

EPISODE 05

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:06] 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: Hi, everybody. It's Rick Torseth. Welcome back to 10,000 Swap Leaders, a podcast that explores what it's like to make a decision to choose to lead in the swamp of messy, gnarly, wicked problems that plague the Earth.

Today, I'm with my friend and colleague for about 13 years, Jacob, I'm going to guess of time, who I've known for a while. We're peers in the consultancy business. I asked Jacob to come on the show, because he's got a lot of experience; professional experience, both in the corporate sector, and in now in his own consultancy. He has oriented himself to some particular strong missions that take big challenges to resolve. Jacob, welcome to the conversation.

[00:01:04] JM: Thank you.

[00:01:04] RT: It's good to have you here.

[00:01:05] JM: It's lovely to be here. I'm looking forward to discovering what it's all about.

[00:01:09] RT: Yeah, me too. I got to say, there are many reasons why I wanted to talk to you. When I thought about it, the thing that keeps jumping out at me is ever since I've met you, two things. One is, you always have a glint in your eye and a sense of possibility that the world can work. Now, you may not always think that in your private thoughts, but that's always how you show up in my experience.

Then secondly, you're one of the earlier pioneers in my history, who was speaking about issues of sustainability, when I would say, they weren't quite in fashion yet. We are certainly not on the edge of COP26, and all the things that we know now. I hold you, rightly or wrongly, in the vanguard of trying to formulate and stimulate this conversation about sustainability. I know that informs your work, and we can get into that. Let's begin with you telling us wherever you want to begin your story, about who you are, and what you're up to.

[00:02:10] JM: Thanks, Rick. I like the glint in the eye thing. If only that were true, but it is true in the sense that I am blessed with an optimism, which keeps me going. If that's visible, and if that gets transmitted, that's fabulous. I think, I am just in the process of saying goodbye to my parents, and my mother in particular.

I think, it comes from upbringing. I think, there are just people who believed that if you played things right, for the most part life would come and meet you and coming towards you. I believe,

that through my own life experience as well, but I'm pretty sure I was brought up that way. I think, it's probably a driver in this tackling your swamp, these gnarly problems as you just called them a minute ago.

If you haven't got this innate optimism that it's worth carrying on, despite the swamp, then I think, you find other things to do, because it's a painful process. There has to be an inner reason to keep going, I think.

[00:03:37] RT: Go ahead.

[00:03:39] JM: Yeah. Well, you were just saying, what's on the menu for me at the moment, apart from my private life and my family. The menu at the moment is climbing this very, very slippery mountain, which is about leaders and followers, and how people manage to be successful in getting others to move along in direction that they're thinking about. I'm tackling that from the sustainability point of view. I think, many other people are tackling it for all kinds of reasons.

My particular menu at the moment is what is different about sustainability as an issue and particularly for business. Because I am business-focused. Not that I like business. We'll

probably come back to that. I'm not a business-like person, but I'm business focused, because that was where I spent 20 years of my life. I consult to businesses. For me, sustainability means sustainability for business, and many other aspects of it.

The leadership in a business context is an airport bookshop subject. Airport bookshop subjects, you have to be extremely optimistic to actually get anyone to take them seriously in the real world. That's what I'm struggling with at the moment. Getting people to look seriously at how their whole model of what leadership is about might be inappropriate, or fit badly with the challenges that we're facing in business and sustainability right now. That's my frame at the moment.

[00:05:25] RT: Okay. If I understand what you're saying, part of the work then is to A, you have to disrupt and disappoint the airport model, book input, and attempt to replace it with something perhaps more rigorous and challenging and harder to absorb and integrate.

[00:05:43] JM: Yeah. I think that's a good way to put it. It's not to throw away all those books. It's a facetious label to stick on the tens, literally tens of thousands of attempts there are, out there in printed form, or digital form. To define what leadership is about is something that the western world is totally obsessed by. In other parts of the world, reckon they've had it taped for the last 2,000 or 3,000 years thinking of no country in particular, but naming China for one. It's not a question what leadership is about.

In the West, it's been a question for a long time. It remains in question. There are 15,000 or 20,000 answers to that question. Rather than try to reinvent that like an airport book, what I'm struggling with is, how do you get down to the personal, personal definitions of leadership that everyone has deep inside them. Everyone who's interested in working with others, has got some

definition of leaders, leadership inside them. They've got an operating model of leadership. If you're interested in working with others, leadership comes into it from day one. You want to work with others and you want to go somewhere new, somewhere better. That's where leadership starts. What is different about going somewhere new, or somewhere different that's about sustainability in business? That's my current obsession.

