

# S6E13-LeeCockerell

Peter Margaritis, Lee Cockerell, Announcer

## **Peter Margaritis**

Hey, welcome back, everybody. I'm doing something I normally don't do. I'm in front of a live audience here at Disney World. So, if the audience could bring some excitement about this podcast, let me hear it. And we have a very special guest, Mr. Lee Cockerell, who is famous around these parts. We'll just leave it at that for now. He's got a lot to tell him. First and foremost. thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to hang out with us today.

## **Lee Cockerell**

Sure. I'm not busy. It's nice to be here.

## **Peter Margaritis**

He was in London last week and he's going someplace else. He's traveling a lot. So, he's a very busy guy. And listening to your book, I found it, it was wonderful. Your voice is great, and your stories that you tell are so plentiful that I could narrow it down to like about, I could narrow it down to maybe 10, but then we'll be here all day. But the one story I really want to start off with is, in the book you talk about your favorite meal is mashed potatoes and gravy, right? And you'd like to put a little Tabasco sauce on your mashed potatoes and gravy, but you came home one night and been doing that for 30 years. This came out and replaced the red Tabasco sauce.

## **Lee Cockerell**

Well, that did happen. And I looked at it, I said to my wife, what's this? I mean, it looks pretty bad, actually. And she said, "We've got to try it." I said, "No, no, no, I don't want to try it." And a few weeks later, I had to give a speech about change at Disney. And my conclusion was everybody likes change until comes to your house. And it's true. We like change for other people but when we have to change something, we're not so excited about it. And so, I gave a speech about this, and I started giving a bottle of this out to people who did a good job and having a good attitude about change. So, this became an award. So, there are people somewhere that have this on, I hope they still have it. But I think the conclusion is, there's a lot of good things out in the world that we have a bad attitude about, and we just don't know. And to try things. Any of your mother's tell you to try things when you were little? Remember them? Mothers are such a, they never stop. They're probably still telling you. What are they telling you now? Be careful, being out there,.. Study hard. Graduate so I can quit paying this tuition. But change is the fact and it's probably been the main reason I've had success is my ability to change and to take risks. And you know, I've done all kinds of things from flunking out of Oklahoma State to going in the Army. Starting as a waiter with Washington Hilton, to becoming, getting in the accounting department. Eventually, 35 years later running Disney World. And I had a lot of issues along the way. I mean, I quit at Hilton because I had a boss I didn't like. I didn't think I could work in that environment. I was working six days a week. He was not loving me. And so, I left I took a job in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. My wife told me not to take it. She said, "You don't know what you're doing.

You shouldn't take it. Get a contract." I said, "I know what I'm doing." And I got fired 90 days later. Now, I had a Volkswagen, a two-year-old, wife, no job. The Sheriff confiscated our furniture because we broke the lease. And so, we drove around the country looking for a job. Luckily, you got friends and family who took care of us, and I got a job with Marriott. So, it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened was getting fired. I stayed with Marriott 17 years. I became the Vice President of Food and Beverage Operations for them. And the reason I got the vice president job was I'd become an expert, and I tell you that. Become the best you can be. I was, I knew, I'd been a chef. I'd been cooking. I'd been a waiter. I had been in finance accounting I knew the food business upside down, and that's what they wanted. And so, I don't recall them looking at my college degree, but luckily, and I got the job and I did a good job. And then I got recruited by Disney in 1990 to go to France and open the food and beverage operations again, even though I wanted to get out of food because it's miserable. And nobody ever shows up for work and you're always short and customers or, you know, doesn't taste like your mother spaghetti. And so, it served me well, and I went to Disney as best thing that ever happened. So, I always tell people don't worry about those things when things happen. Everything that happened in my career turned out to be better than next one. And so, it's just I think the biggest problem most people underestimate what they can achieve and I think most people are afraid to take chances. And you've got to learn to do that because your brain is your biggest problem. It holds you back. It tells you, oh, or your mother wants you to stay in Stillwater after you graduate. Or all this stuff, no, you do what you need to do and want to do and get. And I tell people today the three things that will make you successful are education, and you're getting that, but you're going to get more of it even going forward. I mean literally, what you're learning in college right now is going to be the least thing that makes you successful. The next is going to be experience, getting experience. A lot of experience. Learn how to do it. And then exposure. Getting exposed to the world. And when I left Oklahoma, I was 20 years old. I knew nothing. I grew up there. I didn't watch the news. I didn't read the paper. I didn't know from nothing. I mean, literally I was. And I tell people actually, I think about I just thought, it's the way it was in Oklahoma. I grew up in the 40s, and 50s. And I got out of there and moved to Washington, DC. Now, if you don't like people from other backgrounds, color, sexual orientation, religion, don't go to Washington, because everybody is from somewhere else. And that was good because I worked in this business. They become your friends. These people from all over the world. They become the people you date, you marry, you go to picnics together, and it changes you. Exposure is an amazing thing. So, when I was at Oklahoma, I'd never been anywhere. And today, I traveled and done work in 45 countries. And I, you can never go back. Like, I remember the things I thought, you know, I told people, I was a potential racist when I grew up in Oklahoma until I got out of there. And found out there are other things, other people, other religions, other ways of thinking about things. And I was give you that advice today, when you graduate, get up, go to the big city for five years. Some, any city, Dallas, LA, New York's Chicago, but the time man, and you will become a different person. You'll learn more. Those things you're going to learn they're going to help your business more than knowing what the latest accounting regulation is. And so, think about, are you getting enough of those three? Are you going to keep learning? You know, I read every day, and I don't like to read, but I put a book by my bed so at least I read 30 or 40 minutes every night. So, I know more than some people that don't read at all anymore and couldn't keep up. And it's complicated today, what's going on in the world, and having to adjust to different ways of thinking and different ways of talking about leadership. And today with young people. I mean, it's serious, this turnover, companies don't know how to handle this attitude of, you know, what's in it for me, not just for you, the company. And I'm working with a lot of companies are

