

# LEADERSHIP IS...

**TRISH  
BUZZONE**



*EXPLORING THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP WITH  
DYNAMIC LEADERS IN BUSINESS, POLITICS AND THE ARTS*

# Leadership Is...

Exploring the Nature of Leadership with Dynamic Local Leaders in Business,  
Politics and the Arts

By

Trish Buzzone

John Maxwell Team Executive Director and Founding Partner

with

E. Adam Porter



### **About Trish Buzzone**

Trish Buzzone is a Certified Speaker, Teacher and Coach, as well as an Executive Director and Founding Partner with the John Maxwell International Leadership Development Team. Trish has invested more than 20 years working with leaders in corporate management, nonprofit organizations and individuals interested in increasing their leadership lid and becoming more influential people. For Trish, her “why” is inspiring others to effective action toward the fulfillment of their purpose.

# What other leaders are saying about Trish...



*"Trish has a gift for listening, both for what you are saying and what you're not saying. She's so good, at first, it was a little frightening ... she just understands on a different level. Everyone loves to tell you what to do. That's not Trish. She just asks you the right questions until you figure it out yourself. That's really it—Trish helps you hear yourself... Sometimes you laugh, sometimes you cry, but you always understand."*

*— Chef Michele Griesmer, Instructor*



*"Trish understands how to help people shift their thinking, so they can get past whatever's holding them back. Sometimes you're just too close to a situation to see it clearly. Trish helps you see ... she achieved results, and she did so faster than I thought possible."*

*— Valerie Sherman, CEO United Building Maintenance*

# 'Thank you' from Trish

Thank you for reaching out and taking the time to read this book. I'd like to take a moment to share how it came about.

In early 2017, I was speaking with friends, talking about "What Leadership Is..." That conversation took a lot of twists and turns, and we settled on one idea: Leadership is MANY things. All of us had a similar description, however each of our definitions included aspects and approaches to leadership that were distinctive, if not in their content, in how we prioritized those aspects of leadership.

That conversation created a question in my mind. If all these leaders looked at leadership differently, how could I dig a little bit deeper and find the real gold in those approaches to leadership? I sought out several local leaders who are actively making a real, positive difference in their respective fields, and in the lives of the people they lead. Those leaders included...

- **John Murphy**, Vice President, Human Resources at Accuform, Brooksville, FL
- **Hope Allen**, President and CEO, The North Tampa Bay Chamber
- **Patrick Abad**, Managing Partner at the Williams Automotive Group, VP Lexus of Wesley Chapel, FL
- **Melissa Snively**, State Farm Insurance Agent and Hillsborough County (FL) School Board member
- **Dean Burnside**, Owner and President, Good News Pest Solutions, Sarasota, FL
- **Barbara Friedman**, Executive Producer, Heritage Arts Center Association 'Spotlight on Talent', Central FL

- **E. Adam Porter**, Chief Instigator at Atlas Multimedia Productions, Editor in Chief *NOKP Publications*
- **Danny Burgess**, Florida State House Representative, District 38

In addition to being willing to be one of the leaders interviewed for this book, Adam Porter helped lead the interviews, worked on drafts and edits, and poured his time, energy and wisdom into making this book a reality... Thanks, Adam, for collaborating with me to bring this vision to life!

The conversations Adam and I had with these dynamic leaders led to many different answers to the question "What is leadership?" Every conversation enriched and encouraged us, and we have done our best to accurately capture their answers here. Those conversations were incredibly motivating and inspirational. I hope this book will be the same for you. If you are inspired by what you read here, share that with these incredible leaders, and, please, reach out and let me know as well. I would love to hear from you.

*In friendship,*

*Trish*

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# Leadership Is Intentional Empathy



**John Murphy**

Vice President, Human Resources at Accuform

***"For everything a person does, there is a reason. If we focus too much on the behavior, and not the person, we miss something important."***

John Murphy has been with Accuform, a leading safety identification products manufacturer, for more than 20 years. He began his career in customer care, before transferring to outside sales, where he thrived for 10 years, then transitioned to in-house customer care. Today, John is Vice President of Human Resources, responsible for equipping and protecting



more than 300 on-site employees, a responsibility he has happily and enthusiastically embraced.

Many visitors and new employees, after experiencing Accuform, are struck by the atmosphere. The people seem genuinely happy to be there, appear to genuinely like each other, and look forward to their work. John says that's not an accident.

"Creating that environment begins with the ownership. This is a family-owned business *and* a family business. You don't always get both of those things, but, here, you definitely do. They have certain values, and part of my responsibility here is to encourage those values, both here and in the community. They empower their people to take ownership of their work. For me, that work is taking care of the people here. Having the freedom to do what I know is right for our team is a tremendous blessing."

### **Making the Shift**

"So, I've done a few different things here at Accuform, and each transition began with a different shift in mindset and approach. Coming off the road and into the office environment, that was probably the biggest shift. The transition from customer care to VP of Human Resources was a different kind of shift. I was already working with about 40 people — acting as their coach, pastor and mentor — Now I do that for the whole company."

"One lesson I learned quickly is to understand what I'm good at, and to delegate the aspects of my job that others would do better than me. In that regard, my strength is not the regulatory stuff, the legal side of things. My strength is building culture. Part of that is living out the values of the ownership. Part of it is putting the focus of Human Resources on the *humans* who work here. I see my role as determining the best way to help our people be successful. The operative question is 'how can I help them,' rather than 'how can I use them to get a job done?'"

***"I see my role as determining the best way to help our people be successful..."***

"I'm aware that's a different perspective than some might take. I believe, if I help our people, I'm helping our company. And that's not just about asking, 'what can we give them,' it's about helping everyone on our team choose to be more empathetic."

### **Flipping the Switch on Negativity**

"When you work around 300-plus people, you will occasionally have some negativity. I'm, naturally, a positive person, and negativity is really draining for me. But, in helping people, part of my work is listening, honestly, and with empathy. People need to know they can come into my office and let it all out if they need to. I know there's a solution, and so do they, but, sometimes, you can't get to the solution until you get past the negative emotions in the way of that solution."

"The answer, then, is not to tell people to 'stop being negative.' The real answer is to show people how to learn and practice empathy. When we do that, it transforms how we see people, and that changes the entire atmosphere around us. This perspective aligns with one of our core values as a company: respect. This isn't about treating people how I feel I've been treated. It's about treating people how I wish to be treated."

***"Sometimes, you can't get to a solution until you get past the negative emotions in the way of that solution."***

"That begins with me. When someone comes into my office, do they want to be told what to think and how to act, or do they want to be heard

and understood? Of course, it's the latter, so my goal is to not just have an open door. My goal is to consistently offer a place where people can be honest, direct and open. When our people know I provide that, they trust me. That's the beginning. Even more important, to me, is to help people understand they are appreciated."

### **A Culture of Appreciation**

"People need to know they are appreciated. As a leader in this company, that is one of my primary goals. It's something we are very intentional about every day. Sometimes, we actually stop work to put our entire focus on building a culture of appreciation and empathy."

"The first way we do this is our monthly Wonderful Work Days. No one on the staff knows what day this will happen. There will just be an announcement in the morning, 'stop by the break room from this time to this time today.' There will be a theme and something special for the employees. We just want to give people something to look forward to, a reason to smile. To let them know we think they're wonderful."

"Our Culture Days take that idea to another level. These are developed by our culture committee, which includes employees from every department and revolves around our shared values as a company.

