

Everyday Humanitarians

with Travis Hellstrom

Featuring



Serve to Be Great

with Matt Tenney

Matt Tenney is the author of [Serve to Be Great: Leadership Lessons from a Prison, a Monastery, and a Board Room](#). He is also a social entrepreneur, a keynote speaker, a trainer, and a consultant with Perth Leadership Institute. You can find more about Matt at MattTenney.com.

Travis: Hey, everybody! Welcome back to the *Everyday Humanitarians Conference*. I'm very lucky to be sitting down with Matt Tenney. He's a social entrepreneur, an international speaker. He's a consultant with the Perth Leadership Institute, and he's been working with Fortune 500 companies and talking about how serving others is the key to true greatness.

I think it's wonderful to be sitting down with you, Matt. We have your book here. We're going to be talking a lot about all the details that you have, your wonderful story. Your book is called *Serve to be Great: Leadership Lessons from a Prison, a Monastery, and a Boardroom*. I had a lot of fun reading it. I'm really excited to be talking about it and thank you so much for being here with us today.

Matt: My pleasure, Travis. I'm excited to be talking with you. It sounds like a great conference you're putting on.

Travis: Thank you. First, I'd love if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and your story, where you come from, and kind of the introduction that you give in the book, which I thought was wonderful.

Matt: You're referring to the subtitle of the book, I'm guessing.

Travis: Exactly.

Matt: This journey from prisoner to monk to social entrepreneur. Yeah, so the first thing that you hear about is prison. The journey didn't start off on a very good foot. In January of 2001, I attempted a fraud against the U.S. government. This was doing something that's dishonest, illegal, incredibly stupid.

As a result of doing this, I ended up spending five and a half years confined to a military prison, because at the time, I was serving as an officer in the Marine Corps.

Of course, at first this is obviously the worst thing that I could ever imagine. I put myself in this terrible situation, thought my life was over. I was extremely angry at myself for being so stupid, for causing so much suffering for the people around me. It was an incredibly self-centered thing to do.

But within a few months of being confined, I found out that the situation that I was in wasn't quite as bad as I thought. Initially, they were saying I was going to be there maybe 70 or 80 years, but I found out that it was going to be more like five or six, and I started to adjust and started to consciously look for what opportunities might be found in this situation of being in confinement.

I started learning about a practice that I'm sure many of the people attending this conference would be aware of, which is called mindfulness meditation. It just made so much sense. It was so logical. Within a short time, I was making the effort to be mindful during just about every moment of the day.

After about six months of practice, I realized one day, "Oh, my gosh! I'm thriving in one of the most stressful environments in the world. I'm actually happier right here than I've ever been in my life and I have nothing. No possessions, no fun, no parties or girlfriend."

This gave me a lot of faith in the practice. I was learning principally from monks, so I said, "Whatever these guys are saying, there must be something to it, so I'm going to go all the way." I ended up kind of transforming the military prison into a monastery of sorts, and I spent my last three years there living and training as a monk.

Now the core of monastic training is pretty simple. We're working to become the most kind and compassionate human possible. We're also devoting ourselves 100% to helping other people be free from suffering.

As a result of this training, I discovered both the joy and the power of a life that's devoted to serving others. That's all I've wanted to do ever since. When I left confinement, I actually almost ordained as a monk. I went to live in "real monastery" for a little while. I almost did it. I had already told the monks that I was going to ordain, and the only reason I didn't was because I realized that if I wanted to grow more and be better able to serve others I should go out and face the challenges that everybody else has to face, but try to continue that same direction.

I ended up kind of becoming a serial social entrepreneur and looking for ways to just serve the community and ended up cofounding and leading a couple non-profits. I've actually got one on the chalkboard right now to start my next project, which will be called *Serve to be Great*. The idea will be to work with underprivileged youth and get them involved in doing community service on Saturdays, but also offering them training in social entrepreneurship, just for-profit entrepreneurship, and life skills that will help them to really succeed in life, but connecting it all to this power of being focused on what we can do to be of greater service to others.

Travis: That's wonderful. I'd love to talk a little bit more. In your book, you give a lot of the details around those different non-profits that you're working on and

stepping through in a chronological way all the things you worked on. But can you talk a little bit about when it became clear to you that service was the focus, that was really where you should be spending your time and your energy? How did that come about? When did that become clear to you?

Matt: Yeah, that's a great question, Travis. For me, when that was—I've always been aware of this idea. I've always had this feeling that service is the way to go. That's kind of the main reason I joined the military was I wanted to be of service to the country in some way. I've always done volunteer work, but I noticed that there was always this background selfishness, always this idea of, "What's in it for me? If I join the military and I serve the country, well, that sure looks good on my résumé. Maybe that will help me advance a career one day."

Not to say that this is terrible. I mean we all have—we're always going to have ideas of how this helps us. But I just noticed that there was always a lot of selfish tendency to it. What I noticed was a very big shift for me was when I was in confinement was this idea that we can serve right now. We don't have to have conditions met. We don't have to have a certain amount of money or be in a certain social position. We can serve right now right where we are.

Just by doing that, without any thought of what's going to happen, how it's going to help us, it makes life incredibly rich. It can transform life into something that's incredible. How I noticed that was once I kind of had this ideal of the monastic, which is the core reason for waking up in the morning is to do everything we can to help alleviate the suffering of the people right around us and through a ripple effect thereby helping to alleviate the suffering of everybody, because it has to start somewhere, right?

This idea just totally transformed my experience of being in confinement. For most people that we're confined, they were totally miserable. They were sleeping their lives away because they want to get it over with as quickly as possible, but having this purpose and realizing that I can make an impact in a big way just by helping the people right around me, it inspired me so much that I woke up an hour early every single day. We had to get up at 5 o'clock. I set an alarm for 4 o'clock to get up an hour earlier and have an extra hour to

devote to doing things that helped me to be of greater service to others. Principally mindfulness training.