going to have to get over that autocratic, do it my way. Yeah, when you're in an interview, I tell the CEO, now, you better tell them what's in it for them, not what's in it for you. Because I have three grandkids that are 27, 24, and 22. And I have, I see it. They don't put up with crap. I mean, you don't treat them right and get them involved and advanced them and train them and develop them, give them responsibility, they leave. And they're all three doing well. And they can all three, get a new job every morning. And that's gonna be the reality of what's going forward. So, that alone, there was an article on Harvard Business Review last week about how CEOs really need to learn to change their approach, not this tough, do it my way style that they learned and maybe got them where they are today. Because it's a different time. Those days are over. And if you don't learn that these are over, you end up in trouble in your life, and that there's a better way to do things. And so, that's kind of my trip through getting to where I am today, which is retired.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Time for a quick commercial break. Off script: Mastering the Art of Business Improv is available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle version. If you want to learn more about the book or order a copy, go to [offscriptimprov.com](http://offscriptimprov.com) and order your copy by clicking the click to Order button. If you want to buy 10 or more books, please contact me to offer you a bulk discount. You can reach me through my email at [Peter@Petermargaritas.com](mailto:Peter@Petermargaritas.com).

### **Announcer**

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### **Peter Margaritis**

Speaking when you talk about the anniversaries and stuff. In the book, you talk about the anniversary mishap. About a bottle of wine. Share with the audience, I thought it was an interesting story and how you, how you immediately took that situation and turned it around, and it never happened again.

### **Lee Cockerell**

Yeah, well I think we all got to learn the whole world is into the mode of we got to control everything. We got to control you. We got to control what you do. We got to control the cash. Got to control the liquor. We got to control, I mean, that's you're gonna find out your profession. You control the people who are embezzling and, and so I was running a hotel in Springfield for Marriot, Massachusetts, and a couple came in for dinner one night to celebrate their anniversary. And of course, next morning they came to see me. They were not happy. They had ordered their lobsters or steak or whatever they were eating, and they ordered a nice bottle of wine to celebrate their anniversary. And we had such good controls, they didn't get their wine until they were finished with dinner. Because we had the cabinet locked, and we have a system. And we're going to make sure nobody gets a bottle of wine unless we know about it. Well, we changed that policy. And we opened the cabinet and the new policy was to we told the waiters and waitresses, if you steal a bottle of wine, we'll fire you. That's a new policy. And we didn't have any problems after that because we served the first bottle quick, your chances go up dramatically of selling them a second bottle. And if you're going to ever be in the food business, don't bring them breads and don't bring them water. Get the alcohol there first. First alcohol. Ruins their judgment, so they order something really expensive. And they leave bigger tips. And yeah, water can wait. You're not gonna die. So, that was a good lesson in. And today, it's even more for me. Control is a