"On Culture Days, we shut down completely for three hours. Each department contributes a game, something fun connected with that value. You might ask, why are we shutting down production for hours? Isn't that counterproductive? We don't see it that way. The leaders of this company believe production will increase when people know they are appreciated, and when they are excited to be here. Whether it's Culture Days or Wonderful Work Days, I want our employees thinking: 'This is a great place to work. I've never been a part of something like this, and I'm going to do everything I can to contribute to this team.'"

## **The Necessity of Empathy**

“When you talk to a lot of people about leadership, when you ask them to describe a leader, many times you get the picture of someone who is fast moving, high energy, a Get This Done Now type. While there’s a time for that, if you always take that approach, you will leave a lot of good people behind. One thing I’ve learned, in order to be an effective leader, you really have to be empathetic. You have to be able to put yourself in that other person’s position.”

***“To be an effective leader, you have to be empathetic.”***

“There’s a practical foundation for this. With people, most of the time there’s a reason why something is happening, why they’re saying certain things or acting in a certain way. If we miss the reason, we can’t really understand... and if we can’t understand, we can’t help. That doesn’t mean justifying bad behavior or wrong thinking. The point, again, is to understand, so we know best how to help.”

## **Becoming Contagious**

“Understanding is not just about other people. We need — I need — to also focus on personal growth. I’m a disciplined person by nature, but I’m not always intentional in investing time in behaviors that help me grow. That’s one of the reasons working with Trish has helped me. She has helped me achieve a new level of focus. There are certain things I want to achieve, but if I want to accomplish those things, I need to grow.”

“Being intentional about empathy also begins with understanding yourself better. When you know who you are and you are being intentional about becoming a better version of yourself, you are better able to help

others do the same. If you don't, if you skip that part, you will only ever be able to offer what you can right now."

"This process has begun a shift in me. I come to work in the morning asking the question: 'How can I be useful to people today?' When I grow, I have more to give, and that's motivating for me, because, when I help someone, we can both be successful. I want our people to see that, and I hope that approach rubs off. That's a hard metric to quantify, but I believe there are a lot of people at Accuform moving in that direction."

"This momentum means better things in the business and in the community. That focus we have on empathy in action, of being intentional about understanding and helping people, has grown beyond the four walls of our company. When you see us out in the community, at schools, community events or showing up to support local charity causes, it's not about marketing for us. That's our company culture in action. From the ownership on down, we genuinely love people, and we want to help them, both with the products we make and the impact we can have on each other at work, and in the community."

"Leadership is about empathy, and, when you choose to live that out, it becomes contagious."

# Leadership is Shared Vision



**Hope Allen**

President and CEO, The North Tampa Bay Chamber

***"Give people reasons to believe and opportunities to be a part, and they will build with you. When you can't get buy-in, you can't lead."***

Hope Allen has dedicated her entire professional life to developing chambers of commerce to benefit business owners and encourage community growth. She says she's learned a lot along the way, both good and bad.

“I started in the basement in Jackson, Mississippi at the chamber there. Today, I sit at the head of the largest chamber in Pasco County. When you’re surrounded by leaders all the time, it’s a tremendous learning opportunity. You can learn so much from good leaders ... and you can learn from bad leaders too. If you let yourself see the lesson, you can get as much from what people do wrong as what they do right.”

Hope’s experience developing businesses through three very different chambers of commerce has given her an up-close look at what can happen to an organization’s vision under great – and not so great – leadership.

***“Connecting with a vision is sometimes about fit...  
Knowing where you do, and where you don’t...”***

“Working in Jackson, I absolutely fell in love with what chambers mean to business and what they represent to the community. Jackson was a great beginning, a wonderful experience. I might have stayed there, but that was such a strong chamber, such a strong leadership team, there was really nowhere for me to grow. When I began feeling like I’d grown out of my position there, I let some people know, and I was recruited out of the chamber to be the Vice President of the United Way of Mississippi. A month later, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast.

“Everything we were doing changed... Through that process I had to admit a difficult truth. Someone else, other than me, was a better fit to lead United Way. That was really hard, because I loved the people, and I loved the work. But, sometimes, connecting with a vision is about fit... About knowing where you fit, and where you don’t ... and where someone else would do better work.”

After coming to that realization, Hope returned to her first love. “I interviewed at several chambers, and was hired as Vice President of the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce. We, my husband and I, packed up everything and moved to Florida.”

### **Learning Hard Lessons in the Lean Years**

“I was in Pensacola for five years. It was...well...it was a terrible experience...but I learned a lot.

“Going in, I was so excited. Pensacola was on the cusp of greatness, and I thought I could catch their vision and make a real impact. There were several young leaders on the team, a lot of energy, and we were being led by this strong woman, the kind who, when she walked into the room, everyone stood up.

“I was excited about the opportunity to be a change agent, help the team get to the next level. But, when I got there, the reality was so different. There was something there, a kind of entrenched inertia holding everything back. I guess the best analogy, is that we broke ground on the same property three times ... three times ... the city just couldn’t get out of its own way.

“We were stuck in this forward-back, forward-back cycle ... then the Recession hit. Right after that, the BP oil spill. The chamber was already struggling, and there was oil washing up on our beaches.

“Leadership forced the CEO out and brought in this new guy. At that point, all of us were ready for a new vision, some new direction, so it was exciting. The guy came in, sat all of us down, and said: ‘Your only job is to make me look good.’

“No, sorry... no. I’m not here for that. I’m here to help the members and make the community look good. That’s what we all thought we were there for ... and so most of us got pink slips. When I stuck with what I



believe was my reason for being there, they fired me... And they fired me with great enthusiasm. It was one of the most painful days of my life, but that experience taught me so much, especially about how vision casting works, and what it should look like.”

### **Building a Better Org Chart**

“You can’t run a chamber with a top-down mindset. It can never, I mean never, be about just one person. We are the sum of all our parts. When all those parts are healthy and growing, the chamber is dynamic. Yes, there’s a leader, someone with my job title, but our organizational chart is not a pyramid with me at the top. We’re a circle with me in the middle. All of us hold that circle together and keep it working for everyone.

“This perspective is fundamental to who I am and what makes us successful. This is not about me. I didn’t come here for pats on the back or to be The Leader. I’m here to be the vision carrier. To connect the community and help our businesses grow.

***“Our organizational chart is not a pyramid with me at the top.  
We’re a circle with me in the middle.”***

“Every voice is important. We all have our own ideas, perspectives and priorities. My job is to hear and consider all those voices and build consensus behind a shared vision. I spend a lot of time listening to people, hearing their goals and understanding their methods and priorities. We may have personal agendas and motivations, but we can still all get on the same page and move in the same direction. When we all have the same goals, it’s easier to find solutions to shared challenges.

“My role in all of that is to be a connector and a catalyst for everything that’s happening and other things that have to happen to keep the vision

moving forward. So, I make it a point to surround myself with the people who are thinking about this all the time, the people who enjoy having those conversations ... especially the uncomfortable conversations. So many times, it's those uncomfortable conversations that lead to breakthrough."

### **Growing into the Vision**

"People want to follow a vision they can see, something they can connect with, that makes sense to them. For me, sharing a vision begins with listening and learning. If you're not learning, how are you leading? The world is constantly evolving and changing. You have to learn something every day just to keep up. When we listen to each other, learn from each other, and work together to help the community grow, we all succeed. Learning every day, especially from the people around me, is how I stay relevant. In this role, if you're not relevant, you can't succeed.

***"If you're not learning, how are you leading?  
How are you staying relevant?"***

"My next step is giving everything I can, every day. That's what really defines success for me. Give everything I can today, so that we can have more success tomorrow. What that requires of me evolves, because this role continues to evolve as the community and the chamber grow.

