

S5Ep27: Dr. Hope Zoeller and Dr. Joe Desensi

SPEAKERS

Joe DeSensi, Hope Zoeller, Peter Margaritis

Peter Margaritis

Hey, welcome back, everybody. I've got two great guests that have become my two best friends. They reside in Louisville, Kentucky, which just makes this Kentucky boy very, very happy because it's also getting close to Derby time. And first and foremost, I want to thank you both Joe, and Hope for taking time out of your busy schedule, preparing for the Derby and everything else that you, you have a book launch tomorrow as well, to spend time on my podcast. So thank you so very much.

Joe DeSensi

Peter, thank you so much for having us.

Hope Zoeller

Yes. Thank you. We had to get the book launch in before Derby, because we take in Kentucky about three weeks to celebrate.

Joe DeSensi

And then one week to recover. So, it's a month long.

Hope Zoeller

Yes. It's a month long. It's a month long period of time.

Peter Margaritis

But I have a question as, so a month, a week longer. I remember in college, that was about right. But we're far from college does not take two weeks to recover from Derby.

Hope Zoeller

At our age, yes.

Joe DeSensi

It takes me two weeks sometimes recover from one night, if I'm living like I did in my 20s. Even pacing myself, it's still a solid week or two to come back.

Peter Margaritis

So, you guys have recently published a book, Hope for Leaders in the 2020s: New Issues to Face, New Problems to Solve, New Hope for the Future. What was your motivation for writing this book?

We had originally planned, we put out our first volume in our leadership series in 2015. So, the goal was always going to be 5 years later, we would put out the second volume. And we started it in the beginning of 2020. And then things started changing rapidly. The world started changing, and we really realized the need to maybe shift some of what we were talking about in a different way. And so, as we began working on that, and got into the latter part of 2020, and we're realizing, wow, we're in something. We're in something that is life changing personally for people. Life changing professionally. So, we redirected some of what we had to really look at how are we, and we are now just coming out of some of this, and you know, how do we as leaders, be able to lead post pandemic. Because we can't call, you know, we can't call what was normal, ever normal that normal again. And I've stopped saying new normal. I'm saying it's the now normal. It's the as organizations, we truly have to get on board with leading differently than we've ever led before. And so, that really, you know, for us was what can we do for leaders to give them those tools and resources and a guide to be able to steer into the unknown of a lot of things that you could have never planned for.

Joe DeSensi

And one of the things that I really liked about our approach with this book, of course, all the planning we did in 2019 went out the window, because, you know, the things that we're going to write about the things, that had been like well documented over the last five to 10 years, you know, you had thrown everything up in the air, and we were going to see what was going to fall out. So, this book really went on pause for almost a year. But when we came out, I also write books in K12. Education. The last book that we did in K 12 education, we focused as much on the IP or the actual what we taught as the tools to help implement it because one of the things that you can do as academics is you can get too much, you can have some really good ideas, but then people are like, well, what am I going to do with it? So, this book focused on making sure that people had practical applications to do with their team for self-inventories and that sort of thing. So, it's not just a book to read, but it's actually an inventory in a way to be able to put this into practice without having to figure out how to unpack it yourself.

Peter Margaritis

So, answer this question. What's the difference between leadership prior to the pandemic and leadership today?

Hope Zoeller

If you didn't have empathy before, you better find it.

Joe DeSensi

Yeah.

Hope Zoeller

If your ears had no ability to listen, you better get them cleaned out. You better make space. Because people, people no longer have tolerance to work for people that they don't feel genuinely care about them. And, you know, we're hearing about the Great Resignation. And now it's being called the Great Reshuffling. It's the Great Rethink. And, you know, time and time again, studies have concluded Gallup, the number one reason why people leave organizations is a bad leader. And so, if you weren't in that before this pandemic, you have got to be in that game now. And it's not an unrealistic thing if you're

giving people whatever they want and doing it, but it is really how do we meet in the middle? How do we become more flexible as organizations, and let people have some say, and their work styles and the way they show up and they want to do the way they do things? And people want to know that the person that they work for cares. And so, you know, if you had not tons of that before, it is now more important than ever to show up as that servant leader who listens first. You know, you listen to learn. And how can I best support you? How can I best serve you and be here for you now?

