CHRIS: Looking forward to today's discussion with Tyson Voelkel. Tyson is a name that you may know deeply if you are associated with Texas A&M or you may never have heard of. But he is a friend of ours, Stan and myself, we've known him for quite a while. Really an impressive leader. And we wanted to talk to him today because he has such a unique position. He's the President of the Texas A&M Foundation, which is a massive endowment to support the institution and efforts amongst the students and research, et cetera.

He'll talk more about that during the podcast. But the gravity and the many lenses that are constantly watching him and his team and what they're accomplishing with non-profit dollars is… it's very interesting to hear his perspective on that constant pressure to raise money, constant pressure to maintain strong relationships with an extended network, something we believe in deeply, and a constant pressure to demonstrate what they are leveraging those dollars toward.

So, a thoughtful person in that role, but also an interesting history. You know, he was the class of '96 out of A&M himself, had great leadership roles when he was at A&M as a student, went on to serve 12 years in the infantry, in the US Army. And then went back into, ultimately, back into A&M after a bit of time in the financial world.

And one of the takeaways here that you'll see is, you know, great leadership is great leadership and he's one of those multi-domain leaders [who] has been able to apply skills that he probably wanted to as a young cadet at Texas A&M into many different professional areas of focus throughout his career.

So, a leader that we can all learn from, we really appreciate Tyson taking the time to join us today. So now over to the discussion.

Tyson, thanks for taking the time to join us today. We're really looking forward to the discussion. Our listeners have heard about your background, the size of the enterprise that you're in charge of there. And so, we're really looking forward to just a conversation around what it means to lead in that space as a connector between so many different, strong players, strong institutions. You just have an amazing amount on your plate and your team's plate at any given time. So, we're looking forward to the discussion.

I'm going turn it over to Stan… to kick us off here.

STAN: Well, Tyson, I'd echo my thanks. And we are excited to have you because we're going to really come at this from a way I think will resonate with all of our listeners. You're a combat veteran, you led troops in combat, and so you know that a lot of people don't, that you really don't tell people what to do in combat. You ask them to do something. And they do it if they believe in you, and if they believe in the cause. Now you're doing something that, interestingly enough, most of us at some point in our lives do have to do. We have to raise money for some cause whether it's a Cub Scout Pack or whether it's a Little League team or it's a big endeavor.

And what you're trying to do in my humble way of describing it, is get people to do something that they may not necessarily expect that they will do: to donate their time or resources to a

greater cause. That's an interesting kind of leadership. Tyson… how do you translate that military background to this world?

TYSON: Well first, thanks for having me. I'm really honored to be here with you. As you know, I look up to you, the organizations that you lead, and also the style in which you teach and help others understand how to unleash their own potential in leadership.

And I will tell you that the question you just asked is really poignant one. How do you get people to do things that they may not know they're capable of doing or would want to do? And oftentimes people think that because of my military background, it's a command and control. You give orders to others and they react, and they respond, and they do as you ask. And those of us who've been in combat, those of us who've been in particularly counterinsurgency-type environments, know that the true power and strength of an organization is its belief in its purpose, its mission, and particularly in one another in accomplishing that.

I will tell you that every one of our donors has to first believe in the mission that we have. And that mission in my case right now is higher education. How are we building a brighter future for Texas A&M University, in our case?

And we do that one relationship at a time. And so, everything is founded on trust. Everything we do from our vision statement and how we're organized, our alignment within the organization, and how we partner with the university, is all founded on trust. So, we have to lead in a way that engenders trust. And that can come in in many, many forms, but with trust comes action, with trust comes accountability throughout the organization. And when you have action and accountability, that empowerment, it leads to an increased performance and whatever that measurement is that you're looking for in our case, raising dollars for the benefit of the institution that we serve.

So, I look at trust in two ways: you have the internal trust and dynamic within the organization, among the managers, leaders and team members. And then I have external trust. How are we extolling the virtues that donors can buy into? That they can understand? That resonate with them in order to increase their trust in our organization?