"Something important to emphasize here is that when you're growing, you're trying new things or different ways of doing things. That process is going to have some failures, and that's okay, because success is built from failure, what you learn from your own mistakes and what you learn from others'. So, don't be afraid of your failures. Own your failures, share your successes, and keep working toward the vision."

***"Own your failures, share your successes...  
keep working toward the vision."***

"How I articulate our shared vision is as important as the vision itself. I need to communicate the vision in a way that allows people to really 'get it', they understand where their work or their business fits into our shared success. When people understand where they fit, if they see themselves in the vision, buy-in is easy...and they stick with you when things aren't going so well. The opposite of that is true as well. When you can't get buy-in, you can't lead. But if you give people reasons to believe and opportunities to be a part, they will build that vision with you."

"Even if the vision feels bigger than you ... especially when the vision is bigger than you, don't be afraid to buy-in. I believe, if you buy into the vision, you will grow into your role. And other people will come around you, bring what they have that you're missing, and you can build something together that's greater than any of you.

"That's exactly what we're doing here in Wesley Chapel. We're building a city. How exciting is that! We have the opportunity to live in the present and create our collective future, to bring all the pieces together. What will Wesley Chapel look like in five years? In ten? I don't know. Will I be here to lead this chamber all the way through the process? I don't know. I do know this vision is bigger than me...much bigger...and that's so exciting! Because all of us are working together to bring that vision to life."

# Leadership is Inspiring Success



**Patrick Abad**

Managing Partner at the Williams Automotive Group  
VP Lexus of Wesley Chapel

***"My mentor refused to let me fail. Today, I have the opportunity to inspire success in my own team...and teach them to inspire others."***

Patrick Abad was still in high school when he was introduced to the automotive sales industry. He thrived, and, today, he is the Managing Partner of Williams Automotive Group and Vice President of Lexus of Wesley Chapel.

"I started detailing cars at 15, mainly during the summer. I remember, I hadn't been working there very long, when one of the leaders at the

dealership, David Maus, had me detail a car he'd picked up at auction. Nice car, but it was a mess. Dirty, some paint issues. I put everything I had into that car and, when I was done, he handed me a hundred-dollar tip. When you're a kid and a guy hands you a hundred dollars, that feels like a million bucks.

"That was just the first time David Maus made an indelible impact on my life. Looking back, he's not only responsible for my success in the car business, he helped me be successful with people too. That's much more important, both to me and to my long-term success."

### **The Value of a Mentor**

"When I was 17, Mr. Maus asked if I would be interested in doing something other than detailing cars. I said *yes, definitely*. David told me, 'The day you turn 18, I want you to show up here in a shirt and tie, and I will teach you to sell cars.'"

"At the time, I didn't realize the value of that opportunity, what it would mean for me and for my career. But his belief in me? That meant everything. Especially since he seemed to be the only person who thought I could do it, myself included."

"I was about two weeks away from turning 18, when I was called into a meeting with the dealership's owner and general manager. When I got to the office, my mom and David were both there as well. David told them he wanted to bring me up to sales when I turned 18, and they all ... well... they freaked. They thought it was a bad idea, said they didn't think I had what it takes to make it... Even my mom was worried."

"I walked out of that meeting feeling absolutely defeated. Then David pulled me aside and – I'll never forget this – he said, 'Don't listen to them. You listen to me. I won't let you fail.'"

“Think about that, the power in that statement for me, a kid still in high school. Not even 18 yet, and here’s this incredibly successful guy telling me I would be successful too. *I won’t let you fail.* And he didn’t.”

“From that day forward, I knew David had my back, and I would have jumped off the roof if he asked. I would have run through a wall for David Maus without a second thought. So, I listened and I learned. And, you know what, he was right. I did really well. I loved helping people, and I loved selling cars, and David taught me the best way to do both.”

***“You’re a good leader when people do the right thing because they trust you.”***

“Not that it always went smoothly. I was young, so there were some significant bumps along the way. One month, this was early on, I only sold six cars. In those days, you only move six cars, you’re done. So, when I was called into David’s office, that was my expectation. I could feel people looking at me as I headed that way, and I could tell it was their expectation too. There goes Patrick, the kid who was promoted way too soon. As I walked to David’s office, I thought about that meeting the day he told the GM he wanted to promote me to sales. The owner, the GM, my mom, they had all been right. I didn’t have what it took. That was where my head was when I arrived in David’s office and he asked me to sit down.”

***“I walked into David’s office, fully expecting to be fired.”***

“David leaned forward in his chair and asked me how I was doing. *How was I doing? I was at six cars, that’s how I was doing.* Truth is, things were bad at home. Trouble in my personal life was consuming me, and I wasn’t handling it well. David said, ‘This isn’t you. I know you. What’s going on?’

That's when I realized. To him, I wasn't just some kid with only six cars on the board. He wasn't asking about work, he was asking about me. So, we talked it out, and I left his office with a huge weight off my shoulders. The following month, I led the store in sales — 24 cars."

### **Shifting Focus**

"You know what I remember most about all that? David never changed the way he treated me. Sure, we celebrated when I sold 24, but he treated me exactly the same way he had when I only sold six. I was a person, whether I sold 24 cars or only six ... and he was not going to let me fail."

"Fast forward 20 years, and now I'm the one building teams and leading people. I find myself saying the same thing to people I'm mentoring. As a leader, when you get to know your people, you can tell who's committed, who's willing to go all-in, and I want them to know I'll go all-in for them. 'Stick with me, and I won't let you fail.' There's nothing more powerful you can say."

"Building that trust is the first step. There's something else about the way I lead that, I believe, has been a big part of my success. Car sales is a results-driven business, that's a fact. You have to move inventory to be successful. That leads to a tendency in this industry to only focus on results. People become numbers up on a board. That's not me. I don't want people seeing me as a leader who only cares about numbers, because I don't want them only caring about numbers. You don't create the right kind of work environment, and you can't take good care of your customers, when all you care about is numbers.

***"I don't want people seeing me as a leader who only cares about numbers, because I don't want them only caring about numbers..."***

“When I have a team full of people who know how to make good decisions, it doesn’t matter what situation or circumstance they come up against, they will represent me, the dealership, and our brand well. So that’s my focus, teaching people how to process what’s happening and make good decisions. Do that, and the numbers will be right.”

“How do I know that? Look at the numbers. Seventy percent of what we sell is repeat or referral business. And our turnover rate is around 30 percent. Industry average turnover rate is twice that. You can’t look at those results and say our approach doesn’t work.

“You won’t find ‘they made me feel good’ on a financial statement, but the numbers validate that approach.”

### **Building Legacy Every Day**

“Working with John Williams, Chairman of the Williams Automotive Group, has grown my capacity to lead to a whole new level. John has helped me understand leadership through the lens of faith, and he’s helped me see things with a more long-term, big picture perspective.

“He reinforced in me the understanding that it’s okay to make a mistake. I have this voice inside me that wants perfection, so it’s not always been easy for me to let it be okay that I’ve blown it. John has been a huge factor in my learning how to come back by coaching me through those times. His empathy has made a real difference.

“John has empowered me to lead and run his store. When I need him, he’s there for me, and his nonjudgmental approach is an invaluable ‘people skill,’ because you never know what’s about to walk through your door. Recently, an associate came in, and she was not okay. She’s struggling. On my team, we don’t run from these challenges. We talked, and I asked what was really going on. Because she trusted me, she was honest. She said that she ‘didn’t feel valued or respected’.



“That’s a specific problems we can address, and I wasn’t willing to lose a valuable team member over something we could solve. That’s a lesson our industry seems to be learning slowly. The culture around us, not in the industry but the culture overall, is shifting. The associates we have just coming into the business grew up with different expectations. They see things differently, care about different things. As leaders, if we aren’t aware of that, if we can’t find a way to embrace them, to teach them and help them develop in a way that connects with who they are and what they value, we’ll lose them.”