problem. People trying to control you. And we got it going on in our society right now. Control. We can't let you know this. I mean, it's all going on in Florida right now. You can't control people. I mean, forget it. They find a way. I go back to give good examples. We tried to keep women from voting and look what happened. But, man, we screwed up, they vote now. And they have a lot of influence. You can't control them. We had prohibition. No alcohol. That made a lot of people rich. Like the criminals. You can't control people. Drugs. We've been fighting drugs for I don't know how long. We're making no progress. There's more drugs out there today than there ever was. If it was me, give you the drugs DICOM. If you want to die, go ahead. I mean, it's like, we're spending all this money to fight drugs, and it's not working. People are taking them. People are on them. People your age. Alcohol, you name it. So, think about every time you think you're gonna control somebody. We're gonna put the wall up down in Mexico. It doesn't matter, you can put a wall you want. People are gonna go where they want to go. And so, it's better to I think, good for you all. Education is better. My son came home when he was in first grade. He's 54 now and he said, "Dad, you know what you get when you smoke cigarettes?" This was first grade. I said, "No. What do you get?" He said, "heart disease." He didn't even know what that was. But he knew that wasn't good. Because education does that. Education prepares you for making the right decisions in your life. And control is not one. I tried to control my wife first 25 years we were married, that didn't work out too good. When I quit criticizing her, she got better immediately. And seriously. You know because I wanted it my way. Why did I want it my way? Because I was insecure. That's a man thing. Control. I want it done my way. I don't, you know. And that was my, I was the problem, not her. And we got to really think about, don't try to control people. Don't try to manipulate people. It will come back and bite you. And I'm sure everyone in this room has got a good example of where that has happened in your life. Don't believe everything you think. Half the stuff in your brain is not true. Half the stuff your parents taught you is not true. You got to think these things through. Are they really true? I had to think a lot of things after I left Oklahoma. And after I've lived around the world. Are Muslims really a problem? Are black people are really a problem? Are Hispanic people really a problem? Are gay people really a problem? No, I got an eye doctor, what are those called? It gives you the exam? And they are, whatever they are. Optim...whatever they and he's always writing to me about being too liberal. And he doesn't like this, like that. And I asked him, I said, "Can you, when you're examining somebody's eyes? Can you tell if they're gay?" He gets really mad when I do that. But let it go. I tell people, it's not your business anyway. Stay out of it. You got enough problems taking care of your own life. You don't need to worry about mine. And that's what happens. You gotta be this leadership thing is I think that's one thing. People in Oklahoma tell you mind your business. Right? Don't get involved my business and don't worry about what I am or what religion I am. What do you care? And so, I think those are the kinds of things you've got to think about have be more open minded. You'll make better decisions, You'll take more risks, because you'll build yourself confidence that when you do something it works out and then you do the next one. And the thing that holds you back the most is fear. You know, I'm afraid to move to New York. I'm afraid to take that job. I'm afraid to quit even though I got a boss that's a jerk. And you end up staying in that job for 20, 30,40 years. You're totally miserable. And somebody said, what's the price? Well, the price of regret is really high. The price of regret is really high. And I think about that all the time. I'm not going to work with anybody or for anybody that's not respecting me and my own values and what I do. And every one of you in this room with this degree, you're getting, you get a new job every morning. So, don't put up with any nonsense with people out there. There are going to be all the jobs you want. And Congress is going to make it more and more complex, accounting. And you're going to have, they're going to need you. I can't I don't

even know how to fill out my name on my tax return. I mean, it's got seriously I mean, I'm sure there'll be a code and Jesus Christ. So, you don't worry about doing well. You're getting an education. Hopefully, you had good parents. Anybody have good parents in here? So, you're already set up. You've got all you need already. So, don't put up with being unhappy. It makes, it changes your personality. It changes who you are. And I would say have open arms are all kinds of people. They're all, I've traveled to these 45 countries, and they all have babies, and they love them. And they want to worry about their safety and their education and their religions, what they believe. Everybody has their own beliefs. And by the way, beliefs are not true. They're just your belief. Accounting is true, and don't you have to, doesn't it have to balance? Isn't that how it works in accounting. Balance. In life, your beliefs don't balance. It's just what you think. And actually, you can't even do your job in accounting with beliefs, can you? The IRS probably didn't like that. Oh, I think this should be a deduction.

**Peter Margaritis**

Ophthalmologist? Yeah, it's my belief.

**Lee Cockerell**

I believe this should be a deduction! Then you, I'm your client, and I get put in jail for signing the return. So, that's a good thing.

**Peter Margaritis**

That was all one thing you said that they heard yesterday is about fear. Don't let fear freeze you. And now you've heard it twice. So, you'll probably hear it again a third time while you're here. It usually takes three times before it kind of resonates with you. But do remember that because fear will paralyze you. And the other quote, the other story I want you to talk about is you created this coaching program. But Coach is an acronym. Because you're about lifelong learning, and always learning, always reading, always doing, but also always helping and mentoring.

**Lee Cockerell**

Well, I think, if you want to be a good leader, we call it coaching. We call it call it all kinds of things. I'm sure your mother's the best coach ever had it. She teaches you how she, did your mother have high expectations? Did she reveal those to you occasionally? Did your mother ever say how many times do I have to tell you?

**Peter Margaritis**

Still to this day.

**Lee Cockerell**

Do you understand what I just said? Is that clear? Your mother is the best leader in the world. Actually, my daughter-in-law is coming out in October. Manage like a mother. Anytime you don't know what to do. Call your mom, not your boss. Your Mom knows what to do. She'll do the right thing in a way that works. She'd ever considered herself a coach. She just loved you. And if you were doing something that would not be in your best interest, she would tell you and that's what coaches do. They help you get better. You get to play the game better and I, that should be a big part of your job. Don't get so focused on the technical part of your job you forget about the people. Every person you're going to

work for, every person you're going to interact with has a problem you don't know about. You're gonna deal with angry people. They're not mad at you. They're mad at their marriage is not going well. I got financial problems. The IRS is after them. Their kids are misbehaving. People have, I mean, the amount of anxiety in the world right now is unbelievable. And it's in students like you too. I mean, some of you in here. I mean, anxiety and depression is a big problem right now across the nation, across the world. And it's because of this uncertainty. It's problems that are in your mind. But you know, we all put on a good face in America, don't we? When I say, "How y'all doing?" What do you say? "Great." That's the biggest lie in America. Everybody in here has got a problem we don't know about or a worry. And we need to understand that when we're dealing with customers and clients, I said, there's no customer, nobody can make me angry. Because why? They don't even know me. When somebody's yelling at me because I didn't get to see Cinderella. I don't have an argument with them. I just want their credit card. That's all. And if you're not nice to people, they won't give you their credit card.

