back to that concept of holding your nerve

Mark LeBesque: Sure. I'd had a couple of different careers. I'll share a bit of context. I was your typical young, over-promoted, high-ego manager who in the mid twenties had been put into some roles that I really wasn't ready for. Put in there because I was technically good at what I did. I came from let's call it the shop floor in the logistics business.

So, working loading planes and driving trucks, and then into the call center and into sales. And I got through there because I was technically good. I didn't care much for the people, if I'm gonna be really honest. I cared about my title and I cared about my career. And I treated people like units of labor and outputs.

I did that for quite some time and then the Karma Bus turned up and I was made redundant at a young age. And I still did the same thing for a while. But then as I got a bit older and you sort of start to get a bit more *introspective*, I asked myself a question one day, which turned into my experiment, which was what would happen if I treated my people like human beings? That's an interesting question to ask yourself after over 20 years in the corporate world. But I ran an experiment for two years where I literally wrote down on an a three sheet of paper, the word trust in the middle of it, and then wrote around that what would it look like if I truly treated my people like humans.

And so, then for two years, I unlearned a lot of what I'd been taught in the way that I should manage, and it really was coming from. Let's call it below the neck management. It was about heart and gut rather than just the logical stuff, and saw some incredible things change over that time.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Like a few things that you've shared with us then, but in your business, you began to see, people were happier on the one hand, but you were making more money on the other because of it.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah, and, I think bad Mark, as I called him, that younger version of me, it was all about the money and it was all about, you know, making sure I was 3%, 4% ahead of target just to keep safe and all of those things. But let's call him good Mark in the opposite. I'd always thought that this idea that people are the most important part of your business was true, but we didn't practice it.

So, I looked at it in three ways. The people *started to come to work happier*. We started *to see absenteeism reduce* and all of those sort of, measures that tell you whether people want to be there and not. *Engagement surveys is the big one*. We were in the 90% range in our engagement surveys.

And then the third thing, and I say it very deliberately, third, *our business results* were phenomenal and I didn't look at them to start with. I looked more at the people. And I think once you look after the people, I think your business results like I'd never seen before, went through the roof, as we say here in Australia.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah. Yeah. Incredible. Now, in your book you talk about Frankie and Otto. I'm asking that question because perhaps it's sort of parallels with that, your own experiment. Could you share a little more about that?

Mark LeBesque: Yeah, certainly. So, the book is based around this idea of moving away from this sort of robotic, technically based style that we've been embracing for over a hundred years. And Frankie in essence was me, in the first book. So, the little fable in the book about Frankie and what he did, and basically as a robot, he managed more like a human being. And the results that Frankie was getting were very different to what the business had usually seen. And then there's a little friend Otto, as we call him, our metal mate, Oto, who was a peer of Frankie's, but got a bit jealous.

And Frankie's not playing by the rules. And in fact, at one stage in the business, even though my results were good, someone said to me, we love your results, Mark. We just don't like the way you go about it. You don't look stressed enough. You smile too much and you're laughing a lot and you're having a lots of coffees and things.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: So they were very suspicious

Mark LeBesque: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Of this new Mark.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah, absolutely. So there was this level of, I think jealousy, I don't think's too strong a word to use, and this bit of a resistance to his style. And, and so, you know, Frankie is then told to go back to his usual way.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

Mark LeBesque: Go back to how the system wants you to be. And then the results started to drop off. So, the idea of those two now ultimately what they do is because they want the results, they allow Frankie to go back to what he was doing, and then they suggest to Otto that would be good for him. And now from being, let's call them corporate enemies. They became very good friends because they both, took on the human style.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah. So, this then relates, to you, saying that you have to hold your nerve.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. I think this was a big piece and if I didn't carry this for anybody, 'cause if you're gonna go down the pathway of true human leadership, it's a long game. We don't KPI this stuff on a weekly basis.

You don't know that it's got better in a month. It takes some time, three to six months before I started to see the signs. But in that time, *there's no linear pathway with this human management either, 'cause you're dealing with humans full of emotions and all sorts of things. So, some days it would go really well. Other days it wasn't going so well.*

At one point in time, I felt there was almost a bit of a mutiny about to happen from my team towards me. And I remember saying to myself, hold your nerve because this is worth it. And you're so far into it to go back the other way would not just be, I guess a level I'd say of me being a little bit weak, but I'd be letting my people down and so, I think anyone in that moment where you feel like the system's starting to strangle you or take you back to where you need to be, I think there are three really valuable words to remind yourself of.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Totally. And that's sometimes I think, and Mitch probably has found this too, when you're working with a leader who is trying to go on this journey. I remember one leader I had who just put his head down, you know, and his hands, you know, around his head because he goes, God, this is hard. This is hard. And, having that support until their own team begins to get it, you know, also.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. I love the way that you put that, do they get it? And this is what I say to a lot of people today, my clients, or even people I work with, you actually get it, don't you? And they go, yeah. And you can actually see the difference between the people who espouse it and the people who say, we really want this, but they're really box ticking versus the people who, they've got to a point where they go, You know what, there's some different way. And it's not coming usually again, from above the neck, it's below the neck.

