

Bracken Darrell: Say, "What are my values?" And I don't go back and, and white out the last, or, you know, I don't go back and-and erase and edit; I literally start with a clean slate. They usually are about the same. But I, it forces me to remind myself who I really wanna be. It should not say who I am. You may not feel like you are that person when you write those values down; your values might be aspirational for you, and that's fine. I mean, in fact, that's great. Um, your, just like your goals are probably aspirational for you. But, but write down the values you wanna be. Write down the person you'd like to be, and then, uh, if you keep writing it down long enough and you keep working at it, you will be.

Chris Fussell: Welcome to *No Turning Back*, a McChrystal Group podcast hosted by General Stan McChrystal and me, Chris Fussell. Our goal here is simple: to have serious conversations with serious leaders, so we can learn from the best and navigate these complex times together. Thanks for joining us.

Over the next several weeks, Stan and I will be embarking on a new mini series called Demystifying DEI, where we will look at how organizations are approaching the important work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this series, we're excited to hear how industry leaders are authentically incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into their organizations, and how they are investing in their people to drive change, and the lessons they have learned through curiosity and trial.

Susan O'Malley: This week, we continue our Demystifying DEI mini series with a conversation Stan had with Bracken Darrell, CEO of Logitech. In this fascinating discussion, Stan examines Bracken's personal journey of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and why it's not enough to not be racist; we must be anti-racist. They explore why being fair and getting it right is a growth opportunity for every individual and every organization. Bracken shares how George Floyd's murder was the most transformational moment in his life. He talks about why and how Logitech is constantly learning, and committed to making progress. Thank you, Bracken, for taking the time to talk to us. Now, over to Stan.

Stan McChrystal: Well, Bracken, welcome so much to the No Turning Back series. I really appreciate you coming on. And I've been excited because we met some years ago, you've, of course, been fantastically successful, but you've also been noteworthy in being an advocate for a number of things to include diversity, equity, and inclusion. Now, for a lotta people sorta my age, my demographic, we

talk about, "You need to have more DEI," and we all sorta nod and say, "Yeah, we do," but we're not quite sure what that means. And so there's this mystery about what it is. So what, what I'd like to do today is demystify it a little bit. Let's start with, what is DEI? And then, would you talk about your personal journey with it?

Bracken Darrell: Yeah. I mean, the, the, I will, uh, not give the standard definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion and explain each one of them. What I would say D, E, and I is, is, is just fairness. Um, that with fairness and justice comes opportunity. And so D, E, and I is, is both getting it right, and then realizing that getting it right is a growth opportunity for everybody and every organization in the world. And I mean growth in terms of business growth, but also growth in terms of personal growth. Um, so that's ga-, I guess my starting point.

Now, my personal journey, you know, I grew up in, in Kentucky, so I'm a southerner. And, uh, I grew up thinking I was, uh, you know, really woke, you know? I w-, my, my, my mom and dad were, if, if, if they, if they called people activists back when I was young, they woulda called them activists. My, my dad was the first one, he, w-, I mean, we had a, a, a, a, uh, a, a sign in our front yard supporting Richard Brown, the first Black, uh, c-, uh, candidate for city counselor in Owensboro, Kentucky.

I remember when my mo-, we drove from Abilene, Texas to Owensboro, we stopped in Texarkana, Arkansas, or, or Texas, which, whichever side of the border we were on, and, uh, and we stopped at this little café. And I remember we w-, my mom brought us all in from the station wagon, you know, we sat the little, you know, lunch bar, and I saw my mom in a discussion with the guy at the front counter. And, and, uh, and then my mom was the nicest person in the world; I never saw, she never raised her voice. I heard, sorta heard her raise her voice. I found out, I was six years old, then I felt somebody grab me from the back of my collar and pulled me off the chair, and we marched right back into that station wagon. And I learned later that that was because, uh, she had walked in and seen a sign that said, uh, "We reserve the right to serve who we choose," and she asked the guy at the front, "What does that mean?" He, and when he told her, which is very much not about D, E, and I, uh, she said, "Well then, I reserve the right never to eat in your restaurant. I hope you close tomorrow." And, and so she marched us out.