So, for the internal trust, the team members can they look to their left and right, and can they look throughout the org chart and understand that what we're doing really matters and they can trust the people to their left and right? If they can say, I believe in "so-and-so," that they're here for the same reasons that I am, then you've got Nirvana. It reduces a lot of the noise that often complicates organizations and performance externally.

Do our donors trust that what we're saying is the truth? Do our donors believe that when they provide funds, philanthropic investments as I call them, to the Texas A&M Foundation, are we going to manage them and be great fiduciaries of those funds?

Does the university, our university partners, all the deans, faculty and staff, do they trust that we have their best interests in mind when it comes to promoting different programs, research,

scholarships, support? And really it boils down to, are we delivering the truth as an organization? To me, that is the cornerstone to everything that we do, and I align everything within our organization around that four-letter word: trust.

STAN: It's incredibly well said. Just for our listeners, so we can give them a sense of scope. This is not a couple of car washes and a bake sale. This has a little greater scale. Can you give us a sense of just what, kind of, amounts of philanthropy we're talking about?

TYSON: Yes. Yes. So, we just finished a major campaign. It was one of the largest in the country, the largest in the state of Texas for higher education. The goal was to raise $4 billion by the end of 2020. And we just finished our final accounting just over the last few weeks. And we actually exceeded the goal and raised $4.25 billion for higher education at Texas A&M University. An incredible feat, but what we focus on is our mission. So, we say that that is an indicator that there's 4 billion reasons to believe in a brighter future because each one of those dollars, each one of those donations, impacts a life positively. And when you look at philanthropy in particular, you have to look at the purpose of the organization and what they exist to do.

Texas A&M University is a land-grant institution, and many of our largest donors, they're first-generation college students who viewed Texas A&M as a place that gave them a chance. And so, we strive to raise as much money as we can for the university by connecting those donors' passions with the university's purpose. We talk about our ROI, we talk about business plans. I don't call it charity. I call it philanthropic investing because it's to a purpose: for a brighter future.

And the scale that we're talking about is we had to raise over $1.2 million every day, 365 days a year, in order to hit that goal just over the last five-year time horizon, which is as long as I've been with the Texas A&M Foundation.

CHRIS: That's an intimidating number for sure. And it's really impressive what you've done to get the institution there. I want to go back to the idea of trust, because it's a cornerstone in any effective organization. I mean, Stan and I talk to groups all the time, "What makes the team great?"

Number one thing that 80% of the folks say is trust, right? But getting deeper on that in your position, how do you build that out? Like, what are examples of how you communicate that to your donors and other folks in your network? I mean, you're very familiar and lived in the model that Stan McChrystal built out where we communicated with a hyperaggressive cadence with real transparency, thousands of people a day around the globe connecting like this. And just speaking with one another. So, there were daily examples of, "See, that's Tyson and Chris sharing information because they trust each other. You could all be better if you operated like that."

So, it was very visceral. A lot of storytelling. How do you do that in your world, which is, you know, equally big and complex?

TYSON: I think that's a very unique question in terms of both from the strategic level, how do you build that trust, and then the tactical level, in terms of how do you operationalize the strategy that you put in place?

So, for me, I had to find a way to tie each of my team member's own personal welfare to the cause. So, internally we're talking about a culture change, if you will, an evolution, in terms of why we come to work each day. And I think a lot of companies have had to come to the realization during COVID in particular, if you just take a snapshot of the past year of re-evaluating, how they communicate, when they communicate, what they communicate, and probably most importantly, why they communicate? Why do we have these meetings? Why do we have the architecture in terms of communications and systems that we do? And really refine that. In my world, we micro-targeted the idea that I want everybody on my team to believe that the organization they work for is the absolute best organization on the planet, that our lives and our work have meaning, that what we do matters. What we do matters.

