

Speaker 1:

More important now than ever before. The entrepreneurs are natural leaders. It's time to step out, take control of your business, and decide to be your very best as a leader right now.

Mike Paton:

Hello. Welcome to the Lead Now Podcast. This is your host Mike Paton. Today, I'm really happy to be speaking with Deb Minton. Deb is the senior director of philanthropy and strategic initiatives at Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering anyone affected by a burn injury.

Deb has built a 30 year career as a nonprofit executive, consultant, strategist, teacher, speaker, and coach and she's here to share her insights with us today. Deb, thanks so much for joining us.

Deb Minton:

Thanks for having me.

Mike Paton:

It's my pleasure. So, as we've discussed, I want to have you walk the listener through your journey to understand leadership, and I want you to start as early as you can, when you started noticing coaches or teachers or administrators at your school or your parents leading you and you began to formulate ideas about what a leader is and isn't. When's the first time you can remember thinking about stuff like that as you were growing up?

Deb Minton:

Well, certainly I recall certain teachers and definitely, definitely coaches who had an approach, not necessarily telling me what to do, but empowering me and encouraging me to do those things that I was capable of doing. And I was lucky enough, I think, through high school and college and certainly in my early career that somewhere in each of those situations, and then certainly through my professional journey in various roles and organizations, somebody saw me and was either able to pull me alongside or even just through their example, and through working with them, to really be able to show me a way in which I could be more effective and then in return help my people become more effective. So, I'm a teacher. Technically I was supposed to teach back in the day when I was leaving college and there were no teaching jobs at the time. And so I walked into this nonprofit sector with teaching and coaching skills. Little did I know how valuable they would become throughout the course of my career and my goodness, especially now, right?

And so it's a great question. It's fun to think about that. I've had a couple of folks along the way, both men, that if I could put a bracelet on part of the time it would be, "What would Michael do?" Or, "What would Jerry do?" And I think of these two guys often in situations in leadership and also when I need to be pretty definitive about a direction to take.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And what are the kinds of things Michael or Jerry or the other leaders who influenced you did that made you feel encouraged and empowered? Maybe attitudes or behaviors or actions they took that elicited that feeling?

Deb Minton:

Well, I think first and foremost, they had an abundance of optimism and a commitment to finding a way. And they also had a way of capturing you, bringing you up, scooping you up into the spirit of the direction that they wanted to go. And then they really were very good at making sure that, for those who were caught up in this direction or this project or this vision, that they put you in a position to really contribute at your very highest value and then have a great time along the way. Fun is such an integral part of, of what we do.

So, they were leaders of leaders. And I tell you what, I try to create an environment that I was able to be in with those gentlemen. I try to create that with my teams and I would have followed those guys to the river. It was that kind of a relationship and intensity that we knew we were all working toward the same goals and the same vision and there was nothing that we couldn't do together. And we believed that.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. So give the listener some insight into what role they were playing and what the mission was back in the day.

Deb Minton:

So back in the day, I was serving as an executive in the United Way movement for about a decade. And we had a young president who came in. So, I was one of his direct reports leading the philanthropy area. And I just recall the culture that we created in the organization. His optimism and his ability to draw people into the vision, his ability to really sell and frame up an idea that attracted people and then really allowing me a very long leash, big playpen to go and run in and help accomplish those goals.

And that was a really, really wonderful relationship. And I remember the day he left and I went to my desk and there was a little note in there just about some of the key things that we'd always talked about, about inviting people into the vision and being a leader and really making sure that we were making a way. The other gentleman was a consultant that I worked with, world-known in philanthropy. He's now passed. But he also had a wonderful way of just engaging people and asking questions and peeling back the onion to get to either root cause or root motivation that ultimately allowed people to give of their resources.

And so I went through a couple of campaigns with him and I just remember, again, same thing. Really creating a culture in which people could really contribute their highest value, continue to find a way, and create a vision that really ignites and excites people to be a part of something. And he was a real pleasure to work with. And I still think of him almost on a daily basis in terms of, when faced with decisions or trying to move through certain situations, I think of them often as, "What would Jerry do right now?" And then I would do it.

Mike Paton:

Let's flip the pages. In your early days as you're formulating this definition of what good leadership and not so good leadership is, can you think of any specific things you observed and went, "I'm not going to do that when I have the opportunity to lead"?

Deb Minton:

Yeah. I think in my earlier career, I did work with some folks, and again there were a different leadership and management philosophies at the time. And so I do recall just more of a comply and control environment that it's really ... It's quite suffocating when you think about it. And I remember just

recognizing those singular moments of truth, either in your life or in a job or in an incident where you know it's like, "This is not where I need to stay." Or, "I cannot be here any longer." I have to have a quest for something different.