So I grew up with that kinda background. And I was on the diversity council at GE, when I worked there, and I was on the diversity council everywhere I ever worked, and, you know, I was, I thought, "Boy, I'm really woke." And then when George Floyd was murdered, um, about four or five days later, I was sitting at my, my kitchen, uh, table, thinking, "God, how in the world did we get here?" And then it m-, I started thinking about, um, you know, I started thinking about apartheid in South Africa, thinking, you know, "Why didn't those White leaders speak up?" You know? There was nobody speaking up at the time; after George Floyd's murder, it was like this horrible silence. And then I realized I hadn't spoken up, and I'd never spoken up. And that, it was like getting hit in the head with a frying pan, and the pain's never gone away. And I, so it was the most transformational event in my life, George Floyd's murder, and I immediately, uh, apologized to every Black friend I had, and, and they all said the same thing. And none o-, none of them said, "It's okay"; they all said, "Well, at least you realize now." And, uh, and I've really turned my whole life upside down ever since, and I needed it.

Stan McChrystal: That's incredibly powerful. And for someone, again, of our age and experience, my mother's side of my family is from Lafayette, Alabama. And if-

Bracken Darrell: That's southern.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, and that's where they filmed that old 1989 movie, Mississippi Burning, 'cause they were looking for sorta prototypical town. But a couple years ago, I wrote about Dr. Martin Luther King's 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail. And a lotta-

Bracken Darrell: [inaudible 00:06:31].

Stan McChrystal: Yeah. And a lotta people don't realize what he was really doing was chastising White clergymen who were sympathetic to Civil Rights, but not active.

Bracken Darrell: Yeah.

Stan McChrystal: And so your description of the impact of George Floyd's murder, on sorta saying it's not enough not to be a racist, or not to be, uh, against diversity, isn't enough.

Bracken Darrell: Well, you know, it's funny say that. You know, I, the analogy I, I use for myself in, uh, right after that, was, you know, when they talked about, you know, the, the, being not, it's not enough to be, to not be a racist, you have to be an anti-racist, I was thinking, I always thought, you know, well, it's like burglary, you know? It's not enough to be... You can't, i- okay, if you're not a burglar, that's great, but everybody's anti-burglary, you know? Either that or you're, you're a crook, you know?

Stan McChrystal: [laughs]

Bracken Darrell: And so the same thing with racism. It's not enough to be, you know, not racist; you have to be anti-racist. It's, it's, it's wrong.

Stan McChrystal: And what about in today's environment, leading a major company? Because one of the things that I was sorta imbued with in the military is, we don't talk about political issues. We didn't even talk internally about them when I was in active duty. But then when I got out, there were a number of things in society that matter, and yet there's these series of forces that say business leaders should focus on business. They should protect shareholder value, and they shouldn't talk about social issues, 'cause it might upset some of the customer base or something. How do you think about that?

Bracken Darrell: I think the world's changed, you know? I think that was true. You know, years ago, I think it was a generally accepted reality that, you know, businesses were there to create, uh, economic value and, and just stay away from all the other stuff. And, and if you're really forced into it, have your standard kind of, uh, super neutral line, and just escape from the conversation as fast as you can, and feel free to say whatever you want in private, off the record. I think that's changed, you know? I think, you know, probably a combination of things have changed it, but maybe, uh, one part of it is that, um, there was a period where, you know, I think there was too much silence at the top or the, at least in the United States, around some of these issues. And you know, I think that silence was deafening, you know? And so you couldn't, you couldn't sit in a leadership role and pretend there was somebody else speaking for you.

You know, right after George Floyd happened, nobody said anything, you know? It's like, it's a, we di-, you didn't have a choice. If you didn't speak up, you looked like you were complicit in the idea that this isn't that important, you know? And I

think that's, that has also then translated into sustainability, you know, the environment. That you cannot sit in an organization today and say, "Well, you know, hope it goes well. You know, we're gonna do the best we can." You know, you really have to be for it, for fixing the environment, you know? And, and we're d-, and, uh, and really realize that global warming's real. You know, these are, these issues are no longer topics that I think a, a CEO or a leader of an organization can be silent on; they have to be, uh, they have to be ar-, they have to talk about it, you know? They have to take a position. And there's only, you know, there's, there's n-, there's not really much debate on which position to take, so it's not hard. [laughs]

Stan McChrystal: What about an issue that wouldn't be quite as binary as, as some? What about one that's more nuanced? Do you, as the leader of Logitech, feel like you should be espousing what you think your team, that you're representing them, or do you speak as Bracken?