So, from that standpoint, that drives when we communicate, and a lot of the content of what we communicate, to help drive the trust. So, if we first trust one another internally, if we trust that the organization has our best interests in mind, and if you both think back to combat, I mean the biggest litmus test for a great unit was the cohesion among that unit in terms of mission accomplishment, and the ability to take care of one another. We're all gonna come back together. No man is going to be left behind. We will never leave a fallen comrade. You know, those words have real deep meaning.

What do those words mean in the context of a for-profit organization, a company, to shareholders, so on and so forth? And for me, as I translated it at the Texas A&M Foundation, it was the idea that if I could get my team to understand how valuable each one of them were to the bigger mission, and if I could get them to first trust themselves, to understand that they are passionate professionals that are dedicated to purposeful philanthropy, then they could start trusting one another. And once they started trusting one another in their own small team, their own little cohort, they can start trusting bigger parts of the organization. And then finally that spreads. There's this beautiful ripple effect that the whole organization feels. And it's palpable when you hit that tipping point.

So that's one way. The other thing is in the tactical piece: how do we communicate? We instilled weekly, what we call "All Team" calls, where the entire organization, much like General McChrystal had, are on the same call, and we go through a very quick agenda and then we open it up to any questions, concerns, raise any issues that for the good of the group.

And we try to understand what are the unmet needs of our university partners? What are the unmet needs of our donors? And then what are the unmet needs of our internal team in order to achieve the philanthropic goals that we've got for the university? And that's very powerful because it connects everybody. And once again, through transparency, you should be building more trust and not diminishing trust with that transparency. So hopefully I answered the question.

CHRIS: You did, but I want to tease on one point you made around, which I agree with, that sort of, the palpable sense that you as a leader have when … that trust network has started to take hold? I mean, I described the world that I grew up in inside of Special Operations through a similar lens. Because you know, you get these questions, "Well, when did you know something was different or when was it working?" And I describe a feeling that I can remember, like the three- or four-month period in one deployment, where you could start to feel this collective sense of, you know, what I would say is somewhere around the 12-to-18-hour mark, if nothing had shifted or changed, the whole organization started to get tense, because we knew we're missing something. We're not coordinating, something's happening externally that we're missing.

What are the … when you described that palpable sense of, "Now it's taken hold," what are the things you're looking for as a leader? What are the indicators that tell you, "This is on target" or "We're backsliding?"

TYSON: So, some of the indicators that I use are: what actions are my team members now taking on their own without being asked, or without having some sort of a catalyst to get them to do certain things? And I'll give you a really good example. So, at the start of COVID, the big question amongst philanthropic organizations was: how do you engage with people when the world is in a pandemic? At the time, there was a lot of questions about the economy, you know, what do we do next? And a lot of fear amongst our donors. If you think about donors to an organization like ours, they are generally … the top donors are in 65 years or older. So, they're in that very target group that the pandemic was of most concern. And one of the key indicators for me, it was one of our units: they deal in estates and trust gifts and bequests, and on their own decided instead of asking for something from the donors, let's give something to the donors. Let's find something donors will really value during this pandemic to let them know that we care about them, that during this time we're thinking about them.

And they did a book program. We have a university press on campus. And so, we supported the university press, and we gave the donors a choice of books to select from, and they ordered the books, and we would deliver to about 600 books to donors. So, we didn't ask for anything. We said just, "Thank you." Okay. That for me was a very big turning point that we had hit a point in the organization where the team didn't need permission or guidance all the time from the top.

They didn't need the executive team to constantly drive decision-making. That they trusted the organization enough that they could allocate resources. They could take care of, you know, our customer, the donor, and they could do so in an innovative fashion. And so that was a good example for me.

And I could give you, you know, a dozen more where we felt that.

The other thing I'll tell you, Chris, much, like in combat where you had that sense, that something either was right or wasn't quite right and collectively, everybody starts feeling that way is that, I very positively had less issues with sort of the human resources issues that traditionally pop up to an executive team.

