

Better PR – Evolve Your Leadership Style with Ken Jacobs

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SPEAKERS

Kathie Taylor

Kathie Taylor 00:04

Welcome to BetterPR. Wherever you are in your PR journey, you'll love exploring the stories from your peers about the many faces of public relations. BetterPR is brought to you by In Plain Sight Marketing, a Public Relations and Marketing Agency in Carson City, Nevada, Renown Regional Medical Center in Reno, and the Sierra Nevada chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. I'm your host, Kathie Taylor. Good morning, I am so excited to have you here with me today, Ken Jacobs, PCC CPC. The principle of Jacob's consulting and executive coaching, which helps PR and related communications agencies, one, grow and manage a business, two, manage that business for profit, and three, enhance client service and for improved team performance communications and leadership. It does so by consulting and training that can help co-owners, leaders, and senior executives of those firms to be more inspiring, inspired and effective leaders, he does so via executive coaching. Welcome, Ken,

Ken Jacobs 01:08

Thank you, I am excited to be here.

Kathie Taylor 01:12

Well, I have just loved exploring your, your podcast and your website, and I really want to dive in right away, you do a lot of work with leadership. And I would love for you to define for us what leadership is?

Ken Jacobs 01:26

You know, there are all kinds of definitions. And I'm gonna break the rules of grammar by including the word leadership in my definition, I hope that's okay. But I think when one is using one's leadership, energy, and one leadership, influence, to drive the best outcomes for the agency for the clients, for your team members, for your peers, and if you have one for your boss, then you are a leader. And the reason I believe that so much so deeply is that because then it proves that you can start to lead very early on in your career. And I will tell you that in my experience when I was in the PR agency business,

25 years before I went in this direction, I saw executive vice presidents who couldn't lead their way out of a paper bag. I was one of them from time to time and full of candor. And I knew senior account executives, who were leaders who had influence, who had people lined up outside her door for Leadership Council very early, so it clearly wasn't tied to the title. So, that, to me, started building that notion of leadership is not just the person on the top. And then also I embraced that notion of leadership. Because I saw it in the agency world, people were getting promoted, you know, you have that arc of learner practitioner, manager, and leader. And I saw many people being promoted from manager to leader, and it still happens, unfortunately, without proving they had the requisite leadership skills. So, it's not to me something automatic, it's something you've got to build at home.

Kathie Taylor 03:33

I love that. And I kind of want to have you help us understand the difference between leadership and manager?

Ken Jacobs 03:41

Sure, sure. I've, you know, a lot of people use those terms interchangeably. I absolutely, definitely do not, I don't think it helps anyone to use them interchangeably, I think it's much more helpful to separate them. So, you know, when we think of management, its processes and production schedules, and budgets and calendars, and you know, getting the train out of the station on time, so to speak, and it's executing with excellence. I would never, you know, minimize management. But if you think about it, then then you understand, it's about things. Whereas leadership, leadership is always about people. It's about inspiration. It's about serving them, so that, you know, you only succeed when they succeed. It might include identifying the values of the organization, and it likely includes creating the vision for the organization, where are we going to be, you know, what comes after what comes next and where are we going to be after that? And, helping people there's that word, again, understand their roles in achieving the vision. So, for me, they're quite different.

Kathie Taylor 04:55

So how can I tell if I'm a leader or a manager?

Ken Jacobs 04:58

Well, you're probably gonna go through the arc of practice learner practitioner manager leader. But I think, you know, at its basic, it's, you know, if you turn around, do you have people in the boat with you so to speak, rowing in the same direction? Are they inspired? And leadership is a two-part choice, your conscious decision to lead, that's a little easier, and their conscious decision to follow you. And you know, leadership can't be assumed they can make, you know, they can come in every day, do the work, check it off the list. But that's kind of transactional. And I think, you know, you're a leader or an effective leader, when it's transformative, where they are absolutely choosing to follow you or not, I hope they do follow you. But that's how you know, and, you know, do you really feel you have followers, whether they report to you or not, who look to you for guidance, who look to you for courage, who trust you?

Kathie Taylor 06:07

Wow, that's, that's really powerful thinking through my own last two, three years of, you know, managing and trying to lead through tough times. And as we emerge from those tough times, how can we maybe pull some people along, and help lift them up after we've been through turbulent seas?