For me, that's where the shift occurred was just to realize that when serving becomes our #1 priority and we make sure that serving others and treating others with respect and kindness and compassion is a higher priority than our worldly goals. We know how much money we make or whether or not we get promoted or whether or not we're profitable this quarter, if we're running a business.

When serving is a higher priority than those things, the amazing thing is 1) we enjoy our lives more. Waking up every day is awesome, but then the counter effect is that we actually, over the long-term, do better with worldly success than we would have if we didn't make serving others our #1 priority.

You see it all the time in businesses that make quarterly profits. Their #1 priority, within a very short time they erode the very foundation of long-term success and they end up having to do all these crazy things to make the numbers work and eventually they go out of business.

Travis: Yeah. I think that's wonderful. You're reminding me also of a lot of personal experiences I've had. Before I went into the Peace Corps, I had a chance—actually, the founder of en*theos, Brian Johnson, had written about meditation and the meditation retreat. I've always done meditation a little bit here and there and I enjoyed it. But the idea of going to a retreat and meditating for 12 hours a day for 10 days.

It's this silent retreat—was really and I think for most people it's kind of a paralyzing idea, that much alone time, that much quiet time is intense, but amazing things start to happen when meditation allows your mind to settle and your values to come out and other things that are a lot deeper in you that you don't spend a lot of time thinking about.

Can you talk a little bit about meditation for you and how in the beginning, maybe, what it was like for you and then over time what it developed into in those first couple months when you started to take it much more seriously? What was that like? For the average person that's sitting there thinking, "I

could never meditate like that. I could never focus my mind in that way." Or they just have a hard time with five minutes of meditation. What kind of advice do you give to people to step from the beginning through to a more serious kind of consistent meditation practice?

Matt: I think the key to doing anything where it's consistent is to start small with manageable goals. This is exactly what I did unwittingly. I wasn't and neither am I now an expert on productivity or anything like that, but it just intuitively—I actually learned about mindfulness in what I think is probably the most skillful way to teach it.

I think a lot of times when we hear the word "meditation" we think of, "Oh, my gosh! I have to sit still in some uncomfortable position for an hour." The reality is that's not what mindfulness training is all about. It's really about brushing your teeth and not suffering while you're brushing your teeth and really being present for that. It's really about when you come home and see your spouse or your significant other, to be able to not be clinging to work and what happened at work and be fully present for them.

It's really much more about this quality that we bring to each moment. This is kind of how I was introduced to it. It was actually some logic. I tend to really grab onto things when they make a lot of logical sense. The logic that grabbed me was actually from a Zen teacher named Thich Nhat Hanh. I don't remember where I first saw this idea, but it just made perfect sense to me and it was very simple.

It's this idea that if we're not comparing the present moment to our thoughts of the past or our thoughts of the future, the present moment is perfect just the way it is. You could apply this even to my situation of being in a military prison cell.

Let's say we're sitting on the bed in that cell. We're not in any serious pain. The temperature is okay. We're not starving. If we're not comparing that moment to any of our great thoughts of the past or any of our great hopes for what we're going to do when we get out of the brig, what's wrong with it? There's nothing wrong with it, is there?

The problems don't start until the mind kicks in and starts creating all these comparative thoughts, and then we attach those comparative thoughts and give them too much value. When we start saying, "Well, I could be surfing." Well, when we compare surfing to sitting in a prison cell, obviously, surfing wins that deal, right? But if we're not grabbing onto that thought of how much better surfing is and we just allow our mind to come back to, "Well, what is this experience like?" Well, guess what? It's perfect again.

This is how I approached the practice was, "Okay, if I could be free in one moment," let's just say it's brushing the teeth. "If I can be just fully present with brushing my teeth, not grabbing onto thoughts of the past or the future, then I'm totally free in that moment of brushing the teeth. If I can do it while I'm brushing the teeth, then I can do it while I'm washing my hands. If I can do it in those two activities, I can gradually spread this practice out."

Just about everything I was doing during the day was a moment of freedom. This is how I began my practice. I would pick an activity, like brushing the teeth, and I would say, "Okay, for this week, I'm going to do brushing the teeth, washing my hands, and drinking water. These three activities, I'm going to make sure every time I do them I'm going to stop, take a breath, and make sure that I do them with complete awareness, not allowing myself to be pulled into my thinking."

Now for the people that don't have the luxury of being in a monastic type setting, you may just want to do one a week. It might just be brushing the teeth for week one. In week two, you add another activity. Each week, by week four, you're doing four activities in mindfulness throughout your day. You kind of have these anchors and you start to feel some success. You start to notice, "Wow! I'm a little bit more present in some areas of my life." You might notice that you're a little bit more present after that activity because you kind of cultivated this energy of mindfulness.

Now there is value. You mentioned sitting still. That's one aspect is to try to cultivate this energy of just being present and not allowing ourselves to be pulled completely into our thinking throughout our daily activities. It's most easy to do that when it's a non-intellectual activity and when we're alone.

That's why I mentioned things like washing hands, brushing the teeth, making the bed, getting dressed. I mean the list is pretty long, right?

But there is some value to then taking time to sit still. The reason that I think it's so valuable is that when we sit still, what tends to happen is our awareness gradually becomes more stable. Our attention becomes more stable. The more stable our awareness and our attention, the more clearly we see our inner world. That's how wisdom develops. That's how self-mastery develops.

A friend of mine at Google named Meng wrote a great book called *Search Inside Yourself*. I think you've read that book, right, Travis? Yeah, so he gives a great analogy that I love. For most of us, when our awareness isn't trained, when attention isn't trained, our inner world is a very low-resolution picture. Like a 50 dpi. It's really fuzzy. You can't really make out any details.