[00:07:18] RT: Okay. Do you mind if we break apart and explore your work in sustainability first, and then your thoughts about this piece you raised right at the beginning about a leader bringing people along, in this case, in the work of being, creating more sustainable organizations? Because I think, it's that connective tissue, that's really where the rub is, and where the challenge is, and where you're spending most of your time, it's my understanding. Let's start with, why does sustainability as an issue hold your attention, independent of the leadership for a moment? Just try and hold it in isolation and give us that context.

[00:07:57] JM: Thanks. That reminds me. Thanks, Rick. Because that reminds me of you – in your polite introduction, you're talking about me possibly being a forerunner, in the sense that I was getting a 100% involved in that back in 2007. I just wanted to say that I consider the real forerunners to be the people who were working with the Club of Rome and doing limits to growth. There are people going back to the 17th century, who were thinking about how do you steward and look after natural resources, like forests in Germany in a sustainable way, without using the German for sustainability? But they were thinking about how do we do this in a sustainable way for future generations.

I'm a long, long way from being a forerunner. I would say, that the current movement, the current awareness, linking it to climate change, which was not the case in the 17th century, but linked to climate change, and the threats to our environment, that goes back to the 1970s and the 1972, Club of Rome report, and to the Meadows is the people who model their systems with human –

[00:09:13] RT: Donella Meadows. Donella Meadows, you're referring to, correct?

[00:09:15] JM: Donna or Donella Meadows. Yeah. She was the one who went on longest with it. They revised that. The whole thing has been revised in the last 10 years or so, but it is producing results. It was producing results in 1970, which are happening today. There was a tremendous piece of forerunner work, and Silent Spring with Rachel Carson, and so on. That was happening with against DDT, the use of DDT, spraying kids with DDT and so on. That just revolt against the blindness of the way we do things with chemicals. That was in the 1970s, throughout 1972, again, I think with her.

Those are the people who are real forerunners. They were out on their own. What I was doing was just waking up, because people like Al Gore was making a film called An Inconvenient Truth, or Nicholas Stern in the UK was publishing the report on climate change and how little it would cost to put that right in those days in 2006. That's what woke me up. It's just things going on. I left the company. I was out on my own looking more at the world than I was used to when I was within a company. One of the important things about being in a company is it stops you looking at the world. Your world becomes –

[00:10:33] RT: Say more about. Yeah, get into that.

[00:10:38] JM: Yeah. Well, the advantage of being out on your own scary, though it is, is that you've got really no option, but to look at the world squarely, insofar as that's possible for a single individual, paradigms and all that. To look at the world and try to make sense of what's going on in the world, that's what comes when you operate as an independent, as you have lived yourself.

Working inside the company, we can all feel it with our clients. Those of us who are consulting from outside, the company becomes – in a large company, but even in a small one, the company becomes the world. You actually interpret life and existence in your daily being in your company terms, in your organization's terms. This is why change is really tough.

[00:11:28] RT: Yeah. For people who are listening, who may be inside and we're outside, I would emphasize not only what you're saying, but that world orientation is influenced not just by tactics and strategies and grand business schemes, but the language and the currency and the vibe of the organization that you inhabit 12 hours a day, five days, six days a week, 365 days a year, year after year after year, it oozes into you, in some ways, unbeknownst, and informs how you begin to think. I think, it's a comprehensive absorption. You take over in some ways.

[00:12:07] JM: Well, yeah. It isn't something evil or strange. It's the way we operate to find common ground with those around us. That common ground is let's make sense of the world. You're probably a fan, like me of Karl Weick, *Making Sense of the Organization*. Karl Weick says, “Companies, organizations, where the private sector or public sector, they are actually machines in which we interpret what we did yesterday to give it meaning.” That's actually what they're about.

The P&L is just a detail. Is something that we can sign up to as a pretext, or the brand. We can talk about that at dinner. What we're doing during the day is we're looking at what we did yesterday and making sense of it today. We need this apparently, as human beings, whether we're an independent consultant, or a person, a salaried employee, we need to get together with others and make sense of the world. An organization is actually a tremendously effective way of doing that. The consequence of doing that for a long time in one organization is that you start telling yourself the same story over and over again.

[00:13:25] RT: Same story over and over again. All right, so draw us back then to your sustainability is informing greatly how you spend your days, your times your work, the way you go about wanting to have impact in the world. Let me change my characterization of you from an early pioneer to a worthy grabber of the torch from Al Gore to Carrie **[inaudible 00:13:45]**. It is fair to say, to stay in the metaphor, you've been burying this torch for a long time, and you've learned some things.