Joe DeSensi

And one of the other things that came out of the pandemic was, you know, the old idea that things in motion tend to remain in motion. We have so many things that we do, just because we've always done them this way. We had such a break, you know, with the virtual, with somethings being closed down, with some things reshuffling of what work looks like. We have to actively go back and recapture that if you're trying to get back into that fossilized 2019 version of doing things anymore. It was so easy to, you know, if you've ever watched movie Office Space to require TPS reports, even though nobody actually wondered or realizes like what they actually do or do they add any value? You have to actively go back and recapture those inefficient processes today, so you have to have a better rationale for it other than, well, we've always done it this way. It makes it much more difficult for people to do things that they just been conditioned to do. We have to really work backwards from with the economy of resources with the lack of people that we have to help us out. How are we going to make the most of retaining our folks and getting the most out of them? And, and that has to be having a new mentality about how you approach leadership.

Peter Margaritis

So, how do you, and we've seen this as we've gone through the pandemic, yes, we all had to work remotely. We couldn't go into the offices. But now that we're able to move about, there are some leaders out there. I love the words fossilized, because I can picture these guys, and but they're still trying to revert back to the old leadership style. How and they tend to have been in business for many, many years, the CEO for many, many years. They've got some silver hair about them. Male, female. They get those hashmarks, how are we going to change their minds?

Hope Zoeller

You may not.

Joe DeSensi

Yeah.

Hope Zoeller

They may have to go.

Joe DeSensi

Yeah.

Hope Zoeller

They may not be part of, of the now normal. And that's a hard conversation. I just had that with a client this week. It's going to be they either come to learn to modify some of these behaviors, or they may have to move along and do something else. Because at this point what that fossilization is causing, is the young growing fossils to take their fossils somewhere else. And we can't afford, I mean, companies now just can't afford... I've got one company I'm working with, they've got 40 openings right now. You're not competitive that is to find 40 people, and they need in person. These aren't virtual, you know, this is manufacturing. So, it's a different, different...they can't hire, well, I mean, they could but it's they need basically people that are here. So, how do we be able to do that? You know, and it's giving, giving those leaders, those types of leaders... and I don't begrudge them for it. The way they've lead, in some cases have worked through the years. And in many cases, they've gotten promoted and got rewarded for those types of behaviors. But the workforce now with what everybody has gone through, we've really rethought our priorities. We've really rethought, like, what fulfills us and what do we want to do? What brings us joy? And if my job no longer brings me joy, because of something, because of a boss, I had friends that didn't even have another job and they quit. They weren't worried about it. And so, organizations are going to have to take a serious look and have a serious conversation on this is the way, and we'd love to have you part of it. But if you can't, then you may need to not be.

Joe DeSensi

One of the great advantages of the Great Resignation is, you know, sometimes we are unlikely to change unless things get bad enough to force us to change. So, when nobody was quitting when no leaders were like bleeding, hemorrhaging their top producers, then you, if they're bad leaders, now, they probably weren't awesome leaders before. It was just that you didn't have nearly as many red flags going up about what their approach to leadership was doing. The fact is this exacerbated now. If they were bleeding people before, they're hemorrhaging them now. So, this may actually give either top management an opportunity to put them on a path where it's bad enough now to where it has to be addressed, because it costs so much to recruit, retain, you know, find somebody, find two people that can backfill as a producer that you did. And if the person is at the top of the food chain, it may be that their employees leave, and they may or may not make it through just trying to get back to the old way of doing things. Unfortunately, bad leadership is going to be one of the epidemics we're never going to find a vaccine for. But we are getting, we are going to have things bad enough now to where we're going to address at least a few of them that we can.

Hope Zoeller

Maybe that's what we need to be working on Peter. A vaccine. A vaccine.

Peter Margaritis

A vaccine for bad leadership. My brother used to work for a division of The Limited years ago, and he had this boss that was absolutely toxic. Toxic beyond toxicity, and they hired a coach to come and help her. Didn't really work. But she kept getting promoted. And my brother, I have no idea how this is working. So, he went in toward another. But we hear this, we hear, we used to hear this all the time. And that might be slightly overstatement. That will be bad leaders in place, because they're producing. They're getting the people to produce, but the part they were looking at is they might be producing but

the turnover, versus a good leader, we'll call it, was 10 times more, but they never really took that, they never took the people factor into consideration.