It's that real heart and gut stuff and getting it is very important. And what we've gotta be really conscious of is we don't do this as a phase or some management fad. We do it because we believe in it.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right. Now you talk about some tools and I'm now thinking about, especially now with virtual, how do I make this happen? And they may not quite believe it yet themselves.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. Look, I think with the three tools that I'd share with you here that I think we've worked really, really well. And again, these things are pretty simple and practical as I like to say.

So the **first one** is what I call, it's in both books called *The First Five Questions*. And the first five questions are really there to help build deeper connection with your people. And I call this part of my listen and learn, I-guess process that I went through. The five questions are simple. You give these to your people and you get them to come and tell you their answers, tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear and just listen to them. And the questions are, **1.) What do you expect of me? 2.) What's your work style preference?** So what is it like when you can thrive rather than survive?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

3.) How do you get balance in your life? 4.) What does great leadership look like? 5.) And then what are your three most important values? So, asking those questions and then listening what *I found out was that I sped up my deeper connection with people by about two years, by spending 90 minutes with them and really digging deeply into that.*

The **second one** is what I call the *perspective line*, and I get my people to do an activity where they actually write down the *five most important things in their life, the five moderately important and the five least*. And then we do a little bit of an act of reflective activity on, I reckon that your least important things are your most important things at the moment because people forget about health and family and you know, financial security's important, work's important. But that's the second one.

And then the **third one** is what I call *humannovation*. And this concept that we've gotta put being, before doing so every day, we should ask ourselves this question. How do I choose to-be right now? *So what's in my to-be list rather than my to-do list?* 'cause I believe that if we [inaudible] a to-be-list, like I turn up today and I can, how do I choose to be on this podcast?

I choose to be present and engaged and curious. Because what if I turned up and decided I wanted to be disinterested and I don't wanna talk to these people from the other side of the world. It impacts who I am.

Yeah.

Mark LeBesque: Geez, I hope I'm not boring.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Exactly.

Mark LeBesque: So that'd be three things I think that everyone can do those things right now.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right. And then here's the magic. What is the tool when someone says, All right, I hear you, I need to concentrate on the being. How do I do that? I get up, I got my to-do list, now what?

Mark LeBesque: Yep. So, I actually have a little A5 pad called the humannovation pad. And if people go into my, website, they can actually get an editable, one of these. I use that every day where I just, I'm very, very deliberate about how I'm gonna choose to be. I usually say this one *every day I choose to be curiously provocative*, that's my big word.

But then I've got engagements all day with different people. I've gotta practice that every engagement I go into. So the way that I do that is I do what I call practice the **two A's**, *awareness in the moment* of what am I thinking? and my thoughts helpful or harmful, and if they're harmful, then the *second A is adjustment*.

So, it's just that real mindset piece in becoming more aware of what the stories are that are going on in your mind will help you to practice that and write yourself a to-be list.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: There you go.

Mark LeBesque: I think that's really important.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I do too. And then I also, and I know you do too, try to help people come up with triggers. So for you, you have your list, plus since you live this all you need to see is, or remember the two A's or whatever.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Some people needs, no, I'm gonna need more than that, right? They say. Yeah.

Mark LeBesque: And you know what? I think this is where humans don't give themselves the credit for the capability they have to do this if they simply start to practice it. So, sometimes we're looking for the real complex and complicated solution, and some people say to me. But that's just really simple and common sense. And I go that's right. Because that's what we've gotta get back to in order to embrace our humanity, is that, we don't have to become more human.

We are human already. And if we started to practice those things again, that would become learned behavior. These learned behaviors that I think we've lost along the way.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah. So we can almost reengage with those human behaviors, so they now become the norm.

Mark LeBesque: Absolutely.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: As opposed to these things we've adopted because we think we have to be assertive. Little things like, you know, every time I get into the car, that is when I'm going to ask myself the question, how am I being?

Mark LeBesque: So here's a really practical thing to do for people, when you go into your next meeting. Before you pull out your to-do list, *go around the room and ask each person how you're gonna choose to be in this meeting.*

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Oh, oh, that one's good.