Bracken Darrell: You know, it's, I always speak as Bracken. If I don't speak, it's because I've chosen not to inside of a framework that we use in the company to think about those kinds of issues. Um, fortunately, my board and my, uh, and my leadership team are, are, are very, very good people, and very vocal about issues themselves, and so I, I'm pretty comfortable speaking about most things. I don't speak about everything. It's e-, you know, I have to pick my battles, because we have that framework that, that does it. In the beginning of George Floyd, I probably didn't, I didn't wait to ask permission; I, I just ran right into the fro-, you know, the front, to use your analogy. But, but I think that was an easy front to run into. It just felt so, so right. And I think the same thing's true with environmental sustainability. There is other issues in the world that are much tougher, you know? And I, and I don't, you don't hear me talk about every single issue that comes up, you know, partly because there's also a reality that you, if you talk about everything, you're not really gonna make any noise.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, I think that's very true. It's interesting, I had a reporter reach out to me the last couple of days, and sorta chastising me for not talking about a certain issue.

Bracken Darrell: Yeah.

Stan McChrystal: And they said, "You have a responsibility to." And my response is: I do have a responsibility on some issues, but the reality is, not only do I not have a responsibility on every issue, some of them are just inappropriate.

Bracken Darrell: Yeah.

Stan McChrystal: You know? People are not hanging on every word I say about those.

Bracken Darrell: And I can imagine the issue they were talking about with you, and I think that is so true, you know? I think you, you, you know, you have to be... It's a sensitive, um, you need a, an awareness of yourself and where your place is in the world and culture. And you know, I think you have a, I mean, I've, I know you well enough to know you have it, and I think, and I'm impressed by that. I'm much more impressed by what people don't say than what they do, usually.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, that's really well said. Uh, I wanna talk now about sort of the impact of DEI and how you execute it inside Logitech. Because it's one thing to be for it, but to make it a reality inside a big organization with constant turnover of people and different things takes a bit of work. How do you do that?

Bracken Darrell: You know, we're still learning. You know, I think, uh, there's, there, I don't know of a company that's, that's doing it well enough yet, and we're certainly not. I'll tell you how we've approached it, and then I'll tell you we are really a work in process, so please look elsewhere if you wanna see perfection.

Stan McChrystal: [laughs]

Bracken Darrell: You know, we've, it starts with, uh, it's, it's got, it, we built it into the company's purpose, so, and values. So it's our, it's our, it's numb-, it's our number one value, and it's our, it's in our purpose now. So our purpose statement says, "We enable," we used to say, "We enable people to fulfill their passions." Now we added, "We enable all people, we're, our goal is to enable all people to fulfill their passions in a way that's good for the planet." So we added both the, the D, E, and I, in the word all, which means underrepresented groups, and we added the planet, because it's about sustainability. So we built those two values right into our purpose statement. That sends a very strong message to the company.

Second thing we do is we put somebody in charge, uh, beyond me. You know, I, it's easier for me to say I'm the head of D, E, and I, or the head of sustainability, but that honestly doesn't mean much, 'cause I'm kinda the head of everything. So I put my head of, uh, people and culture in charge of D, E, and I. But not just of the people in the company, which he has responsibility all the way to our suppliers and what their policies are, what they deliver, all the way to our customers. Are we developing products that are, that are a great fit for y- underrepresented groups? And we could talk about, for example, um, people with disabilities right now; it's such a great opportunity for them, uh, like we've never had before, 'cause of remote work.

So, so that, so we put, so it started with building it into purpose, then putting somebody in charge, and, and imbuing it end to end. And, uh, and then the rest of it is about, we've put metrics in place, I, and reward systems. So my leadership team, this year, in their bonus plan, we, we have a, their, their bonus is based on a certain revenue growth level and a certain, uh, profit level, but I have one other thing, and it's D, E, and I. And it's, how are they performing from a standpoint of D, E, and I? And I have a lotta flexibility in that, up to 50% of their total bonus. So every one of them will be evaluated based on that, and they know it.