Hope Zoeller

And, you know, and it's interesting you say that, Peter, because I say this all the time, it's not the people that quit and leave your organization that you have to worry about. It's the people that quit and stay. And there are a lot of people that quit and stay and remain working for the type of leaders that we're talking about. So, what is that costing you? And you know, I will say to organizations based organizations all the time, they're like, well, we can't afford to lose this leader, even though he or she is not the best. I'm like, but what is it costing you to keep this person because you may not have people quickly going out the door, but I guarantee you, you have people not producing to the level in which they can produce. They are noticing problems that they are admiring, not trying to solve. And it's because that they are working for somebody that maybe I can't go find another job right now. But ooh, I can do some things that might make this really difficult for this person. And sometimes, because these types of leaders, generally speaking, do have egos that are a bit larger in size, they don't even see it. If they think production is happening and getting done, they don't want to dive any deeper into it, because then that's going to cause them to have to have some serious reflection on how am I showing up? And what am I doing to contribute to this? Because they definitely are.

Joe DeSensi

And if they're coming back, if they're do 360 studies, if they're losing people, and they're keeping them because they're producing than it sounds like senior management needs to go back and recalibrate their metrics of success. Because if somebody is working their people in a way that they're just compliant, they're not giving you their heart and soul. They're, they're doing it because it's a paycheck, but you know, they're not giving you their A game, their best thoughts, then, how long do you take 20% 25% 30% of somebody's effort? How many years is that go on before what the single person is producing, that is costing you? You know, it's costing you, like Hope said people quit and staying or people quitting and quitting. Or they're, they're just given it, you know, they're just compliant. They're not engaged in, in the world that we have and how few or how scarce resources are, you've got to treat your people to where you're always getting an engagement level out of them, not just a compliance level.

Peter Margaritis

An engagement level. During the pandemic, I heard that there was an employee engagement number, and employees before the pandemic were engaged maybe 30% of the time. During the pandemic, at first it went back to maybe 35, but then it kind of dropped back down. And they said, well, that must be good. I went, I don't understand. I'm a numbers kind of guy. So, let's get to the other side. So, if we have employee engagement, 30%, 70% are on unengaged. That's the problem. Quit looking at the smaller number, look at the other side, and how do we engage our employees. And we've also found that a couple of my clients ran into this, their high performers when they went remote, all of a sudden they started having problems. They were missing deadlines, work was sloppy, and come to figured out, we weren't engaging with them, like we were in the office. We weren't having touch bases, and we weren't...not as frequently. And they felt a little isolated and on an island. And it's kind of lost that enthusiasm. I mean, leadership is tough.

Joe DeSensi

And then on the flip, you have people that thrived when they get to work from home, when they get to cut out the commute, they put them into a bad state of mind in the morning, when they didn't have the office talkie vampires that would come in and just like gnaw on your ear about something, you know, ridiculous for 20 minutes, just like you really need to get to this. So, the fact is not everything before was bad. Not everything through the virtual world is good. It's really based on your circumstance. Based on not just your industry, but the talent that you have in your company. You know, I can in Louisville, we don't have bad commutes, everything's 20 minutes away. Usually, because you took a wrong turn. But I mean, we have a very easy commute in the morning, so we don't have this, like Planes, Trains and Automobiles way to get into work. So, for us, it might be a bit easier. If you're talking up in the northeast, you might have people that that give up so much of their quality of life, that recouped, you know, three hours a day, and still get all their work done. There are real positives to not having everybody be in the office all the time. Even here in our office, in the education company that I run, we have people come in when they have to be but we say work where you will be the most productive. We've stopped looking at how many hours you work, and we start looking at the amount of work you can handle and if you're meeting your deadlines or not, because that's ultimately the metric of success. It's not do I see a butt in a seat for eight hours. It's did I get the amount of work I need to get out of a day, and who cares if they watched a Netflix thing in the middle of it, or if they did a load of laundry or something. If you hit all your deadlines and you're producing at the level I need you to, and it would go down if I made you come into work right in front of me, I need to worry about your output, not micromanage your input.

