EPISODE 02

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:05] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders; leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world with Rick Torseth, and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:19] RT: Greeting, everybody. Rick Torseth back here with 10,000 Swap Leaders. Today, it's my good privilege to welcome a friend and colleague, Mark Clark, who is joining us from Amman, Jordan. Mark is the CEO of Generations For Peace, an NGO in Amman, that he's going to talk about in some detail here in our conversation. But before we get into that, let me give you a sense of that road that Mark has traveled that brought him to Amman. He's a Scotsman. He is a lawyer by education. Ten years as a lawyer. He's made some interesting changes and trajectory in his career from the time he started law. He was in the army for 10 years as a military officer spending time in Iraq. He got involved with the Iraqi Olympic Committee Movement.

Then from there, he made some transitions into development and international humanitarian emergency work. It's taken him many places in the world, from the UK, to India, to Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Papa New Guinea, and now in Jordan. We're in for an interesting conversation here, because he's traveled the world, and he's done some pretty interesting work in the work he's doing today, in Amman, with Generations For Peace is, I'm going to say, knowing Mark, kind of the high point of his career so far. But I expect some other stuff to follow. Just clarification, Mark and I have known each other for about 10 years. We share a lot of time together and an alumni group from graduate school that we attended. It is part of the reason he's here, but the real reason he's here is for his history. I will also add, because we haven't had anybody who's been recognized by Queen Elizabeth, for anything and Mark Clark has that designation as well.

Mark, welcome to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, and thank you for joining us. I'm just going to start with a basic question, which is, tell the people a little bit about yourself that you think is important that I haven't covered yet.

[00:02:08] MC: Wow, Rick. I'm giggling at this, and thank you for such an introduction. Look, I you said I'm on a journey. I think that's exactly what it feels like, but a very unplanned and sort of nonlinear journey. I think I started out choosing law as my university degree, because I frankly have had no real idea what I wanted to do. I have good enough grades, and it felt like something useful. My beginning into law was not necessarily with a sort of vocational calling in mind. But just it seemed to sort of best idea at the time. Then in parallel with my legal career, as you mentioned, I was in the British Army. I come from an army background. My father served in the British Army for 50 years. I think I was brought up moving countries, and very much with the military kind of values.

For my own experience in the army, I did it because I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the physical challenges. I also enjoyed the leadership development. I was in reconnaissance, what in the US, you'd call recon. I also found that aspect fun that you tended to be sort of further in front of other big units. You have more freedom of maneuver, more sense of autonomy, and greater responsibility to take initiative and sort of figure things out when they didn't go to plan. So just that aspect of kind of the double life of being a sort of lawyer in corporate law life, but in sort of parallel, being an army officer. I think one reflection is the idea of mission command that in the army, and especially in recon, you had to understand your own commander's intent, but also the intent of your commander's commander. We call that two up.

This idea of having a big picture understanding of the overall intention, and also the intention of the enemy and the broader context. Then figuring out what you needed to do to stay true to that intention. I think this is an idea, this idea of mission command has eventually emerged in all the other sort of leadership roles that I've had. Certainly, that's true in the work of Generations For Peace in our engagement with young people. I think there's a number of jumping off points for the journey and one of them, perhaps is a kind of dramatic moment back on the 10th of April 2001 when I broke my back paragliding in the French Alps, just opposite Mont Blanc. I had two long titanium rods and screws put around my spine and spent a period

lying in hospital, and sort of reflecting, firstly, what an idiot I was, and then sort of what should I learn from this experience.

I think that moment, that sort of enforced moment of reflection nudged me into taking a look at myself in the mirror, thinking about my career, especially in corporate law. Thinking about it more critically, and perhaps wondering what other paths that might be for me. As soon as I'd sort of got out of hospital and went back to my law firm, one of the first things I did was ask for a secondment and we were part of a global legal practice. I managed to ask for and get a secondment to Mumbai, India to our sort of sister law firm there. I think that was the beginning of a journey away from my law firm, but it was sort of still within a comfort zone. One reflection is, firstly, if you don't ask, you don't get, so be bold enough to ask for opportunities and then be brave enough to take them when people say, "Yes, okay."

[00:06:07] RT: Let me just jump in with a question here. I'm envisioning you in a hospital, French hospital.

[00:06:12] MC: Yes. It was a French Hospital. Okay. You've got these two rods in your back and you're lying there in your reflection. I'm curious, so dig a little deeper around, what came up in reflection that when you got out, and you returned, and you asked for the secondment to India? What changed there? What came up?

[00:06:32] MC: I think it is ultimately about sort of purpose and wanting to do something worthwhile. Knowing that I had started this legal career with very little sort of proactive decision making. I did a legal degree and then got recruited to the best law firm in Scotland, and was on a very sort of very good track within the firm and doing well. Had the greatest respect for the partners and colleagues in the law firm and sort of good future ahead of me. But at the same time, was beginning to understand that I didn't want to become them. I was hoping there was something different. This idea of asking for a secondment to India, what felt like a very kind of exotic, different context was a way of me maybe taking a half step towards exploring something different.