If you think about it, many of the executives that are going to be listening to this podcast, they're dealing with complicated human resource problems. Most of them go back to communication and trust. And miscommunication or a, "he said, she said," and when you've got the trust factor kind of worked out, and when the organization believes in their purpose and they believe in one another, it reduces that exponentially across the organization because they handle their own problems at their level, instead of elevating everything up to the senior leadership of the company to solve.

And that was huge for me in terms of freeing me up to be more strategic and to focus my energies on shaping the environment that makes the Texas A&M Foundation successful.

STAN: Wow. Tyson, you specialize in trust, which you've said eloquently and in connections and for our listeners.

A great example of trust came on June 6th, 1944, and there were believed to be German, heavy guns at a place called Pointe du Hoc, which overlooked American landing beaches. And so those guns had to be silenced before the forces could land on the beaches with any kind of security. So, part of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, under a commander named Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder, landed, to climb, to scale these cliffs under German fire to take out the German guns. [It] wasn't even a full Ranger battalion, but the soldiers that were landing on Utah and Omaha beaches trusted that this small force of Rangers would get up that cliff and get the job done.

Of course, the Rangers made it up the cliff, famously. James Earl Rudder had a pretty good history after that. He became the 16th president of Texas A&M. I had the honor later of commanding 2nd Ranger Battalion that same battalion, many years after Colonel Rudder. So, when I got to make up a pilgrimage to Texas A&M, for me, it was a chance to sort of go back and touch that history.

Now, that idea of trust: you are going into a potential donor or a person who's going to support the Foundation. And the first thing they have to do is trust you, but you've got to start very early in a conversation and be upfront and tell them you're really going to ask them for something. How do you get over that sort of awkward, "I'm really here for money." How do you do that?

TYSON: Great question and General Rudder, we still talk about his legacy, both at Texas A&M, but as well as the character of the leader… and trust and integrity and discipline, you know, they all are inextricably linked. And so, when we have conversations with donors, the very first thing that we talked to our new development officers, as we bring them on our team, is that no one can decide what products or services a customer values better than the customer.

Right. So, the customer, in our case, the donor, they get to decide where they want to put their money. They're going to vote with their checkbook. And so, the first thing that we actually do is we talk about a lesson that many of us have heard over and over again. And it's you have two ears and one mouth and that's for a reason. Because in our business, you have to listen intently.

We try to gather information that helps us connect the donor to the person, the project, or the cause, or the area of the university's vast infrastructure that will solve the needs that the donor identifies. And so, we're in the listening business. And if you're in the listening business intently to those donors, you will find a path for that donor to make a philanthropic investment to the university.

And I think many businesses have that similar need. So, we don't go in with the idea that we're going to make a pitch on X, Y, or Z. We initially go in with: how can we be of service? We believe in what we do. We believe in what our organization does and the work we do matters. We are thankful that you're allowing us into your home or your office, and we'd love to hear what your thoughts are. And so, what we're really saying is we invite you to inspire a brighter future. We invite you to hold us accountable and show you that your dollar is making a meaningful impact from scholarships to faculty professorships, you name it. But the bottom line is that we're improving lives by improving others' lives through philanthropy and that's the crux of where we sort of start. And then we go from there and it can go any direction, you know, from that point on, but listening first: two ears, one mouth.

CHRIS: Tyson, did that come naturally to you as you transitioned from the service over to where you are now? And I'll give some depth to that. I often talk to, you know, as I'm sure you do, I know Stan does to fellow veterans that are shifting out of the military, into the private sector. And inevitably, the conversation comes up about deal-making and sales and … that's a whole new field in the corporate space that I don't feel like I have any requisite skills and I'll often say to them, you know, especially folks from the SEAL community where I grew up, "Hey, do you remember when you deployed to Iraq and, and as a knowledgeable leader of a small unit, you were smart enough to walk across the airfield and meet the battalion commander? And say, 'Hey, I just want to introduce myself, just showed up. What we'd like to start by doing is solving some of your hard problems. What's the toughest thing in this battlespace that we can be helpful with?' And they say, yeah, yeah, but that's just how you got work done." So, I know that that's complex sales at its best. That's building relationships, identifying where you can add value, and that the knock-on results of that may come in two weeks and maybe coming two years, right. But you're building a depth of trust-based relationship.