Hope Zoeller

Well, and you know, what it comes down to, and I know this is a word near and dear to your heart, Peter, is collaboration. And there is a real opportunity for collaborative conversations coming. It's, like, talk to your people and listen to what they're telling you. You may have one person that just can't make it at home working. They've got to come in. They want to be there five days a week. You may have other people that say I can come in one or two. Some that don't want to come in at all, but it should be let's talk about this as a team. What makes the most sense? How are we going to be able to do that, and what works for one team at one company. It's not going to be one size fits all for all of this. But the point is, is you know if you're a leader, leading by yourself, you're not a true leader. I mean, if you're you know, you're dictating things, and you turn around and everything you say is a monologue, not a dialogue, you're eventually going to lose people, even if they're still with you. So, it's like, how are we having these conversations right now? And, you know, again, the whole point of us providing guides and resources is how are we giving leaders tools, especially ones that don't feel comfortable? They're not used to collaborating. They're not used to having these conversations. They think they need to be the one with all the answers. Let's let the team decide this. Up as much as we can, how much flexibility do we have to decide what this looks like now? And what makes the most sense? And like Joe said, if somebody's not producing, then that's another conversation. But I just because I see you, I mean, I've been in the corporate world for 14 years, just because I saw somebody for eight hours a day in their cubicle did not mean they were producing. I had some days what is going on there. So, it to me it's, we know what the goals are, we're explicitly clear. Are we meeting them? And then if we're not, then that's an accountability question. And then maybe we need to look at what's not working there.

Peter Margaritis

Another one of my favorite word's, and Joe was using it, describing how you operate your business. Trust. You trust your people that if you give, I used to be the banking industry. My boss says I'm gonna give you some rope. You can do one or two things. You can either build a bridge or hang yourself. I still have rope burns, but it was not a micromanager, but he trusted I was trying to do my job. And this is back in the 80s. However, a lot of times that let me I gotta make sure I see cheeks in the seat. My father when I first got a job in public accounting, he said son...my dad was owned a the liquor store in Lexington, Kentucky. So, he was never in the corporate world. He said, "Son, when you get up to... 1. You need to be there before your boss gets in. 2. If you're up and moving around, carry a file or something with you. Makes you look busy, and especially if you have to go to the rest room, take that file with you. And then you do not leave until your boss leaves. You need to be seen." And in the back of my mind I went, that's kind of how we were raised as children. We should be seen and not heard.

Hope Zoeller

That feels like the George Costanza Seinfeld episode. He was always walking around, and he was always in a hurry.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Hope Zoeller

You know, and then his desk, his boss would come in and he was straightening files. I mean, it was for appearances. There was nothing happening. I mean, there was no quality product happening there.

Peter Margaritis

Right.

Joe DeSensi

Well, you know, the trust is huge. Now, we have the luxury at our company of everybody will just suck it up and do the work until we have an amazing person to fill. Not every industry can do that. Like if some people have to, you know, sometimes just you hold a mirror up and if a fog appears, you're qualified. You know, you're hired. We are lucky enough to not hire somebody until an amazing person presents themselves. And then we do everything humanly possible to keep them. You know, we make sure that we're constantly checking in with them. Are we meeting your needs? You know, have your needs changed at all? Like, even some of the interpersonal stuff of what can we help you with, so that we're not just giving you a job that pays a paycheck, but we give you a quality of life that would make you never want to leave our company. And that's why our folks come and they don't leave because we focus so much on culture. And I didn't come up with that process by myself. When I used to be in law enforcement software, early in my career, I got to mentee under this amazing servant leader, Doug Cobb. And he would, he was not only this great visionary of where he wanted this company to go, but he would take the fruit cart around. He didn't like that everybody's going to get doughnuts. And by jacking up this back in the gogo 90s of software, where he had to have like, Red Bull, and you know, boxes of candy everywhere. Because you know, we all have our little 20 year olds were just like sugar

high. And so, he started walking a fruit cart around on Thursdays and would handout fruit. Anytime you wanted to talk to him, he always left his office door open. If you didn't have something going on, you could be at any level of the company at the time was now there like a billion dollar company. But at the time, I think we were three or 400 people, you could just plop down and tell Doug your problems, and he would have monthly meetings where you take a cross section for lunches. And just keep getting the first, he didn't want the filtered, filtered, filtered from the VPS all the time. Sometimes, he wanted the firsthand knowledge, and like that's the data that we have to have to run companies. We have to have the real unfiltered stuff to make sure that we're making really good decisions. And it's not because we want to hug a tree or being like, like this big heart that we want to paint on the side of a wall or something. It's because it's the most tactical way to use your resources is to know what motivates people. I had a VP one time, they used to love to give \$100 gift card to his favorite Steakhouse to everybody for Christmas. I'm a vegetarian. Okay, so it wasn't like a real great gift for me. And then for a lot of people, it wasn't even enough to where they could take their spouse out and not have a big bill at the end. He was giving the thing that he wanted them to want, rather than getting into the heads and finding out, man, if you would have donated that to like a shelter, you could have made me much happier than like killing something with a face. You know. So, it's this empathy, this working backwards from the way people think is really important in terms of how to tactically use your resources, and retain and motivate your best people.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, it's kind of like listening to them and ask them. It's...

