

JEFF: And it's that... that's something else we've lost is the role of a leader. Is it moral purge or is it appeasement of, you know, their constituency, but also how do we talk to each other about differences? The way we do it in these forums, without it becoming polarized and poisonous.

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

ANNA: Stan and Chris know the power of the Operations & Intelligence, or O&I brief. As a part of Stan's efforts to transform Joint Special Operations Command, he leaned on Operations & Intelligence brief, or the O&I . It was a tremendously powerful tool that connected countries around the globe and drove the "battle rhythm" of the counterterrorist force.

This week's guest, Jeff Sonnenfeld, runs a similar forum at Yale University. Jeff, who is the Senior Associate Dean for Leadership Studies & a Professor in the Practice of Management at Yale University's School of Management, leads the CEO Summit, which brings leaders from top businesses, parts of government, and scholars from all corners to discuss important leadership topics.

In today's episode, Stan and Chris speak to Jeff about the CEO Summit. They discuss *how* and *why* Jeff created this format that, like the O&I, is a special tool to connect leaders everywhere against shared challenges. During the discussion, Jeff also speaks to the role of a leader: whether it is to have moral courage, or to appease the constituency. Jeff is among our most intelligent, thoughtful guests - we're grateful for his time.

Now, over to Chris.

CHRIS: I'd like to just dive right in we're building on the conversation we were just having. You know, one of the many things obviously you're known for is this executive roundtable session that, that you host, and I've heard Stan describe it. And we've had long conversations about the parallels between the way that he ran the counterterrorism units that he oversaw and what you try to do in that forum very well.

And it might not be an intuitive connection for a lot of folks, but I'm going to ask Stan in a second, just sort of build on that and describe why he did that. Because what I saw as a younger member of that force before I was on Stan's staff, I was just on the receiving end of it. And what jumped out to me, took me a little while to sort of connect the dots of what I thought was happening, was the ability and the willingness of a leader to put themselves into a very exposed position on this aggressive cadence.

We did this, we'll talk more about it during the discussion, but every 24 hours, there were thousands of people jumping onto one single platform to have a conversation. And rather than checking in, being told what to do next, we saw a senior leader and then leadership team,

facilitating conversations across boundaries because they could see connection points in our network that we wouldn't pick up on intuitively.

And so, you would say something, and they would say, "That's interesting. I think that connects to this idea over here, would you two explore that?" You know, of this very free flow of information and, you know, in years looking back, the whole, you know, one of the core concepts of network theory is the idea of emergence.

You know, things will emerge from a network that you can't possibly predict. And so, one of the ways to counter that is to allow and create the opportunity for emergence amongst your own people. And, we didn't talk about it in those terms at the time, but I think that's similar to what you've tried to build out and had been running there for years.

So with that set-up, Stan, I'd be curious if you see that connection or what you've seen Jeff do.

STAN: Oh, absolutely. When we developed the O&I, at first it was a briefing, intel people briefed, operations people briefed, and then everybody multitasks during it. And then they went their own way. And what we changed it to, was a two-way conversation and exchange, which kept people engaged to solve problems and move forward.

And then I remember you, you had me in your class some years ago, and then you invited me to a CEO Summit and I saw, you know, the glittering talent that was going to be there. And I thought what's going to happen. I was going to sit there, and I was going to hear great women and men tell me how great they were and I was going to multitask while they gave a series of speeches. And I was literally floored because there was this energy in the room, led by you, that changed that dynamic completely.

And so, I'm interested what made you start doing that? How do you get CEOs and, you know, great win men and women to live by that?

JEFF: Well, Stan, you, you have just given me the greatest gift of is to have the understanding of what I try to do come from anyone, means a lot to me, and that you understand backstage when I was trying to affect, what I've tried to create in terms of a learning environment, but, for anybody to compliment me also, in terms of the leadership qualities, of course, it was a great thrill, coming from you, pretty much takes my breath away. So, I couldn't imagine a higher compliment. I am very honored.

I, I wish we had become close buddies back 20 years ago. So what, what you guys, you know, and what you basically were, were pioneering yourself, aback, you know, Fort Bragg in the battlefield and others with groups of 20 and 60 in the rest breaking down the barriers across, special operations of, you know, getting Navy, Navy, Navy SEALs and, and getting Rangers and getting others to talk when they'd been in such protective, I don't know, silos if you will, is, it is so parallel to what we do.

I wish I could take some credit, but you were already doing it. I had started this back when I was working. For any other, any other set of colleagues, I will use the following expression, but I can't say in front of you, that I was "behind enemy lines," but I was, as the Yale-y, was up, actually reckless indiscretion of youth, was up at Harvard for 20 years.

And I, I wrote a book back up there on the shelf on CEO succession. It was my seventh or eighth book. And you guys who only write best sellers, wouldn't have this experience, but most of the rest of those books, I couldn't quite retire on, but this one had to do with CEOs at the end of the career called the *Hero's Farewell*, Oxford University Press book.