***“Inspire people in a way that motivates them to inspire other people... That’s what made me successful.”***

“Today, I’m in the process of building something new, a new dealership from the ground up, a blank canvas, and I couldn’t be more excited. I get to handpick every member of the team, and, together, we get to build a unique culture focused on taking care of people.”

“When you’re building something, you think about legacy. I try to be intentional about what I’m building and how people will remember me. No one will remember how many cars I sold. My legacy will be how I made people feel. How I represented them. When I’m done, and the people I’m working with now are where I am today, I want them to think back to what they learned from me and be excited to share those lessons, my approach, with someone else just starting out.”

“When I look back, I want to see the people I mentored in this business leading from where they are, in whatever position they’re in. If I do this right, leaders inspiring others to lead will be my legacy.”

# Leadership Is Making a Difference Every Day



**Melissa Snively**

Owner, Melissa Snively State Farm  
Hillsborough County School Board Member

***"I wake up every day asking, 'how can I make a difference?'"***

Melissa Snively's career, both in business and public service, is a shining example of what can happen when a leader is willing to be honest with themselves about their talents and their limitations, then intentionally work to improve the former and reduce the latter.

"I left for the University of Florida after high school, excited about becoming a teacher. I graduated with a BA in English, with a minor in secondary education. What I didn't have at graduation was what I thought it

would take to be the kind of teacher my students deserved. I needed more experience and, more importantly, patience. So, I asked God for patience... He gave me four kids and a small business... I don't pray for patience anymore."

"After college, and realizing I wasn't ready to be a teacher, I took a job at a small insurance company. That was the first step in a career that's spanned more than two decades, 24 years with State Farm, the last 17 as an agent."

### **Learning to Shift**

"One of the challenges of building a business from scratch is learning to shift as your role changes. I started out in the trenches, working shoulder-to-shoulder with my team. It was like that for years, until the business necessitated that I become more of a coach than a quarterback. That was a tough move for me, personally. But, for the business to grow, I needed to shift my focus and my priorities, to be more strategic in my thinking, not so reactive. In the beginning, there's so much reacting. If you want to grow, you have to stop reacting. You have to plan and respond."

***"If you want to grow, you have to plan and respond,  
not just react."***

"I signed up for leadership training with State Farm, and took advantage of opportunities with local civic leadership groups. One of the steps I learned in that process was to protect my time. If you want to have a CEO perspective, you have to step out of the whirlwind, get a clearer view. That doesn't mean I changed who I am at my core. I'm a doer, an activator. I love to set things in motion and watch them play out, or to give people a task and help them succeed.

“Leadership became about facilitating and getting out of the way, going to each member of my team, being intentional about asking: “What do you need, any resources, training, is there a roadblock I can help you move?” Providing what they need and getting out of their way so they can do what they do best.”

### **Creating and Celebrating Success**

“No one wants to come to work and just push paper around. There’s a lot of paperwork in this business, a lot of rules and regulations. But each document represents a person, something they worked for that we’re helping them protect, or a goal they’re reaching for. That means each member of my team has a genuine opportunity to make a difference for someone every single day.

“I want the people on my team to be aware of that, to celebrate the difference they are making in people’s lives, in their families. We all have the opportunity to get at least one win every day, maybe more. And each of those wins moves the needle in a positive direction for someone.”

### **Small Chunks**

“Every member of my team is required to read *The Slight Edge* by Jeff Olson. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve recommended that book. It’s essentially about choosing to be disciplined, doing the small things well. On my team, we talk all the time about “chunking.” Doing small things better every day. Not massive changes, just tiny, incremental chunks. There’s no real ‘secret’ to long-term success, it’s all about daily discipline.

***“Tiny disciplines, practiced every day,  
add up to massive success.”***

“There’s another aspect of leadership discipline I learned from my accountant: ‘Do those things that cause you to make bank deposits. Hire other people to do everything else.’ I believe I’ve done that. We have a tremendous team here. The place really runs whether I’m here or not. Everyone comes in every day looking to get a little bit better and intending to make a difference.

“That environment has created a very interesting dynamic. If a person joins the team, but they don’t have a strong work ethic or a high level of customer service, they don’t last. I don’t have to show them the door. The team will not tolerate it, and the person, realizing they’re not a good fit, will opt themselves out. Took us 15 years to get there, but it’s a good place to be.”

### **Learning From my Team**

“You hear this from a lot of CEOs, but I’m not normal. Between the agency, being and Boy Scout leader and trainer, and my duties with the school board, I’m going 14 hours a day. That’s a hard pace for a lot of people, but it’s how I’m wired. I’m not normal, but I’m learning. My team has taught me so much, mainly patience and empathy.

***“I’m not normal... but I’m learning.”***

“You learn things that, looking back, you wonder why you didn’t realize it before. The world won’t end because someone has to miss work, or they have to leave early to pick up a child from school. That should be obvious, right? But it can take some time to realize these things. My thinking, my understanding, has grown. Our priorities and goals haven’t changed, but we’re all free to have lives and to enjoy them. The business will be fine, and the world will keep turning.”

## **A New Opportunity**

“Back in 2012, a friend with the Chamber of Commerce asked if I might be interested in running for public office. There was a seat coming available on the Hillsborough County School Board. Well, I had four children in public schools, and I had always had an interest in education... I was already advocating for students every chance I got, so why not make it official? I ran, and I won. I’m a member of the school board, and that’s been a real education.

***“I’m a member of the school board,  
and that’s been a real education.”***

“You come in, gung ho, ready to change the world. But there are six other people, and they all want to change the world too. Their version of the world looks slightly different, maybe even a lot different, than your version... It’s a challenge.

“People elect us to get things done, to protect our students and promote the best possible educational environment. So, for me, success goes back to that ‘chunk’ mindset. I want to be as helpful as I can. Our vision for the district is preparing students for life. When they walk across that stage at graduation, we want them to be self-sufficient, independent, contributing members of society. When I see that light in their eyes, those smiles, that ‘I’m going to conquer the world’ expression, I get so excited.

“Then there’s the other side, the tangible side ... the budget side. The fact of the matter is that while we have infinite desires for the district, we have finite finances. That budget is our voice, it speaks to the priorities of the school district. You have to learn to balance your hopes for the children with the realities of the math, to employ both critical thinking and business skills. There are a great many things I would love to do for our students, but

someone on the dais has to be pragmatic, has to be analytical ... and that can get pretty lonely. Then you see those graduates, those hopeful faces, and it's so fulfilling. We have to get this right, for them."

### **The Next Shift**

"There are other things I want to do, other ways I want to help. Getting there will require yet another shift. Helping certain key people on my team move up, from team leaders to coaches, developing other people. That's where we are right now, putting together a coaching staff to do something bigger than we are right now.

"Thinking about the next level, the growth that needs to happen in me, and the growth I need to empower in my team, that's the challenging part. I haven't been to that 'next level,' and it's my responsibility to lead my team there.

"Right now, I'm in the trenches with my kids — school, sports, music, lessons, homework, Scouting — and I'm involved in my business association, advocating for professionals in my industry. That's where I am in life right now, and that has my full attention. Whatever tomorrow looks like, wherever I go, and whatever I do next, one question will always be at the forefront: *How can I make a difference today?*"

# Leadership is Equipping Others



**Dean Burnside**

Owner and President, Good News Pest Solutions

***"I asked: 'What is the highest and best duty to accomplish our goals?' Over and over, the answer has been, 'delegate and equip.'"***

Dean Burnside has been building a strong reputation in the pest control industry for nearly 30 years, when he got his start working with respected industry pro, John Macy. Dean says Mr. Macy is responsible for teaching him the best way to succeed in the business.