Joe DeSensi

Yeah.

Peter Margaritis

I got this quote that I've used for a number of years, "The collective knowledge outside of the office far exceeds the collective knowledge inside of your office. Go to talk to your people."

Hope Zoeller

Go to talk to your people. I mean, we should be doing stay interviews, not exit interviews.

Peter Margaritis

Yes.

Joe DeSensi

Oh, that's good.

Hope Zoeller

You know how many more exit interviews we do than stay. And when you get to the exit, it's too late in most cases. It's past the tipping point. Checking in regularly, like Joe said, and just what do you need? What can I provide for you? And I may not always be able to do it, but people know that you care and you're asking, and if you can, if you will, and you'll do, you know, you'll do whatever that looks like.

Joe DeSensi

Even just be heard, can release some of the pressure. At least I know somebody knows the issue on my plate because it can be so isolated and lonely to think they don't even know what's wrong. And when you get to speak directly to leadership, you at least feel like you're giving them a window into into your world, and it makes you feel more connected. And we're gonna need that a lot more as people work remotely. We don't get that unintentional watercooler talk nearly as much anymore. You jump onto a Zoom for the amount of time, and then there's no lingering afterwards to, you know, chat about the game or something. So, we have to be so much more intentional about how we develop that empathetic bridge than we ever have before in this now normal.

Peter Margaritis

So, I have a question for you. I know when I wrote, was writing, my book, Off Script, I came across some information that actually surprised me. And there are two pieces. I'm gonna just tell one. I won't tell you the other one. But one of the pieces was is the survey that was done, I keep forgetting I need to look it up again, but this is 78% of people leave their employer not because, not for money, because the lack of appreciation. And you said when we listen to people, the single act of listening to people without an agenda, without conscious or unconscious biases without anything, and just listen and be present and active in that conversation. Because Alan Alda once said, what was it? "Real listening is the ability to let someone change our mind."

Joe DeSensi

Hmm.

Peter Margaritis

Everything else is just the dialogue back and forth. I related to our US political system. So, when I saw that I said, the lack of appreciation, it is so easy to do, but why is it so hard? Because, I don't know. I guess I grew up, I grew up with a lot of lack of appreciation from my boss. But it's, I don't know, a people thing.

Hope Zoeller

It is a people thing. And you've got to be intentional about it, though. And you can't be fake about it. And you can't just, you know, go up to somebody and most of the time, because I teach a lot on how to give good feedback. It's not good feedback. It's like, you know, Hey, Peter, you did a good job. Okay, on what, but I knew a lot of really good things. So, what is it? What is it that I'm doing specifically? Because then I know you're engaged with me. I know you're seeing what I'm doing. And you're appreciating that I'm, you know, doing some things really well.

Joe DeSensi

Hope, what's that recent study that you saw about why people are leaving their jobs now? You quoted something to me the other day.

Hope Zoeller

The number one reason is bad leaders. I mean...

Joe DeSensi

What was the percentage wise?

Hope Zoeller

The percentage wise in that one, in the study that?

Joe DeSensi

86%?

Hope Zoeller

Yeah, it's it was on the upside of 80.

Joe DeSensi

They don't leave a job. They leave their immediate boss.

Hope Zoeller

Yes. And it's normally for not being recognized, Peter, like you said. It's for also lack of feedback. I mean, you know, when I...in the class, I teach on feedback, I asked the question, I'm like, Okay, if your boss were to text you right now, and I'm, let's say, I'll let you have your phones out. And you see a text come through, and it says, "See me, as soon as you have a break, or call me?" How many of you in here, show of hands, think you're getting promoted? And then I've had one person laugh. And then after I had a couple days with this guy in class, I thought, yeah, he would think that, but everybody else was, everybody else was like, I'm getting fired. Oh, my gosh, I've only been in this class for an hour. What happened? I mean, because they don't hear, the only feedback generally that they get is when it's I'm being very destructive with you, not constructive, destructive, and because you screwed up. And so, if I'm making enough deposits along the way in my emotional bank account with you, when you call me, I know I'm coming in to get something that's going to help me be better. Even if it's you telling me I did something great. I worked on a project, keep doing it. You know, reward what you want more of, or if it's something that next time I do it, here's maybe a better way. Here's something that I need to think about. And then, I don't completely feel like, wow, I'm, I'm so incompetent. You know, what that does to my motivation and my engagement, when I feel like that, but it's because most of the time people hear feedback, it's only when things have not gone well.