But with training, we can train that awareness and attention to where all of a sudden it's a 500 dpi picture or 1,000 dpi picture. Then all of a sudden, thoughts and emotions are seen with absolute clarity, and then we develop wisdom about them and that's how we develop self-mastery. It makes it so that we don't attach to the thoughts and emotions as easily, so that then when we go out in our daily life, it's easier to be present. We're less likely to kind of automatically attach to those thoughts and emotions.

What I would recommend for the person who just wants to get started is kind of what I did in the appendix of the book, which I imagine you read. It's just a very quick guide to getting started. That is pick a couple activities, like I mentioned, to practice during the day, but then see if you can commit to just one minute. Just set a timer on your smartphone for one minute in the morning, one minute in the evening, and take time to just be still and have this attitude of what's happening right now without judgment. Just kind of let your awareness be aware of whatever is most prominent, whether it's a thought or what you hear or what it feels like to sit. That's what's most important.

There are all these techniques out there. You have different teachers teaching different techniques. To me, they're all great, but you'll notice the the people

who have wisdom, they all teach the same attitude throughout the technique. That is to just explore non-judgmentally what is this moment like? What's happening now? It's just always coming back to what's happening now?

When you do that, 1) it's very relaxing. It's a nice way to just experience the perfection of the present moment, but then we also start to see all the benefits that mindfulness training brings. If you can do one minute in the morning and evening, then you might like it. The next week, maybe you're doing two or three minutes. Then you might build up—there was a while where I was doing three, four hours a day while I was in confinement of sitting still time. But now, 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening I feel is enough. For others, it may be a little more. It may be a little less, but just start, I think, with just one minute. Something that's totally manageable. That alone can start to have an effect in our lives.

Travis: I really like that a lot. That's very helpful. Also something that I've heard from different places. I'm not sure where I first heard it, but this idea that you are not your thoughts I think is a very powerful part of what mindfulness training and meditation can help you come to terms with. Can you talk a little bit about what that means to you or how when someone says, "Yeah, the idea of sitting and being still for one minute, what about all my thoughts? What about all the things that flood into my mind? Should I be angry at myself about them? Should I try to fight them? Should I force myself not to think them?" How do you deal with all the thoughts that come in and what do you think about the idea that you are not your thoughts? What does that mean to you?

Matt: Great, great question, Travis. Yeah, so I think coming back to that attitude that I mentioned a moment ago. It's the same with what's coming through our thoughts—or what's coming through our mind and applying it to our thoughts.

The idea of meditation is not to have an empty mind. That may happen at times, but it doesn't matter at all when that happens or if it happens. What's most important is to have that attitude of honestly recognizing what's it like now?

Maybe we sit down and there's just a super-fast stream of thoughts going through our mind. We just recognize, "There's a lot of thinking right now." Here's the magic is in that simple recognition, we create some space where now it's not as though those thoughts are just pulling us and moving us and sucking us in. I mean you know it, right? Sometimes you catch yourself lost in thought and your body is all contorted. You feel the muscular tension and you realize, "Oh, okay." Then you wake back up and you feel the body just relax.

What I think is most important is that attitude of just, "Okay, is there lots of thinking or is there not so much thinking?" It doesn't matter. The point is to just recognize what's there, because when we recognize what's there, then we actually cut out the fuel that perpetuates all of the negative thought patterns and the negative emotions, which is our attachment to our ego.

That comes back to what you were talking about with this idea that we are not our thinking. Intellectually, we all know this, right? Intellectually we know that when this body dies and this brain stops getting oxygen, it's not going to produce thoughts anymore. Within a few seconds of this brain not getting oxygen, maybe 30 seconds, it's out. When the body stops feeding it with oxygen permanently, it's going to eventually turn to dust and become some dirt and worms are going to eat it, whatever.

We know that when that happens it's not making thoughts. We know that we're not our thinking if we believe that there's something more to this life than just our temporal existence here in this body. But even if we don't, this is something that we know, especially if we practice mindfulness.

What mindfulness training allows us to do is transform that intellectual understanding of we're not our thinking into the wisdom that we're not our thinking. There's a huge difference between knowing something intellectually and having wisdom about it.

I tend to use the example of driving a car a lot. Let's say that I've read 50 books on driving a car, but I've never driven one. You, Travis, have been driving daily for 40 years. Well, you're not that old yet, so maybe you've been driving daily for 15 years, let's say. Clearly, most people consider me an expert

on driving a car, right? I've read 50 books. I've written papers on it, but I don't have any wisdom about driving a car.

If somebody had to choose between who's going to drive them to work, I'm going to guess they choose you hands down, right? That's the difference between wisdom and understanding something intellectually.

What happens with mindfulness training is that as we start to observe the mind more clearly, we start to see this with that absolute clarity that we talked about before, with the very high-resolution image. What we notice is it seems very simple, but it's incredibly profound.

Let's say that I'm observing my mind right now in this moment, which I am, actually. Let's say that—so in this moment, there's not a thought in my mind. That's true. Now let's say that I observe a thought actually arise up into the mind and I can observe that with awareness, and then I see the thought dissolve. Now there's an empty mind again.

Well, now something pretty incredible just happened. I just directly experienced the truth that I'm not my thinking, because I was there observing an empty mind before that thought came. Then a thought came up and I could look at it, and then I observed it dissolve and I'm still there when the mind is empty again observing an empty mind.

This takes us to the experiential level of, "Oh, that thought is not what I am. It's just something that comes and goes and I can observe that process." Now the more that we develop this sustained attention, the more that we develop our awareness and our attention to what's very stable and we increase that resolution, we see it with increasing clarity. As we start to see it every day, that wisdom grows that we're not our thinking.