"Mr. Macy focused his business on relationships, taking care of people in and out of the business, and that resonated with me."



In 1998, Dean bought the business from Mr. Macy and set about making the shift from employee to owner. As part of that transition, Dean set a goal. He would earn a place among the top 100 companies in his industry, nationwide. Now, nearly 20 years along, Dean has Good News Pest Solutions built to last and well on its way to that goal. He credits his company's success to being intentional about personal and team development.

### **Making the Shift**

When Dean transitioned from an employee of Mr. Macy's company to the owner-operator, he said one of the most important aspects was the mental shift. "I had been on the ground up to that point. Now, it was like I had taken off and was being trusted to fly this plane at 35,000 feet. My entire focus, my priorities, and how I thought about the business had to change."

"It wasn't always what I thought about that shifted. Some of it was how I thought about those things. For example, I was still thinking about customer acquisition and sales, but I was thinking about how we all did it, rather than just how I did it. I asked myself: as the owner, what is the highest and best use of my time. talents and resources that will continue to build this brand and benefit my customers?"

"I looked at how I talked about pest control, what we represented to our customers, and how I started each day. In the morning, I would ask myself: 'What is your highest and best duty to accomplish your goals?' Over and over again, the answer was: delegate, find ways to equip the people doing what you used to do, so you can focus on setting the vision and building the business."

"When I thought about delegation, my first inclination was to hire people to do the things I'm not good at. That's a good first step, but it's not

enough. There's something I learned from Andy Stanley: pass off responsibilities until you're only doing the things that only you can do, and equip others to do what you should not be doing."

***"My goal is to spend all of my time doing the things only I can do and equipping others to do everything else."***

"This approach has resulted in steady, successful growth for more than two decades. Because I wasn't trying to do everything, I was not standing in the way of that growth. Because I focused on hiring, training and equipping the right people, we all benefitted."

### **Developing Unity**

"I began by investing as much as I could in my primary positional leaders. We met weekly, one-on-one, and in a group. I wanted them to hear my words and feel my heart, and I wanted to hear theirs as well. That exchange develops mutual trust and understanding, which is vital to sustained growth. If you want to develop a team that trusts each other, up and down the leadership chart, that takes time invested together."

"When I say I wanted them to feel my heart, this wasn't about creating robots. It's about encouraging unity of purpose, thought and action. They might approach something differently than I would, but as long as they are making that decision from the perspective of what the company represents and for the best interests of all concerned, I believe they will make the right call."

***"Investing in your team is about encouraging unity of purpose, thought and action."***

“When you look back, you see that, maybe, you didn’t do exactly the same thing for every customer, but the approach was consistent. Doing the best thing, from the way we communicate to the way we serve that customer.”

## **Seeking Wisdom**

“In our culture, we have this archetype of the leader as The Ultimate Loner. The person with All The Answers who can – and should – go it alone. That’s a recipe for disaster.

“If you don’t have a sounding board, if you spend all your time inside your own head, that’s all you will ever have to draw from. That limits yourself, your team and your business potential. Everyone misses out on what could be.”

“Years ago, I was challenged to spend the first hour of my day seeking wisdom about how to approach the rest of that day. I begin every day reading God’s word, reading business books, and spending time with people who will invest in me, my mission and my business.”

***“If you spend all your time in your own head,  
you limit everything you do.”***

“I joined a leadership peer-mentoring group called C12. There is no way to overstate the positive impact that group of leaders has made on my life, both as a man and as a business leader. Being a part of that group has given me so much, taught me so many things. It is easily one of the best decisions I’ve made as a leader.

“Because I have experienced the benefits of so many mentoring relationships, I have made that a part of how I give back to the people

around me. I'm always looking for ways to invest in their lives, personally and professionally."

### **Finding Better Ways to Serve**

Good News Pest Solutions is based in southwest Florida, an area that has seen a major population boom in recent years. In 2016, Dean's company reached a tipping point. "Our coverage area had expanded to the point that travel time was eating up too much of our costs. We needed to make a change."

"We knew a second location was a risk, but we also knew a satellite location in one of the fastest growing areas would increase our ability to serve that community. We could decrease our windshield time and be more responsive to our customers. I knew, if I could successfully divide our team, we had the opportunity to grow with the community. Do that well, and we could follow that process in other communities as well. Divide, then multiply. That was the plan. To do that, I knew I needed to duplicate what made us successful at our original location, but tweak it for that specific market.

"We began a process of talking with our employees about why they enjoyed working at Good News, and asking where they thought the company could improve. My wife, Terri, led this effort, because she had the best skill set to make it work. Let me reiterate that, because it's important. We were intentionally seeking out what we needed to do to double our business, and someone else was leading that part of the process. I was involved in the process, but I wasn't leading it. I knew Terri was better than I would have been, so me getting out of the way and trusting her made that effort more successful."

***"Me getting out of the way made  
that effort more successful."***

“At the end of the discovery process, Terri, me, and my management team took the next six months looking for ways to increase our positives and implement the suggestions offered by the team.

“We found better ways to serve our customers and expand our business successfully while also protecting our culture, which is our fundamental commitment to care about everything we do.”

### **Hiring Leaders**

“For me, the mentoring process begins with the hiring process. I want to hire people better than me for clearly defined roles and put them in a position to succeed. Finding people like that can be a challenge. It’s definitely easier to find a laborer than a leader, but I want leaders, because they allow me to keep my focus on what I should be doing. Every time I hire a leader, it helps me fine tune my focus, which gets my name out of another box or two of What Needs To Be Done, and makes us all better.”

***“Every time I hire a leader, it helps me fine tune my focus...”***

“Another benefit of hiring leaders is the opportunity to learn from each other. I recognize how much other people — from Mr. Macy, to my wife, to the members of C12, and the leaders on our team — have taught me. It’s humbling, and it’s rewarding, to know you’re surrounded by people you trust, people who are like-minded in their approach to business and to life. When you have that, it’s not difficult to listen or to learn from each other. So, I hire leaders, and I equip them to own their role on our team. I’ve been doing that for a long time now, and our entire organization is better for it.”

# Leadership is Stepping Up



**Barbara Friedman**

Executive Producer, Heritage Arts Center Association  
'Spotlight on Talent'

***"Leadership is a journey that begins with asking:  
'What can I do?'"***

Barbara Friedman has led the Heritage Arts Center Association's signature annual event "Spotlight on Talent" for nearly 30 years. The annual competition, held each year in Wesley Chapel, Florida, showcases aspiring performers in music, dance and drama. "Spotlight" offers these talented

children and teens the opportunity to perform for family, friends and a panel of distinguished professional judges.

“Spotlight was started by dance teacher, Sally Blackwood, back in 1982. We were members of the Heritage Arts Center Association, a group dedicated to expanding interest in the performing arts in this area... I got involved, because I wanted this community, and my kids, to have this opportunity, and to be encouraged to explore the performing arts. That’s the real beauty of Spotlight. These kids that can take their God-given talent and combine that with discipline and hard work, to enhance their lives in immeasurable ways.”

Barbara volunteered with Spotlight for several years until a vacancy at the Executive Producer position left Barbara with a choice: step up or, possibly, watch the program that meant so much to her fail.

“I could not let that happen, so I stepped up into a position I’ve held for 27 years now. That commitment has meant a lot of work, a lot of heart, and a lot of growth, both in the event and in me.”