It took off and was there for a couple of seconds a bestseller. And I thought this could be my highwater market. I was hearing from all kinds of incumbent CEOs. We need a school for CEOs and even at Harvard, and you'll hate this, which is often as classified as the quote unquote "West Point of Capitalism," is that they did, we didn't have CEOs come together as peers.

We would prop up a CEO on a stage. They talked to cast of thousands. If we had two or three on campus on, the same day was considered a scheduling error. And people were sitting there passively genuflecting, applauding, trying not to offend and try to get a preemptive jump in recruiting or something. But the leaders weren't learning.

And as you know, that all Greek adage was, if it's okay to use, about the fish rotting at the top, from the head is I thought, you know, here are these great leaders that have accomplished so much. And in working with them on this research that I mentioned to you, I saw that they become increasingly isolated whether or not it was the protective guards around them, the swelling numbers of public relations, you know, platoons of, I can use that term with you guys of, of, of General's council and government lobbyists and others guarding them.

That they weren't hearing from carriers with bad information, this car is going to get shot and they're so busy. They're not the most reflective of people that, how are they going to learn? And I thought, if I can get peers together that respect each other, even though I'm wasn't of their station, I'm not a CEO and don't run some intergalactic enterprise, and yet they respect each other, if I can create a forum where they can challenge each other and then get out of the way of it, it could produce incredible learning.

Harvard was really ambivalent about it. I took off and it's just been soaring. We've been here at Yale for, for 20 years. And many times, Harvard has said, would you reconsider and come back, even between us, they said, we'd throw in the editorship of the *Harvard Business Review*, but you know, this is, and it taken off who was doing so well here.

So we're thrilled. And this is by the way, before *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *The Business Week*, Klaus Schwab and the World Economic Forum and others going. And perhaps you might think unwisely, I helped them all enter the space. I knew none of them would be crazy enough to create this kind of a forum to be an actual competitor, because there is, as you pointed out in your opening, an element of risk.

STAN: Yeah. There's, there's absolutely an element of risk. What you've created is a training environment for CEOs. You've also created a community of CEOs. I think you'll remember some months back, you had a really special session on COVID and you put out some very tough questions to all of us said, "What do you think about this? What are you doing about it?"

And my sense was, two things were happening. They were teaching each other, but they were also buttressing their will, as you use some polls and some other techniques. So, as you create this community, what does it look like? I mean, what does it look and feel like?

JEFF: You know, I'm glad you used that example.

That was... especially we thought a successful learning intervention. We really felt we catalyzed something there. And, it was the second try on the topic, which I'll explain to you, but I'm so, so thrilled you got it because Stan, as you know, I've been a fan of the mesmerizing talks you give, but the O&I experience where you replicate what I'm doing in your own way, and exceeded for sure. I hadn't seen that. So, I must admit in our CEO summits of where I see you sitting out there and these forums, I was always afraid you are judging me, harshly thinking, "Yeah. But where's that giving us the list of ho- tos," because I don't in this forum, I don't provide that for them.

And in fact, sometimes even the topic that we've given, it can be an inadvertently, a bait and switch. For example, that coming out of our COVID talk, we were talking about how to recharge communities and economies and companies. I first tried it last June, and all we had CEOs, you name it, the heads of all the airlines, pharmaceutical companies... financial institutions.

And, uh, and I, the first call was to go to Ken Frazier of Merck, who... I just congratulated him on a CNBC appearance he had just been on moments earlier, in the seconds after the, really the immediate aftermath, not seconds, but just a day or so after the killing of George Floyd, and Ken Frazier, who was one of the most prominent, black executives business leaders, Just start off by saying, well, you know, George Floyd could have been me. At that point, I just threw my whole program out the window and we have a real time pivot.

And at this point, the CEOs don't complain because after he spoke, Alex Gorsky, who, as you know, is a huge fan of yours, the CEO of Johnson & Johnson, the "frenemy" of the CEO of Merck, I'm talking about things that they can do to help reach out across communities, CEO of Goldman Sachs and Walmart and Target started talking about what they were doing to change their roles as messengers in their companies, instead of their external ambassadorial role on something like racial justice, they talked about how do they learn not to be patronizing as a messenger. The CEO of American Airlines, Doug Parker, said, well, you know, just coming up here, I got on a plane to where he was going to do this telecast from, and I bounced from an American Airlines flight. I had to take a Southwest Airlines flight, if you can imagine. And I was carrying a book called *White Fragility* and the flight attendant on it sat next to me cause she wouldn't know what was all about, and at the end asked for his card. He got quite emotional between... she was very spiritual and she was, she was an African-American, a Black flight attendant at Southwest Airlines. She looks at his car and said, wait, you're the CEO of American Airlines. And my mom works there and they embraced despite COVID. But the messages got

out of that, that you instantly see is talking about, not what I planned to talk about, we're going to where their concerns were and where the society's energy was, is leadership at the top of the institutional ambassadorial level with Gorski, Merck, and others who talked about it, leadership and within the enterprise, how you make meaning how you message and things. And basically, we're saying that they reversed focus and town hall meetings who did the talking instead of the CEO, talking down at Goldman Sachs and others, they, they reversed it.