[00:13:54] JM: When you go the torch, just be careful to grab it – grab the right end. **[00:13:58] RT:** Grab the right end of it. What is it about this issue that draws you in and keeps you in, in spite of the difficulties? What do you care about that matters so much here?

[00:14:11] JM: Well, I'll give two answers to that, because it's fun. I really enjoy your way of playing with these things, Rick. I'll give two answers to that. The first is to say, well, clearly, it's my way of making sense of my life. The reason I get deeply engaged with it is because I've told the world, this is what I'm doing. That is self-reinforcing.

[00:14:33] RT: You publicly put a stake in the ground for all of those **[inaudible 00:14:37]**.

[00:14:38] JM: Made a company whose tagline is 'change business for good'. Every time I'm handing out that digital business card, I'm saying, "This is what I do." It's like saying, I sell Lipton tea bags. I work for Unilever. In other words, it's my way of making sense of my life. There is a purely Vikian response to your question, which is, is because I've said that's what I'm going to do.

Then there's a more rational way of doing it, which is everything I know about, which isn't very much. Everything that I know about what's going on in the sustainability field, which I've been looking at for 15 years in a serious way, everything I know tells me that we're not going to make it. That we are not going to pull out of the curve. I was watching Sully, the film Sully the other evening. Clint Eastwood film, about the guy who landed a plane on the Hudson. He had dreams at night. He had dreams at night, while he was in the inquiry afterwards, about how he didn't pull out of the curve. He went straight into a building in the middle of Manhattan.

Everything tells me that the world is not going to change fast enough to come out of the curve, come out of that downward curve. It's going to take us into a different world. It's going to create a difference on your status, a different stability pattern. Human beings are going to be extremely challenged in that new stability pattern, to the extent of probably dying out. Everything I know points in that direction.

[00:16:31] RT: Just to put in context, just to put it therefore, in the context of this moment time, if you're – Let's be clear, for everybody listening, you're not the only one who might be thinking this. That outcome makes the pandemic look like a cold.

[00:16:48] JM: Well, it's just a wake-up sign. Yeah, cold. A cold. Right. A cold, which gives a warning that you want to be getting more sleep, or doing more exercise. Yeah. It's that thing. I don't say that lightly. I say that after many, many years of saying, no, we are going to pull up. We are going to come out of this dive. We are actually going to soar again. About two years ago, I stopped believing that.

[00:17:19] RT: What happened two years ago?

[00:17:20] JM: Just the pressure of the evidence and looking at how the Paris agreements, which I thought were a turning point, how the Paris agreements had not prevented us continuing to behave, globally speaking, in a catastrophic way at all. The so-called transition that's going on, has not made a dent in the fundamental problems, if you just look at inequality. If you look at biodiversity, and if you look at any of the parameters of the planetary boundaries, but climate change included, it hasn't made a dent.

All of that policymaking, all of that signing up to agreements is still being undermined by a previous behaviors, of perverse subsidizing of the fossil fuel industry, of continuing to build more and more capacity to destroy the planet. To put our investment disproportionately into that, compared with into changing the curve. The numbers are very, very clear. We have increased our emissions regularly, year by year, even with the blip of COVID. We've increased our emissions regularly year by year, since the Paris agreement. Every country in the world so long signed up to that.

[00:18:50] RT: As we speak, in about a week's time or so, they'll all gather in Glasgow for COP26. Will you be there? I'm just curious. This occurred to me. Will you be there?

[00:19:00] JM: I'm not going to be there. It's a circus.

[00:19:03] RT: You won't be there.

[00:19:04] JM: Even if it wasn't a circus, I would not be there. No, I will not be there.

[00:19:10] RT: Okay. Given what you've just said, what do you expect them to say at the conclusion of the conference? One. Two, what could happen there that would surprise you and give you some sense that maybe something might be different, as opposed to the trajectory you're projecting is now ahead of us? Two questions here.

[00:19:36] JM: The second is easier than the first. It's so tempting to be cynical. Because my previous remarks were not cynical. It's so tempting to be cynical, when you ask me what will COP26 say at the end, is very likely that they will say, this has been a stronger coalition than we ever had in the past. We've done come together in a more meaningful way than we have in the past, and that we've really recognized the claims of the south to be financed by the north. We have made commitments country by country here, which have been signed on the spot. You will see that those commitments are sufficient to get to net zero by 2050.