Certainly, the context in India was markedly different. Yes, I was doing sort of legal work, and also sort of business development for the law firm there. But the juxtaposition of rubbing

shoulders with the corporate elite in Mumbai, also the Bollywood elite because we were involved with Hollywood film, Bollywood film contracts and so on. The cricketing elite, because we were doing sponsorship contracts for the Indian cricket team. That sort of juxtaposition with the poverty and I got to travel significant amount around different parts of India and really relish that opportunity to try and kind of understand such a vast country and sort of very different lifestyles out of corporate Mumbai.

[00:08:06] RT: You're in India, and you've gone somewhere from India. What happened there, that you've taken a half step, but there's a full step somewhere coming here. Keep us going here.

[00:08:18] MC: Yeah. Well, just to finish the paragliding story. Maybe India was where I also chose to try out paragliding again. It's very tenuous kind of pathetic first flight because I was super nervous. But the moment I was airborne, and I was borrowing someone's kit, the moment I was airborne, I knew yeah, this was something I wanted to get back into doing. Returning from India, the first thing I did was an advanced paragliding course in Turkey. This is a course where you deliberately test the limits of the wing of your paragliding skills, by pushing beyond the limits, and deliberately collapsing the wing, and stalling, and tumbling, and spinning and then working out how to extricate yourself from these situations before having a quick impact on the ground.

I think the reflection for me here, there is a reflection. The reflection is that, how much time we spend stress testing different procedures, how much time we really set up an environment where people are able to fail, able to push and make mistakes in order to identify the real limits. How much we're able to give people stretch targets within an environment of safety and security. In that paragliding advanced course, the security was, we were doing it above water. I was wearing a life jacket. I had a radio in contact with the instructor who's in a safety boat down below. You have plenty of height to try various things out to solve whatever scenario you're in before you go and land on a very beautiful sandy beach.

This is something I think we're still pushing against in Generation For Peace. But this idea of creating and enabling environment where there is safety and security, but also encouragement to push boundaries and have the ability to make mistakes.

[00:10:19] RT: Okay. I definitely want us to dig into what's going on to Generations For Peace, because that's the world you've been living in for 10 years. But you're a long ways from Jordan right now in this journey. I know that there's some adventures that come forward here, so take us through those a little bit, so we get to Jordan.

[00:10:39] MC: You're right. I think the paragliding training thing in a wave mirrors the army training, and this other reflection that how much time the military spend on training and exercising, compared with any other organization. I think a lot of us in organizations get trapped into just doing, just acting and very little sort of training and exercising, playing out scenarios, and thereby developing our competencies and skills. What Kobe would call sharpening the saw. We're determined in our work to try and carry that ethos of training, and learning and creating space in very busy schedules for that to be part of a routine.

The stepping stone to Jordan was Iraq 2003. I was deployed with the British Army in a military role, and then later got seconded to the British Foreign Office to work on youth and sport issues in Iraq. Again, it's one of those kinds of absurd circumstances where opportunities pop up when you have a choice to say yes to them or not. One of the youth and sport projects was reestablishing an Olympic Committee in Iraq, two years in Iraq with series of quite unusual circumstances, a significant amount of violence, and low points, but also quite a lot of progress and sort of successes at a small scale in those years in Iraq.

It's a much longer story to be told, but I think it felt like, being in a very complex environment that was fast moving and it sort of looked like a chessboard. But you're familiar with a chessboard and the pieces, but in this case, there seem to be pieces that move in different ways. You're not even sure how big the chessboard is, how many other pieces are out of sight. There was that kind of growing, almost like a political awareness for me that there were other forces at play. Whilst we were making some progress, and chipping away, notching up some successes in our youth and sport work. Ultimately, the bigger forces of kind of geopolitics within Iraq in those years, came back to bite us.

[00:13:03] RT: Mark, before you move, because this is an important part for people in organizations who lead, which is the dynamic of politics and power, and where you're located

in the system, and how much of each of those you have. You're in the military, which is obviously hugely hierarchical levels of power and authority. Can you talk a little bit about what your insights were and actually the craft, I guess I would call it or the skills you started to develop to navigate that world so you could get stuff done?

[00:13:32] MC: Yeah. I mean, you're right. I, on the one hand, was coming out of a hierarchical system, but on secondment to the Foreign Office, actually, a very unstructured and sort of frankly chaotic set of circumstances in Iraq in those years. Therefore, lots of freedom, and also nominally, a lot of power. At one point, I was the Acting Minister for Youth and Sport of Iraq, at age 29, with no clue what I was doing. That itself was a kind of political awakening for me that isn't it absurd that somebody like me has ended up in this situation at all. That's not how I thought the world should be operating. But then when you do find yourself in that situation, thinking, "Well, how do I make the best of it?"