Now the freedom that comes from that is incredible because then we are never a victim of our thinking. We can reach that point where our thoughts don't have any control over us. We see the mind as what it's supposed to be, which is a tool that can help us to succeed, but it's no longer something that limits us.

I think most of us would probably agree that a lot of times our mind is a limiting factor in our personal and professional success. It's a source of anxiety, of negative thoughts that limit us, of self-doubt, all these things that come up, laziness. There are all these things that run through the mind.

If we're a victim of that, then it can drastically reduce our effectiveness in life. Whereas if those things no longer have control over us and we transform the mind into a tool that we use when we need it, but we're not a victim of it when we don't need it, that's a huge shift.

Travis: Not only that, but then when you interact with people, it completely changes the way that you choose to interact with someone. If you have that ability in yourself to create that space between the stimulus and the response when you're observing the stimulus of your mind or observing the stimulus of something outside in the world, you think—normally maybe you just react. It's a threat. I react. I get angry. I get scared. I run, whatever.

If you have that space, all of a sudden you have this choice. With people, then this gives you this opportunity to interact with someone who before you might have thought was insulting you or is a danger to you or so on and so forth. If you have that space, you can then create this completely different interaction where you're not taking it personally. You don't feel like your ego is under attack.

All these other beautiful things start to happen, which I think I'd like to jump into your book and talking a little bit about this idea of servant leadership when you have that space between the stimulus and the response and you're interacting as a leader or as an individual in a team, how do you feel this practice of mindfulness can then impact your ability to work with others, to be a leader, to pursue this idea of servant leadership? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Matt: Sure. Yeah and we can talk about why would we want to lead in that way, too, if you'd like at some point. Why bother cultivating servant leadership and maybe even start off with that, and then link it back to how mindfulness helps.

But I think if we look at what the essence of leadership is, it's pretty clear. It's the ability to influence the decisions and the behaviors of others. You could have a position of authority, but have no influence. As soon as your authority is gone, people, they wouldn't follow you anywhere.

That's not influence. That's having this temporal power. Influence is where people will willingly follow you. When we think of the great leaders, we think of people who—the people who follow this leader. They have so much influence with their followers that the people who follow this leader would essentially do anything for them.

We see sometimes in the military where people would actually give their lives for the people around them, their leaders or their peers because their peers have so much influence with them or the leader has so much influence.

Influence is not something that you can't force somebody to have it. You can't force influence on somebody, because that, again, is more of this power trip, this authority-type thing. Influence is something that comes about voluntarily when people trust you, when they have confidence in you. I truly believe and I think we could talk about numerous, numerous case studies of extraordinary leaders who prove this, that the greatest way to build influence with other people is to show them consistently that you truly care about them and do what you can to serve them.

In fact, in the military, if you ask any really high-ranking Marine officer just to sum up Marine Corps leadership in a few words, it's very simple. They would just say, "Officers eat last." Simon Sinek's new book is kind of based on this principle. He has a new book out called *Leaders Eat Last*.

The idea is if I, as a leader, let's say I have five people on my team and I say, "Look, of course, I want to create a culture of excellence. I want to get people excited about doing well and hold them accountable to the expectations that we set. Of course, we have goals that we have to hit," but all those things, although I measure them, I don't let them ever be a higher priority than doing whatever I can to serve the five people on my team, making sure that they have everything that they need to succeed, making sure that they're growing personally and professionally, that I take the time to talk to them on

a personal level, that I take time to listen to them, that I take time to catch them doing things right and appreciating them for it.

All these little things that we do that lets somebody know, "Wow! This person doesn't—he's not only thinking about what he can get out of me. He's thinking more about what he can give and help me grow and help me succeed. He's introducing me to people."

I haven't done this yet with anybody that works with me, but it's because I haven't had anybody work with me long enough where I thought it was an important skill to have. But this is something that I see with CEOs that I think is absolutely incredible. Some of the best CEOs I've met, they actually encourage their people, the people that are on their team, or not even necessarily the CEOs, but maybe high-level managers. They encourage the people on their team to go out and interview for other positions once a year.

The reason they do that is because they say, "Look, as much as you might like working for me, I only want to have you working with me if it's something that's challenging for you and it's stimulating for you and that you're still growing. If that stops happening, then I'd like you to find someplace else if you think you're going to grow more there. I will gladly support you in that."

Think about that shift in mentality. Instead of being always about, "Oh, we have to protect ourselves and hold information and not let people interview." No, no, no, it's all about, "I care about you as a human being and I want to do whatever I can to help you succeed."

As you read in the book, Travis, I mean there are just a huge number of companies that are led that way from the top down, and they have just extraordinary results. We can go more into that later if you like, but coming back to what you mentioned is how does mindfulness help us do that more?

To me, that's the whole reason that I approached this whole issue of servant leadership from the perspective of how mindfulness can help, because I think the two are incredibly interrelated.

For instance, I would think that most of us, if not all of us, deep down inside we know that's a better way to live and a better way to lead. We know that we're going to be much more effective if we take care of people and if we do what we can to serve them. The trouble is it can be really hard to do that. If we're under pressure to hit quarterly numbers or if we're under pressure to hit some type of short-term organizational goal or we're experiencing some type of emotional distress as a result of a personal issue or a work issue, like we're anxious or we're angry.

Whenever these types of things happen, our ability and even our desire to serve other people are diminished. At the most simple level, what mindfulness helps us do is as we're developing emotional intelligence, we're developing that space between our thoughts and our emotions, between, as you say, stimulus and response. It helps us to when we have those challenging emotions or when we're under pressure, it helps us to not be controlled by them. It helps us to not be a victim of those things.