### **Stepping Up**

“The program was smaller then, much smaller than it is today, so the transition wasn’t really too much of a jolt. The most important criteria, other than the heart for it, was to have the time. Producing Spotlight is pretty much a full-time job. If you can’t devote the time and the effort, the event suffers.

“The arts helped me pay for college, they taught me self-discipline and a passion for excellence. I firmly believe, when you’ve received much, much is required of you. I had received so much, especially from the arts, and I felt like I owed it to my heritage, my God and the next generation of performing artists to give back all I could.”

***"I am living proof of how much the arts can impact your life."***

"At the time I took over, the event had been winding down for years. Each year we had fewer applicants, but I could see the value in the program. I had a heart for Sally's original vision, and I wanted to see this event take off, really grow into something incredible. One thing I knew... if I was going to put my stamp on this event, it would be a positive influence on the contestants, win or lose. There are so many talent competitions out there, and they can be so cruel. You even see that played up on the TV competitions. The meaner the judges, the higher the ratings. That's not us. Our judges are required to be positive, specific, and constructive."

### **Growing the Vision**

"In the early days, Spotlight was much smaller. We would hold it at the Fairgrounds, during the Pasco County Fair. People would come in off the midway when they heard the performances. But the fair was loud and disruptive, distracting for the contestants. We made the decision to move into Pasco Middle School auditorium, and that was a step in the right direction. It was still pretty low-tech, though. We had no sound or lighting, just a cassette player on stage for accompaniment.

"We knew, if we kept working, kept getting the word out, and putting on an incredible show, Spotlight would continue to grow."

That's exactly what happened. Under Barbara's leadership, the event began to grow again. More students signed up to compete each year, and, today, some of those contestants have come back as volunteers, as judges, and as enthusiastic supporters of the event. Of course, the event cost grew as well.

"I see the additional cost as opportunity. Growth has a cost. If you want to grow, you must be prepared to pay for it. To do this right, it costs a



lot of money. I knew we didn't have a huge income, but I was not going to allow us to run in the red. We would make adjustments to get the bottom line where it needs to be."

***"Growth has a cost. If you want to grow, you must be prepared to pay for it."***

"Spotlight benefits tremendously from a great team of 15 volunteer board members who help with so many things. Some come from the arts world, some from business or the financial industry. All of them bring important skills and perspectives, a passion for the children in this community, and a big heart to serve. I feel so fortunate to be aligned with these wonderful people."

"Spotlight has grown in some amazing ways over the years. Today, we're in a professional venue with top-notch sound and lighting. Instead of friends of supporters volunteering as judges, we have working professional performing artists who know what it takes to make it in the industry. The feedback they offer these kids is invaluable."

The work that goes into finding those judges, Barbara says, is just one example of how her role has grown along with the event. "Just finding the best-qualified judges takes two or three months, a lot of phone calls and emails. But it's that important. If these kids take on this scary thing of auditioning, you don't want just anyone judging them. You want people who can give them the best advice they can get going forward. Every year, after the event, I read through every judge's sheet for every audition, looking for kindness, as well as specific, meaningful feedback for the performers. That's the very least these brave, talented kids deserve."

## **Growing With Your Role**

“As the event has evolved, so has my role and my level of involvement. We started small, and now we routinely have more than 100 auditions each year. We still want to grow, though. We’re beginning a committee to promote visual, as well as performing, arts. Anything and everything we can do for these kids, count me in.”

“Of course, more programs and opportunities, more growth, means more time invested by our board, by me, and by my assistant producers. Rebecca Grooms, in particular, has played a big role in developing Spotlight’s technical direction. A lot of the A/V improvements we’ve been able to make have been thanks to her contributions. Rebecca, along with our other two assistant producers, Alicia Polk and Michael Roberts, have made a major difference in the professionalism of the competition experience for the performers and production value for the audience.”

“Because of these three outstanding assistant producers, and the board, we are able to do so much more for the kids and for the community than I could ever do on my own. There’s a lesson in that, for sure. When you want to do something bigger than yourself, don’t quit. Just find people you can trust to come alongside and work on it with you ... and when they’re better at something than you are, get out of the way and let them do it!”

***“When you want to do something bigger than yourself, find people you can trust to work on it with you...”***

“Because we take that approach, and we’re all in this for the children and to promote the arts, we’re able to do some pretty amazing things, to take on whatever we need to handle to make everything run smoothly.”

## **Always Getting Better**

“One of the big reasons for our continued growth and success over the years, is that we are intentional about getting better. We take notes during auditions and during the competition. After the competition, we have a producers’ meeting where we ask four questions:

What went well?

What didn’t go so well?

What can we make better?

What responsibilities could be delegated?

“Each of these questions leads to a better production the following year. You want to begin with celebrating what you did right, that’s important. Follow that up with being honest about where you can improve. When you look at that, be honest about what can be done and what may be something to address down the road. Keep your focus on incremental changes, getting a little bit better every year.

“Finally, look at both what went well and what can be improved, and look seriously at whether delegating that responsibility would improve the result. When you care about something, it can be tough to let it go, but if you’re willing to pass it along to someone who can do it better, you create two benefits. First, you produce a better result for the vision and mission of the event. Second, you are building a foundation for the eventual handoff.”

“This is something every leader has to face sooner or later. You want to build something that outlasts, that outlives, you. I want to see Spotlight continue, with or without me, so we can’t make it dependent on me.”

## **Passing the Baton**

“Lately, we’ve been thinking a lot about a succession plan. The program has already grown well beyond what I could hope to do myself. We have some tremendous assistant producers, but they have families and full time jobs... I know I can’t do it forever, but I feel the same way I did all those years ago when I first stepped into the producer role: Spotlight is too important, to these kids and this community, to let it fade. Right now, we are focused on delegating various responsibilities, sharing the load... but I believe someone will do as I did, they will step up.”

# Leadership is Connecting and Investing



**E. Adam Porter**

Chief Instigator at Atlas Multimedia Productions

Editor in Chief *NOKP Publications*

***"As a writer, the story comes from you, but it's not about you. As a leader, the vision may be yours, but it doesn't belong to you."***

Adam Porter realized his life would be best spent telling stories when he was seven years old. He's spent the rest of his life, to this point, honing

that craft, a pursuit and a passion that, Adam says, he will continue as long as he can.

“There was never a single moment when I thought ‘a ha’ I’m going to be a storyteller. The idea just sort of settled inside me in a way I accepted, even if I didn’t understand it. The stories just came out of me, elaborate interactions involving characters around me, both real and fictional.

“Good stories are magnetic. When other kids heard my stories, they wanted to be a part of them. We would act them out, all of us contributing, making the stories bigger, better, more involved. Less about me and what I wanted and more about the enjoyment of the other kids. It would take another 20 years before I really unpacked the truth in that idea.

“Those experiences also taught me something about leadership. When you offer a vision that connects with people, they embrace it. It’s not necessarily an intellectual choice, it’s a deeper connection with the greater possibility... the answer to ‘What May Be If I ...’

***“Grabbing hold of a vision is not necessarily an intellectual choice. It’s a deeper connection.”***

“I gravitated toward stories of all kinds — books, movies, music — didn’t matter the source, I was immersed. I liked the 60s and 70s singer-songwriter stuff, even in elementary school. I may have been the only kid in my class who listened to Cat Stevens, John Denver, Dan Fogelberg and Joni Mitchell. Even *The Beach Boys* stuff. Brian Wilson had redefined rock music, and I was captivated by the short, evocative stories he and Mike Love, and others, told. Dynamic storytelling delivered about three minutes. I didn’t always understand what they were saying, but something in those stories, the humanity and emotion, resonated.