I mean, that's how I see it. I'm curious how you sort of navigated that pivot over into what you just described.

TYSON: Great point. Because the transition from being active duty to going into the private sector for me was one that I made with great apprehension. I was a paratrooper, I've taught leadership at West Point, I was on a fast track and I had this sort of this glide path that my wife and I had set for our future.

And we were blessed with a second child who was very medically complicated. And at the time we were in Houston, Texas, wonderful medical care, the best in the world. And I left the active duty because she was on life support. She had a very complicated syndrome called CHARGE.

And so that experience did more to humble me to get me to a point where I looked through different eyes, if you will, and a different perspective on almost every problem, because being in the hospital for month after month, watching this beautiful young baby, you know, cope with this syndrome and dealing with all the doctors and everything else, it humbled me to a point where I was not that paratrooper that had the answer for everything on the battlefield. I wasn't that confident commander that knew exactly what I needed to do in a situation. And so, I went into the business sector and the first company that I was afforded the opportunity to be a part of and run had a lot of complexities to it and I didn't have the confidence and I wasn't sure how my military experience would translate and nor did the people who hired me.

But I listened and I learned, and what I found out was that at the core of every complicated problem was a human being. And, and the more I could do to understand the human aspect of the problem set, the better off I was at pulling together the teams necessary to solve whatever that problem was. And that's truly where I learned, and it reinforced what I had learned in the military through combat. Combat is a crucible, as you know, that forces together the most complicated dynamics with the highest stakes of anything on the planet: life, and death. And so, it really focuses you on what's important day-to-day and in a corporate setting there's lots of complication and lots of very difficult scenarios that usually they're not life and death. And so, you have the opportunity to dive into the human factor with a longer-term sort of strategy and understand what is making this organization work or not work at a much more granular level in terms of timelines. And that's where I really learned that aspect of the two ears, one mouth, and try to figure it out.

If you'll allow me, I've got one other thing and that is: the organization that I was selected to lead, the Texas A&M Foundation, had a leader before me that had been there for over 20 years and the gentleman was a legend. And so, this organization was already known to be a really, really good organization, but we had different leadership styles. We had different ways of looking at problem-solving. We had different ways of achieving success. And I've found in my career post-military that sometimes it's harder to evolve a culture of a very high-functioning organization than it is one that's got lots and lots of issues.

And I think you even have to be more strategic in your approach on that human factor in an organization that's already doing well because they resistance to change the barriers to a new leader's approach and vision can actually be much larger hurdles than an organization that is known to have a lot of problems.

STAN: That's a really interesting observation that resonates because I remember when I was commanding Rangers or Joint Special Operations Command, peers would say you have a great unit, but it's gotta be an easy job because your people are so good that you don't have to do anything. And I said, "Their expectations are also much different than people of less experience. They really expect the leader to be able to do some amazing things."

Tyson, you've definitely evolved as a leader. I mean, we all do as we get older. How have you changed in your style, or in your mindset about leading?

TYSON: I think that my style has evolved in terms of allowing the situation to develop a little bit more before I jumped to a solution, or before I jumped in to necessarily solve the problem. That's one way, for sure. I think another way is I spend time now, reflecting on the work that I'm involved in and the decision-making that I'm involved in, and that reflection has given me some different perspectives on my style of leadership.

I'm also a big believer in a lifetime of learning. I don't think we ever stopped learning and I don't think we should ever stop wanting to be better leaders. And whatever litmus test you use to define that, I think also evolves over time as you move on. And also depending on the type of organization that you lead, that changes. So, the short answer is I think I'm more reflective now than I used to be, and I'm less reactive than I used to be. I try to be more proactive now and more strategic and long-term and the decisions that I'm making and how I'm approaching the organization that I'm leading.