### **Peter Margaritis**

That's the truth. Seriously.

### **Lee Cockerell**

And when you're really nice, they gave it to you more, and they come back every year. And but it's, why would you let anybody aggravate you? You know, somebody said, "Lee, you're a jerk, and I don't like your politics." And I said, "Okay. I don't care." Because I'm not gonna get angry. Because you know what happens when you get angry, you make mistakes. You say something you wish you hadn't said. I'm working with the police, now, law enforcement. When they get angry, they make mistakes. They say the wrong thing. They do the wrong thing. They get sued. The city has to pay a big settlement for how they handled a person on the street. Anger is just, put in your mind right now. You cannot make me mad. Now, my wife feels I'm mean, that's different. She can, she can. That's different. So, think about that. Think about controlling your emotions. The biggest problem you're gonna have in your life is your emotions in your marriage, in your job. When you become insecure, there's a recession, things are not going well, you're afraid about losing your job, just stay cool and calm. You know, I say the one thing to be, be professional. Just be professional. And when you're professional, and don't take it personally. You just have a better life. Because there's two things that will make you successful. One is attitude and one is reliability. Those two things, attitude and reliability. Why? Because when you have a good attitude, people give you a break. They like to work with you. You take care of things. When you are reliable, they can count on you. You do what you say you're going to do. You call them back when you say gonna call them back. You do your work well. You have attention to detail, reliability, probably pretty important in your work, reliability.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Lee go deeper into the professionalism. Talk more about the professionalism. What makes somebody a professional? What is it? The way they speak? Their mannerisms? How they conduct themselves?

### **Lee Cockerell**

Oh, I think, we have professionals in every walk of life. You know, I think professionalism is knowing what you're doing, continuing to learn how to do it better. You know, I tell everybody get a little better every day. That's why I read every day. Every morning, I know more than I did last night. Just a little bit.

And one, and professionalism is how you carry yourself. You send the message that I'm here to help you. I value you. Let me know if I can take care of you. You know, like they're my phone numbers on that bookmark. My phone number, every Disney cast member had my phone number. If they needed to call me at three in the morning because there was an emergency, they could. And people say are you crazy putting your phone number on there? I will tell you every one of you should have on your email signature, your phone number. I spend more time with problems and needing to get back to somebody when we got a call because they gave me the wrong link. And there's no phone number. Nobody's coming after you probably. I don't know why they're gonna if somebody wants to find you, they'll find you. Just be more professional. Make it easy to do business with you. Tell the truth. That's I think the most professional. Tell the truth. The truth is not easy. People ask me what's the best way to deal with difficult situations in your life? I say the truth usually works best. You know, is it easy? No. My father-in-law, who was an Admiral in the Navy said after World War Two, after Priscilla and I were married, she asked him once, "What advice would you give people after your life of growing up going into military?" He said, "My advice is do your best and forgive yourself every day." And that doesn't mean, that means sometimes you got to make hard decisions. And you might have to fire somebody and their family will suffer. But you did the right thing. Forgive yourself. Even when you, when you do hard things, they're usually the right thing. And if you have a, if you do the right thing, it's almost always hard. This is the problem. You know, it's hard to be right and it's hard to do hard things and the main reason people are not successful in their life as they don't do the hard things. They, you know, hard. Why don't people exercise? It's hard. There's only one reason. You know, why don't, why do people go back for the third meatball at night? Because it's hard to not. Why do you drink the whole bottle of wine? Or the whole six pack? Because, you know, first alcohol impairs your judgment. So, you think it's fine. Why do you go back for the dessert? It's hard not to. Everything that you don't want to do is usually hard. And you got to think about what are those things in your life and they're going to come up and you got to, what are you going to do? Are you going to have enough self-discipline to realize the payoff is later. Exercise pays off way later for you guys. Alright. Now, you can probably do anything, and you probably drink three cases of beer and survive. But later, you got to get those habits now. Because listen, I, my wife and I have a trainer, we work out twice a week on strength, agility and balance. And I do go a little series exercise every day at home. And why do we do that? Why? Because I tell people, I'm in the ozone. You know what the ozone is? The obituaries zone. I'm gonna be 80 next year. You look in the paper not good. That's a bad number. But there's a lot of 40s in there. A lot of 50 ones. And there's a lot of young women in there. And it's not just old people in there. There's a lot of young people in there that don't get old. I'm telling you the one thing if you want to focus on one thing in your life, we talked about being resilient. Take care of your health. When I retired, you know, when I was at Disney all I focused on only three things, making sure we were hiring the right people, we were training everybody and developing them and treating them right. Those three things, the culture. And when I retired, my wife gave me three new ones. She said, "You don't have to do that anymore. Here's your new list of priorities. Number one, take care of yourself so you can take care of us. Number two, take care of your family. Number three, take care of your work. And after that you can go do whatever you want. But not until you've done those three, then you can go help Kim Kardashian with her problems. You can go play golf, you can." But it's true. If you don't do the real, and by the way, you all know what's important. You know. Everybody in this room has two or three things you're not doing that you should be doing. You know. And they're gonna bite you, they're gonna bite you hard. Because the longer you wait, the harder it gets to have that discipline. I liked routine, routine. And that's why I wrote this time