But then how do you personally model as a leader? With Doug Parker and American Airlines is that we have three different levels of leadership instead of getting a speech on it, they talk from their own experience. And that is what we did with the COVID discussions too, when we call you had to restart the topic, six months later, the next forum, is the brilliance these guys have is not what their public relations people draft for them to read out in these awful speeches that are possibly Stan and Chris, even more boring than our colleagues' dogs on campus. That's off the record. It is when they try to be a scholar, that's not their shtick.

Their brilliance, and these people are as brilliant, generally as any scholar, if not more so in many cases, it's their brilliance to the decisions they've made. It's the wisdom of action that we want to get from them. That's why I don't want them giving speeches to pretend to be scholars. And that's why I don't want to ambush them. Nobody has to talk. But if somebody walks in in the early days, I used to, I used to check if they had them, cause I'm not beholden to any of them.

And to get a mixture, just like you would break down those barriers across different units is to have not one person represent all of pharma... is you want somebody who can, who can ask naive questions, have a spectrum of ideas. Here's how we deal with nations, going through a people's like in today's headlines and we see different three or four different approaches as they start to talk about it, then legitimates, everybody else can talk.

It isn't just putting out the late ... or somebody to give a speech. And then who are we ... the challenge is that everybody's questions are legitimate.

CHRIS: Jeff, It's a great, it's a great point. I have a comment and a question that either both of you can certainly the build on. The comment is just as you're talking and reflecting on a experience I had... like I said, we all talked to groups a lot.

I've, since I got out of the military, just become, most comfortable if I'm talking to a group that's more than three people just never having a deck, or if it's early stage, we just want to explore some ideas, just bring a whiteboard out or a flip chart. That's the only backdrop I'm never really comfortable in front of, because I think it allows for very non-directional conversations right. Now, if you're briefing a project plan or whatever, that's totally different, but I don't know. I've never figured out how to brief ideas off of two-dimensional PowerPoint deck just doesn't it doesn't make sense in my head. I don't remember a discussion I had one time with a group, I didn't know anyone afterwards, one of the execs walked up to the new C-suite folks ... and said, you know, I was about to just hop on my iPhone and it gets me emails done. Cause I never liked listening to guest speakers. But when you walked out with just a whiteboard and started talking, you got me for at least three minutes.

Cause I thought it was going to be interesting or terrible. Either way, it was going to be fun to watch so that you're taking somebody to notes and throwing them out. Like I think gets to a part of people's brains. They go, wow. I get to be a real person again, and we can have an honest exchange. And I think that's part of what that was the magic of what I saw Stan build out in the military and the O&I concept, the Ops and Intel update.

One of the questions that he, I watched him field regularly was, how do you measure the impact of this? So you just gave some great examples, but I'm, I'm wondering if you've thought about that over the years. I mean, for the three of us who have lived in that world, it's pretty, it's pretty obvious that it's a thousand little wins all the time, but do you ever have to explain to that, that to folks when they're thinking about joining or new members, or how do you, how do you tackle that?

JEFF: Well, there are, there are some big takeaways, profound moments that people see that they've had impact. And by the way, you're exactly right when you talked about stepping away from being married to PowerPoint and teleprompter and all the rest, sometimes you need it, sometimes different forums.

Sometimes you buy because of the crowd, it has to be a passive audience, but if you really want the audience engagement and you want people to think on your feet, you don't want all that. Now, as Stan will tell you, I do have sometimes some devices that I'll turn to at time begin to a particularly sensitive area in some of the politically charged or personal setback arenas. I try to get to it with some humor. Never humor's ever going to be anybody's expense, but there's a way to get at things either through some bi-partisan clips of humor, you're an equal opportunity offender of sorts, in modest ways, or else a lot of times, in a sense, since you both know Ash Carter, so well, you know... Ash still keeps going. They'd probably come to the 45 of these or so, but Steve Schwarzman of Blackstone, some others would be coming for a long time. I've got clips of them saying all sorts of things from past years and they, sometimes the conditions change and they're giving a different message than they gave us with great certainty before.

And as they walk out there, they realize I, I start to put up a clip, they know, oh my gosh, they're going to see a reversal. And it's not to humiliate them. It's to show that you have to be adjusting the different times, but sometimes, you know, I'll have maybe a 120 very short clip, ready, and to use five or six of them, perhaps, but because I don't know where the group's going to go.

But in terms of measuring impact, which is where you went with that question, but you had two great parts to it. The measuring impact is there's sometimes our public policies after Sarbanes Oxley rolled out, for example, the CEO of Raymond James, who, was head of the financial services round table at the time, Tom James just said, you know, this section 404 is a disaster.

It's really crushing all of our small business customers. We had a lot of them there of mid-sized companies. I said, well, tell me what you want because we had the chairman of the Securities Exchange Commission, Bill Donaldson. We had the leading voice on, on the left. There are only five commissioners there, Cynthia Glassman from the right.