One of the examples of just coming back to basics was the role I was in with the Foreign Office would have insisted on me taking various protection measures, going to meetings with a convoy of three armored Land Cruisers, with personal protection, X Special Forces, personal protection people to every single meeting I was supposed to go to, and wearing body armor and helmets and showing up at meetings in that way, just sets off the meeting for failure. I'm not sure if my former foreign office colleagues notice, but I decided to buy a car, and drove myself around and went to meetings alone with no protection, and got a much better reception, and actually became – especially with the Iraqi Olympic Committee, almost became adopted as somebody that they felt responsibility for.

Firstly, I felt less of a target driving in a normal kind of beaten-up car, around the streets of Baghdad. But I also felt that security was being provided more by my hosts, rather than any kind of military or security apparatus. It comes back to human contact with people and getting that human engagement going from the beginning. If you have too many barriers put in the way, then you're really reducing the chances of success.

[00:15:52] RT: You're fair to say, then, based on that experience, you have a kind of sensitivity to barriers that could be in the way of people working together. I mean, is that a radar that you have attuned to a little bit?

[00:16:07] MC: I think so. I think a lot of it appears like common sense. But I think we catch ourselves ignoring the common sense, and we get into habits where we're actually behaving in ways that is not staying true to that basic principle of, engage on the human being level first. It's one of the things, with all new recruits to Generation For Peace, I try and meet them physically on day one. One of the bits of advice I really emphasize in that very first conversation with them, is focus on people first, and then tasks. Because if you can engage the people, work out who the people who are key to your success, and there'll be in your own team, but also across other departments, and build a human connection with them before the work starts getting busy. Because then, your success will be dependent on them giving you what you need when the tasks do come. I really believe that and I think, I've had my own failures in not doing that, and then experienced just how different fields when you just take that little bit of effort at the beginning to connect on a human level.

[00:17:13] RT: Because when the breakdowns occur, and you know they're going to occur, you have the relationship to fall back on, rather than having to create that in the middle of the breakdown.

[00:17:20] MC: Absolutely. It's the same in other contexts, where I've been working from Iraq to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and then Papua New Guinea and then here in Jordan. Actually, safety and security comes primarily from your community, your people, your neighbors, far more than anyone else, any sort of structures or institutions. I want to talk a little bit about Democratic Republic of Congo. Because that was after Iraq, there was a sort of decision point for me whether to return back to my legal career or to carry on exploring this whole new world of sort of International Development. I recognized Iraq was a very specific and peculiar circumstance.

I knew enough that I needed to learn a lot and I looked around at different contexts, where I thought I'd be able to learn the most and Democratic Republic of Congo fitted the bill and I got a job with an NGO there. I was working on quite intense circumstances of emergency humanitarian relief for people displaced by fighting in eastern Congo, close to the border with Rwanda, providing food and shelter. But also, early stage community development, drilling water wells, providing health extension workers and medicine supplies, an early stage kind of

agricultural development. This gave me such insights into how to work in very remote communities, communities that we accessed only by air. There were no roads into those communities. Again, examples of just finding solutions to basic problems.

In one of the more remote communities, we flew in by air, but there were no vehicles in those communities once we landed. There were only motorbikes, and quad bikes and trailers that a quad bike could pull along. But I asked the question, “Well, what if we did have a vehicle, a kind of Land Cruiser or some sort of four-by-four vehicle?” The answer was, “Well, it would make the world of difference. We’d be able to do 10 times that sort of programming we could do.” The aircraft we used to access the community was small Cessna caravans that obviously, you couldn’t put a Toyota Land Cruiser in the back off, but you could if you took it apart. We flew in a Toyota Land Cruiser in three separate flights. The body. and the chassis and then the engine block, and we sent an engineer on the third flight, and had a bit of a bet as to whether he’d get it to start or not and he did. That transformed our programming in that particular community overnight.

[00:20:11] RT: Okay. Hang on a second there, because I want to. You might not know the answer to this question, but what is it inside you, the diagnostic, the what if we could and therefore how to, that has you actually take a vehicle apart, get it there and have it work? I mean, that’s not a complicated thing, right? It’s available to everybody in some way, shape, or form. What’s going on with Mark Clark that has this capacity to come up with this?

[00:20:43] MC: Well, firstly, I don’t know. I’m sure it’s sporadic and random. But I think it all comes back to imagination. I think imagination is one of the most important resources in any team, in any organization. When we’re recruiting, we’re looking for that quality. What I mean by is, we’re not recruiting for people who can just do the job, the job description that is our current need. We’re really looking for people who have the potential to shape, and create and actually envision and imagine the future of Generations For Peace. We have a wonderful opportunity together to, to create that and make it what we want it to be. Imagination, I think, is completely underrated. I think you can create the enabling environment where imagination can be encouraged.

That requires all sorts of other inputs, but it starts with creating an environment of open dialogue, where feedback is at the level of maturity that you can be candid, and yes, give positive comments and appreciation for sound ideas, but also shoot down ideas that are not going to work. It comes back to that sort of learning culture. I would really – it's not just my imagination, it's the collective imagination and the appreciation that good ideas can come from anywhere in the system, and you want to get away from the idea that it's senior management that come up with the ideas, and then others implement them. I think usually, the best ideas come from the coalface, come from where the action is, the interface with communities. And we need to be making sure we have processes that are sort of antenna response mechanisms that are picking up all of those potential ideas.