management book, Schedule the Priorities in Your Life. Schedule them. I scheduled every one of my doctor's appointments. When I walk out the door, I scheduled the next one. I don't miss any of them. Because time management when the doctor says, Oh, you haven't been here in four years, too bad because we could have caught this and done something with it. You talk about reality. So, think about it, unless you feel good, you're not going to do good. And you ought to think about what you're not doing that you shouldn't do. And you know, you should do it. And it's pretty clear. You're all college people. You know, you know. And it's like, if you don't sleep well, do you know why? Does anybody have sleeping problems? Do you know why? Do you really? You better figure it out. Because if you don't sleep well, you don't feel well. When you don't feel well, you procrastinate and don't get things done and you don't you don't do hard things. If you won't sit down and talk to somebody about their performance when you don't feel good. You'll just put it off. Let me tell you sleeps the name of the game. If you're not happy, is anybody in here not happy? You don't have to raise your hand. If you're not happy in your life. Why? Figure out why? Until you know why you will know how to deal with it. You might have to get a trainer, a nutritionist. You might have to get some help from somebody, a psychologist or psychiatrist who knows. But once you know what your problem is, you can get to help to fix it. But most people don't want to admit why are you not happy? Do you know anybody is not happy? They're not happy with their life. Do they know why? No, they don't want to because fixing it's hard. But it's worth it. It's worth it. That's all I can tell you. I quit drinking alcohol. That was hard. I love red wine. But I, I sleep better. I do better. I took sugar out of my diet, and it's hard in my house. My wife has a pile of sugar stuff over their cookies and stuff. I don't even want it anymore. But I found ways to not want it. I keep pineapple chunks. I keep apples or cantaloupe, watermelon chunks in the fridge, little yogurts just to get that sweetness. And after a couple of weeks, I don't even, didn't want it anymore. There are ways to find somebody to help you do what you need to do. You don't have to do anything in your life. You just have to get it done. That's the key. You don't have to do anything. Just get it done.

### **Peter Margaritis**

You want to answer some questions. Sure. First question, what has been the most influential customer complaint throughout your time at Disney? And what did it lead to?

### **Lee Cockerell**

Yeah, I mean, certainly the one, the lessons I learned or about the control I talked about disappointing a guest. You know, for many people, this is a big trip of their life. Coming down here with their daughter, four-year-old. And you think you got problems? They want to see Cinderella. And if they don't seem Cinderella, they want to see me and not disappointing people. And, and also the lessons I learned during 911 of what how leadership pays off. If you get it in place, get the right people, you train them, and they're committed to the job, and they want to do the job. On 911, we executed perfectly. We closed these parks down in 90 minutes, had everybody out of them and back into their hotels. We suspended charges. We gave them free rooms. We did, we practice two or three times a year scenarios. We pulled it off perfectly. I didn't do anything that day would just watch because everybody knew what to do. And that is when you, it's kind of like your parents, when they see how successful you are. They go, "Yeah." Your mother thinks about you every day. You think about her once every couple months. I mean, this is like, right? How often you think about your mother every day? No, she thinks about you every hour. So, it was just great to watch it happen that that training, development, picking the right people, making the guest so comfortable and feeling safe and secure getting back to their



rooms. You know, there were no flights after that nobody could leave. There were no rental cars, they were all gone. We had people here for several days because they couldn't get out. People are really upset from New York and New Jersey, that knew people there. And the cast here really pulled it off and made people feel very comfortable and safe. And that's what you get. If you got good leadership, and people are doing the right things, you're hiring the right people, you're training them and they have empathy. And when there's a problem, it'll happen, right? It's kind of like a fire drill at home. You practice so if there is a fire I think goes well. But you don't have regrets later, as you wish you to talk to your kids how to get out of the house or what to do. I tell people, the best way to make decisions is number one, reflection, think about every day yesterday, what you didn't do so well. Think about it. That's will go in your brain and think about anticipation what could go wrong if you don't do things? And then think about what if you don't exercise, if you don't get your annual big, physical, if you don't eat the right foods, if you don't get your degree. If you don't go back if you're going to go back for your Master's or whatever. Think about what are the consequences of those decisions. Because you're not a product of your circumstances, none of you, you're a product of the decisions you make every day. That's it. And by the way, nobody cares about you anyway, except your mother. Seriously, nobody cares. They say they do, they don't. Push to shove, they're gonna take care of themselves because life's tough, and we gotta be. You'll find me you might have a couple friends who will be there for you but overall, you got to focus on anticipating what's gonna go wrong if you don't figure it out for yourself or what needs to be done. So, I think about that a lot. I know with my business, I gotta keep up, or I won't. I can't talk to people about ways to do things now versus three years ago. How to attack turnover, and creating an environment and a culture where people matter where they want to, they wake up in the morning they want to come to work not have to come just for a paycheck and I'm sure you've all been in those different jobs where you couldn't you hope something happened to your boss on the way to work. And you would participate in it if you could. We know that's bad. I want people to come to my funeral. So, I'm nice to people. And I would say my son and his kids are all successful because we, they were raised with empathy and discipline and fairness and firmness. You know, that's what you do in business fair and firm. If you're, if you're known as somebody that's fair and firm and tells the truth, and whether that's good or bad, people are gonna love you. And all of a sudden, your job is to make people better. So, you can retire, take a nap, go play golf.