I think, they will try to make a headline of net zero, and they will try to make a headline of recognizing the claims of the south. What I would like them to say is, we have decided that it is time to price carbon, by law, in all regions of the planet at above \$70 a ton. If that happened tomorrow, in law, there is a possibility that we might pull out of the curb. That would be enough to –

There's so many more things that need to be done on sustainability. I'm not trying, because I'm all the time in my work, trying to pull companies away from looking at carbon as the only problem. In the context of COP26, it is the problem. That's what COP26 is about. COP26 does not have a mandate to look at sustainability. It's just looking at climate change.

[00:21:31] RT: Just climate change.

[00:21:32] JM: The conference of the party is on climate change. Yeah.

[00:21:35] RT: That's the world landscape that you're walking around here. Share with people. First of all, I want to acknowledge this, what seems like a challenge that you have a glint in your eye, and you have an optimism and you also have another voice that's saying, we may not pull out of this. It's in that dual state and probably a few other influences that bang around, like they do for all of us, that you go out every day and you actually try and do something about it. Give people who are listening a grounded sense of what you're actually doing in the world with new angles –

[00:22:08] JM: You've just done a good job of defining insanity, haven't you, Rick?

[00:22:15] RT: Well, that's what it means to be a consultant, man. That's the min spec to get into the role. Tell people a little bit about what you're actually up to, what you're trying to do and how you go about it, and some of the successes, some of the maybe some failures, lessons learned. What's going on out there that you touch and make a difference in?

[00:22:35] JM: Yeah. The mission for new angles is to help businesses who are serious about change on sustainability. To help them do it. Because it's not so much anymore as it was in the old days, that one in the old days, meaning back in 2008, when we started. It's not so much why we need to change now. It's, how do we deal with this as a company? With our obsession, we're making, we're obsessed with what we make. We make yogurt. We make tires. We make textiles. We're in that world.

Remember, the organization defines the universe as it were. We're in that world. Don't tell us about what's going on elsewhere. Just how do we make sense of it for us? Because we're not here to solve the problems of the world. New angles has developed a frameworking, first of all, and roadmapping. Frameworking, so that people within a company, management, but everybody, if we're allowed to go that far, get homogeneous view of what sustainability is about.

Planetary boundaries, donut economics, SDGs, frameworks that make this jargon word, sustainability, come alive and give it some – translate it into our experience and translate it into what we think is important in the world.

Then, how do you link that? How do you link those frameworks of what sustainability is about, or unsustainability? Unsustainability has a meaning. Sustainability doesn't really have a meaning. We're so used to just talking about sustainability as some abstract goal. No one knows what it is. Most people pursuing it can't define it, in terms of what it means, how could they be a sustainable company, or a sustainable country, or a sustainable organization. They can just deal with the parameters of unsustainability and say, “Well, we'll do better on those parameters.”

Putting that to one side, we give them roadmapping tools that allow them to take that framework and apply it to their own value chain. Every company of any kind has a value chain. That value chain is roughly corresponding to an upstream and midstream and downstream. We have a strategy consulting business, which says, framework what's sustainability and unsustainability are, define them in ways that are material for your own operation, relate those parameters of sustainability, or impact if you like, to your own value chain.

We have tools that we use, very simple tools that we've devised, or stolen over the years, that allow managers to talk to each other about this and to create projects for doing something about the ones that they consider to be the most material, the most important, the most strategic. With the best companies that we work with, the most proactive, we can only ever come up with three or four things they really want to do. They can't cope with more than that.

[00:25:51] RT: It's a lot.

[00:25:52] JM: It's already a lot. We're very happy if we get to three or four things they really wanted. Then, we do the usual consulting thing of how to translate that into projects. How you're going to measure a baseline for that? Otherwise, you won't ever be able to say you've got anywhere. It's pretty classic strategy consulting. Then we get into the change part of it, which is this is countercultural. Everything you've said you want to do in this nice strategies here, where you're rationalizing your approach to sustainability, all of that is a waste of time, if you can't get people in your company to adopt it as an innovation. Adopt it as a new way of doing things.

If you're just going to program it into people with no attention on adoption and integration into the people, so they own it themselves, then it's going to be – you're going to be limiting it to the things you can measure already, the things you've got data on. You can probably do a programmatic approach to reducing waste, to using less water, to making your energy greener, your energy consumption greener, reducing your carbon emissions, reducing your pollution. You can do that programmatically. Companies do that already. Companies that have factories do that already. Because the legislation tells them they have to. Then, they find they're saving money, so they do even more of it. That's not sustainability. My problem is I can go on talking forever.