And the leading commissioner on the left, was there. So right then and there, we had three people who were able to shape a policy. They set up a study commission to change the section 404 part of Sarbanes-Oxley just had an excessive reporting in there. There was no limit to it.

And there's securities exchange. So they could, they could address the there's sometimes particular policy issues, sometimes there's something that's specific as, since it was several CEO's back, I can use the name, it was David Glass of Walmart, had a false start on the succession plan, mark. I mean, we've had those in some others, I shouldn't name that are more recent and they retooled their succession plan and told us all about it afterwards, which was, you know, amazingly candid.

We found that the Founder of McKinsey met the Founder of the Boston Consulting group, McKinsey as an octogenarian, and the founder of Boston consulting as a late octogenarian, they hated each other, but we had dramatically different models of how professional service firms should be led. McKinsey's model, you could see, as he talked, which has been institutionalized into the kind of the culture of McKinsey was that's aromanticized view of a law firm. Well, others will say, well, that's the way law firms actually... but McKinsey made it work. Marvin Bower was that, that founder of McKinsey, the founder of Boston Consulting Group, Bruce Henderson, said, "No, you got that all wrong."

Fundamentally, you hire people better than yourself. You have to watch out. Cause they're all out to devour the alpha males. You have to keep bringing them in and then throwing them out again. And BCG is most pernicious competitors are actually, spinouts like Bain and others that left there, we had some dramatic differences of a confrontation, really different models.

That is very helpful. We we've had all the different airlines CEOs, and they converge a little bit more in terms of their values today than they did in their past. But you can see it's not industry specific. We have most recently, as Stan was talking about on COVID, is our whole spectrum of ideas from the pharmaceutical industry and what they were doing, what was going to work and what those implications would be.

So, you get a lot of learning that way. When you get the diversity of ideas and then people realize they're going to take different practices, we'll bring them back in a future session and they tell us what's changed or what they have. But, um, those are some of the ways from, from policy to the best practice that's shared to really, changed management files and things that we have seen.

STAN: Jeff, in terms of measuring the effectiveness of something like this. I'll give you a little bit of feedback. One is I pay attention the whole time. And I pay attention cause it's interesting and I pay attention cause you cold call on people. And I find that really effective for two reasons. One, you show me that my participation, my presence matters. You're paying attention to that. And also because, you know, obviously don't want to be there and not, you know, have my head in the game when we do that. So, to me, another measure of effectiveness is: there are many CEOs that I have met before or know about, but through that interaction, although when have a

personal conversation in front of everybody, we'll chat, we'll connect, and I will establish a relationship from that. And I find that to be of exceptional value. So, you know, just give you that feedback.

JEFF: Thanks, Stan.

STAN: However, you challenge people. I mean, you challenge people in those sessions and you challenge them in your written documents as well, where you go out and you say, sometimes you'll call a CEO out and say, you should have gone left and you went right.

Or, you know, whatever it is, how do you, how do you get that balance, right? Where you can poke the group and sometimes individuals but not lose the, the sense of community belonging?

JEFF: Thank you for appreciating that dimension is, I, I do push them hard. Nobody's ever going to be though embarrassed. Nobody's ever going to be ridiculed, but if they want to talk, we warn them is going to be, it's going to be candid. If it feels really edgy. And this is something which is hard to do through, the remote, learning we've had to do through COVID. But I walked up to the desk, drop a sheet of paper if we get into thus and such, give somebody particularly sensitive, give them a little heads up. We're going down that path. They get a nod of thumbs up, thumbs down or something if we've taken that path. But it didn't, they've not walked in there prepared for where we're going to go. And that's of course, by design.

I also have an, even though I know the, the delivery never looks as smooth and prepared as. Your heritage would have you think, that nobody would confuse this for looking like, our trained military at its best because there's an, a carnival like element to it that you wouldn't ever want to see in the battlefield, but there actually is, as you would know, extensive preparation has taken place backstage.

So, everybody in the room that, you know, in everybody's room that you don't know, I know a huge amount at the time I'm there. Some of it won't stay with me. Some of these people I will have known for decades, I will have known their predecessors. In some cases, their predecessor's predecessor, it's the advantage of being old in some of these, you know, I've started really with the founding generation of the building, a business round table and knew them all well, it is that, that I I've researched the, the Dickens out of everybody there. We know what that I'm going to start to surface there: celebrate their successes, but also, uh, celebrate, uh, you know, surface their setbacks. And if I start down the path of the setbacks, a lot of times they'll let me tell the story, cause I'm afraid it could be too raw and then they'll take it on, which is great.

I'd rather it come from their words. But at background preparation is really important. I don't walk in there not knowing who they are and, and that's helpful because it's not just the vanity, you know, and this is one of the things I did like and learned about the Harvard Business School that we had to memorize who all of our 180 students were by day one, be able to call on them whether or not they shaved put on lost hair or whatever it was.