CHRIS: Tyson, I'm going to pull you back just a bit to the discussion Stan and you were just having about leading an already successful group of individuals. I can make assumptions here about the quality of talent that you have on your team, given the mission, the institution, the expectations of your outside folks, et cetera. And in some ways, it's similar to other organizations we've all been part of. Right. And I think of, you know, back in the old days being in the SEAL teams or whatever units you were in, you know, we went to these crazy places around the world and fought together. But the interesting through line into all those units was the vast majority of those people, where we were, was secondary to who we were with.

Right. And there was that recognition as a leader, you had to recognize all of these people could be anywhere else if they chose to. Right. It's an all-volunteer force. These people have triple volunteered to get through these crazy selection processes so that they get the hardest missions in the weirdest corner of the world. The leadership responsibility there is intense because you have to constantly balance the scales, so that all this other opportunity, which is really endless for those types of personalities, is less interesting than spending another day in a terrible place with people that you trust. Right.

So how do you… do you agree with that as it maps over to your institution and the work you're doing now? And how do you keep those personalities engaged on the mission, when I'm assuming similarly, they could say, "Tyson, that you're just not cutting it, I'm taking one of 17 offers that comes across my desk at any given week?"

TYSON: I think that is probably an issue that every one of the listeners can appreciate in terms of talent development and self-selection, two terms that you used that are important. And, so, if I can start with the idea that yes, I believe exactly what you just said and I even wrote it down as you were talking that where we were was less important than who we were with, and that's a very powerful, very powerful quote, because many studies have been conducted about happiness in the workplace. And there's lots of organizations that make a living based on doing incentive compensation studies, performance studies, compensation, just overall, you know, fair market value for a given role and responsibilities and all the rest of it.

But it's been my experience that as long as those numbers in the compensation range are fair, what's more important is if the team believes in one another and who they are with, you know, Stephen Covey, in many of his books, talk about, you know, sharpening your saw, and we hear about how iron sharpens iron.

And those are the things that I missed the most when I transitioned from active duty military into the private sector, was those teams, those other, in my case, men, because the units I started rooms were male, and the ability for us to make one another better. Right. To be our best selves. And when I when I first left the military, that was a struggle for me until I realized that I could bring that philosophy to the organizations that I was with.

Now, granted, it's different, but at the fundamental core, you want people that want to be their best selves. You want to implement programs within your company that enable your team members to be their best selves. And if somebody is a passionate professional, and they believe in their cause so strongly, and they believe the organization supports them so strongly and they believe that there are other team members, their colleagues, support them and that they can trust them, a lot of those other problems go away because they're happy. And they believe that what they're doing really matters and we've instituted a few policies within the Texas A&M Foundation to help pull that out. We've also put in place training programs, education, sort of programs to help grow our next pool of talent management within the organization.

But simple things, Chris, for example, we put in place a leave policy where we would allow you to take three days off paid for by the Texas A&M Foundation to go volunteer for any nonprofit of your choice. And so, why would I do that? Well, mainly because I want them, my team, to go out and see what other non-profits are doing.

I mean, they're going to come back and say, "Tyson, did you know that the Catholic Church is doing X, Y, and Z and we should think about doing something like this? This is a great program." The other reason is connecting my team to what really matters. When they look in the eyes of a child whose life they've changed, I mean, there's no price that you can put on that. When you see a sick child who's getting the best medical treatment on the planet because of research that a faculty member, you know, on campus has helped enable. There's no price for that. I mean… and so if I can connect my team to what matters most, and that's influencing and inspiring them through the lives that they're changing, number one, I don't have retention issues. Number one, I have people that are fighting to become part of my organization. And then again, I say this quite a bit, but it reduces a lot of the normal drama that you have in organizations where there's infighting and where you don't trust one another. And when you're always looking over your shoulder. Instead, I want people thinking about who can I put on my shoulders, right? Who can I carry? Who can I help in my organization?