[00:27:38] RT: That's all right. That's good. **[00:27:40] JM:** I need to breathe.

[00:27:43] RT: You breathe, while I follow up on this adoption and integrate it into people. What are you actually doing in an organization, when you're going to take these three or four items that they decided they want to take on, and they can do some of it through the mechanistic aspects of their business, or the government's influence, but that doesn't get it all done, what do you at New Angles doing to help them integrate into people being unsustainable, and paying attention to it so they can be sustainable? What's actually happening there?

[00:28:30] JM: The process of doing it is about supporting people to make the connection between their private lives on them and their work life. Because now and more and more in the Western Europe, for the most part, the same would be true for a lot of the United States. Beyond those two regions, and half of Latin America, things change. If you take Latin America, the States and Western Europe, people have a strong personal desire to live in a more sustainable world for the most part. Yet, they go to work and they do completely unsustainable things.

It's actually making that awareness come alive for people. Roleplays for example. Roleplay stakeholders, roleplay the environment, roleplay impact in the value chain. It's all crazy stuff, but getting people to do roleplays and to see what it's like as a stakeholder of their own company. See what impacts really are. Don't know if you know the constellations coaching approach, but

this physical relationship. You can be with a group of people and do some therapy by adjusting the spatial relationships between a group of people in a room.

Well, we do that with me as a manager in a company and you as a stakeholder. Now, let's just see how can we adjust that relationship. That's in a very, very permissive environment, right? We don't get to do that all the time.

[00:30:14] RT: Not all the time. You just said something, Jacob, that I want to go back to. I misunderstood, or I heard it literally, when I mentioned that you adopt and integrate into people. What I think I hear you say is what you're helping people do is integrate themselves. The whole.

[00:30:33] JM: Well, that's a good way of saying it. Good way of saying it. Yeah. **[00:30:38] RT:** When you walk through the door of the organization, I don't – **[00:30:41] JM:** Yeah. I don't leave myself on the outside. Yeah.

[00:30:44] RT: Yeah. I'm imagining, therefore, if you're successful in that binding, that integration of me whole, and the outside the building person cares about the environment and the conditions of the world, and now I'm bringing it in, that you're producing, or growing a few possible deviants in your organization, different levels, potentially, that seems –

[00:31:09] JM: We're not growing them. We're recognizing them. **[00:31:12] RT:** They're already there.

[00:31:14] JM: They're already there, by definition. I was wondering whether to bring this up, and you've brought it up. My God, Rick. You've brought it up, so I'm going to talk about it.

[00:31:23] RT: Go ahead.

[00:31:25] JM: This is not so much, indeed, is not so much trying to change people. It's exposing them to the people who are different in their organization. Because it goes back to this point of, we adopt organization as a norm for the universe in a way. The model which our organization represents is the model that we over time, learn to project onto the world.

The difficulties of being unsustainable, unresolvable for us, if we remain tied to our current paradigm. There, I've said the word again. I should stop saying it, my colleagues tell me. The way of seeing the world is tied to our current business model. Asking a company to stop being unsustainable is asking it to change his business model, not just to make less waste, or use less water. It's asking it to change its value chain, its distribution of value, how it makes money. That has to change, if companies are to move from being unsustainable to sustainable, whatever sustainable means.

What I'm trying to get at here, is related to the deviants. Within every large company, at any rate that we've come across, there are always people who are doing this already, who have decided that for their own reason, not because the company tells them, or even not because it's they think is good for the company, they are not change agents in that they're trying to change everything around them. They are deviants, in that they do business differently. *Your Secret Change Agents*

was the title of a book by Richard – that we both know, or an article at any rate, that was written about positive deviants.

The positive deviant wants to get a positive outcome for their own sake. They're not doing it because they want to change the village they live in, or the community they operate in, or the organization they work for. For the others who are getting lousy results, who are getting unsustainable outcomes from what they do, to be confronted with, or to be given the opportunity of seeing that there are colleagues within the same organization as themselves, subject to the same constraints, subject to the same imperatives from the top, subject to all the pressures and playing by the rules enough to survive are actually producing different results and better results in terms of sustainability, because that's our subject today.

The positive deviants are working on doing business sustainability, for their own reasons. Perhaps, because they've identified that clients want this. They they're finding ways to do it within the context of an unsustainable organization.