Mark LeBesque: Now, just on that, I'll give you an example. I would ask that of my former team when I was good Mark, and someone would say, I'm gonna be quiet today because I've got some things going on outside of work and I'm just a little bit distracted. Rather than get to the end of the meeting and then say, Oh, well, you know, if that was you, Virginia.

Virginia didn't contribute today. I actually know. That there's something going on, so I'm not making assumptions that you're not contributing. Or if someone came in and said, I'm gonna be a bit antagonistic today because I think we practice group think too much, I'm not gonna leave the meeting and go, oh, they weren't fitting in today. I'm gonna go. They actually were very deliberately doing something to help us. So I think that's, that's an important little practice to bring into your teams.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I love that one. Oh, thanks for that little gift there.

Mitch Simon: I know that, I've heard of, giving someone a black hat.

Yeah.

So, as you said, mark as antagonist. So I'm gonna, I'm giving myself permission to, you know, disagree, which is always good for the group.

Mark LeBesque: We do too much of that group think, then we don't make the progress that again, we're capable of making.

Mitch Simon: You know, without this exercise, what usually shows up is, you know, I'm gonna be non-confrontational and agreeable and protect myself from people not liking me. It'd be nice if I knew that ahead of the time, then we could really talk about that. You know, I, I know not to expect much from you.

Mark LeBesque: *We're human beings, we're social species. We like to be liked. I have a little saying and it is politeness, prolongs progress. And what I mean by that is not that sort of etiquette politeness, it's what you just described.*

It's my story going, I'm gonna be really polite in this meeting so people will like me and I don't ruffle any feathers. And get anyone off side that actually prevents you from making the progress. I think we need, I say bravo to the well intentioned provocateurs and protagonists and antagonists in meetings 'cause we need them. That's human.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes. And that sort of goes back, I believe too, when you said baby, sometimes you have to be a tyrant.

Mark LeBesque: Yep.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: The point is, you're announcing that?

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. Yep.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: You're letting folks know or listen, everybody, we're gonna discuss X, Y, Z. You see that on the agenda? I'm gonna tell you right now, this is a difficult topic and I do not like the discussions we've had in the past, so I'm just letting you know. Well, that's a very different discussion.

Mark LeBesque: And because what you've just done is you've made sense to people. And again, we're a sense making species and if we can't make sense and if I change my style without actually being deliberate about it and letting people know, that'd be like, Which mark's turning up today?

Right. And that's when people disengage. So, I think, you've made a great point. Announcing it to your team is really, really important. So they can go, Well, I can make sense of that now. And now I don't feel like it's gonna be bad. I think it's gonna be good for us.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes. I love it. So, when you enter an organization, Mark, what are people asking for? Hey, just tell us about human leadership and then you pontificate.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. I sit there and pontificate forever. It's interesting. I'll tell you what I do. I ask a lot of questions 'cause people, the h word has become really popular in the last two years, human but to build momentum before that about we need to be more human in the workplace. The first thing I'll do is ask him, Why are you doing this work?

Because what I'm trying to work out is are they invested or are they ticking a box here? And you can find out really quickly, whether they're invested in it or whether they're not. I look for red flags. I get asked this question very often, right near the start of a chat, What's the ROI gonna be on the change? And I go and my response is this, Virginia and Mitch is, I don't know.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I said then, why am I paying you all this money?

Mark LeBesque: And then they look at me like, hang on, that's not what the consultants are supposed to say. I don't know what it is because you are doing the work.

You are the work. I'm there. I'm here to enable you. And you know, I also look for things like how often have they tried some sort of intervention? Usually when I get asked in, things aren't just going a little bit wrong. They're going very wrong 'cause they've tried all the other things and all of a sudden they go, hey, I think we need to be provoked a little bit.

So, they're the things that I'd be looking for. But lots of questions. I think it's really important in the space that, that we are in is that, and I'll tell clients this, that I'm actually trying to work out whether I wanna work with you just as much as you are doing the same with me.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah. 'Cause this is a partnership, it's a journey. And you gotta pack your bag and come along. I would love to cut open your head and pour it inside, but, until then this is wonderful.

Give me just a couple before we leave a couple of, I told you sos. That's a sun heading in one of your books.

Mark LeBesque: It is indeed. I dunno the amount of times I've told myself, I told you so. And that's been happening for decades. Like, 'cause you just, you

know, I'm human too and you just don't learn. So, here's a couple. ***One is to lose the B word busy.*** Like busyness and busy has become a badge of honor and almost a safety net for people that I'm so busy. I've got so many meetings to go to, and I say this to people rather than saying, I'm busy.