“Even before I could write, I began taking the stories out of my head and putting them down on paper. Sometimes in words, a lot of times in pictures. For a couple of years pretty much all I did was draw comics in spiral notebooks. Mostly satire. Again, for me, it was just something I did. I don’t think I could imagine not doing it. My poor mother was forever buying new spiral notebooks.”

### **What About Writer’s Block?**

“As a working writer, you get the same question all the time: ‘How do you come up with ideas?’ I understand the question, but coming up with ideas has never been a problem. My challenge is focusing my writing. I have too many ideas for the time I have to write them. My challenge is distilling my vision, choosing which story to write.

“When I’m working with a writer who is struggling, whether it’s one of my reporters or a student I’m mentoring, first thing I suggest is not to force it. Give yourself permission to walk away. Maybe for five minutes, maybe an hour or a day, depending on the deadline. Take a breath. Grab your notebook, get out in the world and write down what you see and hear. Listen to conversations. Watch faces and birds and bus drivers. Go to the mall or the park or traffic court and just watch people. Describe them in detail... without using adverbs.”

### **The First Lesson**

“I’ve been a teacher, a public speaker, a minister, a reporter, an editor, and a working writer, and this truth is fundamental to success in all those venues: “It’s not about me.”

“Many people fail as writers, or as communicators, because they think their story is about them. They get it all down, spend years loving it into being, then they put it out into the world and ... nobody cares. That can be

crushing, and it's why a lot of promising careers never get off the launch pad.

"I think this is key to success as a communicator, and it took me a while, probably too long, to get there. As a young man, in my early 20s, I wanted to tell stories because I liked those characters. I wanted to write commentaries because I had an opinion. These characters and opinions meant so much to me, I just assumed they would mean as much to other people. That mistake taught me about the need to give people a reason to care *before* you ask them to connect.

"I hear so many aspiring writers say things like, 'It's my art. I write for me.' Well, that's fine, but don't quit your day job. If you ask any working writer, we have a crate of stories, maybe even a closet full, that will never see the light of day. We may love them, we may have a piece of ourselves in the story, but we know they will never sell. For whatever reason, those stories are not good enough.

"That's not to say we shouldn't write for ourselves or write stories that won't sell. Yes, write those. Get them out of you and out of the way. Then box them up. Let them go. You may dig one or two up later, but don't force it.

"People don't become fans because they like you. They become fans because your work did something inside them. So, for me, the most important question is this: Did I cause a connection or a reaction, did I make them feel something? That's the big one."

***"Good stories are entertaining.  
Great stories are transformational."***



## **Let yourself be uncomfortable**

“One of the most unique aspects of my work is that I lead in multiple different ecosystems. At the newspaper, I have paid staff as well as volunteers. Both groups have to be timely, creative and disciplined to get the paper to press, and then delivered, on time.

“With Atlas Media Ink, I work with a constantly shifting group of freelancers, contractors in multiple creative fields, and several other business owners. I have a core group of professionals I depend on, but almost all of our work is managed remotely.

“Each project is an independent vision that we’re all committed to realizing. For a lot of folks, that volatile cycle of: [start-create something from nothing-publish-reset] might be ulcer-inducing... we get accustomed to it in print media. Every cycle we’re starting from scratch, filling empty paper. And, once it’s printed, there are no take-backs. So, we better get it right.

***“Each project is an independent vision  
we’re all committed to realizing.”***

“As a leader, my job is to keep everyone focused and connected to the common goal. Anyone, any link in the chain, loses focus, and something important gets missed. This is a challenge when the team all has employment riding on their performance. When half the crew is volunteers, or even loosely-connected contractors, that adds another layer leadership opportunity.

“In the early going, that took a lot of juggling, a lot of conscious effort. I made too many assumptions, tried to force too many people to respond to the sort of leadership I thought the situation required ... *and I learned a lot the hard way.*

“One time, many years ago, I was working with a team on a startup print publication. We were all-in, shoulder-to-shoulder, pulling off miracles to get that magazine to press every month. I was so focused on that End Result, getting to press on time, that I was less conscious of my tone and approach than I should have been. Years later, I was having breakfast with some of those folks, and one of them said: ‘You’ve really mellowed. You were so arrogant back then.’

“That hit me pretty hard, and I wanted to get defensive, because, at that time, arrogance was nowhere in my orbit. Desperate? Sure. Exhausted? Definitely. Invested to my last nickel? Yep. But arrogant? No chance... Or was I? I sat there, cup of coffee halfway to my mouth, feeling insulted... Then it hit me. At the time, in the trenches, I’d been so focused on what we were trying to do, I never considered what *they* were trying to do. Never even thought about it. I assumed they were doing what I was doing for reasons similar to mine. Is there anything more arrogant than assuming someone else’s motives? That person had me dead to rights.”

***“Is there anything more arrogant than assuming someone else’s motives?”***

“Since that kitchen table epiphany, I’ve done my best to approach each person — whether staff, volunteer, apprentice, contractor, or student — as an individual. Even if we were on the same team, ostensibly working toward the same goal, I’ve been intentional about knowing why and how they do what they do.

“Today, when it comes time to choose between the person on the other side of the conversation and a leadership approach that may be most comfortable for me in that moment, I try to remember the person is more important than my comfort level.”

## **Making a Connection**

"How do you build a story?" Is another question I get a lot. There are a lot of times it feels like magic. But underneath the spell is all the dirty, knuckle busting work. Crafting a story is a lot like trying to assemble an internal combustion engine while juggling car parts. It reminds me of this video I saw once of a guy juggling Rubik's cubes. As he juggled, he was solving the cubes.

"That's the writing process. Constant motion and intense focus ... on six things at once. I think, if I do anything truly well, that's it. I bring disparate parts together and build something out of it. Part of that is natural wiring, the rest of it is skills I've picked up and honed over the years.

***"That's the writing process. Constant motion and intense focus ... on six things at once."***

"When I think about the writing process and the leadership process, how that comes together in what I do every day, there's really no school for that. You may learn the form in college, but not the function. I have benefited tremendously from being around some amazing mentors, people who were geniuses, both in the craft of writing and the mystery of people.

"If I had to graph everything they taught me along with everything I learned by Doing It Wrong At Least Once, I'd have a Venn Diagram with writing process in one bubble and leading people in the other. The crossover? Personal connection."

***"People invest in who and what they feel connected with."***

“I could be writing fiction, ad copy, commentary, or news. I could build the most logistically perfect news story out there — great lede, all five W’s, proper inverse pyramid of focus, all that J-school stuff — and if someone reads it and goes, ‘meh’, I haven’t done my job.

“I want people to read my stuff and feel something. I want a shift, and a transformation. Even if it just turns the crank a quarter-turn in their mind, so they keep thinking about it. That’s what happens if I’m doing my job right.

“At the end of the day, if you’re wired to write, putting words on paper is easy. Making the connection in a way that invests in the reader, that’s where the art meets the craft. That’s the magic. Do it well, and you can make that connection writing fiction, reporting the news, or scripting a seafood shack takeout menu.

“For me, that’s where it all comes together. Whether I’m entertaining, inspiring or leading, it’s not about me.”

# Leadership is Listening



**Danny Burgess**

Florida House Representative, District 38

***"If you're not listening, you're not learning...  
That's why my door is always open."***

Hanging above Florida State Representative Danny Burgess' desk in his Zephyrhills office is a framed newspaper article. Not from when he won his first campaign, at the age of 18, the youngest city councilman in Zephyrhills history, and not from when he won his first or second term as State Representative for Florida House of Representatives District 38. This framed article, hanging on the wall to the right of his desk shows Rep.

Burgess' face, along with 12 of his house colleagues. The headline screams: "The Immoral Minority."