But between the photo, you vastly, you still have to know who they are. And that's, I always thought I used to think, some would think that that was a cheap vanity it's an integrating device. It's not it shits on one hand, it shows that you care to know who your audience is. But secondly, there are tools you have available to cause cause we'll see connections that they don't see between one another to make those bridges, somebody who has done something very similar in a really different industry, a different vein of life, that helps them out a lot.

And also, I know how they got out of a jam. So, if I'm setting somebody up, I'll never walk them out and not know how to help them get back in. If they feel they've gotten exposed. I want to know they're never going to walk out of the humiliated. Only one time. Did that happen? The CEO of one major forest products company attack the CEO of another major forest products company.

And brought up the fact that the guy's wife ran off with them to some Caribbean island and left him or something. It was particularly gratuitous. That was, that was really hard. There was an, another awkward moment, where you know, two retired CEOs added on an old battle. Usually you're ready for that drunk in the back of the room.

But those, those two times, you know, linger with me forever. Cause I think I got the group back, but those two guys never wanted to be together again. But everybody who comes through our events all come back because they, they didn't feel humility. They felt, it was felt was worthy of their time. So, thank you for, for picking up on that, but the, the preparation... and I guess one other thing, as you mentioned, that seems to be important on engagement, which is sometimes part of some of my colleagues to understand is we do go deep on topics, but you don't have to go long to go deep.

Sometimes you can have penetrating depth. And then move on, uh, that, um, not everybody is interested in the, the final word on, on zero carbon or a nanotechnology or on understanding cryptocurrency or whatever, but there's somebody in the room is interested in everything and it's good to know a little bit about everything, but, what we do is we keep the topics moving because their attention spans while these are some of the smartest people on earth, unlike a lot of colleagues back on campus, they have a shorter attention span, and that's often what made them great and they want to move on. So that, that finding those segues and those connections. So, it doesn't seem rough, but they keep the thing moving into other areas too, that we don't have to spend a whole day on what the risk factors are in terrorism with cybersecurity. We'll get to it, but, and there'll also be some, "gee could have done more on this topic or that topic," yeah, and traded off what in the limited time that we have at the CEO's attention. So tell me what we shouldn't have done to get into something else.

STAN: Yeah, that for our listeners, I want to hit two words that just really stick with me that you used. One is preparation and the other is respect, and they're actually intertwined because you do so much preparation, and it actually is great respect to the people who participate because you know what they know, you know, the context of it. And you know, when to ask it and you do it in a way that makes people want to participate. When I was commanding JSOC, we were spread

across 76 different bases. So often we would have very young intelligence analysts working out of an embassy somewhere, a thousand miles from the larger basis.

And they would be called upon to participate. And when they came up on the screen, because we were using virtual for everything, I knew their name. And I would say, "Susan" and I had a cheat sheet because my staff wanted me to be able to greet everybody. And you see a 22-year-old, how they respond when the commanding general has never met him in person knows their name, and then asks a question when they finish their comment, just to show that what they, what they do matters. And so...

JEFF: That it is important. David Rockefeller once told me that he had 50,000 people on a first name basis. Eventually you and I come almost close to that, but he had a briefing book for every town when he'd come in there where he would get off to speed and get into the family issues and business challenges and things, and wherever he was in the world, that seemed to be a, a great idea. And it's very important. It does show respect, and it isn't that you are somehow using a sleazy manipulative device. It's showing, it's showing care and there's also, you can help them better if you have that context and you have the knowledge that you've invested. So, I completely, completely agree with you. And, a lot of people don't put that time in to know who the audience is and, and it falls flat.

STAN: Well, I've never seen anyone do it as well as you do Jeff, but now we're going to play hard ball because now we're going to switch questions a little bit. I'm going to ask you about our government and politics now, and in a little bit into business leadership, because there's a sense among many Americans that we're struggling, that we are not being the leaders or the citizens we need people to be.

Why do you think that's the key? Do you think that's a correct observation? And if so, why?

JEFF: You not only can, but you do help so much in this front because you understand that, even in civilian life, that a leader doesn't have to be there as an appeaser. Jefferson had asked this difficult question in the early days of our nation, Thomas Jefferson, you know, wondered, the question about how, when a, a leader should be a representative of a constituency, and when a leader gets in front of the constituency and pushes them in a new direction that they didn't want to go in. As, you know, a lot of the ascendance of Steve Jobs, his greatest innovations from, you know, the iPhone and other things, were coming at a time where there are a lot of books out there on being a customer-centric organization.

He told me he hated that concept. They can't customer-centric... that's asking and the person rowing a boat, if they ever thought of, you know, a power engine, you know, an outboard motor, but it didn't have the concept of it. They wouldn't know they needed that. It was a possibility is that sometimes you bring somebody different that the customer didn't know.

And when you think of a constituency... customers bring something new to them, but also your own work teams is to bring something new to them and in public office, unfortunately, we're seeing that pendulum swing. We have that balancing act of, are you there as a representative?