When someone says to you, you must be busy or are you really busy. I say this to them, I'm really productive. And then I just pause and they look at me like I've got two heads because it's supposed to be busy days. So I think that's one is lose the B word.

And the other one that I had written down, and we've talked about this already, ***is make sure you make sense.*** Like it's so important as a manager that you are making sense because you know what happens sometimes when you talk to your people and you and I hear this a lot at the end of a sentence. Now it's like, do you understand? And people just nod their heads because that's what you're supposed to do.

Almost subserviently. I better look like I know what Mark said because if I don't, he's gonna think I don't know how to do my job. And then we spiral into this bad news filing cabinet that we have. *So, if someone's not making sense and you say, do you understand? And they look like they don't, be kind to them and then say this to them, Can you replay it back for me?*

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That's right.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah. I'll give you one other one quickly. ***Your work should never define you*** and I'm big on what I call life design, traditionally called work-life balance, but so many people are defined these days by what their work is.

So when that work's, not there, it's almost like popping the balloon and deflating and all of, who am I? *So, just be really, really careful that your work doesn't become you.*

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And you include that in one of your first four questions, you know, what does balance mean to you?

Mark LeBesque: Absolutely. In fact, my last team, I had them build non-work related goals into their performance plan and they earn 15% of their bonus by doing things like going for a walk with their partner on the beach—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: oh, cool.

Mark LeBesque: Reducing their golf handicap, and talking at a local school. I actually paid them up to 15% of their bonus because it was really important they did those sorts of things.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: So, you're paying human beings to be human.

Mark LeBesque: Yes.

Mitch Simon: That's such a crazy idea there, Mark.

Mark LeBesque: Why would you do that, Mitch?

Mitch Simon: Dunno why you would do that.

Mark LeBesque: Hey. Now this is just a listening podcast, but let me share with the audience. I cannot see what's on your t-shirt, what does it say? Do you have a to-be list?

Yeah, do you have a to-be list? So, I think I've got about 30 of these shirts which are my uniform, and they have little statements or questions or call to actions for people who come into the room. And I think it's really important that people read it and just reflect on it for a moment.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That's wonderful. And the one I'm gonna, you know, will use is how are you showing up right now?

Mark LeBesque: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I think that one sort of punches people in the face.

Mitch Simon: Yeah.

Mark LeBesque: That's the idea. But only metaphorically punches them in the face. Don't actually physically strike them.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Or otherwise we just have to announce I'm about to punch you in the face. Just so they're prepared.

Mitch Simon: I really do appreciate, the experiment. You know, I really fully present your experiment that you had a few years ago or many years. Where you asked the question, Huh? What would happen if instead of focusing on

what there is to do, I focus on, what there is to be. I could really appreciate that trying to jump into that lake or that soup or that ocean would seem like to be really uncomfortable and counterintuitive. And so amazing to see that by focusing on who must I be, actually has you be more productive. Makes you more productive in all the things that you have to do.

Mark LeBesque: Yeah.

Mitch Simon: So, how can we find you, Mark? Maybe get one of your t-shirts or get one of your books or, you know, or some of the tools that you actually have, which I think you called the humannovation process.

Mark LeBesque: Thanks Mitch. Yeah. So we can find me on, my website is a good place. It's www.marklebusque.com, it's L-E-B-U-S-Q-U-E.com. In there, I have a fortnightly blog that comes out that you can sign up for. I don't try and spam you and sell you anything else. It's just like my thoughts over that time. My podcasts are in there. There's some other tools and tips and I guess the other one is LinkedIn.

Please people reach out and send me a connection request on LinkedIn. I love LinkedIn. I think it's a great source of information and learning, but it's a great place to connect with other human beings as well. The other thing just quickly to keep an eye out for next month. 'Cause I got over my ego, which wasn't my amigo.

I've created an online self-paced version of my in the room work, which is called the Human Manager Academy. And that launches in October this year. And it's two modules. One on leading self and one on leading team. And it takes about they take about 60 minutes each. And it's got all the simple, practical stuff in there that I've learned to put together over the last 8 to 10 years.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Wow. Good for you that you were able to get it down to those two modules because now people will actually listen to it.

Mitch Simon: The Human Manager Academy. Great. Well, I wanna thank you, Mark, for joining us today. Really delightful to have someone from the Land Ananda. And it's so great to have Ginny as always. And it's so great to pleasure to have you all of our incredible listeners. If you've loved this episode or any of our episodes, please share this episode with your friends, your colleagues, your family, and we look forward to seeing you next time on our next edition of Team Anywhere.