When we're not a victim of those things, then we're much more likely to remember that our top priority should always be the human beings around us and what we can do to take care of them. Because if we take care of the people around us, the business things take care of themselves. But when we focus on the numbers and we neglect the people, eventually the business suffers incredibly.

That's the most simple level, I think, is just understanding that the more that we are able to have space between negative thought patterns, negative moods, negative emotional states that are more acute like anger and anxiety, the more that we're free from the control of those things, the more likely we are to still be able to bring a positive energy to the people around us and have the ability to not get sucked into the urgent and the short-term and be more aware of how important it is to really focus on what really matters over the long-term, which is caring for people.

In fact, to quantify this, there's a great book by Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership*. He cited a study that was done. I think it was at the University of Maryland, where they've actually quantified how when you're able to create a more positive climate where people feel positive emotions. They feel cared for.

You can actually quantify that in terms of revenue. A 1% increase in a positive climate in a workplace results in a 2% increase in revenue.

If you want to extrapolate that a little bit, you want to boost your revenue by 10% a year? Simple. Improve the climate in your workplace by 5%. I think you could do that for free with things like doing some mindfulness training, working on cultivating emotional intelligence, finding new ways to remind ourselves that serving and caring for the people on our team, that's the #1 priority.

I think if you just did that right there, you're going to improve the climate in your workplace by 5% and you'll probably see a 10% increase in revenue.

Travis: Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm glad you mentioned Simon's book, too. His newest book, *Leaders Eat Last*, is followed up from his first book, *Start With Why*, which, I think is really special. I was wondering if you were going to talk a little bit about that. I know in your book you do. he talks about a lot of the great leaders in the past and how this idea of starting with why is something that ties all of them together. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that and how that informs what we're talking about right now, too.

Matt: Yeah, I think one of the things that we can do to really be of service to the people around us is to inspire them. I mean people come to work every day. Most people are doing 40 hours a week. They're spending more time at work than they are with their families, in most cases. Unfortunately, for most people in America, it's not an inspiring experience.

I think a recent Gallup poll that I remember. They estimate that about only 30% of people that go to work are actively engaged in their work. That means roughly 70% are either just there doing the bare minimums to get by and get a paycheck, or unfortunately, there's a good number that are actively disengaged, where they're so unhappy with their situation that they're actually doing things that directly undermine the performance of the organization.

I think, one, if we're a leader, it behooves us in terms of running our organization better to inspire people, to give them a reason to come to work,

to wake up in the morning and say, "I'm really glad that I'm going to work today. I like going to work."

But it's a gift to them. Imagine if everybody had that. I think this is actually kind of Simon's dream. Simon dreams of this world where 90% of the people, at least, are fulfilled by what they do every day. Think about what that means. It means they go home and they treat their families better. They treat their neighbors better. The ripple effect of creating an environment that's inspiring, that people want to be a part of. It's really powerful.

To me, just from what I understand and I don't consider myself an expert on leadership, by any means. I'm definitely a student of leadership and I feel that because I have expertise in mindfulness training that I can help people to do things better.

But I'm mostly a student. I love just studying all these great leaders and seeing what they do. What I've noticed and I think this is somewhat intuitive, but if we look at what inspires people, it's essentially two components. One is having a purpose that is bigger than themselves. That helps inspire people. The other is being surrounded by people of high character or seeing examples of really high character, of extreme examples of generosity or compassion or determination. Things like this, when we see these inspiring emotions of people of high character, that inspires us.

With Simon's idea of *Start with Why*, that's the whole point. If you can determine what it is that you're doing in your organization that serves the customer in a way that's really palpable and really easy to take home, that's one level of helping inspire people. If you can connect their work to that purpose, like Medtronic is a medical device company that just had absolutely unbelievable business outcomes. The former CEO, Bill George, cites essentially the whole—all of their success based on the very simple idea of having a purpose-driven workplace.

They have pictures of people that have been saved or their lives have been changed by their devices. They have people come in and talk about it. Their mission is everywhere. I think that's one side of it, but you could even take it a step further and create an inspiring vision. What if—and I think Simon

eludes to this with Apple, for instance. They don't really talk about their mission, like we want to give customers these great computers. I'm sure that's their mission. They talk about their vision in their marketing. They talk about, "We envision a world where the status quo is just challenged in every way." That's kind of Apple's crux.

Or what if you had a vision of how the world is going to be improved as the result of the fact that your organization exists? I think you could do that. Let's say it's an insurance company, for instance. Or I'm sorry, like a financial services company that might offer insurance, but in either case, whether you're offering a peace of mind that comes from insurance or the peace of mind that comes from financial security, the vision for that organization could be, "Well, we envision a world where people are significantly more kind and compassionate towards each other because they're not worried about their finances. They're not worried about insurance issues." We take a little bit of stress off of people and it resulted at they're just a little bit more kind and compassionate.

You would just condense that down into a vision of, "We envision a more kind and compassionate world as a result of people not having to worry about their finances." If that's authentic, if people actually care about that, the leaders actually care about it, then other people are going to be incredibly inspired by that.

I mean if you were at a financial services company, what would inspire you more? To come to work with a vision like that or to come to work with somebody that says, "We want to offer the best insurance products and make a good profit every quarter, blah, blah, blah." It's night and day, right?

I think that's what Simon really hit a chord was that not only—and this idea of purpose-driven leadership has been around for a long time. But what Simon did was he codified it in a way that actually correlates to biology, and it showed us the importance of communicating it and really helping it be—making sure that it's authentic and that it's something that you're actually living because if you really care about the vision and that's actually what you want to do, all you have to do is find it. You don't have to create something. You look back at your life and you say, "What do I really want the world to

look like? Is my organization doing anything to affect that?" If it is, well, boom! There's your vision. When it's authentic and you communicate it in that way, then you start touching people's hearts. That's where inspiration comes from.