Stan McChrystal: I grew up in an Army family. And in the 1940s, there was an argument, actually, well into the 1950s, an argument that you couldn't put African Americans in normal units because they wouldn't perform as well, and therefore, the combat effectiveness of the American Army would go down. Of course, practice later proved that that was incorrect. Then, during my career, I heard the same argument about females in key positions: if we do that, we will accept risk that defense of the nation won't allow. And so this sorta goes on with each new case that we take on. How do you talk to people in terms of the competitiveness of Logitech, or any organization, when people make that counterargument that says, "Yeah, yeah, all that stuff is fine, but we're really here in a competitive environment; we gotta win. So we'll do that either on the edges or after we've won"?

Bracken Darrell: Well, you know, it's one of those, it's one of my pet peeves that there's this, um, some kinda belief that if we, you know, do better, uh, either hiring, or promoting, or, or creating products for underrepresented groups, that we're somehow, that it's somehow a trade off, you know? But it's actually a trade up. I mean, you know, the, the amount of talent out there is so phenomenal that has been

systematically blocked, or, or had hurdles put in front of them to get to where, to get to the, the job, or the promotion, or the C Suite, or whatever. But there's so much talent that, that, uh, you know, it's nothing but a trade up. If you've got a, if you're in an organization, which almost everybody is, that has systematically blocked all those underrepresented groups, or at least made it more difficult to get there, and almost every organization in the world has, including the US Military, uh, certainly Logitech, then you've got such an opportunity to improve your performance by, by being better in D, E, and I, that it's a, it's, it's the lowest hanging fruit you probably have from an organization's standpoint.

That's it. You shouldn't need that, because it's the right thing to do. [laughs] I mean, it's just the right thing to do. So even if that weren't true, you should be doing it. But it, it is true.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, it's, it's interesting, in my career, females in the military, they didn't start attending West Point until right after I graduated, the first females entered. And of course, a, there were a number of old grads who said that the place would literally fall off the cliff into the Hudson River.

Bracken Darrell: I'm sure.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah. Which, which s- amazingly, it didn't. And it's, they've done very well. But-

Bracken Darrell: Yeah.

Stan McChrystal: ... then we would put females in jobs. Like, every division has a protocol officer, and invariably, that was a young female officer. And so we would put them in jobs like that, and then when it came time to promote them to very senior rank, like Brigadier General, they didn't have the same experience that, that their male counterparts. And then the board was in that hellish position of saying, "Well, this person didn't have as many of those key jobs, developmental jobs," but that wasn't their fault. How do you deal with that kinda challenge?

Bracken Darrell: Well, I think i-, that's a, uh, you know, that really comes back to, you wanna develop people across the board, you know? And that was a good example of the sys-, of systemic genderism, you know? Where the military was, and they're probably s-, people in the military thought they were doing the right

thing, but they were really systematically disadvantaging women in the next role. And it's, so I'd say, "What do you do if..." What would I do if I walked into an organization and went, "Oh my gosh, I've been systematically disadvantaging women by putting them into," whatever, you know, a certain function. I would say, "Shi-," uh, you know, if you wanna move fast, create an accelerated path to get them experience in the other areas, you know? Move. Just act, you know? W- the worst case, the accelerated path doesn't get them as much experience as you like, but I can guarantee you that, um, you get, you keep adding experience to them and they'll keep growing, you know? That's the way it works, and, and so you can, whether it's accelerated or not.

And, you know, I think w-, an example of that would be, inside and organization like ours, would be, um, suppliers. You know, there's, right now, when, when I started our s-, or when, I didn't start it, when we started our supplier development program, we had zero Black suppliers. We had, I think, I think it was 2% women, 8% total underrepresented groups? You know, these are horrible numbers. Maybe it was 5% women. Um, you know, so, so there's two ways to look at it. Y- the problem is, then you say, well, gosh, there's so few people have had a supplier diversity program that you don't have companies with experience working with companies like ours. So you could say, "Okay, well, it's not our fault. Too bad. We'll just live with it. We'll let it change slowly over time." But what we've done is we've created a, a program where we, we bring in and try to develop suppliers. We'll give, uh, work to suppliers who are very, very small, and we'll intentionally try to get them developed, you know, invest in them. You know, I think it's the least we could do if we're, if we, we played the role as, as part of the, part of the platoon that was, uh, that was causing this problem, the least we could do is invest in trying to fix it. And so I think there are ways to work your way out of that.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah. I, I think you're right. And I would remind people who talk about, "Things will change over time," that Martin Luther King wrote the Letter from the Birmingham Jail 100 years after President Lincoln instituted the Emancipation Proclamation, and there was still a long way to go.