Joe DeSensi

In going back to what we were talking about earlier. It's not just this, this hippie stuff. It's actually a way to get the most out. So, when Hope was talking about doing stay interviews, instead of just doing exit interviews. If we promoted the positive things that we want to see, if somebody does a great work, a way to go isn't just a way to put a little wind in their sails. It also lets them know what the level of proficient work should look like, and you're reinforcing it. Because if people hand us stuff all the time, and sometimes it's good, sometimes it's okay. And we only really follow up with them when it's terrible. We're never really telling them what proficiency is and reinforcing it the same way. So, we should reinforce proficiency as much as we give shaping feedback on the things that's below the minimum of what we would allow to come in. And one of the problems that we have is we build this culture. A lot of times we stick the new person with whoever is producing the least. So, because we can't have our top

fliers, you know, slow down any. So, they onboard with an idea of what proficiency and then when they actually need to start producing. We're like, this is all terrible. Like, this is the way you train me to, you know, you put me with the person that onboarded being that you form that impression. So, I'm making sure that people understand what good work looks like, and then giving them scaffold and shaping feedback to get them there. It's a tactical, efficient use of resources.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely. And as you were describing that, I had a couple of thoughts that went through my head, but I want to make sure that I asked. Is when you were researching this book, what was something that you just went, oh my god, I never realized that or that surprised me?

Hope Zoeller

I will say for me, and Joe can answer from his perspective, and this is Alan Denny is the contributing author on this chapter. And I say this all the time. But I think it's even more so important now with all that we're going through is the need for the leader to start with him or herself first. And that also means empathy and compassion for me. Taking care of myself. I have realized how important that is, because I'm coaching leaders right now that that's not happening. And guess what, that's cascading. That's cascading to the teams. That's and, you know, just telling them, you need to be taken care of you too. And when there's that feeling of, they're not being able to do that, or they're not doing that. Sure, if any of us, in a given period of time, haven't been able to do anything for ourselves, we've become, you know. But I think letting leaders know, we need to help take care of leaders. That's why leadership development is so important. And I think a lot got uncovered the last two years with organizations that had decided to strip away that. You know, generally what are the two things that go when, you know, money's not there? Marketing and training. And what are the two things you shouldn't be investing in when things go? :Marketing and training. I mean, you know, and it's getting people into that position. So, you're putting people into these positions, sometimes that they don't know, you know, they just don't know better, and they're not taking care of themselves well. And I just, you know, as I went through, and I read all the author's chapters, I'm like, it really does start with leaders first. I've got to be the model for it. Because if I'm telling people to take care of themselves, and you don't see me doing it, then I'm not really walking that talk. And, you know, people are gonna watch my actions far more ever than the words that I speak. And so for me, it wasn't this thing. It was just this validation that we need to make sure we're supporting people and taking care of themselves, and not making them feel bad. If they say, you know, I need to take this day off, or I'm having this, but they also need me to see me doing it, again, as a leader.

Joe DeSensi

We had some interesting guest authors come in and write on pieces that they were better research than we were. In general Denny was an amazing addition to the book, because he was a one star general on the military and his chapters on emotional intelligence are brilliant and researched and footnoted. And I think that was one of the things that I found most interesting was, I think we have a certain idea about how the military works. This idea that, you know, this theory X, this, the old Frederick Taylor bottle of just, you know, it all trickles downhill. And he kind of flipped the script for me in terms of how you can't run things like a military operation, if you're not really listening to what people are saying. Not what you want to hear. Not what you hope you hear, but you listen with that blank slate that you're

talking about, and having the emotional intelligence to get the critical data that you need, for in his case, save lives. You know, because these, some of these were in combat missions. And it's just think about being so much more dictatorial. And it was still so servant leadership based in terms of even how the military works when it works properly. That's probably the single thing that blew me away the most, when we were going through the research in the book. What chapter is that, if you know it off the top of your head?