Now the second side of it is character. The more that we can do the right thing, even when it's really hard to do it, the more inspired people are going to be by our actions, just by being around us. That's why I use Martin Luther King as kind of the example of, to me, the epitome of an inspiring person because 1) he had this incredible vision that was easy to see. He envisioned a world where little black kids and little white kids could play together and not have to worry about racial tension. He carried out pursuing that vision with impeccable character. I mean his life was threatened. He was thrown in jail. All these things happened to him and he always responded with respect and with kindness and compassion.

Now granted he broke unjust laws intentionally, but that's kind of a higher level. I mean I personally don't take issue with someone breaking an unjust law. If it's something like that that's segregating people like apartheid or something like that, then that's something that probably should be challenged. Did that answer your question or did I go off too much on a tangent?

Travis: No, that's wonderful. I'm glad you also mentioned the part in your book, one of the parts I really liked is you talk about inspiring leaders can really help people enjoy the vast majority of their lives, which is at work. I think we forget, especially if we're in a helping profession, we help people when they're sick or when a disaster happens or when something difficult is happening in their life, but that's not the vast majority. That's a very small piece of their life when day-to-day, like you're saying, they're at work. They're with people that either are doing something that they really like, they feel inspired by, they feel like they're a big part of something.

I feel like you also touched on it in your book when you talked about gross domestic happiness and the GDH movement, all these possibilities that a lot of countries now are seeing of, "Can we measure something better than just gross domestic product?"

One of the quotes that I love and this was from a long time ago. Robert Kennedy was talking about GDP measures everything in short except those things that make our lives worth living. I love that quote. He actually goes into detail about all the things that GDP measures, which is unfortunate. We measure things that we know don't make our lives better, but in the lives of people all around the world better. Can you talk a little bit about GDH, why you talked about it, what you love about it? Then what each of us can do to make it a bigger part of our lives.

Matt: Sure. Yeah, so the reason I mentioned GDH in the book or gross domestic happiness is this idea that there's a simple kind of overstated or overused business axiom, which is if something doesn't get measured, it doesn't get done.

I think there's a lot of value in measuring things. For instance, if I tell you that let's say we're on the same team, Travis, and I tell you that showing up for work on time is something that's really important. But no one ever checks to make sure that people are there on time and no one is held accountable to it. Then you don't really believe me that it's important, do you, because it's not measured.

In the same way, if we don't measure the things that really matter, like how well—if I'm a leader on a team, how well am I serving the people that work for me? How well do I listen? How much patience do I have? How well do I manage my emotions so that I make sure that I am creating a positive mood, a positive environment in the workplace? If these things aren't measured, then nobody is going to pay any attention to them. Nobody is going to believe that they're important.

I think the gross domestic happiness set this great president of this young king from Bhutan who became a king, I think, when he was 17 or something, when his father died. He approaches leading the country with this total mind of a beginner. Somebody asked him, "What do you think about their gross domestic product of Bhutan?" He said, "I don't understand why people are so worried about it." Why don't we measure gross domestic happiness? I think that's a much better indicator of the state of the country.

Obviously, that's not to say we ignore gross domestic product or if we're running an organization, that we ignore sales goals and margin goals that we have and cost reduction goals that we have, whatever the goals might be. It's not to say that we ignore those or we don't measure those. It's just to say that we balance that by also measuring the things that really matter, that really drive long-term performance of people on our teams and that really drive long-term success of an organization, which is an organization that has happy, loyal people that are a part of it.

Because if the people are happy and loyal and they're fully engaged, I mean it's a pretty simple equation. That translates to happy, loyal customers. I think we had mentioned just a few moments ago that it's actually been quantified now. 1% increase in that environment results in a 2% increase in revenue.

I think a great example of this in the real world is a company called Herschend Family Entertainment. They run amusement parks all over the country. The CEO, Joel Manby, actually wrote a great book, which if you haven't read, anybody listening, it's a great read. It's called *Love Works*. But he got some notoriety when he was actually on *Undercover Boss*, the TV show. He got notoriety because they really love their people there at HFE and they do a lot to take care of them.

In fact, at HFE, they measure how well the leaders love the people around them. You hear this word "love" and I'm not talking about some feeling. I'm not talking about some silliness here. I'm talking about actions. How well did leaders respect the people? How well do they listen? How much empathy do they have? How well do they work to serve the people on their team?

But they actually call their leadership development program, Leading with Love, and they measure how well the leaders love the people on their teams. If you want to be a senior leader at HFE, yes, you have to excel at management skills. You have to be able to do the things that are required of a manager, but you also—you need to excel at those qualities of kindness and compassion, empathy, patience. You need to excel at loving the people on your team, otherwise you're not going to be a senior leader there.

Guess what happens in that culture? People know that it's important. They know they're being measured on it, and people work at it. They realize that, "Okay, yes, I may want to be a caring leader, but it doesn't come easily. When things are tough and we're under pressure and things aren't going well, it's hard to consistently care for the people around us." It's a challenging thing to do, but if it's measured, then people say, "Well, I need to work at it. I need to find—if I'm not doing well at it, I need to find ways to get better."

Travis: That's wonderful. I'm mindful of how much time we have. I don't want to take all of your day, although I feel like this interview could go on forever. I wanted to ask you if you could tell one of my favorite stories in your book. The emperor and the hermit, I think, is a wonderful story. I was wondering if you could tell that story because I feel like it kind of goes back to a lot of the things we're talking about and wondering, "What's the best thing I can do now? How should I be focusing my life?" I never heard this story before. I think it's just wonderful. I was wondering if you could tell that to us.