[00:22:44] RT: Let's get back to the vehicle note. How much did you lose on the bet that the vehicle actually started?

[00:22:52] MC: I was betting that it would. Many –

[00:22:54] RT: How did the vehicle impact the work done?

[00:22:59] MC: Well, I mean, literally sort of times 10. We had been operating, I forget, I think it was three quad bikes and three trailers. But the carrying load was pathetic, compared with a Toyota Land Cruiser, which could also pull a trailer. The capacity to send medicines to remote clinics, and engage with difficult cases of medical emergencies, because you don't really want to carry a medical emergency on the back of a motorbike or kind of crosser trailer, much easier in a Toyota Land Cruiser. It was really the load carrying capacity that transforms the program.

[00:23:39] RT: It's amazing how one vehicle changes so many people's lives. All right. Are we going to stay here in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or do we want to go down to Papua New Guinea?

[00:23:47] MC: No, I think you probably want to jump to Papua New Guinea. Again, that's a case of when opportunity knocks, make sure you open the door. There, I was in Democratic Republic of Congo in these very remote communities where we were sending email over HF radio. I got an email from a friend of mine with a job advert from the economist about some

sport for development program in a place called Papua New Guinea. I think like many people, I had to look up where is Papua New Guinea thinking it might be in West Africa, and discovered it's north of Australia in the Pacific. Immediately, I was hooked. It was such an unusual opportunity to design a program funded by the Australian government with the PNG government with a 10-year horizon.

I applied. I did a ridiculous job interview over this HF radio kind of Zoom type call or audio calls, sort of Skype call over radio, if you like, with chickens and children running around me and managed to get the job. There I was in Papua New Guinea. It really hit home having had experiences in Iraq, then Democratic Republic of Congo and then arriving to Papua New Guinea. What little I thought I knew about arriving into new contexts and sort of finding my way, Papua New Guinea really just taught me to rethink all of that all over again. It's a very diverse place. Population of about 10 million, but with more than 800 languages, distinct languages. It's because the population lives in very isolated remote groups, small tribes up in the highlands, coastal plains and islands, and with very little interaction over hundreds of years. This gave me an insight into something, which I think is a lifelong lesson for me and it feeds into how we approach our work in Generations For Peace.

That is stepping into any new community. And in some cases, I would walk for a day away from the nearest road in order to arrive into a new community in Papua New Guinea. But stepping into any new community and sort of observing what goes on, I feel that you inevitably carry with you all sorts of perspectives, and worldviews and hypotheses about what's going on. But most of them will be wrong and it's having the humility just to observe, and watch, and maybe ask questions, and seek really to understand. This is in a context where sort of sorcery, and other local spiritual and cultural beliefs were dominant aspects of life and of decision making, and of social, cultural and political structures. These were just a universe removed from all the other environments that I have been in. And yet, our work was to engage communities, and to find ways that were localized and sustainable for addressing quite serious issues of violence. Violence against women, tribal fighting, youth violence, and sort of gang violence in urban centers, and also post-conflict reconciliation in Bougainville, where they had a civil war for several decades.

I think the real lesson for me was, every system makes sense to itself and it's your job to start to engage in the system in order to seek to understand it, not to walk in going, "Well, this doesn't make sense. Therefore, it's wrong or it's crazy, just because it doesn't fit your own pre-conceptions.

[00:27:37] RT: Talk a little bit then what you've learned to date at that point in Papua New Guinea. I'm sure it's expanded with your time at generation trapeze, how you started to develop those discerning diagnostic or observational skills before you started to dive into the system with your ideas. If somebody is listening to you, what does it actually – what are you actually doing when you're doing that work of trying to understand the system?

[00:28:06] MC: I think it's a great question. I'm trying to think through the actual steps. I think the first one is all about intention. Seek first to understand, and that it sounds so simple, but it's mostly neglected, and people jump to displaying their expertise, and their knowledge without an awareness that it's not relevant. Then time spent, there's a phrase in certainly in the British Army. Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted. The effort and time that is invested in that analysis phase, that kind of diagnosis phase is incredibly important. Again, in most contexts, in most organizations, and not just development organizations, but private sector as well. There's this pressure to kind of get things done and move forward. You lose the valuable investment in diagnosing really what is the context and digging deeper below what might be a presenting problem and sort of working upstream also to one of the root causes of this particular dynamic that you're seeing the symptoms of.

Then another tool, which we found useful and it gives people sort of aha moments is the ladder of inference. It's just this kind of image of a ladder, where generally, people race up the ladder too fast. They start at the bottom of the ladder, observing some data, but then they jump several rungs up the ladder, because they make assumptions based on a small portion of the data that they've seen. Of course, that's a survival mechanism. It's a biological system that we have. But the real skills in slowing down, and spending the time that is needed to climb the ladder of inference, one rung at a time. Then the quality of appreciation of the situation and all its complexity, and therefore, the quality of decisions about how to engage in that system and what actions to take will just be an order of magnitude better if you can slow down how fast you climb that that ladder of inference.