And we could pejoratively call that as an appeaser, or are you there as a moral pillar of somebody who's trying to show a righteous different path? Unfortunately, it's too long, so far towards the direction of political survival. JFK's great book, of course, *Profiles in Courage*, were uniformly people who went against their constituents. There were people who, whose political career suffered. The Governor Slaton, who went after the release of Leo Frank, who was wrongly accused of the, of a murder of a young woman in a pencil factory in Atlanta.

He released the guy and ultimately the person wound up... sadly, uh, he, he had him wanted and pardoned, Leo Frank, and sadly a mob got him and, and lynched him, back in the early part of the last century, and Governor Slaton was driven out of office. Is that virtually everybody in Kennedy's book suffered.

Ken Fraser at Merck led an interesting move in the summer of August of 2017. No matter, you know, how you feel about Democrats, Republicans about is that having, Nazi trample through a peaceful demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Trump who was not involved in that remotely, after the murder of one of the, the young peaceful protestors, came out with a, a modest statement.

That was, it was not great, but it was okay, on the Saturday, I think the murders are Friday, it's on a Sunday for no reason. And so many of our joint friends in the administration were horrified. He went back into it, in a moral equivocation of, of both sets of that.... So then Ken Frazier, the CEO of Merck who grew up in and really, gang-ridden slums of north Philadelphia and had gone through such difficult, origins, family read, three newspapers a day.

And he, it was amazing. He winds up as the CEO of Merck, one of the greatest companies in the world and was very active in the president's business advisory council said, you know, I can't stand there as a potted plant for photo ops and I, and he just pulled the Merck board that's Sunday night, I'm going to announce I'm leaving the next morning, Monday. When he did it started such a ripple effect, a slight delay, but then ultimately all three of those groups and the media thought there were two, there were three, all of them disintegrated.

It's the first time in American history that we had the nation's commander in chief, and I know not technically commander in chief of business leaders, commander in chief of people in the military, but still, a nation commander in chief or a call the national service. And the versus community said, no, that's never happened before. So, you can see things like that were a bit, and he didn't intend this to be a political statement. It was his own moral statement, and he warned the Merck board he was going to do this, not that he wanted their blessing, but just if they didn't agree, then they would probably have a separation of a parting of their paths.

But Merck stood behind them. But so did you know Walmart, UPS, PepsiCo, you name it? They, they all hung together and it's a, it's a shame when that kind of stuff happens. We do need to see bold leadership lead. There's the last line if you ever remember reading Henrik Ibsen *Enemy of the People*, there's a physician in the, in the town, in this play in a Norwegian town who discovers the town's water supply is polluted. And because he had sent out some vials, people

were coming to the spas there and getting sick and the town didn't want to hear about it because it was an economic magnet to come to those spots.

So he got up at a town meeting and made it a public fact. He got stoned and run out of town, but the last line in there that was so powerful, that Epton said, is sometimes the strongest person, he actually said the strongest man, but today he said, "the strongest person in the world is the person who can stand alone."

And sometimes it's those courageous acts. And we talk about these things and the catalytic effect that these of these CEO summits is they'll start to talk about things that they had done that were courageous, lonely moves that light fires, others to come out and talk about that, it's it. You, you certainly see that, that both the individual courage and the collective action are what we need to work together in business.

And as you know, we've had President Trump, at our events and President Biden at our events. We've had President Bush, President Carter. And, so you try to stay nonpartisan. I mean, we have all sides there. And we'll have some pretty candid discussions and sometimes it gets pretty heated, but never, is it personal. It's never accusatory. And that's something else we've lost: is the role of a leader. Is it moral courage or is it appeasement of the constituency, but also how do we talk to each other about differences the way we do in these forums, without it becoming polarized and poisonous?

As, as you know, I've got points of view on things, but if I wind up running the event around my own personal, political, I'll write about some of them, but at the forum, I try to show a point of view at all, other than the stand on my head to make sure that every other point of view is as has been tolerated. Now, at some point, you draw a line in the sand and you say, you know, you don't want to give equal time to patriotism versus treason. You know, at some point we would have to decide we're not going down there, but they're not making it personal is the objective.

CHRIS: Jeff, one last question, if I could, and this is just, of course pre-run, just personal motivation. You've built out this amazing thing and been just personally invested in it for so long and it, it produces great results as you've spoken about. In today's world, people would say, "oh, this is great. You've built a platform like this." You know, everyone wants to build some sort of platform. They get leverage out of it and you figure out who you're gonna sell it to. You make a million bucks and you go do it again and again.

You've taken a different approach, which I have great respect for, and invested deeply in this thing for, for years on end. Can you talk about that decision? Because I think it's something that younger generations of leaders, and I would put myself in that, in that camp are losing sight of" the playing the long game and the impact that that can have it gets lost in the, you know, the unicorn discussion. Everybody wants to be on a private jet by the time they're 30 and it doesn't afford building out a sustainable high impact platform like you've described.