Bracken Darrell: And, you know, when you read that letter, it's just mind-blowing how, how slow the progress has been since then, and yet how certain he was that we were on the cusp of this major change, you know? And it's heartbreaking to me to read letter, because I, I really feel like, "Gosh," you know, "why in the world didn't we move faster? What had happened?" I think we're moving fast now, but

not fast enough. But boy, we really didn't move fast enough after Martin Luther King, and it's heartbreaking.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah. I mean, that's almost 60 years ago. And most of my lifetime, I've watched that and it's been really gut-wrenching. And you look in the mirror, you realize we're all responsible, but the reality is, our record's not very good.

Bracken Darrell: I feel tota-, I feel such a sense of, uh, guilt, um, about that. I'm not, I'm not acting on guilt; I'm acting on, on the, the need to do it right. But I do think, you know, every one of us is responsible for not making the progress if we were in roles where we could've, and I certainly have been. And, uh... But, you know, th-, look, there's no time to sit around and, and, and, and whine about the past. You know, if you're, if you're, if you're part of the problem, you need to act and do stuff about the future. I mean-

Stan McChrystal: It's a great quote that says, "We shoulda done it then, but the next best time is right now."

Bracken Darrell: Absolutely. That's so true.

Stan McChrystal: Now I'm gonna take you back a little bit, to your first year as a CEO of Logitech. You walked into the company, you gave some guidance, and things started r- hitting all cylinders, and things just ran perfectly, and, and you had a lotta time off. Is that correct description?

Bracken Darrell: Uh, no. You know, it was, uh, it was a time of, I was, I came into a classic, you know, turn around problem. Well, you don't know you have a turn around until you turn it around, really. But I came into a company that was in trouble, and, uh, I was very, very excited. I didn't know the people, I didn't know the industry, um, I did have some skills that were transferrable into it, but, but basically, I came in with a lot of unknowns. I had a couple major advantages. One of the advantages I had was that the board had promoted someone wh-, and it, and the, and it hadn't worked out, and they had then had to bring back the chairman, who was a, who was a former CEO, and he was, he's a great person. And so they were all, like, looking for somebody to come in and figure out what to do, 'cause they felt sort of responsible for where we were. And they were partly responsible for where they were. So I had the advantage of, of, uh, coming in and... And then I

also had a great team. I mean, the people there were fami- amazing. I mean, a lot of them are still there today with me, most of them, you know? And I, and so it was a great team.

And so I came in and I, I would listen to everybody. And then, but I had this, this monster, monster advantage, 'cause I had brilliant advice from above and around me, but I had, but I knew that they had gone into the ditch together. So I would stop after every, like, incredibly informative session where we needed to make a decision. I'd say, "Now, I've gotta stop and think for myself, because these people all were here when we went off the r- track, so the only real value I have now is to think for myself." So I would stop and think for myself, 'cause... And you know, nine times outta 10, I probably made the same decisions everybody else in that room woulda, but one of 10, I made my own that was different. And I f-, and I knew I was an outlier, but I was perfectly fine with that, 'cause I knew that's why I was there.

Stan McChrystal: You know, I almost wanna delve into that further, because I'm gonna guess that some of the listeners to this are gonna find themselves, sometimes, in a situation very similar to yours, where they get into an organization, and whether they knew beforehand or not, but it's gonna need major change. And yet, there's often a hesitance to be as decisive as you need to be, particularly if you didn't grow up there. So y- you decided to think for yourself. How do you find the personal courage to go down roads, roads that haven't been taken in an organization?

Bracken Darrell: You know, I've been a, a l-, I apologize in advance for this somewhat long story. But when my parents, uh, my dad walked out when I was nine years old, 10 years old, and, uh, God rest his soul, so I'm more comfortable saying this publicly, but you know, he kinda left us high and dry. And he left my mom in particular, who was a first grade teacher with four kids, and, uh, and a back problem. And, and so I didn't feel sorry for myself; I felt terribly sorry for my mom. And, uh, and she was, uh, I just, a hu-, an incredible human being. And I, she kinda had a nervous breakdown during the first year. She's come home every night and, you know, and, and second guess everything in her life, you know, and every conversation she'd had during the day. And I, and for whatever reason, I'm sure my siblings had the same experience I did, but I found myself feeling like her therapist. You know, she would come and kinda download the issues of the day, and regrets of her life and everything else.