### **Peter Margaritis**

So, along those lines, someone asked a question, what's the common... I thought this was really interesting. What's the common traits of your most successful employees?

### **Lee Cockerell**

Yeah, attitude. Actually, we hire for attitude, and then we'll train you. I mean, not every, we might have a job open for an engineer, we might have to end will not have to interview, we might interview five that are qualified, but they don't have the right attitude. So, we keep going until we find one that has the technical skill and the right attitude. And you know what that is? Think about people you deal with every day, attitude, when you go in and you got a problem in a store. Just people are, there's a lot of people are born angry, and they stay that way, their whole life. You know, any of these people? They never get over it. Those people should not work at Disney. Although we're very clear with people to when you work here, you don't have to be happy to work at Disney, you got to act happy for eight hours. You know what I mean? That's professionalism.

**Peter Margaritis**

That's professionalism right there.

**Lee Cockerell**

And Disney is The Happiest Place on Earth or else. You know, remember when your mother should be home by 11 or else? I never want to find out what that or else meant. But you got to be clear. And I think clarity is one of the most important things. When you deal with people, be clear with them. You hire somebody be clear, here's what you're getting into. Here's what we expect. And you need to talk about all those big things, being on time to work, sexual harassment issues, how you treat people. Those, most of the problems you're going to have in your career with yourself or with people you hire are not going to be technical problems. They're going to be behavior problems. And this is, look in the paper every day. Why do people get in trouble? Really smart people? Behavior. They got recorded saying something. They got their picture taken. They, oh my god, it's like, y'all know what I mean? Get caught.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, what's the one question you would ask? So, if working here and you could only ask one question during an interview, what would that question be?

**Lee Cockerell**

Oh, it might be something like, tell me about the hardest obstacle you've ever had to deal with in your life and how you dealt with it? What's the worst thing you ever had to deal with in your life? And how did you deal with and what was the outcome? Because I'm sure you know this by now, but if you don't, everything in your life is dealing with obstacles. From traffic, to getting out of bed, to you name it. How many obstacles, anybody have an obstacle today? You're here, but we don't know what you went through to get here. And you're gonna have them all day long. And overcoming obstacles is the name of the game. That's why I wrote this book, Career Magic. How to overcome the obstacles in your life that are going to be here. It's just it's not if you're going to have obstacles, you are going to have them. You're going to have a lot of them. Some of you are going to, there's going to be illness, things in your family, unexpected, car accidents. Your kids calling you at three in the morning. It's pretty much if you can overcome obstacles and deal with them cool, calm and collected. And when you can't get help find somebody to help you deal with it. Get advice, you'll sail through life because you're gonna have them. A lot of people withdrawal when they have an obstacle. They just stopped doing, you know, it's easier. I don't think I'll do that anymore. You know, obstacles are I think that's probably what pretty much while we're here. See how many obstacles you can overcome. Do you know anybody has trouble overcoming adversity or obstacles? What happens? You know, when you don't know what, you're the only one, the only problem was overcoming obstacle is your brain. Nobody else knows you don't know what you're doing. And by the way, as soon as you realize nobody knows what they're doing, you'll know you're in good company. Mainly nobody knows what they're doing in this life. They just get through, they learned, get a little better. But your brain, be careful what you believe. Because if you believe you can, you will. And if you believe you can't, you won't. And you'll make, you won't make those, take those risks. And by the way, at your age, you can be make all kinds of mistakes for the next 10 years. If you, let's say you get out of school and you don't like accounting, then don't do it. Go do

something else. Go get another degree or go start an ice cream store, or whatever turns you on. But don't do what you don't like. Because you do that, you'll be at work more than you'll be at home, probably. I guess, I don't know, especially around April and October.

### **Peter Margaritis**

So, think about the thinking about our audience here. And they want to know what's the biggest hindrance for people their age in leadership development and personal growth?