Ken Jacobs 06:32

So, you know, it's easy to lead through easy times. I don't remember the lead. Well, you know, I think 2010 and 11, whatever, after we came back from that was the great recession. Those were somewhat easier times. I've been talking about, you know, how we've been leading through uncertain times. So, I think, and I believe the uncertainty will continue, it's just going to change, but I don't see it going away anytime soon. So, I think one of the best things you can do, to lead through those times is to accept uncertainty. And to accept that it is your role, to dig deep and build trust and build followership, despite it being uncertain, and, and accepting uncertainty. And going beyond when life gives you lemons make lemonade, it's going beyond that way beyond that, and saying, when something happened, wow, I didn't expect that. What's the opportunity here? What's the opportunity for me as a leader, for my people, for my clients, and if you look back to two and a half, or whatever, years ago, the big lockdown, you know, some agencies were able to see the opportunity, and they pivoted, they emphasized, you know, certain parts of their practice areas, they emphasized within anyone they could serve, they serve the industries that needed them and could pay, right, if you look back to March or April or May 2020, There were a lot of industries that needed the PR world, you know, brick and mortar retail, and travel and leisure, but they didn't have the money to pay. So, why go after them? So, I think the ability to pivot is so absolutely important. And, and when you get in that calm, centered, I expect uncertainty, and I look for the opportunity in it, you bounce back, and then a lot more, a lot more. So, I think that mindset is helpful. And you know, speaking of mindset, I believe energy is contagious. It mirrors and mindset is contagious. So, you could think, Oh, my God, these are bad times how old the recession might be coming? And that's what you'll believe. And so will your people, your people will believe you. If you believe well, it's a little uncertain. We've gotten through uncertainty before, we'll get through that uncertainty, you'll believe it, and so will your people. And if you believe you know, I don't know what's coming. We don't know what's coming, we will find the opportunity and all of it. Your people will believe that as well. So that's your choice as a leader, your mindset.

Kathie Taylor 09:25

Yeah, I mean, where we've been, I feel like business is accelerating, right? So, you mentioned 2010, after the great recession. And then we went through this tremendous period of growth and then we had COVID and then we had coming out of COVID. And now we're heading into you know, we went through the great resignation or the big quit. Now there's the phenomenon of quiet quitting. There's every single article from Harvard Business Review tells you how dangerous it is for employers. There's so how can employers help empower their employees, their team members kind of navigate this rapidly changing environment that we find ourselves in? I think that the great resignation really opened up eyes for employers of okay, we have got to figure this out and make this acceptable for people. But then we see the business world changing. And now it's you've got to come back to the office, we might have layoffs, how can we help our team members navigate this? You talked a lot about seeing the opportunity in it. But there seems to be a lot of fear as well.

10:37

Well, I always say fear is not a good business strategy. It's not a good business development strategy. It's not a good leadership strategy. The first thing I say is if you're experiencing fear, as a leader, figure that out, work that out, walk through it, hire a coach, and hire me. Because I have walked through my own fears. And I learned a lot from that. And actually, you know, it's funny, here's this agency business where we're asking clients over the years, for 50,000, or 100,000, or 75,500, whatever it is, so you would think it's the most we would have the most courageous people on Earth in this industry. And I can tell you, that's not the case. There's an amazing amount of fear and uncertainty out there. And one of the best things you can do as a leader, regardless, of good times, bad times, work through your fear because people followers are attracted, are attracted to courageous leaders, and courageous leaders are attractive. And I don't mean in the well, not in the pretty unpretty attractive sense. But in that like, like, you remember that that game when we were kids, it was like a piece of cardboard. And it was Mr. Fuzzy, I think, and he was bald and don't say anything. But he had nothing on the bottom. And then you would move the magnet and the iron filings, you could create hair, eyebrows, and a beard. I don't know, I'm really dating myself now, Boomer time. And so just like those magnetic filings are attracted to the magnet, people are attracted to courageous leaders, and they're not attracted to fearful ones. So, number one, number one, connect with your courage connect with your, you know, MLK Jr, or your Mandela, or Malala or Lincoln, or Gandhi or Harriet Tubman. I mean, those. I'm a history nerd, okay, no big shock. Those are my courageous heroes, but we all can have courageous heroes, embrace that, because all those leaders, they must have had fear. But they walked through their fears and made doing so they gave courage to their followers, 10s of 1000s, hundreds of 1000s of million of followers, whatever it was, and they changed their worlds. All we have to do is PR, you know, so I'm not minimizing how frightening it can be to lead an agency at any time. But number one, in these times, get in touch with your courage. I have two other thoughts to answer your question. The two E's are emotional intelligence and empathy. And they're two phrases that have a lot in common they both begin with you know, but we Bandy them about without really knowing what they are, it's really important to understand what true empathy is, it's a little more complex than you might think. I would encourage you and everybody listening or watching to Google either Daniel Goleman. He is the man when it comes to empathy and in my opinion, are the three types of empathy you will learn so much about truly being empathetic. And then I encourage everyone to take the emotional intelligence assessment, emotional intelligence, two dot O, is a great way to get it and you and I have no relationship with the author let me say, other than they should be paying me because I've recommended this book, in every leadership training for years, to all my coaching clients, but even though I'm not an EI certified coach, but I believe in its power and when you buy emotional intelligence to dot O. One of the authors is Sean Greaves she R EA vs. Mr. Greaves. If you're out there, you probably should send me a check. No, that's not true. That's not true. And you get a little code in the back, you read a few chapters, you take the assessment, and it's really powerful so, so while there are many skills most leaders should work on for these times, courage. Emotional Intelligence, and empathy, rise to the top for me.