Matt: I'd be happy to. It's actually—I think it was originally titled, *The Three Questions*. It's a story that was written originally by the famous Russian author named Leo Tolstoy.

The story is about this emperor who thinks that if he knew the answer to three questions he would be the most successful leader possible. He'd be the most successful leader ever. The three questions are: what is the most important time to do each thing? Who are the most important people to work with? What is the most important task to pursue at all times?

Because he thinks that knowing the answers to these three questions is so valuable, he sends out a decree throughout the entire kingdom. He says, "Anybody that can answer these three questions to my satisfaction, you'll live the rest of your life in luxury. You'll have everything you want living inside the palace walls."

Of course, just about everybody comes with their answers. In response to the first question, people say things like—the first question, again, is what's the most important time to do each thing? Some people say, "Well, you could never have the foresight to be able to plan what you're going to do all the

time, so I think you should hire a counsel of wise people who create a calendar and they consecrate every moment of every day for you so that you always do what's most important."

Somebody else said, "No, no, no, you know what you should really do is you should consult magicians and soothsayers who can predict the future because then you'll always know what to do at what time." The emperor, he wasn't really satisfied with any of the answers that he got to the first question.

Similarly with the second question. Who are the most important people to work with? Some people said, "You should definitely work with military people. That's the most important." Some people said, "No, it's politicians." Other people said, "No, it's scientists." Somebody else said, "No, no, no, it's religious people. That's who you should work with."

Again, the emperor just—he wasn't really satisfied with any of the answers. Same thing with the third question. What's the most important task to pursue? Some people said military might. Some people said science. Some people said religion.

The emperor was pulling his hair out. Days after days he's just getting all these answers. It just wasn't what he was looking for. He was just about to give up, and then he remembered that there was supposedly this enlightened man who was a very, very wise man, who lives up in the mountain. He's kind of a hermit. He kind of just stays away from the village for the most part.

He figures, "Well, I would imagine this wise man can answer my question." But there was a problem and the problem is that this hermit would never see somebody of wealth or power like the emperor. He would only entertain a visit from somebody who's humble.

The emperor decided, "Well, what I'm going to do is just dress up as a peasant and I'll go see this hermit." He took a couple guards with him. He left the guards at the base of the mountain, and then he walked up the mountain to go see the hermit. When he came upon the hermit, the hermit was digging rows in a garden with a spade. He looked at the emperor as he approached and smiled and nodded, and then he went right back to digging.

The emperor said, "Pardon me, wise man, but I'd like to ask you three questions that I would imagine you could answer because I believe you're very wise. What is the most important time to do each thing? Who are the most important people to work with, and what is the most important task to pursue at all times?"

Well, the hermit just looked at him with a smile and he patted him on the shoulder and he went right back to digging. Now the hermit was pretty old. He was maybe 85, 90-years-old so this digging was pretty hard on him, and he grunted as he was digging. Each time he put the spade in the ground, you could just hear an, "Ugh, ugh." The emperor took pity on him and said, "Well, can I help you with that?" The hermit smiled and handed him the spade. The emperor started digging and he dug one row and he dug a second row. Then he remembered his three questions and asked them again.

The hermit just looked at him with a smile and said, "I feel quite rested now. I think I can take over." The emperor said, "Oh, no, no, no. I got it. I got it." He went back to digging. He dug another row and another row. He really got into it. He dug all the way up to about the point where the sun was going to set. Then he remembered, "Oh, my gosh! I have to get home before the sun sets and I need to ask these three questions."

He asked the hermit again the three questions. This time the hermit looked off into this tree line and then pointed, and he said, "Do you see that man with the long white beard running out of the trees?" Sure enough, they looked and there was this man sprinting towards the emperor out of the tree line with a long white beard and he had his hands over his stomach.

As he ran up to the emperor, he fell down, passed out, and his hand fell off of his stomach and the emperor and the hermit noticed that he had this huge gash in his stomach and he was bleeding profusely. The emperor immediately wanted to help and so he took his shirt off and he put it on the wound to try to stop the bleeding, and it soaked his shirt through with blood in just a matter of seconds, maybe 15, 20 seconds.

He went down to a crick that was about 15 yards away and he rinsed out the shirt and he came back and he did that again. He had to do this two or three times before he finally got the bleeding to stop. Once he had the bleeding stopped, the man with the white beard regained consciousness and he said, "So thirsty."

So the emperor grabbed a jug and he went back to the crick. He got some more water, brought it back up to the man, gave him something to drink. Then after he had a few sips of water, the man with the white beard just kind of fell into this very peaceful sleep.

By now, it was almost dark. The emperor and the hermit carried the man up to the hermit's hut, put him in the bed, and the emperor was so tired from the day of digging and walking up the mountain and helping this man, all the excitement that he sat down at the doorstep of the hut and passed out.

In what seemed like an instant, he woke up and the sun was rising and he was a little bit confused about where he was. He was looking around in confusion, and then he noticed that the man with the white beard was also looking around in confusion. Their eyes met. The man with the white beard said, "Please forgive me." The emperor said, "Forgive you? Why should I forgive you? What have you done that I should forgive you?" The man with the white beard said, "Your Majesty, you do not know me, but I know you. During the last war, you killed my brother and you seized all my property. I vowed that I would take revenge on you. When I found out that you were coming here alone to see the hermit, I put a plan in place to make sure that I could take my revenge on you. I saw that you had your two guards, so I came about halfway up the mountain and I decided I would wait there and ambush for you to come back from seeing the hermit."

"But I waited and I waited and you never came. Eventually, I decided I should leave my place of ambush and come seek you out, but when I did, your two attendants recognized me and they chased me and gave me this gash. But luckily I was able to escape from them and here I came running at you with the intention of taking your life and you saved my life. I'm deeply ashamed, but I'm also very, very grateful. I vow that I will be your servant for the rest of my life and I will bid my children and their children to do the same."