### **Lee Cockerell**

I think good, you know, not under estimating what you need to know and continuing your education. I think those early experiences you get, try to get him with the best company you can so you'll see the professionalism. You'll see how people are successful at that company, that organization. Think about what does professionalism mean to you? Think about people, you know, that are really professional. What do they do? What do they do? Could be your doctor, it could be your accountant, it could be anything, anybody. What's their behavior? Do they make you feel special when you deal with them? Do they treat you as an individual, they focus on your problem and deal with you? Do they respect you? And are they knowledgeable? They're looking for people who know what they're doing? And the more you should I tell you, the leadership part and the behavior part and the management part are what you ought to be studying right now. The accounting, yes, that's, that's going to change. It's going to change here and there but you need to learn how to be a good reliable manager that can get things done, keep your promises, be credible, do what you say you're going to do. Have that reputation. And second, be an influential person that people are glad when they see you come into work and not wish it go away. And that they are, people are not afraid to come to you and tell you the truth and give, ask for advice and just be human. Be human. And by the way, if you want to be a leader, by the way, if you can't make hard decisions, and you can't have hard conversations with people, number one, don't have children. Right. Number two, don't be in a leadership job where you're responsible for people's lives. Don't do it. If you can't sit down, you know, I said, you got somebody coming to work late. Now you got this job, they work for you. And they're coming to work late every day. And you talk to them, you talk to them, a couple times, then you let it go. And they are good at what they do. They do a good job. But they're so you call your mom, "Mom, I got this guy comes to work late every day." Your mom will say, "Well, hey, have you talked to him lately?" "Well, no, I kind of gave up." Well, have a conversation with him." You call her back in three weeks. "Mom, he's still not come to work, like what should I do?" "Fire him." Most of the decisions you make are practical. Don't get it. It's not complicated. It's not complicated. Give people a chance, train them develop them. It's not your fault. They don't perform. It's not your fault. It's their fault. We call those a Disney good people who don't do the job that they were hired to do, and we were clear with him what the job was. So, if you don't do it, you got to go to Universal or SeaWorld. Right? If you want to be excellent, you got to be excellent. The difference between average and excellent is the people. That's all it is. It's the people. And you individually will decide to either be great, or average. Great is hard. Gotta work longer sometimes. You've got more stress and aggravation. But if you hire the right people and train them and treat them well, people will take care of things for you. And then but you got to have the courage to get rid of the wrong people. And that'll be your biggest challenge. Letting it go. Letting it go. Letting it go. And when you start hoping things will get better and wishing things would get better and praying things get better, they won't. You got to do what you got to do. And by the way, if you don't somebody might do to you. Your boss might

say, my boss said to me once when I wasn't dealing with a performer when I was very young, I didn't know how to do it. It was insecure. I was didn't know how to fire somebody. He said, "Lee, if you don't deal with him, I'm going to deal with you." I'll never forget that day. I can still see it right now. It's implanted in my brain. If you don't do your job, I'm going to do my job. That's pretty clear. And by the way, your reputation is out there every day. Be careful what you say and do. Everyone's watching you. You're creating your reputation. And it's probably the best thing you need to be successful is to have a reputation that you're reliable, you're credible, you'll do what you say you're going to do, you'll make hard decisions, you'll have hard conversations, and you get results. And you do it in a respectful way. You know, you know, when I learned to have to fire somebody, I call them in I say, "Well, you know, we've talked about this half a dozen times, and today I'm terminating." Now I'm going to spend an hour with you telling you why. So maybe you won't, because if you wait till the end of the conversation to terminate him, you get so nervous, you can't, they think they got promoted. So, because you got babbling, so just call me I'm sorry. I'm sure you knew this was coming, and we've talked about it three or four times. It's not any better. And today is be your last day. And now let me tell you the things we've talked about over and over and over again. And get it over with, you know, when you got to do something hard, do it so it doesn't screw up the rest of your day. Fire people in the morning, not at four o'clock. Before you have power, you know, if you're gonna do it at 4:00, you're thinking about that all day long. And no just do what has to be done, when it has to be done, in the way it should be done, whether you like it or not. You don't have to like it. Of course, you won't like it. But it's called responsibility. You signed up. You signed up.

### **Peter Margaritis**

So, maybe we need a question from the audience. So, they may have a question for you. Okay, Johnny.

What about people skills? Say, never obviously never tried to manipulate people. We also talked a lot about, especially in Creating Magic how people skills and just learning to deal with people is really, really important. What's the line for you between manipulation and people skills? One person it's people skills, another manipulation?

### **Lee Cockerell**

Yeah, I think, well, for me, it's asking questions. I don't believe everybody the first time, you know, if it doesn't sound right, I want more. And I had a good boss here, President of Disney. This guy was amazing. He, by the way, he was an accountant or CPA. And man, I might think I'm explaining something to him. It's so simple. Anybody should know it, and he's, "Lee, I don't know what you're talking about. Tell me again. Let me know. What is this about? Why are you doing this?" I mean, and I cut through the, sometimes, the exaggeration. Does that sound right? You know, it's like, all these offers you get online and, on the TV, you know, lose 12 pounds today. And you're going really? Or I saw one yesterday, I was looking, you can buy us postage stamps for \$19 or 100? Really? I don't think so. I looked it up. And it's a big scam. People are actually counterfeiting them. But there are people buying them. You know, it's like, you've got to think, does this make sense? Is this really true? And by the way, you already know that from what's online these days. I don't believe anybody. And maybe because they may be telling me what they believe is true but you got to find out for yourself. And if it's