Just to finish the point, that gives a permission to the original manager, or employee I was talking about, who is stuck in an unsustainable business model, can't do anything about changing that, because that's what life is like around here. They suddenly get approved, when they see these positive deviants, that life does not need to be that way around it. That carries an enormous charge in terms of enormous potential voltage in terms of change. Much, much more powerful voltage and potential than hearing from some outside expert about best practice. That's one of the focuses for us.

[00:35:45] RT: Okay. Let me make sure I'm tracking with you here. You're doing your work in your organization. In doing your work, you come across these people who are deviating from the norm, or what –

[00:36:00] JM: We look for them, yes.

[00:36:01] RT: I think, you and I should, because we're familiar with the term positive deviant. It means something very specific, and that might not be known to everybody who is listening here. I want you to define that in the specific ways in which it's useful. You're seeing these people, and I'll add another piece here so we take them in turn. Because at the beginning, you talked about this issue of leading self-leadership, or people finding their own voice of leading, and how do you move people along. I'm seeing a bit of a link here. You're discovering these positive deviants who are in a way, a bit of a leader, positive leader, deviant leader, however you want to phrase that, inside this organization. If enough of them band together, there's a chance you tip something a little bit.

[00:36:50] JM: Yeah, that's the mechanism.

[00:36:52] RT: The theory. That's the theory.

[00:36:55] JM: Banding them together. Yeah.

[00:36:57] RT: Yeah. Talk about one, what do you do when you start to see these people? How do you make use of that? How do you help them find voice, or how to help the organization organize them? Then, maybe you segue into how you lead these people into this movement that possibly going to have this positive effect you want? A lot there. I'll let you play with it.

[00:37:20] JM: Thank you. Yeah, it's great, because we very rarely – I very rarely find that curiosity. That's exactly what we try to do in companies who are really serious, which are really serious about getting some kind of transformation happening. They don't have to be serious from the top down, through every part of the organization, but there needs to be somebody. This is what I want to just emphasize. There needs to be a client in the organization. We all as consultants know what that means, right? There needs to be someone in the organization who wants this outcome. Then, we can work with that client within a system. Get towards that outcome, which means creating in an emergent way, some strange attractors, some we're talking complexity. Some strange attractor in the system that shows us an alternative way of doing things, which can be better.

Everett Rogers said, there's no point trying to get people to adopt an innovation, if you can't show them that it's better. There has to be an experiential proof that there's a relative advantage in the new way. Okay. We'll come back to what is the relative advantage for people on sustainability. There are strong relative advantages on sustainability for people within organizations. Thank goodness. Because otherwise, we would never get anywhere. The first point is to have that client. You have a client, either whose job it is to make this change start with, or who has just committed themselves in any case, one way or another, to making this change happen, towards away from unsustainability and towards sustainability in the true impact sense. That person is the one who can give you the permission to go looking, or can help you go looking for the deviants.

[00:39:19] RT: Just for everybody listening, let's make sure that they're following what you're saying here. Your client isn't necessarily the person at the top of the hierarchy. It could be somebody further down in the system.

[00:39:31] JM: Very rarely it's the person at the top. Yeah.

[00:39:34] RT: All right. Therefore, that person that is “your client” has less organizational authority than anybody above them. In doing this work with you, they do possibly put themselves at some professional risk in certain situations, by traveling this road. Is that a fair assessment?

[00:39:59] JM: Yeah. This is why our business remains small and commercially insignificant. It's because finding clients who are committed in this way within organizations to counter cultural transformation is not an easy ask. If we don't find them –

[00:40:20] RT: Because you can get hurt. You can get hurt doing this.

[00:40:23] JM: Yeah. You can get badly hurt. We've seen people get hurt. We currently have a client who's got badly hurt doing this. We have other clients who've managed to make it a

stepping stone to doing more transformation. Those are the ones who are lucky, if you like, but also, politically astute.

[00:40:45] RT: Okay, so I have to ask you this question now. I'm giving you a lot of questions here, but you're bringing up all sorts of cool stuff that I want to chase down. You were almost a lifer inside organizations. 20 years. That's a long time to drink the Kool Aid and eat the soup and jel-o. You probably had some epiphanies when you left and you started down this road. You've been at this game for quite a while now. Almost, maybe as long as 20 years inside, 20 years outside.

[00:41:15] JM: Yeah. It's 20 years of independent consulting, 15 years on sustainability. Yeah.

[00:41:20] RT: Okay. Long enough to forget some stuff. A question I have is, have you in your work, how frequent is it that part of your thought process, what is it like for your client, to be in your clients shoes, as a way to inform your diagnosis and thought process? How connected are you to that exploration from that angle?

