

Podcast Recording: Leading with integrity – Episode 104 – Collaborating for Success with Dave Bates – Abridged Transcript

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Attendees

David Bates, David Hatch

Transcript

This transcript is abridged to remove other guests and focus on the portion of the interview with Paravelle and David Bates.

Introduction

David Hatch: What do an executive and communications coach, a technology CEO, a medal winning former Olympian, a retired Top Gun instructor, and an expert on empathy and emotional agency all have in common?

Don't know?

Probably loads of things. But today, two things very specifically that I'm interested in. One, they each have valuable insights on collaboration and teamwork. And two, they're sharing those insights with us today on this very special episode of Leading with Integrity. This week, it's International Leadership Week.

So I am doing five episodes, one a day, starting today. Stick around at the end of this episode, and I will run you through what else is coming this week. International Leadership Week is one of my favorite weeks of the year, which is probably no surprise to any long-time listener, but it's all about community and uniting leaders across the world.

People who are passionate about leadership and raising the standard of it in workplaces and organizations everywhere. People like me, in other words, and I hope people like you, listener, as well. It's run by the Institute of Leadership and every year they pick a different theme for the week. This year, it's all about collaborating for success.

And I just love that theme this year. It is such an important one because ultimately the goal of any application of leadership is enabling an effective team, one that's working towards a common goal. And the core of that is all about collaboration. So what is the secret to that all important collaboration?

Is it clarity? Is it communication, trust, psychological safety, understanding your role, knowing the roles of others, inclusive behaviours? Is it, as a leader, ensuring that your people are seen, heard and valued? Is it all of the above? Who knows? We'll find out. This week, maybe even today. All of those things speak very much to the heart of modern leadership and what leading with integrity is all about. In fact, collaborate is one of the five pillars of the leading with integrity approach to leadership. So as I say, I couldn't be more excited to get into this vital topic.

And on that note, this week, we're going to touch on many of those ideas and more. We'll be hearing from leaders and experts across the spectrum of life, career, industry, and backgrounds. And to launch us into the week, today, we're going to explore this ILW24 theme very specifically

Announcer: Welcome to the leading with integrity podcast, leadership talk for the modern manager with your host, David Hatch.

David Hatch: So I'm joined by two former guests today, Irela Pannon, who you may remember from episode 55, which was way back in June last year. It seems like a decade ago now. And we talked then about empathy and emotional agency at work.

I'm also joined by executive coach and communications expert, David Bates, who is a more recent guest from episode 102, only a couple of weeks ago. So I'm sure you probably remember him a lot more easily.

And today we're going to hear from Ira and Dave on their views about successful collaboration, what it looks like and how leaders can best achieve it in their teams.

05:02 - Other guests mentioned (not in this transcript)

And then for the final segment of the episode, I have a few more guests and everyone's going to be answering my quickfire question, which is what is the secret to successful collaboration?

Those extra guests, you may recognize tech CEO and AI expert Denzel Eden from episode 99 last month, and then the final two guests, you probably won't recognize because they are from future episodes that haven't come out yet. So you're getting a double bonus there, really, of being very on topic for International Leadership Week.

And you're getting a sneak preview for some of the upcoming conversations that haven't been released yet. So those extra guests are Olympic medal winning athlete, TEDx speaker and executive coach Joey Lai, and then retired fighter pilot, former Top Gun instructor, previous commander of the US Navy display team, the Blue Angels, speaker, consultant, author, the list goes on, Captain George Dong.

So it's going to be an interesting one. We're going to go be going all over the place today. I'm really pleased that you're here with us. And yeah, I'm too excited. We're just going to have to dive straight in. I can't, can't hold back any longer.

Well, Dave, thank you so much for coming back so soon after your last appearance as much appreciated. It's great to have you back on Leading with Integrity.

Dave Bates: Thank you. It's great to be back. I'm excited about it.

06:38 – What is the secret to successful collaboration?

David Hatch: Yeah, me too. And today's topic in honor of International Leadership Week 2024 is collaborating for success. So the first question I'll ask you really just to get your thoughts on that as a, as a theme, if you like, what, what do you think is the secret to successful collaboration?

If there is one?

Dave Bates: Yeah, I don't know that there is one secret, but, I think that good collaboration requires at least two things. If I thought about it for longer, I might, come up with different things. But, the first thing is that I think we have to value other people and the contribution that they have to make.

A lot of times leaders end up in a situation where they kind of just need smart people so they can tell them what to do. Like that's kind of an oxymoron, but that's, that's the behavior. Like, look, I just need to tell you what needs to be done so that you can go off and do it the way I would have done it.

And that can work for a little while, but it doesn't necessarily value the thing that somebody uniquely brings their perspective, their insight, their attitude, whatever those things are. When we're just doling out assignments so that we can get from point A to point B the way we expect to get there, we lose something in that and it doesn't feel very collaborative.

So understanding the value that they bring. I think then the second thing that is essential is that we have to invest in becoming better communicators. We are constantly seeking to be heard and I think a lot of times we don't understand the essential model for communications. And when we don't understand that model, it gets in the way of our ability to get things done.