And I finally got to the point where I said, "Mom, you know, you're standing on a beach," I'd never even been on one; I grew up in Kentucky. "You're standing on a beach, you got a stick in your hand, you drag that stick right behind your heels, and everything behind you is over. Your whole life is right here in front of you, and everything behind you is worth nothing except learning from. So if you wanna learn from it, that's fantastic, but there..." So that, that really colored the way I thought about everything for the rest of my life, and I kept drawing that line behind my own heels every step of the way.

And so, um, when I came into Logitech as the new CEO and I, you know, I, and, and being surrounded with all these super smart people who seemed to understand exactly why we were there and what we needed to do about it, I kept thinking, "Well, you know, we're starting over right now; we're not starting over a year ago. [laughs] So, so today is the day." And so, I'm, I've got good common sense. I may not be the smartest person in the room, but I'll use my common sense, I'll listen very hard, and then I'll just try to use my best judgements. And I am not afraid of failing. I'm, I'm not afraid of failing; I'm much, much more afraid of success than I am failing. So if it doesn't work out, we'll risk manage it and do better.

Stan McChrystal: Well, I hope people are listening, because that's a great lesson. I mean, I've failed. I left the military under a cloud when I left. It was very disappointing, and it was that moment where you wonder about yourself. But then, similar to what you advised your mother, my wife really made it clear to me that we were gonna move forward, and everything behind us wasn't something we should re-litigate.

Bracken Darrell: That's awesome.

Stan McChrystal: And it's just been so valuable, because you just move forward, and okay, you do, you do the best you can. How do you mentor young leaders who may be standing on the precipice of something that's an unknown, like a leadership challenge in a business?

Bracken Darrell: You know, I'm, I actually, Stan, I, I don't think I'm a very good mentor. Um, I don't think I'm a particularly good coach, either, or maybe not even a good manager. I'm, I'm just, um, I'm honest with myself. I thought I, I always thought I was; I thought I was a natural, and I, and through my career, I got great feedback, you know, on this stuff. But it, when I really reflect on who I am and

what I do for my people, I realize how flawed I am compared to what I could be. So I'm working on that. I don't feel very qualified to answer your question about being a good mentor for young people.

What I do think I'm good at, maybe I'm, maybe I'm world class at this, is I'm really good at believing in people. And, and I'm really good at, when they take chances and they don't work, explaining to them why that's okay, you know? And I'm really good at demonstrating that, [laughs] because I don't let the things that don't work for me get to me much, you know? I try to risk manage really well; that's probably the one thing I really know I'm world class at. If you risk manage well, you can really take a lotta risks, and, uh, and that, and you learn a lot, and you can make a lotta mistakes. And I've got, uh, a resume full of them. So I recommend to everybody, be a good risk manager, and we could talk about that if you want to, um, and then be, be... You don't, even then, have to be fearless, because if you're good at risk management, it's not particularly scary. Be afraid of success. That's the one to be afraid of.

Stan McChrystal: [laughs] Not a lotta people gonna tell people that. So let's, let's talk a little bit more about that risk management, because when we talk about the risks, sometimes we talk about the risk of failing at some particular endeavor: losing an election, failing on a business deal, et cetera. But at the same, to succeed in that brings you intention with your values, i.e., you've got to do something that doesn't feel particularly right to get elected, or to win the contract. How, where's the risk lie, and how do you talk to young leaders about that kinda situation?

Bracken Darrell: Well, I think, you know, y- integrity's everything, you know? Y- you just, that's not a, a risk to manage. You'll never take a chance on your integrity. I don't care what y- the stakes are, I don't care what the opportunity is; your integrity's the one thing you can't gamble with. So you don't, um, so I don't, I don't think that's, that's something you ever... Now, if you're, if you find yourself faced with that, you find yourself in a, in a real moral dilemma, where you're, you're sitting there and, and for whatever reason, you're, you're being, uh, coaxed to cross the line, remind yourself one thing: it's not enough to say, "I won't cross the line." You actually have to stand so far away from the line that if somebody from a distance looked at you, they would say, "No, he's not over the line." It's not like, you don't have the, the advantage of instant replay in football, where they can film it and show you that you really didn't cross the line, you weren't outta bounds when you crossed, when you step into the, when you caught that pass. You don't have

that advantage. You have to make that advantage by making sure you are nowhere near that line. Don't even operate anywhere close to it. It's not worth it.