[00:41:47] JM: Well, I would say that my value, if we can add value through New Angles, it's because we can disconnect from them. I think, too much empathy, too much empathy with the problems of the client has been a barrier to us adding the value that potentially we could. This is paradoxical, because in fact, we depend on that strong empathy with the client and the strong trust that the client has in us, that we will not push them into too dangerous a spot, or place. That we will not expose them to ridicule by the things we say when they're not around, and we're talking to their colleagues. They need to trust us deeply on that.

There is this symbiotic, strong bond with the clients we work with. It tends to get quite personal. We don't go on holiday together, but we do tend to share quite a lot about what's going down for us in the different situations and particularly for the client, but also for us as consultants. We do tend to have a strong close relationship. I am coming to the view that that can be counterproductive. I remember, one of the people who lectured us, Rick. We were not in the same classroom, but we were on the same program. One of the people who lectured us on the consulting and coaching for Change program was very proud – They did a session on how they built a career as a change consultant.

They seem to be extremely proud of the fact they'd had the same clients for 20, 24 years. I remember, even wet behind the ears in consulting terms, I was thinking to myself, that doesn't make any sense. This is the danger. We tend to we tend to outlive our welcome, if you like. We tend to be still in there with the clients, four, five, six years later.

[00:43:56] RT: It's interesting you raised this, Jacob. I finally met a consultant who has a firm, who is part of their explicit strategy and the firm is A, they carry no more than 10 to 12 clients at any one time. B, every year, they determine which two to three clients exit their system for exactly this reason you're talking about. I thought, I'd been in this business for a long time and I finally met one.

[00:44:26] JM: An honest consultant.

[00:44:28] **RT:** Positive deviant in the consultant world. Go figure.

[00:44:37] **JM:** Who's going to shoot him? You or me? He's really bad for business, Rick.

[00:44:45] **RT:** Well, nobody knows about it. You didn't know about it, until I told you.

[00:44:48] **JM:** Okay. Good. Good, good.

[00:44:51] **RT:** You referenced this. I don't want to lose this. You brought it up with Everett Rogers about this relative advantage. Because there's something about that, that seems to me to be a point of leverage, a way to stimulate and promote the change initiative internally and externally, that matters. Can you speak to that for people who may not even know who Everett Rogers is, much less relative advantage?

[00:45:17] **JM:** Yes. It's a corny story.

[00:45:19] **RT:** We got time for corny stories, man.

[00:45:21] **JM:** It's a corny story, because he did his research with corn farmers in Iowa, as you know. The guy wanted to study –

[00:45:28] **RT:** Ba-boom.

[00:45:29] **JM:** Ba-boom. The guy wanted to study innovation. He purposely – Well, I don't know whether it's purposely, actually. He seems, purposely, to have chosen the population of corn farmers in Iowa, because that's the innovation that moves the slowest on the whole planet, right? It's moving so slowly that you can see it happen. He spent 30 years, he spent 30 years studying corn farmers in Iowa, and how they adopted, formulated fashion in harvesters, or doctored grain, or polluting chemicals, or insanely large silos. He followed all that stuff, and made it statistically viable, so that he could turn it into research papers. Eventually, start deriving some science of change from it.

Now, he called it the diffusion of innovation. The breakthrough for me, was realizing that actually, he was talking about change in a population. Because he's been ignored by the change people. Actually, he's a change person. It's been taken as a theory of how do you get a new product into a population, or a new service. In fact, think of sustainability as a new way of seeing business. That's an innovation. It's just as relevant for us as it would be for someone trying to sell a smartphone. Would I invent the smartphone. It's a new behavior –

[00:47:16] **RT:** Or grow corn in Iowa. Nothing's changed from growing corn in Iowa. We're all corn farmers in Iowa, as it turns out.

[00:47:24] **JM:** Yeah. Most people think the tipping point was invented by the guy who wrote the book called *The Tipping Point*. No. The tipping point was invented by Everett Rogers, because he observed that there was a different curve. When an innovation, in its route into a population, in his way that he was following of diffusion into a population with the innovators

and the early adopters and the early majority, that famous roadmapping that he did for innovation going into a population being adopted, he recognized there was some cases where that was an exponential – that hit an exponential. It was by going, by the growth of the rate of that adoption by going exponential, the S-curve, you can actually be sure that it would get to all of the population.

[00:48:18] RT: All of population. Yup.