not true, ask questions. Ask more questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. And I would say that was part of my success. I had a boss once told me, "Lee, if you don't ask questions, you can be a fool once or a fool all your life." So, when you don't know, ask, then you won't, then you'll know. I go into Google so many times a day because there's a lot I don't know. I'll see a definition a word. I don't even know what it means. I look it up. I say I look up countries. I didn't even know there were countries. 5 million people live there. I said, why didn't I know that? You know, be curious. When you don't know something? Find out. Find out. And if you don't know something today, it's pretty much your own fault. Anything you want to know is at your fingertips. Anything you want to know is that your fingers. I mean really, if you don't know, you don't want to know. And, and also, I would say always question what you believe is true versus is it really? Does that really make sense? When I talked about some of those beliefs people have depending on where you live and where you grew up and what your religion. Yeah, don't believe everything you think, may not be true. And mostly today you get a lot of manipulation, online. In an interview, people will they'll tell you, they're the greatest thing since sliced bread. And then you check them out and they're not so good. So, you gotta know the truth is hard. And so you got to ask questions, and you got to challenge and you got to really? Who can I talk to? Just, and depends what the issue is. Sometimes it's not the big deal. When you hire a person, that's a big deal for your, with your team. You know, if you want to order of that coffee versus that coffee, who cares? The worst thing is a bad cup of coffee. But if I tell you go here, and they have great coffee, and you don't like it, so cost you three bucks. You hire a bad person. So, think about the degree of what are going to be the consequences if you do this. That's what is going to be the consequences if you do this? What can happen, what can go wrong? And people do it. I was reading one this morning where a lady said I took a job, and I had great training the first day and development the first week. And then my boss went on vacation for three weeks. And I had a new guy started the day after I did and now, he was, he didn't know anything. And she said by the end of the third week, I thought I've made the biggest mistake in my life coming to this company. She said it did smooth out when everybody was back on board but and I've done that in line. I joined Marriott and I thought after a month I would made the biggest mistake of my life. It was total chaos. My boss was, didn't know what he was doing. Place without a control. I went home to Priscilla, I think I made a mistake coming here. I hung in there and it worked out. But in Marriott when I joined Marriott had they had 32 hotels. Today they have 8500. So, it was a different time period. It was not a big famous company. So, I was concerned, did I make a mistake. And sometimes you got to stick in there for a while. And make sure you're comfortable with where it ends up after six months or then you can make your decision but you're gonna have these questions every day. You're gonna have some clients that are going to worry you what they're doing with the books. And they're going to ask, you're going to ask, be asked to do things that are inappropriate. You're going to be asked to take the deductions that, come on just this times, no problem, they're not going to find out. You better know what you stand for now and what you won't stand for. Because when you if you don't know you'll get in trouble one day. Anybody ever talked you into something? During your teenage years? That sounded good but be careful. It's your reputation. And today by the way you do something, it never goes away. Never Never Never. GPT your GP what is it? I use it now. I looked up the other day I said as Lee Cockerell ever been in jail, and you know, it's going to search the whole internet. So, are you're going, oh shit. And it said, no Lee, he's a good guy, bla bla, bla bla. It's because I was in jail 1964 for gambling under age with a fake ID in Lake Tahoe, but that was before the internet. So, my records are in a box in the sheriff's department somewhere. And the internet, if the internet says I wasn't in jail, then you're not in jail. That's it. If the internet, find something, and I'm sure all of you're

thinking about that right now. Go back and do a GPT on yourself. So, you can start getting your excuses together. So, you're ready when the boss when the company does it wants to find out. That's going to be a big background check they now.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, we've come to the end. It went by so quick.

**Lee Cockerell**

It does. It does. Okay, I'm gonna get, leave these books, you all can figure out what to do with them. There's Creating Magic, the first one I wrote it's in 22 languages now. It's all over the world. It's about how Disney runs a business and leadership. This is customer service. The customer rules. This one is about keeping yourself under control and the obstacles in your life, time management. That's my granddaughter. My daughter-in-law's books it's coming out soon. I was going to write that book by the way, and I gave her the title because I was thinking I probably wouldn't have any credibility. Would I?

**Peter Margaritis**

It would have a different twist.

**Lee Cockerell**

I thought this for years. I could write that book. What? How can I wrote it? I would beat people I would take a lot of grief of women. I'll tell you. And then there's my son's book he was here 25 years around the Magic Kingdom. He ran Epcot and he ran the Studio. And here's one we did together with two engineers how to the How to Hardwire the Magic with measurement and statistics and surveys and finding out if you're all, the truth, you know, measuring not just anecdotal. It's, oh, that was pretty good two engineers, because engineers get the system in place on how to measure your ideas. And so, that was fun. So, there they are. This was a good one, too. This is from a friend of mine, How to Write Copy that Sells, copy that sells. Think about the copy you see on the internet all the time. What makes you want to buy it when you see the words, the headline? It's an art. It's an art. You talked about manipulation. This is how you do it.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, let's give him a big thank you for your time. I would like to thank Lee for taking time out of his tremendously busy schedule to spend this time with me on my podcast and with the students at Oklahoma State University in their Master's program. His thoughts his ideas were well received by the 32 students, and they will rave reviews about his conversation that we had from the students and the faculty that were in attendance. So once again, Lee, thank you so very much. So, if you enjoyed today's episode, please leave a review on Apple podcast, Spotify, Google Play, Audible iHeart Radio or your favorite podcast platform. Also, please subscribe to share this podcast episode with a friend. Also please visit my YouTube channel Peter A Margaritas CSP CPA biz improv virtuoso where you can see previous podcast video episodes along with this one. While they're just hit the subscribe button so you won't miss any updates. And remember, there are people who prefer to say yes, and there are people who prefer to say no, those who say yes are rewarded by the adventures they have. And those who say no are rewarded by the safety they obtain. Be a yes person and thank you for listening.