In our work, we try and follow that, but on a collective level. We really evolve whole groups of people in communities, in these participatory processes to slow down and to go through this analysis, this diagnosis that community needs assessment process together. We find time and again, it sharpens their own understanding of their own community and the dynamics at play, because we're bringing different tools to help them slow down and go through this thought process. As a result, the sense making and then the decision making is different, but it's also far stronger. It's got much more conviction and commitment behind it.

[00:30:58] RT: I want this whole part that you just said about slowing down, and putting that in as a cultural way in which an organization works. I want to come back to that because I want you to address what you're actually doing with your teams and organizations to put that in place. But I'd like to have you put it in the context of the work you're doing at Generations For Peace. I don't want to go to GFP yet if you're not done with Papua New Guinea, but let's come back to that in that context. Anything you want to say – I've heard a little bit about your time in Papua New Guinea, and I have a weird recollection of a story that's about sailboats, or catamarans, or something like that. Do I remember that correctly?

[00:31:44] MC: I certainly enjoyed sailing catamarans. I'm trying to remember what the story was apart from lots of hilarious accidents crashing.

[00:31:51] RT: My recollection is that you found one, two or a few of them, but they weren't nearby and you had to go through a similar exercise of the taking the truck apart to get these boats.

[00:32:04] MC: Good. Yes, I've remembered it. The Sailing Club in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea tended to be dominated by expats and very little opportunity for young Papua New Guineans to learn to sail. Of course, they have a great culture of sailing, but traditional craft, a lot of seagoing canoes. I got together a plan to bring up from Australia a whole load of old catamarans that were kind of nearing the end of their life, but still viable. We got them fairly cheaply, and loaded as many as we could into a shipping container and got shipping container delivered for free. Managed to get a sort of private sector sponsor just to do the delivery for us. Then we sold some of them to club members, and that paid for the rest. Donated the rest to

the club, with the condition that they had to be set, had to be sailed by young Papua New Guineans.

We opened up the sports, the opportunity to young Papua New Guineans. I remember, it took, I think three outings, one weekend after another. They learned they were slow. They were doing things wrong. They were sort of damaging things. On the first day, the first weekend, second weekend, they were beginning to get the hang of it. Literally by the third weekend, some of them were winning races. It just blew my mind that this natural talent was there. I think, again, it's a reflection that young people have such untapped potential, and they don't need much. They just need the path, and then usually for adults to get out of their way. I think that was our approach to letting that natural talent come through in that circumstance.

[00:33:56] RT: That seems to be a perfect segue to – how did you get from there to Amman, Jordan.

[00:34:04] MC: While I was in Iraq, and working on the Iraqi Olympic Committee side of things, we got a lot of help from the Jordan Olympic Committee. We were in and out of Jordan a lot, and the President of the Jordan Olympic Committee elected in 2003, so very recently elected was His Royal Highness, Prince Feisal bin Al Hussein of Jordan. That's how I met him with our sort of collective interest in the Iraqi Olympic Committee and stayed in touch with him and came to see in 2007. So while I was in Papua New Guinea, he founded generations for peace. This was a initially a peace through sport mission coming out of the Jordan Olympic Committee with an international mandate. Being absolutely focused on sport for peace and development in my work in Papua New Guinea, I was really curious to see how this Generations For Peace model was being set up and what sort of activities it was doing.

In 2009, I got an invitation to come and see Generations For Peace in action. And then at the end of – I was in PNG for four and a half years. At the end of my stint there, I came to join Generations For Peace in January 2011. Just to put that in context, that was just before the so-called Arab Spring. So much has changed, both in Jordan and the wider region since I arrived into Amman. Our global headquarters is here, but our work is in very diverse contexts, all around the world. We've been programming in 51 countries since GFP was founded.

It's that diversity of contexts that gives us an appreciation of complexity, but also an understanding that there are certain minimum specifications, certain practices that over time, being tested in diverse circumstances are proven to have value. I think at the heart of it, is maybe a lot of the threads that we've already talked about. Providing tools, and support and a qualitative relationship of commitment that allows people in communities to be valued as partners in development, and that's especially young people. To see them as having the potential to lead change in their own communities, rather than seeing young people as a problem, as a security threat, or just as some sort of economic unit that needs to be developed. To get away from engaging young people by doing things to them or for them, and instead working out approaches that really respects them and work with them. It's this participatory approach, this philosophy that drives all of our programming.