Stan McChrystal: You know, I think it was Adlai Stevenson who said of politics years ago, that the challenge of the presidency is doing what it takes to be elected and still being worthy of the job.

Bracken Darrell: [laughs] Oh, it's a sad statement about politics, I, I guess.

Stan McChrystal: It is, but I, I, I see a lot of current politicians in that, seemingly, in that contradictory position where they want to be one thing, but they do very differently because they believe it's expedient.

Bracken Darrell: Yeah. I don't know what to say about that except that that, that, I, uh, needless to say, I'm not a, I'm not, I'm not too big a fan of politics. Uh, I don't, I don't love them, but I do think they're important, and I think there are so many great politicians out there who... And by the way, there's, the new crop of politicians is great, too. I'm so impressed by some of the people that are, who are finding their way into politics now; it's, it's really inspiring to me. And I just refu-, I'm too much of an optist-, optimist, and, uh, I'm too much of an optimist to believe that you have to do, uh, you have to compromise it, your, your morals or your ethics, or even get close to that line to get into political office. So I would encourage anybody who's thinking, "Ah, I'd like to be a politician, but I don't wanna be like that." Well, do it anyway and prove that it can be done. There are a lotta people doing that.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, I think that's right, and I think it's up to us as voters and supporters to reinforce that when someone does do the kinds of things that we want.

Bracken Darrell: Or does the kinds of things we don't want. We should, we should stand up and say, "Hey, I'm sorry, it doesn't, that doesn't pass," you know? "I- it's unacceptable," you know? And I, I, and I refuse to, to accept that the i-, the idea that, "Well, everybody does it, so let's just take the lowest kinda, let's take the," you know, just accept that you're gonna have somebody cross the line left, right, and center and still get the, go ahead and elect them. I don't believe that.

Stan McChrystal: Talk about values a little more. You communicated a great story about your mom, who literally pulls you out of a small restaurant because the values that they have are so, uh, an opposite of what she believes in, and so that becomes a powerful life lesson. You're a b- y-, a young person and you go, "Wow, somebody's willing to do something." How do you teach young people now to develop their values, reflect their values, and, and move forward?

Bracken Darrell: Uh, you know, I think the best way is through example, you know? And by the way, I've had plenty of times throughout my life where my values have been challenged, you know, and I was never perfect, you know? I don't, I, I haven't met a perfect person yet, um, al- although you're, you're close, Stan. It's, you're very close. I, i-, you know, it's, it's, you can't be perfect. So what you, I think when you really are trying to, to teach this in other people, you gotta be authentic, you gotta be honest, and then you gotta realize that you're striving. You're always striving to be the best version of yourself you can possibly be. Um, and I don't, you know, I'm not a religious person, but I do believe in faith, you know, and, and a belief that, that some things just should be. And I think one of those is, you know, living your values. And it, it probably took me too long to really realize how important that is. But when you live your values, good things happen, you know? It's just amazing how, how good your life is when you align it with your values.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah, couldn't agree more. One of the things I've found as I got more senior in the military was, I would have interactions with, we'll say, 200 different soldiers in a day, many of whom would never meet another four star General in their entire time in the service, so there was that one very short interaction. And I had the chance to either have them walk away going, "Wow, four star Generals are good people," or walk away going, "What a jerk." And the reality is, I didn't always get it right. Every day there was some percentage where I would walk away and I'd say, "I blew that. I was impatient, I was arrogant," I was something. And I would go into my room at night, and I would beat myself over it. I mean, I would literally say, "I didn't get that right." And I, I came to believe that the key was not being satisfied with that, was saying, "Okay, I wasn't great today, but that's not the new standard."

Bracken Darrell: I love your story. There's so much in your story, you know? How much you cared about every person, you know? That you, that, and how, how hard you were on yourself that weren't delivering that, you know, kind of 100% for

every single person of those 200 a day you ran into. I love that story. And I think, you know, that kind of intentional leadership, you know, uh, two people that I, that come to mind when I think about that, um, and you know, there're, there're probably many in your life, but one of them you know of, and one you might not: Jack Welch at GE. You know, he was, he was a, he was an incredibly charismatic guy, and he didn't have any reason to try to impress you. But every single interaction he had with everybody, he was, he was really trying to inspire you. That was his, he believed in it. And it, and it wasn't, it was authentic; it wasn't just a rare interaction. And I mean really, really one on one, not in front of anybody. And I saw him do it to so many people, and he did it with me.