Kathie Taylor 15:05

Brilliant, brilliant. So, tell us a little bit about your podcast about your leadership podcast, how does that help aspiring leaders or tired leaders, or any fearful?

Ken Jacobs 15:23

So, it's called taking the lead, which has been my column and PRSA strategies and tactics every quarter, and we realize the value of going on video for all kinds of reasons. So, I get to interview these just magnificent leaders from the world of PR, many agency, many corporate nonprofit, you name it. And the thing is, you know, they're, I guess they're known as smart PR people and comms people. But that's not why I'm attracted to them, I'm attracted to them. Because they are known as amazing, amazing leaders. And we, I'm sometimes shocked, we get CEOs of global firms to spend time with me, it's such a delight. They are lovely, smart, intelligent, tested leaders, and they willingly share all their knowledge with our viewers. So, to me, it's just a joy. And you know, and I guess it shouldn't surprise me. But we have so much fun. And we have a lot of laughs doing it. And these are pretty prominent people. And they're just great. And they again, willingly share such wisdom. And I like to believe we bring a lot of joy during it. So, when you watch a segment, they're like, 18 minutes, maybe 25 minutes, I think your viewers and listeners can get a lot from it. It's called taking the lead. It's on my website. And also, I put it out on YouTube.

Kathie Taylor 17:00

Fantastic, thank you for that. I think, in these days where it's scary and uncertain, and we feel like we've slaying the dragon only to find out that there's another one around the corner. I think this is really helpful information.

Ken Jacobs 17:15

Yeah, yeah. They're, they're truly wonderful. And, you know, the other thing that may or that surprised me about all this, is the humility. I mean, these are not all, you know, CEOs of global firms, CEO of North American firms, CEOs and leaders of smaller firms, but they're, you know, really successful entrepreneurs, some of them. So, you know, the whole gamut, the humility, I mean, the humility. And they tell me, they're honored. I've asked him to be on the podcast, and like, what is?

Kathie Taylor 17:52

That feels good? Yeah.

Ken Jacobs 17:53

And they've and some of them, not only lead teams and lead individuals, but many of them also lead leaders, which is a whole different, you know, they lead stars in their own right, right? And just the humility and they talk about the leaders they've worked for who've inspired them. And I just get such a kick out of that. And they're also great communicators, no surprise, I think there are a lot of links between leadership, and communications, PR, a lot of the same rules apply. So, I think if you're really good at PR and comms, you have the potential to be a great leader. But it's not for everyone. Leadership is not for everyone. And that's okay.

Kathie Taylor 18:43

You touched on this earlier, and I want to come back to it. Who can be a leader in an in an organization and how can they show leadership? Let's say you've got someone who's new, relatively new to the field, how can they show leadership and how is it? How can it be perceived?