And when you've got that - it's truly Nirvana. I mean, it truly is. And I don't think you ever fully get there. I think it's the progress, you make progress and you evolve. And that's the ultimate goal, but hopefully I answered your question with regard to how to, you know, inspire and keep people engaged and that self-selection process that you talked about.

CHRIS: No, you did. It's an amazing example. Thanks for that.

STAN: Yeah, Tyson, we talked about being your best self. And I would say that you and your team have been your best selves in kind of an amazing way. And just to give some perspective to listeners, the resources, the money that is brought in by your team, is building things. It's building programs, it's building facilities that people who are not yet born will often benefit from, and they won't know exactly who did it, or the feeling behind it, but they will have a better educational experience, a better life. They'll contribute to other people in a better way because of that.

And that's got to be something that gives you and all the people who work with you, a tremendous amount of pride. It gives me a lot of pride to know that Chris and I are your friend, and it gives us a lot of pride to have you on with us today and share this with the people who have a chance to hear it.

So, thanks Tyson - for all you do.

CHRIS: Yeah. And if I heard you correctly, you've got $1.2 million to raise before the end of the day. So, we won't eat up any more of your time.

TYSON: We're honored to be a part of the program. Thanks for your leadership. I think it's incredible what you enable. And thank you again for the opportunity and I'll leave you with one other thing I learned, uh, over the last couple of years, and it's from a long retired general officer named, Schweitzer, who said, "If you don't care about who gets the credit, you're going to get a whole lot more done."

And we, we try to instill that as well. And, and Sir, when you mentioned just now, we're improving lives well into the future. And many of these folks won't even know who had contributed and enabled it, but that gets back to, if you don't care about who gets the credit, you can get a whole lot more done and that's so much harder to actually execute than it is to say - but thank you all for everything that you do. And let me know if I can do anything for you.

CHRIS: Thanks, Tyson.

STAN: Thanks again.

TYSON: Thank you very much.

CHRIS: So, good discussion with Tyson who you and I both known well for years. I never served with Tyson in the military, but his reputation there was great. And then obviously the work he's doing at the Foundation is impressive.

I didn't know what to expect from a discussion like this. I don't know people that run big funds or non-profits or foundations at that scale. His is massive. It was more… it was interesting in a way that I didn't expect around his understanding and focus of what your donor base needs from you.

It's very much, it's a very sophisticated relationship in a way that that's surprised me. I assumed it was loyal people to the institution that are always going to write their check, but it's… much deeper than that.

STAN: Yeah. I think when I think of Tyson's background, he was a paratrooper leader, he was in business, and now he's managing the Foundation, which basically connects the university to people who can donate, have the ability and desire to donate. And if you think of his time back leading soldiers, you think of soldiers in a simplistic way as they are the chess pieces you move, so can accomplish your mission.

But he didn't think about it that way. He thinks about - they are his mission. And so, when he talked about engaging with donors, see what he said, which jumped out at me was he says, "I reach out to them and I say, how can we be of service to you?" And then he also, basically, he deals in trust. He gives people a sense that they can trust he and his organization, but they can also trust whatever they donate will go to, that it will support good things in Texas A&M, and these some may be alumni and they may have very good firsthand experience, but others are looking for a way to make a difference.

And Tyson is giving them a vehicle that they, a person, and a vehicle that they can trust, to do something good.

CHRIS: How do you look at… I mean, you've led in these environments. You've worked with leaders, we have over the years in other domains…and you went through this personally, taking an organization that doesn't necessarily need to be doing a lot of stuff that it's doing.

There's a core charter mission, you know, I saw you do this in the counterterrorism world, but then recognizing there's a much bigger thing here we should be focusing on. And we've seen that in other demands, working with other leadership or leadership teams. How do you think about the role of a leader when it comes to convincing the organization that it has to become more than it is, even though all of us are hardwired, I know I am, to be sort of lazy and complacent if given the opportunity, and you can always say, well, somebody else can pick up that piece of it? But he's a unique person who is obviously taking a good institution and made it better because of his recognition that no, we should push ourselves to do even more for our donor base, and for the institution that we support.