Hope Zoeller

I've got a copy of it right here. I can actually tell you well, in it. This was one of my favorites, because he talks about putting the oxygen mask on yourself first. That's Chapter Four.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, cuz I just interviewed last night, a friend of mine. And we were talking about emotional intelligence. And why there is a need for this. And you even mentioned the word empathy a number of times in here. There's a book that was written a few years ago, probably eight, called Humans are Underrated by Jeffrey Colvin, who was the managing editor, I believe at Fortune Magazine. And in the book, he writes about artificial intelligence and machine learning. But it gets to the point it talks about leadership, and said leaders of the future need empathy. And those who have empathy will become better leaders, will be better leaders. And sorry, guys, women, because they have that natural empathy to them. They will become the leaders of the future unless you guys can figure it out, and become more empathetic in what you do. And I've used that general aspect of the book for years. And I agree with it. We have to learn empathy. We have to, and there's a lot of definitions of empathy, but the one that really stuck out to me came out during the pandemic is you want to say understand somebody and put yourself in their shoes. Well, you can't, but can you understand how they feel in their shoes? Has nothing to do with your shoes... what, what they're feeling in their shoes? And on top of that, be vulnerable.

Hope Zoeller

Yes, yeah, well, then, you know, it's interesting, I was having flashbacks of my corporate career and feedback I received was that I was too empathetic. And I got too connected to the people that I lead, because I cared about them. And I remember one leader in particular, which was, you know, was a great motivator for me to go on and do something else. Let's just say that. You know, he told me, he's like, that's never going to work for you. And he called me nice, and I'm using, he's like, You're nice.

Joe DeSensi

As a negative.

Hope Zoeller

You will get crushed as a leader. He said, if you have any aspirations of going higher, you've got to figure out how to clamp that down a little bit. And I will never forget that feedback. Because I've made a whole life off of it, you know, there's a balance. And I don't mean, you know, we all have to find that balance. But in his mind, it was really, that's not something I'm recommending you work into your leadership style. It's, you know, people are looking to you for answers. You need to give them answers. You need to tell them what to do. And never in there, did I ever tell him give me feedback on listening. I

just did, because that's who I am. And I always want to make sure that the people that I'm working with are taken care of, and it's not about what I need. It's about what you need. But that for me, when you say that about women, I don't know if it was because I was a woman. I don't know. But it was just interesting. He definitely didn't give that feedback to my male colleagues, my male counterparts, you know. He was rewarding them for being tough and for, you know, for doing what they needed to do. And he just said, I would struggle in my career, if I didn't figure out how to get that under control.

Joe DeSensi

Give him a copy of your book.

Hope Zoeller

I need to find out where he is and send it.

Joe DeSensi

I think another thing, and I don't know if this is age for me, I know, when I was 25, I was sure I knew everything. So, what possibly would you have to tell me. Now that I'm 50, I realize that how little I know, and I depend so much more about really getting experts in front of me and letting them drive me. You know, if you have to be the expert of everything in your, then most of your stuff is going to be mediocre. If you're an expert of getting great knowledge from people and finding a practical application from it, you can lead anything. It's such a transferable skill, rather quickly, just to circle back around just for a second on the emotional intelligence. There's three, actually, three different chapters on EI. The one that General Denny wrote was developing a practice of workplace feedback, further discussion of implementing feedback, best practices. And it's talking about how feedback tends to have that emotional intelligence, and that empathetic back end, because you're not scolding, you're not rating, you're not giving a report card. You're trying to shape better work for the future. So, you want to promote the good, and you want to mitigate the bad in a way that still is uplifting. And it's a beautiful chapter. He did a really great job with that.

Peter Margaritis

I may start with that chapter and work backwards. So, as we begin to wrap things up, this has been a fascinating conversation. What's one piece of advice you would give to my audience in order to be able to become better leaders in 2022 and beyond?