And because we're working in such diverse contexts, from Jordan and the Middle East, but also Sri Lanka, and the USA, and the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa, no single context is the same. But we're covering a range of issues from identity related conflicts, into religious, into tribal, into ethnic violence, gender-based violence, which is pervasive across every context, every society, every culture, that we work in inclusion of displaced people, including the Syrian refugee crisis that's dominated this part of the world for the last 12 years. Then also, the inclusion of people with disabilities. A whole range of issues, but this participatory approach, this focus on building on strengths, and assets, and existing structures within communities, keeping a very lean model, providing support that, yes, sometimes includes resources, but really is the technical know-how, and the mentoring, and the fact that we continue that mentoring. We don't just deliver training, and then that's it.

I think these are the hallmarks of Generations For Peace's approach. Just one other thing in terms of systems, I think we understand a community, even a small community at grassroots level, a kind of a neighborhood is a complex adaptive system. You want to engage the system; you want to seek first to understand. The system makes sense to itself, even if it doesn't make sense to you at the beginning and then use the available levers. If you have access to the real influences in the community, then great, work with them. We have a dialogue for peace approach that we use once we've earned the access to two leaders in a community. But if you don't have access to them, deploy what other tools you do have. Start where you can.

We use sport and arts-based approaches to engage younger people. We use advocacy and economic empowerment to engage older youth or parents. Having this diversity of tools allows us to engage at different levels in the system, literally different age groups and to, over time, find ways ultimately to engage everybody. And to connect, especially young people with the influencers and with officials in government and with the private sector. I think those connections are really, really important in thinking about that system's view.

[00:39:38] RT: So there's a lot there. I want to pull it apart a little bit. But first, would you frame for people who are listening, what is the mission of Generations For Peace. I know it's evolved, it started in one form and you've responded to different needs in the world and saw an opportunity to help in ways that were different than your original mission. But let people know why you exist and what you're trying to do, and then we can go back into this unpacking a little bit here if you would mind.

[00:40:05] MC: Yeah. Well, our mission is really as a peacebuilding organization, to work in communities to transform daily issues of conflict and violence. As I've said, they take very different forms in different places. But it's this word transformed, that I think is significant. Peacebuilding is not about stopping conflict. Conflict is a really necessary and important aspect of human life and human development and it's all about difference. We have to have difference. Otherwise, there's no innovation and no development. It's not about stopping that sort of conflict, but it's about transforming conflict interactions, so that they can be prosocial, so they can be constructive rather than destructive and resorting to violence. I think our peacebuilding mission is really interpreted at that level, at grassroots level, transforming personal capacities within people, their competencies to engage in a moment of conflict, but in a prosocial constructive way.

Then to transform relationships between people, especially relationships across different identity divides. Then thirdly, to transform the dynamics of a conflict, especially those conflict dynamics that feel intractable and stuck, to try and expand that polarized simplicity, that sort of collapsed complexity, and provide people with different perspectives, different viewpoints. So that perhaps, fresh insights give them ideas for actions that they have not thought of before. Personal capacities, relationships and also the dynamics.

[00:41:55] RT: I want to shift it a little bit here and talk about when you, when you arrived at GFP, the number of people you were touching is quite small compared to what it is now. What I'm interested in is, what you've learned, I'm going to – I mean, use language that I'm familiar with and I think you probably are, too. But what you've learned about fostering the movement, in the absence of having sort of desirable authority to just have people do what you'd like them to do. And you have a global network of people who are working in ways together, and independently. And you've had to learn how to mobilize those people, keep them moving, keep them connected. I'm interested in you sharing what you've learned about how to do that. May be undoubtedly, you've traveled that road without always being 100% successful. What lessons might have you learned as a leader about through some failures or some non-successes?

[00:42:56] MC: Yeah. Very, very good question. The journey of Generations For Peace has also been a growth journey. The organization is 14 years old. I've been with it a little over 10 and a half years. When I joined just before the Arab Spring, GFP was seven staff at the headquarters. Over the last 10 years, we've grown tenfold. It's that growth that has actually allowed us to do more sophisticated work, more impactful work. Frankly, more interesting and more exciting work all around the world. To not only reach more people, but to reach them in more effective ways. I think that has also within the headquarters team, that has provided incredible pathways for individual people, because they've been joining an organization that is growing, and has the freedom to allow them to shape and create the next chapter of their own role. It's this idea, we're building GFP together. That's a very powerful sort of team dynamic.

Then you're right, our headquarters team exists solely to serve Generations For Peace volunteers all around the world. We've over the years, we've trained a little over nineteen and a half thousand. These are people in the communities I've described across this context, who share one thing in common, and that is that they're passionate about changing some aspect of their communities lived experience that involves some issue of conflict and violence. Our job is really to support them and to stay with them kind of step-by-step, side by side on the journey towards transforming those issues that they're really passionate about changing.

So yes, we've trained nineteen and a half thousands of them over the years, but so what. Well, the real answer is, the effect of their programming and what it's achieving. It's been positively

impacting a little over 1.4 million children, youth and adults across these different circumstances. I think as we evolve and sharpen, sharpen the saw, sharpen our tools and processes, we invest in learning and research. We want data to inform our work. We also feel we need to be a learning organization. We have to put that sort of nice ambition really into action in every process that we have. We have a knowledge management process across every department. This is not only in the program's department. It's also in the finance department and in the communications department.