Ken Jacobs 19:01

Yeah, so I think, again, think of that arc of learner practitioner, manager, leader, I think early in the career. It's more about observation because you're so busy learning. You're learning the practice of PR, maybe or maybe you've interned before and you're building on that you're learning the culture of the agency or the organization, and you're learning about your clients. There's a lot of learning going on. So, at that point in the career, I would recommend, observe who in the organization, regardless of title, have influence and are humble. Serve others, go for the win, win-win, treat people you know, give constructive, truly constructive feedback, not constructive critique, constructive feedback. And who does it you know, who is able to communicate with that blend of deep Pharmacy, directness, kindness, and honesty? So, I think early in the career, it is more about observation. But I think, you know, we talked about the word influence this industry, PR content, data analytics, what have I missed, is changing so rapidly. So, if you can keep on top of some of those things, and share your knowledge willingly, that's a great way to start to become a leader and an influencer with your organization. And if I can give a hat tip, if any of you've heard me in other venues talk about leading young or leading, you know, when you're a senior AE, when I was at Marina Mar a trillion years ago, any heck and Berger was a senior at EA in the media department. She was such a leader because she didn't call it content then. But she brought us content and knowledge and trends. And here's what's going on out there. Things you wouldn't necessarily expect from a senior AE and she's gone on to such a great career, much more social than PR, she actually headed social for the Democratic Convention out of Philadelphia many years ago. I want to say she's now, I helped her get her title, right, like a senior Creative Director at Saatchi and Saatchi wellness, Annie, I hope I got it right. On Twitter, she's animal, I have no like and I know I'm getting it wrong, just look up any Eichenberger only. But I just would want and at that point, I was an SVP and an EVP and I'm like, wow, you can be a leader very young. And I'm gonna give another tip of the hat to her, forgive me. But when I was first coming into social and I knew I needed to understand it, I was 50 I was not going to be that guy who didn't get it. You know, we, she reverse mentored me. And she really helped me understand the world of social. And, one of the, if you want to learn something, right, of course, right? Of course, like, like social 101. So, I ended up writing a course on social 101. And I ran it by her. And what a thrilling day it was when she said you got it, you know, and we shouldn't call it reverse mentoring, you know, just because she was young, she will always be younger than me. That's when we were born. And, you know, it was she who mentored me, she helped me understand it. That's leadership. And it's a gift.

Kathie Taylor 22:46

Oh, that's fantastic. That's me. That well, we'll have to take our social 101 Yes. No, I really like that. Because when you're a senior in the organization, you don't always have all the answers. And you can learn something from everyone you speak with. And I loved what you said about kindness and respect and all of those things in being able to. And we don't want to say reverse mentorship, but to mentor others

Ken Jacobs 23:18

In the areas open to it, mentor and you right, that's how you spread your influence in a very positive way. And you know, something you just said made me think, you know, anyone out there who's a practitioner or a manager in PR, or, you know, well, maybe none of it but practitioner or a manager, you are going to be following and building your professional knowledge of PR and comms and social and digital and data and analytics and what SEO whatever. You know you got to keep on top of it. It's

changing at warp speed. 10 years ago, we were chain-thick talking about it changing at warp speed. We look good. We know it was so slow. years ago, compared to today. Why did we know? If you really want to be a leader. This has got to be the beginning of a lifelong leadership learning journey. You must always be enhancing leadership, you must always be building your knowledge, and new things are happening every day. I don't think it's at the warp speed of PR and communications, thank goodness because I could never keep up with all of that. But we are learning new things. We're learning things about neuroscience and how, you know, asking empowering questions affects the other person's brain in a way that just telling them doesn't. And that's such an amazing tool for leaders. We we've learned, for example, that we used to say, oh, how do I motivate someone it's like you can't motivate someone. They motivate themselves, but you can inspire them. And that's a different approach. So, leadership changes and evolves. And if you're going to be a leader, as long as you're a leader, you've got to stay on top. Well, you don't have to, I think you should want to stay on top of this by reading blogs, my podcast, if I can say that take up. Other great sources of leadership.

Kathie Taylor 25:21

You mentioned a term spreading your influence. And you are spreading your influence through PRSA. January 18. You have a workshop coming up. Tell us about that one.

Ken Jacobs 25:32

Yeah. So, January 18. Mark your calendars from 3 to 4 pm eastern time. So, our West Coast cousins can easily participate. And we're going to be talking about something we mentioned today. I've been talking about it quite a lot to PRSA chapters and other PR groups about the whole notion of leading through uncertainty and will courage and EI and empathy come up. Well, you'll have to log on to find out.

Kathie Taylor 26:07

That's fantastic. We'll be sure to include the link for everyone so they can sign up and register can give us your website and podcast one more time.

Ken Jacobs 26:15

Yes, so it's taking the lead. You can find it on my website, [www. Jacob's calm.com](http://www.Jacob'scalm.com) That's J ACOBS comm.com. And if you go to YouTube, and you look up Jacob's consulting and executive coaching, they're also there. So, whatever, you know, have our view and whenever we share, you know, we share it on LinkedIn, we share it via Twitter, we share it via my Facebook business page. So, you know, hopefully, we're out there. Hopefully, we're out there.

Kathie Taylor 26:51

Wonderful. Ken Jacobs, thank you so much for joining us this morning.

Ken Jacobs 26:56

Thank you What a pleasure.

Kathie Taylor 26:59

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