Hope Zoeller

Well, I'm gonna, I'm gonna take it from one of my chapters, because the first chapter of the book is called Leading with Love. And you'll appreciate this acronym. So, LOVE is an acronym. LOVE is all caps. And no, I'm not shouting love. But that may be in a way. But in a soft, nice way. I'm shouting this. But the four components of being able to lead with LOVE is first of all, you've got to have a listening ear. And we have talked much about that on our interviews. I mean, it's just, it's critical. You start there. That's why it's the very first one. And then beyond that is when your listening ear is tuned in. It's having an objective mind. It's being curious, not critical of what is being shared with you. It's just sitting back and purely listening to what someone's having to say. And then when you're doing that, having a versatile attitude. And do we always have to do the way that we've done it? Not because maybe we've been successful, but it's the way that I feel comfortable doing it. So, I think we should stay doing that.

And then lastly, it's an empathetic heart. And if you look at all four of those things, in my mind, in my 20 plus years in corporate America, and now having my own leadership development firm, if you do for those four things, if you can figure out how to do that version of that for you in a sincere way, people will go miles for you. And they will do things that they may not believe they can do, but they will do it because they know you believe it and that you believe in them. So, for me, that's, you know, that's been a greatest takeaway. What I aspire to do and show up and be every day. And some days, I'm really great. Some days I can be better, but I don't quit trying.

Joe DeSensi

And on my side, I'm sorry.

Peter Margaritis

All we needed love, according to you.

Joe DeSensi

All we need is love.

Hope Zoeller

The Beatles said that. But with love comes challenges and loves not easy.

Joe DeSensi

On my side I would, I would tell leaders that they really need to be focused on their culture and climate. If you had a great culture and climate before, don't assume it's going to pop back. If you had a terrible culture and climate before with a great rethink, you really got some work to do. But if you, especially if everybody's not always back in the office. If you're doing some of the virtual work, if you're rethinking how actual production happens, anybody that's not concentrated on the culture and climate is going to unintentionally get whichever one forms on its own. What you don't want is that to form on its own. You want to craft what you want your company, what you want your department, even what you want your small little interconnected team, what that workflow, what that connectivity looks like. Culture and Climate is going to be one of the few things right now that's going to retain the best, maybe even attract great people because they want to work with you. And not have to have you go through a constant churn of folks. It's going to do nothing but you know, every time a new person comes in, it's kind of like a chicken pecking order. The longer you can have your team together, the more efficient and the better they can work together. Culture and Climate is absolutely where I'd put some of your bandwidth as a leader right now.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely. Great advice from both you. So, as we end here real quickly, how can people find you?

Hope Zoeller

They can find us at HopeforLeaders.com. And if they go and it's just Hope For Leaders, so hopeforleaders.com. We've got all the information out there about how they can get the book. If it feels like a helpful resource for them again, it definitely was a labor of much love. And I, you know, when we did the first book in 2015, I said it takes a village. Now I've shifted, and I'm going to quote my father,

very wise sage mentor. He says you have to have your people. You have to have your people. You have to believe in your people. You have to trust your people. And this book would not have happened without all of our people. That, you know, we entrusted in. And that's how I lead and that's you know, we have Joe leads, and that's how we aspire to because that's it's true. We can't get anywhere by ourselves. And wherever you are. Somebody helped you get there. So, just always remember that.

Peter Margaritis

Well, guys, thank you so very much. After I talk to you guys. I gotta go find some mint. I think I'm completely out of mint for here about three weeks, put in some bourbon to celebrate the Derby, but I can't thank you guys enough. It's a pleasure meeting you. When I get to Louisville, I'm looking you guys up. I'm thankful to Kate for introducing us. Because yeah, we're kind of attached at the hip with this whole how leaders should lead in current times.

Joe DeSensi

I knew I liked you when you said how much you love bourbon. I'm like man, we're already right there.

Hope Zoeller

Well and, I do just want to end this with you. You just describe the drink the Mint Julep, and so just so you know, they are getting ready to release a gold Mint Julep cup that you can have for your very own for \$2,000. Money goes to charity, but second year now you're like \$2000 is a little high. They do have a silver one for \$1000. So...

Joe DeSensi

Yeah, I think I would have be drinking out of a paper cup, but just in mass.

Peter Margaritis

In a big paper cup in mass.

Hope Zoeller

If you want to go high end.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely. I want to thank Hope and Joe, for sharing their thoughts on how leadership has changed moving forward in the 2020s. There was a lot of food for thought. I hope you take some of that food, per se, and ponder it. And can you apply those practices in your organization? Remember, there are people who prefer to say yes, and the people who prefer to say no. Those who say yes are rewarded by the victories they have. And those who say no, are rewarded by the safety they obtain. Be a yes person. Thank you for listening.