Every aspect of Generations For Peace work boils down to these learning loops, and always pushing for, okay, we're doing it this way. Now, what could be done differently? How could we do it better, or leaner or faster? I think that's been an exciting journey that is still ongoing. I think, along the way, they've been various leadership moments and different thresholds of evolution. Leading a team that has seven people is very different to leading a team that is 10 times that. The organizational processes that were good when we were seven people are not fit for purpose as you cross 20, 30, 50, 70 people. That's also been a really stimulating kind of intellectual journey for me and the senior management team together to think, "Okay. Well, what should the process be next?"

Again, good ideas come from everywhere. Certainly not just for me, but I find that aspect of how you support positive change, not only in individual people and communities, but also within an organization really fascinating, and to kind of philosophically think, well, what is an organization. It's a group of people with this shared vision, this collective imagination that I referred to. There are set of structures that really come down to cultural norms, some of which get formalized, and some of which don't.

Culture in an organization, in any organization, I believe is really created in every conversation every single day. It's the water cooler moments passing each other in the corridor. Yes, it's the formal communications, but it's also the informal stuff and trying to shape a culture that keeps the eye on the passion and the impact. But also, on the effectiveness and the efficiency. I think that's part of our learning journey as well. I don't think we've got it perfect, but I think being intentional about it, is at least half the battle.

[00:47:58] RT: Let's do a little Q&A here around leading. What's your definition of leading?

[00:48:04] MC: Wow! Several answers there. I think it's changed very significantly over time. When I started out as a lawyer, I think I was not really thinking about leadership and leadership seemed pretty invisible to me. I wasn't ever involved or even felt like I was receiving information from the leaders of the law firm in the army. It was completely the other way around. Almost every moment was spent on thinking about leadership, developing leadership, and developing leadership as an act, as a behavior, not as a title. That may surprise a lot of people. People think the army has – the military is very hierarchical and people just obey orders from the top down. That couldn't be further from the truth. I think this idea of mission command that I referred to, is really about fostering leadership at every level. In fact, driving leadership behavior as low as it can be, because that's where the responsiveness initiative adaptability comes from.

Those were my sort of early reflections on leadership. I think another answer I'd give is the responsibility of any leader to develop other leaders, not just to develop followers, kind of related responses with my young kids, as we as we sort of explore different environments. They're five years old now and we sort of clamber around different historical monuments in Jordan. I try and get them to lead different sections of a route. I have a boy and a girl. As they're leading, often, one of them leading will just disappear off into the distance, and I sort of gently remind them that if you're alone, you're not leading, because you don't have any followers. You have to take people with you. If you're a leader, you can't just charge off into the future.

Then, I think another answer. Several years ago, I thought this was the right answer is, leadership requires holding quite a lot of uncertainty, and projecting certainty and releasing the uncertainty at the rate people can absorb. I thought, for a number of years, I thought I was quite smart. I was quite pleased with myself for thinking of things in that way. I found it genuinely kind of practical and useful as we went through significant uncertainties breaking through these different evolutionary thresholds as we grew as an organization. I think one of the biggest reflections with COVID and the impact on an organization like Generations For Peace last year was that, it's wrong to think of that model where it's the leader alone. The leader, the figure of authority alone that should be containing that uncertainty and kind of holding it and then choosing to release it. It has to be or it's far better if that is a collective endeavor of at least a leadership team.

I think our navigation through challenging financial circumstances last year, and kind of emerging out of it more resilient, stronger, on a good financial track again, back to our growth path. But also, now with improved capabilities in terms of digitized approaches alongside our on site in person peacebuilding activities has proven that this collective idea of leadership is much more powerful.

I'll give one final answer on leadership, because I think the dominant issue of our time, as a race, as humanity is the climate emergency. An issue that big, that dwarfs we may think of as a big issue like COVID-19, a pandemic. The climate emergency is a million times bigger, and sort of worse in terms of potential impact than the COVID pandemic. It demands a rethink, a kind of sea change, a really transformative shift towards distributed leadership and sort of collective responsibility. We've moved climate action up to the top of our strategic priority list, understanding that really, we feel a responsibility that every organization, every household, every government, every private sector, entity, we should all be thinking what can we do and we better get on and do it fast to collectively respond to the climate emergency.

[00:52:53] RT: Great. I have a couple more questions before I let you off the hook here. It's my view in the work that I do, and in my life, and as a parent, we tend to learn more from our failures than we do our successes. If you look back on your leadership career, since this got an emphasis on leadership in 10,000 Swamp Leaders. What's one example of something that didn't go the way you wanted that stayed with you and you profited from as a leader, it's made you more effective?