The emperor was so overjoyed by being reconciled with a former enemy that he said, "No, that's not necessary. In fact, I'll make sure that you get all of your property back and I'm going to have my attendants take you to the palace and make sure you get the best medical care." So that's what he ordered.

The attendants took the man with the white beard to the palace, and as the emperor was getting ready to leave, he remembered, "Oh, yeah, my three questions." He went to go find the hermit and he found him planting seeds in the soil that they had cultivated the day before. As the emperor approached, the hermit just looked at him with a smile. He knew exactly what he was going to ask. He said, "Don't you see that your three questions have already been answered?"

The emperor was a little confused. He said, "Well, how is that?" The hermit said, "Well, yesterday when you took the time to help me dig, the most important time was the time that you spent helping me. Because had you not done that, you would have walked down the hill and been killed by that man. You would have deeply regretted not having helped me."

"Likewise, I was the most important person and helping me was the most important task. Now later on, when that man came running at your feet, the most important person was him. The most important task was to help him and the most important time was the time that you spent helping him heal and taking care of him, because had you not done that, at a minimum, you never would have known the joy of reconciliation with a former enemy. At a maximum, he might have come back to try to seek his revenge another time."

"The most important time is always the present moment, because this is the only moment that we have any control over at all. The most important person is the person that you're with right now in this moment, the person right at your side, because you never know if you're going to interact with another human being in your entire life. The most important task is to make the person at your side happy and that alone is the sole pursuit of life."

Travis: I love that story. It's a great story and I feel like—I was going to ask you, this conference being called the *Everyday Humanitarians* conference, what do you think an everyday humanitarian is? I feel like that story is a beautiful example of what an everyday humanitarian is, but I'd still like to ask you that question.

We have these lofty ideas of humanitarians being people that do great things and we could never be that, but what do you think of the idea of an everyday humanitarian? What does that mean to you?

Matt: Well, I'd like to tell you another—this is a very short story, but it's a beautiful one. I was presenting at a conference of orientation directors for universities out in Salt Lake City about two months ago. After I presented, I went and I listened to somebody that's an academic who was talking about research in retention of college students present her talk. It was absolutely fantastic. But one of the things that she said towards the end just absolutely struck me.

She had mentioned that what really helps retain students and I think this is the exact same for the business world is when they feel that people actually care about them. That's the #1 predictor of whether or not someone is going to stay.

What she mentioned was this one particular student at a small liberal arts college there in Salt Lake City. They have maybe 3,000, 4,000 people on campus. There was one student who had stayed and when surveyed she said that she thought about leaving all the time, and that she felt like there was really no one on campus in positions that you would normally think of, like professors, guidance counselors, anybody. There was no one in positions that you would normally think of that she felt actually cared about her at all.

She said the only reason she stayed was because of the guy who flips the pancakes in the dining facility. She said that every morning when she came in to get breakfast, this guy always, without fail, offered her a smile and asked her, "What happened yesterday? How did your test go? How's it going with your boyfriend?" He actually cared about her and was involved in her life. She stayed in college because of a guy working in a dining facility probably making minimum wage.

To answer your question, Travis, I think an everyday humanitarian is that guy. It doesn't matter what position we have. It doesn't matter what our social stature is. What matters is how high of a priority is it to us to be of service to the people around us and do the little things that bring happiness to the people around us, even if it's just offering somebody a smile, saying hello, if it's somebody you see more than once, asking them their name so that the next time you see them you can address them by name.

These little things, these can create communities of people that actually care about each other. They create ripple effects. To me, this is much more important than going out and trying to save the world on a large level. I mean if we're going out and we're trying to save the world, but we don't take care of the people that are right by our side, then I think our efforts are going to be futile.

The good news is this is something that we can all do and it enriches life. It makes it so that we wake up happy every day, excited to face the day because no matter what our position is, we have a purpose. That purpose is what can I do to help the people around me to be happy? What can I do to help people? Even if it's just the tiniest little wave, offering a smile, or a kind word.

Travis: I love that. That's wonderful. That's such a good story. That's such a great story. I'm glad you told that. My last question for you and this is the fun question I like asking everybody in this great conference that we've been able to put together is how we can help you. You can take it any way you want. We or all the people that love this interview, are very inspired by the great work you're doing, but how can we best help you?

Matt: The best way to help me is to pay it forward. The way that I always think of it is I love the work that I do and I love going around and speaking for organizations and doing what I can to help leaders be more effective at serving the people around them. But I'm just one person. The more people that are out there really doing things every day to be better at being a more kind and more compassionate and more service-oriented person, then I feel like that's helping me with what I want to do because my vision is of a world where we all see that the most powerful road that there is to success is to

make serving the people around us our top priority and doing things every day to make sure that we do that more effectively.

If people are doing that, then that helps me. Now if you find the book inspiring and you want to share it, that can help spread the message. It also helps raise some money for some good causes. All the author proceeds from the sale of my book go to charity. If you like the book and you think that would help inspire people to do these things, then that is very helpful as well. It's a tangible thing that you can do to spread the message in addition to actually living the message. Most important, I think, is doing what we can to live the message every day.

Travis: I love that. You remind me, too, of one of my favorite quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. and I know he's one of your heroes that you talk about in your book is he says, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve." I think that's a wonderful quote. It's very much like the title of your book. I hope everybody goes out and grabs it. I really enjoyed it and I really enjoyed this interview, too, Matt. Thank you so much for being with us. It's wonderful to have you as part of this conference and I wish you the very best in all of your great work that you're doing.

Matt: Thank you, Travis. Yeah, it was a great time chatting with you. I really appreciate you inviting me to do this.