Burgess says that framed accusation reminds him of the value of being able to disagree without being disagreeable, as well as his mandate to actively listen to people, especially to those with whom he vehemently disagrees.

"I understand — we all understand — why headlines like that are written. But, in my experience, that's not the way to build consensus, and it's certainly not an effective way to lead.

"When you get into politics, you expect those kinds of things to happen. And, because the process of governing is so much more complicated than supporting something you believe in, you can become disheartened. You believe in something so strongly, and you get caught up in the sometimes very slow political process. Then, someone on the outside, who hasn't taken the time to listen, calls you the 'Immoral Minority' or, more recently, another article called me and a few others 'Disciples of Darkness'"

Burgess pauses, steeples his fingers and leans forward. "I knew what I signed up for when I ran for office. And, while those kinds of things can be discouraging, it just motivates me to listen more, to make sure my door is always open. Whether you voted for me or not, whether you agree with me or not, I was elected to represent you, and I cannot do that if I don't listen.

"When you serve at the local level, this is a lesson driven home every day. I remember being on city council, you make a decision Monday night, then, Tuesday, you're standing at the deli counter next to two neighbors. For one, that decision was a good one, but the other guy doesn't see it that way. As a leader, you're often faced with those kinds of challenges. Choose one way, and no one is happy. Choose another, and some people are happy.

"You have to do what you believe is best for everyone, but that doesn't mean there aren't consequences. You will be challenged. The reflex in that

moment is to try to explain, to show the person why you feel as you do. You know what, though, the better choice is to actively listen. To show them you understand. Maybe you change your mind, maybe you don't, but, if you want to lead, you need to listen to understand."

### **Listening to Understand**

"I started in elected office at the age of 18. That's young, and I had a lot to learn. But, I think, no matter when you start, there's a lot of learning on the job, at least, there should be. For me, what helps improve my leadership is asking questions and listening to the answers in order to better understand. I may have strong positions on things, but I don't know everything, and I can't learn if I'm always the one talking, or if I'm not willing to listen."

***"It's impossible to learn if you're always talking."***

"One of the most important leadership lessons I've learned is that we only think we're expected to 'know everything.' We're not. We're really not, and we need to embrace that. The people we lead know we don't have all the answers. There are people out there who do have the answers, and, if they know you are willing to listen, they are eager to help you find the best answer."

"Having the answer doesn't automatically mean you will get consensus on an issue. Sometimes, that aspect of it can be disheartening, because you believe in something so strongly, and other people either don't want to hear it, or they flat out disagree.

"While there are special interests out there, I believe what most people want is an elected official who listens, we all want to know we're being heard."

## **Making agreement possible**

Burgess freely admits active listening does not always lead to agreement, but, he says, it encourages the possibility. “We’ve come to a place, many times, where it feels like if they don’t agree, people just stop listening, and I see that as dangerous.

“In Tallahassee, there’s a room full of people who are highly motivated, passionate about their beliefs and about their positions on certain issues. I’m just one of those people. I happen to identify with very conservative ideals, both socially and fiscally. This does not mean other positions are not valid or should not be listened to. We should always seek, first, to understand. That doesn’t mean we agree. It’s about respect. When we show each other a little bit more respect, imagine what that could mean for our society! When you just write someone off, when you stop listening, who is that helping? I don’t think it helps any of us.”

***“We should always seek, first, to understand.  
That doesn’t mean we agree... It’s about respect.”***

“Consensus-building, getting that buy-in, is a process, and you have to earn it. That takes time, and it’s tough. When you start feeling that process, you need to step back and celebrate the small victories. In our case, we passed a balanced budget, and we have a reserve. These things important to me, and we accomplished those things. Are there other projects I’d like to see moving faster, sure, but don’t let yourself get stuck. Lead, and let the process work.”

***“Consensus building, getting buy-in, is a process...  
you have to earn it.”***



“For me, step one is seeing the person, not their position. That approach shifts the way you listen, and the way you explain your own position. You may disagree, but at least you understand each other. That’s my personal mission.

“It can be so easy to look like we’re listening to someone when we’re really just waiting to tell them why they’re wrong. This kind of thinking ... just look where it’s getting us. When people focus mostly on honing in more on what’s wrong than what’s right, we need to reevaluate ourselves, as individuals and as a society. That kind of thinking, dismissing others, forgetting to listen... that hurts all of us. As a leader, I feel I have a responsibility to be better than that.

“I was not elected to represent only the people who agree with me. Whatever your political affiliation, whether you voted for me or not, my door is always open.”

### **Who I’m Listening To**

“I was inspired to run for public office by the people who helped shape me growing up. I’ve been blessed with wonderful parents, a great extended family, teachers, coaches, and people in my community that took a special interest in me, who invested in me in so many important ways. They taught me the importance of surrounding myself with people I trust, people who know me, who can help me see myself or an issue in a different way. And to remember who I am.

“When you read my bio, I’m an elected representative, an Army Reserve officer, an attorney ... but, at the end of the day, I’m just Danny. A husband, father, a guy who makes mistakes and hopes to learn from them. My main motivation, both in public office and as a citizen, is to be a good example for my kids, and to protect their innocence as long as possible. That’s my main goal in life, personally.

“In public life, I still have a lot more work to do. When I’m done, whenever that might be, if I’ve done nothing else, I want to at least have been the guy that everyone knew his door was always open. I want people to know I care, and that I’m really willing to listen. I have the best interest of our community at heart, and I believe most other people do as well. We can work together toward this goal, even when we don’t agree. Look, we all know there’s a problem in politics these days. Some call it a lack of leadership ... and it is ... and a lot of it is a lack of listening. We can talk about it, or we can change it. I want to be part of that change.

“So, to me, leadership is keeping the door open... and choosing to really listen to anyone who comes through it.”

# Making the Shift with Trish

Thank you for investing your time to read this book. I hope the stories and perspectives offered by these outstanding leaders have resonated with you. They are making tremendous investments in their organization and communities, every day, and I'm grateful for the time they invested in this project.

Before we close, I would like to ask you what I believe is one of the most important questions any leader may ask themselves. I've asked hundreds of people this question over the years, and I believe answering it is a fundamental key to success in any endeavor:

***"Do you have a daily plan for personal leadership growth?"***

Would you be open to making a small daily shift that could dramatically increase your capacity for success? If so, here's what your daily plan for personal growth could look like, courtesy of my friend and mentor, John Maxwell.

1. Make a commitment to grow everyday.
2. Make the commitment public.
3. Be specific: Choose two areas in which you want to grow, one area of choice and one area of skill.
4. Invest one hour per day investing in growth in these areas. Include time for preparation, practice and reflection. This does not have to be all at once. I like to prepare in the morning, practice during the day, and reflect in the evening.

5. Focus about an hour at the end of every week to reflect on what you learned in that week. Write down what you have learned.
6. Share your growth with someone you trust.

When you are intentional about your growth in this way, you will outgrow almost everyone you know.

I would love to be one of the people you choose to share your intentional daily growth plan with. Please reach out to me through my website "[trishbuzzone.com](http://trishbuzzone.com)" or via Facebook at "[facebook.com/trishbuzzone](https://facebook.com/trishbuzzone)". Ask me how to build your simple daily plan for personal growth, and share with me the results you want to have.

And, if there's a leader in your community who's had a positive impact on your life, please let me know. We would love to feature that leader on our Facebook page and possibly in our next book.

Finally, if this book has been a blessing and an encouragement to you, please share it with someone else. Remember, anyone, anywhere has the capacity to be a leader, if they choose to be. And any leader will be a better leader tomorrow, if they invest time to grow today.

Let's make it happen!

Trish