[00:53:22] MC: Yeah, thank you. I mean, I think it's a really healthy practice to be reflective. Probably, one of the biggest things I've been encouraging myself and others in Generations For Peace to do is something called one minute journaling every day, reflecting on leadership moments that you did take, and leadership moments opportunities that you missed. Reflecting on missed opportunities and failures, I think is incredibly helpful. I think there are two types of mistake, and you see examples of them perhaps every day in oneself and in others. There are mistakes of action, and mistakes of inaction. Mistakes of action, I would say is, where you've gone and done something and it's had a bad consequence, maybe an unintended bad consequence or you screwed up how you were doing it, and so you've kind of messed

everything up. But that was a mistake of action. You at least chose to do something, you acted in a certain way and something happened. I think those mistakes are really positive.

If an organization is creating this environment, where more and more and more of those mistakes can happen, but when they happen, there must be a learning loop so that you don't have a repeat of the same mistakes. If possible, if one person makes that mistake and learns from it, the learning must be shared, so that others don't need to go through that learning by making the same mistake. Mistakes of action are good, provided there is a learning loop and the learning can be distributed. Mistakes of inaction I think are the real problem. I see this in myself every day and in my daily journaling. At the end of each day, I look down and go, "Yeah, there were three or four moments today that I didn't take. I didn't have that conversation. I was too busy I was running to the next thing." But actually, it would only have taken 30 seconds. I could have done that."

The mistakes of inaction end up costing an organization, or a team, or an organizational culture far more. It's the conversations we don't have, though those are probably the biggest failures. There's one other challenge/failure that I think we face every day. That is the challenge of saying no to things. I think I'm extremely guilty of this. My team would tell you as well. I've been trying to get better. I'm trying to make it much more of a collective process within Generations For Peace. But I think we're all very passionate about the work we do, so it's doubly hard for us to say no to an opportunity. And we get hit with requests and sort of ideas and opportunities every day, and yet we've got to try and be extremely smart, and disciplined and sort of – and show kind of ruthless prioritization to any of these opportunities.

Out of these opportunities, what must we do to meet our strategic objectives? Let's focus on those, because all the other nice shiny ones that might be quite exciting and interesting, if they're not super essential, we should probably be saying no to them. That's a daily struggle, I fail on that every day for sure.

[00:56:44] RT: Thank you for your candor. I'm with you on that failure as well. All right. I have one last question I want to ask you before we bring this to a close. If you and I were having a discussion three years from today, and you're looking back over these last three years, what

has to happen for you in your life, both personally and professionally for you to be happy with your progress?

[00:57:05] MC: Wow! So envisioning is another great tool, and it comes back to the power of imagination. If people say if you can't see it, you can't be it. Well, yes, but seeing in reality, or seeing an imagination. I love the practice of envisioning different things. If you can envision it, if you can imagine it and begin to feel what it might be like, then I think you're onto a good track with actually making it a reality.

Where would my imagined reality be in three years from now? I think Generations For Peace is on such an exciting journey. There is no reason not to imagine we can create the next chapter, and indeed, three chapters three years down the road. I think there are some key things that would really help that growth trajectory to be strong, and sustained and even accelerate. One aspect of it that is personal to me is, I've got to get better at delegating. I think I had conversations with colleagues about this two days ago. Sorry, last Thursday, end of last week. I'm constantly up against, and I'm sure, other colleagues and team members are as well.

The balance between sort of quality or perfection aren't good enough. This is a calculus we have to have to decide. There's sometimes if you delegate something and sort of the product comes back and you go sort of, "Ugh! Okay. Now, I'm going to spend a bit more time just tinkering with it, improving it the way I would have done it or the standard I want to do it. Great! That product may now be improved in terms of quality, but the collective amount of time invested in it, was it necessary? So drawing the line between good enough and letting quality just slide, that's a really difficult line to set. I truly believe there are almost no things in an organization that need to be perfect, except our financial management. That's the bedrock of our kind of reputation, especially as an organization that's in the nonprofit world. But everything else, the quality kind of good enough threshold can probably be a bit lower in order to release the potential for more and more delegation.

I think that's probably the single most important frontier for me personally, as a leader to keep pushing against. I think if I can do that, then I'll be unleashing a lot more of the potential of the organization as a whole, including my own potential to focus on the more strategic things, the new frontiers. It's kind of a double win if I can work on that. I think the – unfortunately, the

mission of GFP is needed more than ever, through COVID needs have only gone up, preexisting needs have been amplified by additional pressures, both the mental health pressures of the pandemic, domestic and gender-based violence has exacerbated in every culture and country that we work in. But also, the economic impact of COVID is going to have a very long tail and that itself exacerbates a lot of these conflict fault lines and issues of violence or the potential for people to participate in different forms of violence.

Unfortunately, there's much more work ahead of us. But I think if we can keep this learning attitude, and this attitude that we're building it together and shaping the future together, then the next three years, should we continue the really fascinating journey.

[01:00:57] RT: Mark, thank you very much for your time here. You've made us all a little wiser in multiple ways around how to lead. Thanks for joining and thanks for the work you're doing in the swamp. Much appreciate it.

[01:01:08] MC: It's a privilege to be in the swamp with you, Rick. Thanks so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[01:01:14] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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