Um, how many times have you played the telephone game, right? I use an example in one of the talks I give of like, hey, let's meet. Let's meet on Monday at Starbucks for coffee at 10 a. m. And I go to Starbucks and at 10 a. m. there I am. This isn't an ad for Starbucks by the way, just so you know. Uh, the uh, but there I am at 10 a.m. and you're not there. But you're at Starbucks and it's 10 a. m. and I'm not there. Where are we? Oh, there's a Starbucks on every corner. We didn't agree on which Starbucks it was. Or we didn't agree on which Monday it was. Or, you know, just so, so simple things that can derail us. Imagine what happens when we're talking about organizational projects and things.

There's no wonder that 70 plus percent of organizational change initiatives fail. We can't even communicate with each other how we're going to get coffee. How are we going to get things done? So there's two parts of valuing each other, what we can bring, and being able to communicate effectively towards the goal that we have in mind that we share.

David Hatch: Yeah, other coffees are available, of course. Yeah.

Dave Bates: Yes, indeed. And often I like to, uh, to support my, my local coffee shop over a chain, but sometimes the ubiquity of other thing makes it more convenient for others.

David Hatch: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I think there's, there's two really good points in there that you've made.

And I guess that the link in between the two of them is, is that communication piece, isn't it? Which we've talked about previously, haven't we? But it's that bit where leaders get so I don't know what the word is really that they get carried away, don't they? With with I'm the leader. I need to do that.

I transmit the information. Everyone else sits and takes notes and then goes away and does things when actually, you know, and as we talked about before, listening is the key component of communication. And the reason I think that links your two themes there is if you're going to value people, one of the best ways to do that is to listen to them, isn't it?

Because then they feel valued and they feel like their opinions, their inputs their contributions matter and are appreciated by their leader, right?

10:27 – The paradox of handing control to others to get things done.

Dave Bates: Yeah. And I think I think with empathy as leaders, we're just under such tremendous pressure to get things done right. And, um, we've gotten, we've gotten to where we are in a lot of cases because we've been, uh, an effective individual contributor.

So as an individual contributor, what do I control? I control the things that are within my span of control and I influence the things that are not. And as I rise through the levels of leadership, formalized leadership, then, you know, I tend to do things my way because now I have increased span of control, right?

And so there's this natural inbuilt tendency to lean into that span of control in order to get the outcomes that we believe are there. But it's paradoxical because the more senior our formal leadership role is the less we want to become the limiting factor in getting things done. So we have to get out of this out of the control seat and hand that control to other people.

It's one of the things I love about *Turn The Ship around* by David Marquette that it's such a great book on decentralized decision making and leadership, where the CEO - in his case, the sub captain - still has the final word on what we're going to go do, right? But it's influenced so much by input from the people who are closest to the information.

So leadership becomes about listening for the signals, right? And then putting a plan together with folks for based on those signals here's, here's how we achieve the objective. So...

David Hatch: yeah, I mean, as you say, with a bit of empathy, the vast majority of leaders, you know, they're not doing that to be control freaks or

Dave Bates: some of them are.

David Hatch: Well, yeah, I mean, that's why I said the majority, but there's always the few in there aren't there who are just egomaniacs. But yeah, um, I don't think most of them are doing it maliciously. I mean, I know I certainly didn't when I made that mistake myself way back when, however many years ago it was. Um, but I think, you know, there is that, I mean, a question I'd love to know the answer to because you spent a lot more time in big companies than I have.

I did a few temp jobs there. Most of my career has been in small businesses. So that problem you mentioned earlier where you hire these experts who really know their stuff and then you tell them what to do. That's sort of weird dynamic. You see it a lot in small companies, which it's never really made sense to me.

12:48 – The problem of hiring smart people and then telling them what to do

You know, if you're the business owner, you know how much those people are costing you. So why aren't you using their skills? Does it happen a lot in the big companies as well? Or is it more of a small business challenge? Let's say,

Dave Bates: I think it happens in all places. I think part of the challenge is that there's such a wide variety of how consultants do what they do.

I was listening to the Acquired podcast, um, recently, and they did a, an episode on Hermes and Hermes has part of its core operating principles: never hire consultants because they hired some consultants who were well meaning, but they gave them the advice that would basically eviscerate what makes Hermes Hermes.

And so part of the challenge is that a lot of consultants, they know their stuff, but they, they come in with a recipe. And I still have yet to write my blog post on this thing, but, um, but frameworks are way more powerful than recipes. Because what worked in one organization probably won't work in another organization.

I mean, let's think about why a founder starts a business in the first place and doesn't go work for somebody else because they think they can do something better. Or different, or they are, they're innovating on a concept. So if I'm innovating on a concept, why would I do what everybody else is doing? So as a consultant, when you come in and you tell people what to do, you're not necessarily helping.