JEFF: Thanks. So, there's an issue. And this issue in, in, in teaching, MBAs for over 40 years, you know, that we live in a society and perhaps people pursuing an MBA, especially epitomize

it, of climbing hierarchies. And there has to be different ways of defining success and having impact. There are many people, in, you know, in the military has had this challenge of course, with the “up or out” system. And yet you find ways where people can be, I mean, you just saw that, what just over this past weekend, or we, we learn now that who was a great advisor to Generals, Austin and Miller of course was Joe Dunford, the former chairman, of course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The military has sort of gone into “mothballed stature.” We find that these Merlin type mentors, there's a way to continue to define success and have impact without them still climbing some hierarchy somewhere. In fact, the second World War was really caught on thin ice with you guys because if I'm wrong, don't tell me now, but it was in many ways a, uh, you know, some people like to say, you know, that it was, it was a triumph of first... because of, you know, what happened around D-Day. But there are a lot of ways, it was a triumph of retirees to that. I believe that Patton and MacArthur, Montgomery, uh, were all fully retired and de Gaulle, you know, he came out four times.

For that matter, non-military Churchill had been retired, is that there are opportunities to serve coming back in, to be ready and prepare is so important, but you don't have to be climbing a hierarchy, all the time to make a difference. And that frankly, I didn't know that when I started this and began my career, you can, you know, sometimes with success you get typecast or caught in the quicksand or whatever it is, it's enormously gratifying to have the kind of impact that we're talking about right now.

It's hard at times because I'm working at a group that's always perilously close to their own retirement. So, you have to keep re-engaging there's no, there's no legacy Sally, or whether I've got decades to feed off of a great relationship, that I forge that great relationship is going to be very short-lived and you're kind of like in a treadmill going back and reestablishing it.

But, but, you know, thanks for pointing that out. It is a, it is a very gratifying and you have to have a long timeframe in terms of the institution. But then, also appreciate the short timeframe of the, of the turnover, but thanks, it's a way of sort of defining career and a lateral way, like not just in, you know, people who leave the military and continue to get physicians do this and attorneys, teachers that we admire and stuff, that there are many that are many professions that, they define, their expertise and their greatness by... they make, without climbing a hierarchy. And that is a little bit different from the way a lot of our, our younger executives and students would think.

STAN: Yeah, I, I'm going to close, Jeff, by, by thanking you, as a friend and as an admirer for what you do. You know, one of the things that I think people should remember, and, and you, I know will, a lot of what we do is indirect, particularly as teachers or as community builders.

And when a CEO goes out and performs a little bit better than they might had, had they not been a part of that community or when a graduate of the school of management is successful and does it in a moral and, admirable way your fingerprints are on both. And that's the thing. I think, where as we get older, I certainly do. I take incredible indirect pride in what those people contribute. The people that I care so much about, and I, and I was lucky enough to be around. I

think your... it'd be impossible to measure the impact of Jeff Sonnenfeld. Cause you'd have to measure so many different data points and put them all together, but it's extraordinary.

JEFF: Thanks. If only my wife had seen this, I'm going to have to get a copy, if you ever like Rodney Dangerfield around the house, not getting any respect. I appreciate that. Had anybody on the planet said it, again, coming from you, uh, you, you could probably see on the screen, my complexion has changed. I'm hushed and I should've been more humbled through it all, but, but just what those comments allow, and I, we all try to do our part and I sort of found my niche. I could never do what would you guys have done through your career and admire it enormously and the nations of the world have benefited from it. I'm just trying to do my part as well. So, thank you.

STAN: Oh, that's huge. Well, Jeff, my thanks.

JEFF: Oh, thank you.

CHRIS: Yeah, just, uh, just a great discussion. Not surprising. I mean, Jeff's a master of his trade. Did you learn anything different about the way he approaches those round tables?

STAN: I didn't learn something different, but I walked away... we talk about leadership and leaders and he convenes leaders. But the reality is, the leader of the summit that he puts together is Jeff Sonnenfeld.

And so, he doesn't run. As he said, he doesn't run a corporation, he doesn't run a college. He doesn't have political power, but he's got moral suasion and he's got credibility because he has created a community. He empowers other people in it, and it makes him the essence of a leader in my view.

CHRIS: Yeah. It's an interesting one. I'm glad we, I wasn't sure how much time we're going to spend on that topic. And I'm glad we went so deep on it with him because it is, it is unique. And, I know you and I, I think you've, you've just read as well, *The Premonition*, Michael Lewis's book. And part of that's about the, you know, the last year and a half the pandemic and Michael Lewis, just being a great storyteller.

He talks about these sort of, sub networks that start trying to get ahead of this, you know, health professionals and scientists, et cetera, that put together these sort of secret roundtables. And which is fascinating, but it's, there's so much that you can gain from those sorts of conversations. And I loved his vignette at the end of like: Hey, I, this, this network has real power. We can convene, I could start this at seven o'clock at night. And we can have some really, really busy executives together in 12 hours. And you're not going to just suddenly do that. Right. He's got years of investment to make something like that happen and just sort of connecting the dots to the last year and a half. We don't do that enough. We don't have these cross-functional networks that are ready to come together. And even when it does, as Lewis lays out in his book, people have to break all sorts of rules silently to make it possible. I think we just, we lose so much by not pulling leaders like that together on a regular cadence.