STAN: Yeah, I'm not sure, but my sense is that if Tyson Voelkel had come out of college, for example, and immediately become the head of the Texas A&M Foundation, he would learn fundraising techniques. He would learn finance, but he wouldn't be the leader he is. I think his life journey, through the military experience with his family, where he had to make the very difficult choice to leave the service for family reasons…

I mean, Tyson would be a general officer in the military now, if he'd stayed. And what he is now is he's that kind of a leader. I look at you, Chris, you spent, well, more than a decade as a Navy

SEAL, you would not be what you are McChrystal Group now absent that life journey. And so, I start to get down and say, okay, we take a life journey for someone.

What pieces does it give them? How does it shape how they see things? In many cases I think it expands your thinking because you have a task in front of you, but now it's more broad. Sometimes it's purpose. Sometimes it's the things that are more important to the people who work for him. And that's where I think Tyson is, and that's where I think you are.

CHRIS: Yeah. It's a really interesting… I know you and I are both fans of longer stays in a space so that you can really go deep and develop some level of subject matter expertise. I don't, I think that's underrecognized in today's world. Maybe we're on a reset of that.

But there's also an interesting aspect of pivoting between chapters, right? There are also great leaders, I know you've spoken about this, we haven't talked about in a while, I don't know what your current sort of view is, but that the military… Other big institutions… but definitely in the military, perhaps self-limits, because you can't take senior experienced folks in one domain and roll them into the other.

But the military does that into the corporate space, or Tyson as an example here, to great benefit. I mean, we've seen some exceptional in our own personal networks. Seasoned 20-year plus military leaders roll into something else and have this amazing impact. I wonder if the military is going to learn that lesson of allowing that chapter to flow the other way.

It might be a bridge too far, but it's an interesting thought experiment.

STAN: I think we need to, and as you and I discussed, we see such talented guys from uniform go out and do really great things in the civilian world. More like Tyson, like you, and others. I think the military is not this arcane skill that you can only learn if you start at birth. It's reality, it's common-sense stuff. It is problem-solving and it's leadership. And I think we could take people from the civilian world at every different level, some very senior and some midgrade who could come in and they could be value-add in uniform, in tough jobs, even combat leadership jobs tomorrow. And I think that we ought to be thinking that way, because you need fresh air in any organization. You need somebody who walks in and goes, "Why do we do it that way?" And the problem with a guild-like structure is it's pretty hard to get those fresh ideas.

CHRIS: Yeah. It's, you know, and we've had leaders on this show before, Keith Krach, you know, you could go down the list of these really talented folks that could pivot over. It would be fascinating to see, you know, that the military broadly trying to take that on, get a few test cases and see what the impact is.

I also think it would bridge the ever widening disconnect between the uniform service and the rest of the country in a way that that would be very, very beneficial. You know, take someone like that and put them in uniform for four or five years and have them come back in industry, it would demystify both sides in a way that would be probably hard to measure.

STAN: And as you said in our conversation before, good leadership's good leadership. There are some techniques and the lexicon you learn, but the reality is how you treat people, how you learn to focus an organization on a task, and your personal self-discipline to conduct yourself as a mature leader, ought to, all of those things are appropriate anywhere.

CHRIS: Well, it was a great discussion. Tyson's a unique and thoughtful leader, individual, and having, I mean, the impact that he has and the amount of money that they raise for their mission is both impressive and just sounds exhausting to hear them describe it.

STAN: It really does. And when you, I was down a few years ago at Texas A&M on a Friday night before a football game, and I saw this flood of RVs and people who were postured for the game. And I realized just what a place that university has in Texas and in the United States. And so, I wish Tyson well.

CHRIS: Okay. Thanks everyone. Great discussion. And thanks to Tyson and his team.