[00:48:20] JM: That's what matters for us in changing organizations from unsustainable to sustainable. It has to go through that exponential curve. The reason we go for the impact pioneers is to bridge the chasm, the famous chasm around the tipping point, 17.6%, a number none of us have ever forgotten, of the population. If you can keep the change momentum across that chasm between 16% and 18% of the population, then you have a very good chance of the mayonnaise sticking, coagulating, working and getting to full penetration of the population.

[00:49:01] RT: Okay, cool.

[00:49:02] JM: Our impact pioneers are the ones we need. They're the innovators. They don't care whether anyone follows them or not. They're not actually change leaders. The impact pioneers do it for themselves, only for themselves. As Simon Sinek, they only do it for themselves. It's the early adopters who are very interesting, and Everett Rogers knows all about early adopters. All of us who are interested in getting populations to change within any community, or organization should study what Everett Rogers discovered and characterized in early adopters and their capacity to have social influence. That's the that's the key. That's the key for us on change projects.

[00:49:51] RT: In the time we have left, I want to shift it – **[00:49:54] JM:** We overran.

[00:49:57] RT: I know. We got time. They're following your conversation here. I do want to turn it a little more –

[00:50:05] JM: I have to cook dinner for my dad, Rick.

[00:50:09] RT: A couple more questions here. I noticed in the typical English way, you're now deflecting, because I'm heading down the personal road and you're going to go cook dinner now. Jacob, whether you would say it or not, you do lead. You're leading New Angles in an explicit way. You're using your informal authority and your willingness to choose to lead in the work you do in an organization. Given the fact that this podcast is about 10,000 Swap Leaders, I want to draw on your life experience a little bit for people who may be a little further back in the road than you and I are, and who are looking for thoughts and ideas and ways in which they might navigate what's ahead in leading. Just some questions. What do you wish you'd known earlier about leading that you've learned the hard way, that might save some people a little bit of time and effort and blood?

[00:51:06] JM: Deep sigh from Jacob at that point. I found it nicely summed up by a guy. I'm sorry, I can't remember his name, but he has a lovely TED Talk, and I will send you for our

listeners, if there are any. I will send you a link to this TED Talk, because I'm sure I can track it down. Rule number one, it's not about you. It's not about you, the leader. Rule number two, it's all about you. In other words, if you don't change, why the hell should anyone else? I came across this quite recently, and I think it sums up the answer to your question. That's what I wish I had known 40 years ago.

[00:51:55] RT: In your 40 years, what would you add to the body of knowledge about leading, that you have both learned yourself, or maybe actually created as a contribution to the conversation about choosing to lead? I want to make this explicit to people listening, but I am making a distinction that leading is an activity and a choice, rather than a role, because we all know that the org chart maps authority, but it doesn't necessarily map leading. You and your position are constantly raising your hand and inserting yourself as a voice of leading in the world. What do you know about that from your own experience, that is helpful for people who again, might be looking for some ways to think about how they use themselves to lead?

[00:52:54] JM: Looking just purely at my own experience, and learning, I would say, I've learned to really appreciate and be grateful to a first follower, anyone who would tie their – yoke themselves under the same yoke as me and start pulling the same wagon. The debt that I owe to the five, six, seven people over the course of my independent consulting, who have accepted to do that is just enormous.

Just appreciating how wonderful it is to be able to share the yoke to pull together, pull that wagon together, and how that explodes, the ratio of value adding that you're capable of alone. That's what I've really valued in my life.

[00:54:06] RT: Jacob Mayne, I have a feeling this is just part one of an extended conversation that's going to take place over the next, I don't know, as long as we know each other, probably.

[00:54:17] JM: You're a bold man, Rick.

[00:54:19] RT: Thank you for this first installment. Thank you for coming on. Thank you for the work you're doing in the world. Much appreciated, my friend.

[00:54:26] JM: A huge unsurprising pleasure. Thank you very much, Rick.

[END OF EPISODE]

[00:54:30] RT: I want to thank my friend, Jacob Mayne, for spending time with me in the swamp talking about the work that he does. I'm just again re-reminded why I value his relationship as a friend, as a professional colleague, as a thought partner. Jacob has this unique, quiet, gifted capacity to always see the possibility that things could be better, and then know how to translate that idea, that belief into some concrete specific practical actions, as he helps people both as a coach, as a consultant, as a teacher sometimes at university.

He is one of the true change agents; one of the change leaders as we'd like to call ourselves in the world, doing work that's so important in this time. Jacob, thanks again so much for your time, for

your contributions, for your thought, for your friendship. Man, I look forward to being with you live and in person as soon as I can, brother. Take care.

[OUTRO]

[00:55:23] 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.

[END]

© 2022 10,000 Swamp Leaders