STAN: Yeah. I just finished Michael Lewis's book on your recommendation and loved it. And what I walked away with is no, we often talk about, you need to get the structure, right? You need to lock in good processes, but I would also say that sometimes you need to not let the structure or the processes constrain you.

You've got to create unexpected communities. You've got to empower unlikely people who bring specific capabilities or passion or talent to something, and these things that gotta be organic. And so, they've, you've got to create an environment where they can grow, and they can have the kind of impact that is necessary.

CHRIS: I just had a conversation within the last 24 hours with an executive that our group works with... who is in the process of going through something like that, building out this sort of structure. And one of the points I made to that, that exec, was that I love your, we haven't talked about this a long time. So, your reaction or observations on it, said, you know, you have a set... I don't, it doesn't matter what they are, but have a consistent set of questions that people get comfortable hearing you ask. And it's sort of like, I use the "Pavlov's whistle" sort of example, like people are gonna know when you start talking about X, this executive is going to say one of these three questions, you know, how, why does that, how does that tie to the strategy? How does it, whatever it is... like, but be consistent. Don't say it differently every time ask the same question.

And before you know it, they're going to answer those before you have to ask them. And then you can ask the next series of questions and you're using those as education tools to get people thinking at the right level. Just curious, any, any thoughts on that.

STAN: Yeah, no, I, I think the power of good questions is extraordinary. In two ways: one, it allows you to expand the conversation, to force people, to, to think further than they probably would otherwise. And two: it's, it's another sign of respect. If I am asking someone's thoughts and opinions, if I'm in willing to listen, then it is a way to engage them more than, than if it's, I'm walking around just giving people orders.

CHRIS: Yeah. And I think it breaks down and it sounds like Jeff clearly does, does that, in his group, I mean, I think he has to break down, I'm guessing like the, the, sort of the powerful personalities make everybody human, leaders that are at the center of that. The CEO that is trying to communicate like this, that the general officer, flag officer, that's trying to communicate with a force, has to break down his or her presence as the intimidating factor.

So, I think question asking is, is a, is a tool towards that end. It's like, I don't know the answer to this. I need you to answer it for me, rather than a traditional, bureaucratic approach that might say, send me all the reports and then I'll tell the team all the good news are all interpreted or I'll seem like the, the great leader up front. So it's, it's interesting to see his... I mean, in a weird way, he's doing similar to what you did except the whole room would be these, you know, every senior leader in the military, around the world, getting together for these conversations and you're creating, getting them all to be human with one another.

So it's the power of that sort of forum is really impressive to hear him walk through.

STAN: Yeah. And the, and the power of questions that ask someone's opinion. I don't know how many times we've either experienced or seen or been guilty where we go to someone and we say, what's the situation? Give me the numbers?

And then the implication is giving me the information. I will make a decision and give you orders. And instead, if you go to somebody and say, "What should we do about the situation now? What should happen next?" It's a completely different conversation.

CHRIS: Why do you think we lose that? Cause you say that to leaders and they... it's intuitively everybody wants to be that. Most people want to be that, that leader. What gets in the way of it?

STAN: Great question. I think we, we sometimes just forget, you know, we, we get in the moment, and we don't think enough. We don't think about what's the, how's the other person in the conversation thinking? How are they going to react?

CHRIS: Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, and despite all that, you know, you can look around the world in any direction right now and see some, you know, massive crisis. But so many of them are these really complex issues that you, whether you're an expert on or not, I can guarantee you one thing: there are people that knew the problem, and they just weren't given the right audience to share that with, they weren't pulled in early enough, there's a thousand reasons why it didn't happen.

And it's very rarely, in my experience, evil people. It's not some jerk. It's not, some are not some idiot that doesn't deserve the job. It's really smart people trying to work incredibly hard, and they can't connect those dots fast enough. And I think what Jeff does is a great example of trying to get ahead of those sorts of things.

STAN: Yeah. I mean, the thing about Jeff is you want to participate. You want to participate because you like him and you want to participate because he's created a good venue. If it was more combative, it was more edgy, and he was pushy, I think a lot of people would find an excuse not to be there and others would find an excuse to very much curtail their answers.

And instead, Jeff creates an environment where you feel like you're all part of seeking a solution and there's a, there's an art to treating people that way.

CHRIS: Yeah. We, you know, we get the question all the time when we're doing work like this for clients. When, when do I know that this sort of communication structure is working? And I always say it's, when people are asking to be there. Nobody wants another meeting when people are banging on the door to be part of it, you know, it's successful.

So great discussion, really an exceptional human being on so many levels. So we appreciate him being a part of this.

STAN: Perfect.

Yeah. All right. Do we, you want to go straight into those other conversations, the prep, or do you want to, I can let these guys go and I can go down on my iPad, whatever works for you.

Yeah. We got the Annie duke, which will take 10 to 15 minutes and then we'll talk about that.