If you're an SAP consultant and the customer's - not ad for SAP, it could be Dynamics or anybody else, right? - But if you're an ERP consultant and you happen to be on a piece of software that they. Customer has already chosen and you're going to help them be effective and efficient with that E. R. P. system. Well, then you probably do have a playbook to follow and that will be its own bumpy ride. But at the end of it, you're probably going to have a successful E. R. P. Implementation.

But when a consultant comes in with a playbook to your unique business, whether it's a big business or a small business, there's a good chance you're going to end up in that 70 percent of organizational transformation failures because it's not custom to you.

So the minute they start customizing, they're listening to what you're trying to deal with as a business leader. Your job is to say you're about to take away the distinctiveness of my organization with that approach. How do I get the benefit of that thing without losing my distinctiveness? And a lot of times a consultant was just, I don't know if you want that, I'm not your person.

Okay, so it happens everywhere. And if you also remember that large organizations are just a bunch of small organizations that all roll up into a bigger one, then we as a leader at whatever level in that organization, we're responsible for saying this is where we're trying to get to.

And I have to believe that any third party that comes in has loaded enough context and brought their framework in and can help me get there. And if they can't or I don't believe they can, it's my duty to say, okay, thank you. I'm gonna keep looking.

David Hatch: Yeah, I like the recipe analogy. Um, yeah. Because for that to work you're assuming that every organization has the same ingredients, aren't they? I'm straining your metaphor now, but...

Dave Bates: we call that extending it. It's only straining when it falls apart. We try to hold it together

David Hatch: or nearly there. Yeah, interesting. Um, all right. So one more question for you then on this subject.

16:49 – Attributes of good collaborative teams and organizations

David Hatch: What is the best and most effective collaborating team that you've ever been part of?

Dave Bates: Hmm. Good question. You're good at good questions.

David Hatch: Thank you.

Dave Bates: Uh, I, man... I've been a part of so many different teams and I don't know if I can say that one was the best or not the best. Um, just... The challenge is, is isolating what made it the best, right? Um,

David Hatch: that was gonna be my next question.

Dave Bates: I've been a leader of teams before, and, um, for most of my career, I've been in formalized leadership positions. And even when I haven't been in a formal leader role, I've kind of been in the okay, well, how do we get this done? How do we solve this problem?

And so I think the, the things that characterize high performing teams are where they have a clear and shared understanding of what the objective is.

It's not that somebody has said, this is the objective, but that we've pressure tested it - that we know that what people heard us say is actually what we said, and that gets back to this

communication framework that I talked about, and then they're resourced to accomplish that.

We know what the constraints are. And so the basic project management things like this is the this is the budget that we have to work in. I had an example. This isn't necessarily the best one, but it was an interesting one where, um, we had to do a nationwide training plan, and we had a ridiculous number of people, but we didn't have the budget to get them all through this training program.

It was literally a - back in the day when we used to ship anvil cases all around the country full of equipment, and we would set it up in a location, and then we would run a training class - I had a team that did that for me, a curriculum team, and I had the training team. We got this, this requirement from the board, the leading indicator of revenue was how many people could we train in our dealer channel.

Like, I don't know how we're going to do that because the math doesn't, it just doesn't work with the dollar amount. So I went and I got the head of the curriculum team and I got the head of the training team. We pulled a couple of folks from their teams in and we said, this is what we got. What do we do?

Let's start with the options. Like, here's the constraints. And, you know, we, these guys came up with, with some pretty great stuff. It required us to spend a little bit of money, but we reallocated budget. And at the end of the year, we had actually gotten 20 percent more than the already aggressive number of people to train.

And it was solely because we understood what the goal was. We understood what, what our objective was and how it related to the leading indicator or was the leading indicator. And then we just said, okay, what options do we have? And we built a plan. And I think that's an example of high-performance team.

And, and what helps it to be that way. It wasn't easy. It was not a foregone thing. We had a lot of risk. We didn't know if it would work. And so there's a lot of detail in there. But overarchingly, I think that's what makes teams work the best.

David Hatch: Okay. Makes sense. Didn't quite answer my question, but you answered the question I was going to ask you next, so I'll let you off.

Dave Bates: Well, I answered the question. I wish you would have asked.

David Hatch: It's very political of you, yeah

Dave Bates: Well, the trouble is, it's a hard question, right? And, um, and it requires you to, it requires me to think back through 30 plus years of teams, right? And I've been on a lot of teams, and some of them have worked well, and some of them have not so well, so.

David Hatch: Mm hmm. Okay. Well, I won't hold you, hold it against you.

Dave Bates: I appreciate that.

David Hatch: Yeah. Yeah. Fair enough.

21:17 – Segment conclusion

Well, that's it. Thank you so much again for being here. Happy International Leadership Week.

Dave Bates: I'll celebrate International Leadership Week every week if I can.

David Hatch: Yeah. Well, I do anyway, pretty much, but it's good to have an excuse as well.

Dave Bates: Yeah. That's right. Well, thank you for having me again.

David Hatch: Well, thanks for being here and yeah, have a great rest of your day. Thanks.

21:22 – End of Segment

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