The other one's Susan Arnold, who I worked for at GE. There's, there's almost nobody who got inside people's skin in a more personal way, on a more consistent, in a more consistent way. And I don't mean just positive, but also very direct and clear. You know, those people who do that for you, it's such a gift, and, because they do touch thousands of people like you did. And I already knew you were that way, but I'm not surprised to hear you tell that story, 'cause it sounds like the same kind of, uh, uh, standard that you set in everything you do, and I'm, I'm, I'm not surprised you set it for inspiring every single individual you interact with.

Stan McChrystal: Bracken, people can look at someone like you and they can say, "Well, it's easy for him to be values-based and clear now because he's made it. He's succeeded." But go back and talk to either Bracken Darrell when he's 20, or talk to the next person coming along, who are worried about very practical things: making the next car payment, getting the next job, doing the things that are seemingly huge challenges of the moment, but later seem to have not been so bad. Give some advice to that person going forward.

Bracken Darrell: You know, I think the best thing you can do in that regard is write it down. You know, when I was about 26 or 27, it was probably the first time I really was explicit about what I, what I believed in, you know, the values for my life, um, and I failed against those values many times. But, but the, but the longer I lived with those written values, and I read, and by the way, I go back through that every single year, and I have every year my entire life. I, I think the first time was I- younger than 20. It was probably 22 or 23.

You know, so I go back through that every year by writing that down, and I start over again. I draw the line behind my heels and I say, "What are my values?" And

I don't go back and, and white out the last, or, you know, I don't go back and, and erase and edit; I literally start with a clean slate. They usually are about the same. But I, it forces me to remind myself who I really wanna be. It should not say who I am. You may not feel like you are that person when you write those values down; your values might be aspirational for you, and that's fine. I mean, in fact, that's great. Um, your, just like your goals are probably aspirational for you. But, but write down the values you wanna be. Write down the person you'd like to be, and then, uh, if you keep writing it down long enough and you keep working at it, you will be.

Stan McChrystal: That's a really effective, uh, technique. I'm gonna ask one final question, and it's tough, and I once asked my Yale Leadership Seminar to do this. And I asked them to write their own obituary, and I asked them to describe the things that they would like to have as the themes in that obituary. What would people say... If you were successful, what would people say about Bracken Darrell after you're gone?

Bracken Darrell: Well, you know, with my, my whole, you know, my whole view of things is s-, makes it so hard to answer a question like that, because I, I really am about the future, you know? So, but I, but that's where you're headed.

Stan McChrystal: Yeah.

Bracken Darrell: I don't really care about any credit for anything. I guess I, I, I hope that the obituary's not about me; I hope it's about some, uh, the, the career that somebody's off and running on, or the organization that's making a big impact on the world. And I hope my, I don't care if my name's even mentioned. Um, so I hope it's not an obituary, it's a, it's a f- headline story about something great that's happening, or somebody who's doing something great, and if I played any small part in that, I'd be proud of that.

Stan McChrystal: That's perfect. There's a great line from an old Clint Eastwood movie that I always like. He stands over a comrade, a young person who's been killed, and he says, "All I got to say is I rode with him, and I got no complaints."

Bracken Darrell: [laughs]

Stan McChrystal: And I guess if anybody could say that about us, that would pretty high praise.

Bracken Darrell: That's pretty high praise. I'm sure I would not get that praise. But... [laughs] At least not from my team.

Stan McChrystal: Bracken, you are a legendary leader, and you touch so many people. Not in the business success, but just in the success of how you do it. And so I wanna thank you on the part of all the listeners, and the part of Chris Fussel, who couldn't make it today, and of course, myself, personally, for all you've done, and for your generosity today.

Bracken Darrell: Well, I'm such an admirer of yours, and I really appreciate you having me on the show. I'm very humbled by the fact that you're asking me questions about my career. Um, we should flip the t- w-, in fact, I'll ask you to flip the, uh, script here, and you do that for my company and I'll interview you.

Stan McChrystal: I'd be honored. Thank you very much, Bracken, and have a great day.

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