Mike Paton:

Let's broaden the conversation and let the listener get to know you a little bit. Let's start by having you tell us about Phoenix Society.

Deb Minton:

So, the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors is a national nonprofit serving a global community of people who have been impacted by burn injuries. We specifically tout in our philosophy and in our programming, people are not burn victims, they're survivors and they become thrivers. And our organization occupies that very delicate space and we walk with people once they leave the burn unit and the acute care and walk out the door to the rest of their lives, we support them in that social and emotional space.

So, as they return to their families, as they return to their lives, as they return to the workplace, as they return to their marriages and their community, we help them integrate and gain confidence at whatever aspect of their healing they might be struggling with. And we make a promise to them that in that journey they'll never be alone.

And so core and central to the way in which we support people, we have thousands of peer supporters, people who have walked the journey before who are available to continue to coach and walk with folks. We have virtual resources available that they can self-direct to, and an annual gathering where we bring people together and they can be in fellowship with other survivors and their families. And also healthcare providers and firefighters, first responders. It's quite an organization and one in which I, in 30 year plus career in nonprofit, have never really experienced and been a part of such tremendous human potential and impact.

And to see a survivor come from an incident and overcome their injuries and reintegrate fully, more fully sometimes, in their life, it's really amazing. I'm a better person for being associated with this organization and our staff, our hook line and sinker, just really, really missionally focused.

Mike Paton:

Thank you for sharing that very noble work you're all doing. How many people in the organization?

Deb Minton:

There's about 18 people in the organization. The majority of us, a good portion of us, are located right here in our headquarter offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And then we have some remote employees. And then of course this year, we're all remote. But essentially geographically, we work out of Grand Rapids, national staff, and then we have supporters from all over the globe and then many national and global companies supporting us as well.

Mike Paton:

And what role do you serve or what seat on the accountability chart do you own in your organization?

Deb Minton:

So, my seat in the organizational structure is really the development area, which would revolve to all revenue resourcing, but primarily at this point, our corporate contributions and our individual contributions. And then since we've moved into a better alignment with one another, I've also taken on the marketing component. And so we're a small, nimble group. I can't really tell you how much we appreciate our journey into, albeit brief to date, our journey into really becoming an EOS organization. It has been a game changer for me personally, as well as the organization.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Thank you. That's very kind. Tell us how it's changed the game. What did things feel like in the organization before EOS and what has begun to change as you're implementing the tools?

Deb Minton:

Prior to EOS, we were an organization, a nonprofit organization, that ruled primarily by consensus. We had a decision-making model in which everyone wanted to contribute and did. Sometimes this elongated some of our decision cycle time. We knew we had to scale and replicate and begin expanding our program offerings, but couldn't quite get out of our annual business model to make those changes happen. We had a little bit of challenge in terms of getting out of our own nonprofit speak and marketing external messages when it's really internal. Not a clear vision at times of who our primary marketing focus should be with. I think meetings that at times could be productive and also at times frustrating, just because depending on the subject matter and decision to be made and issues that were on the table, we were really good at talking about stuff.

Mike Paton:

Let's see, I've heard that from roughly 99.7% of the people I talked to about meetings. They're generally left on their own devices, not very good. And then what's, what's improving. What are you seeing? Give us a couple of specific examples of things that are getting better as a result of your journey.

Deb Minton:

Well, probably two key things. One is just our clear alignment in terms of our core values, the focus for our marketing, what our place is in this world in terms of our purpose and cause, what we would consider to be really our niche and area of expertise of things that we can provide that nobody else can. That has been just so clarifying and something that we look to and lean against on a daily basis as we continue to get employees aligned with our direction and just more simplicity around what we're about and what we're doing and how we're aligning budget time resources. That's just paramount.

The second piece gets back to our meetings and I smile and I'm a little bit chuckling because I know what they'd been and our leadership team in terms of our meeting journey has been just utterly spectacular and funny. And I say that because we can and do actively call each other out because we're learning every day, right? We're getting better, it's a practice. And so if one of us begins to squirrel off the agenda, or we're not necessarily setting up a subject on the IDS list, or we've gone completely off topic, or we get to the rating portion of the meeting, and we're just, just dead honest about what we thought. It's just provided a far more honest and transparent and supportive and fun and productive meeting environment.

And then that has spilled out into the organization by design and our employees can see it. They can feel it. They're now practicing. At times we may say, "Hey, time out, we're having a learning moment right now. You see what that was? We're going to pull that back in." So, that's been really paramount.

And then probably a third thing is the coming alive and the utilization of our new values. And now they're starting to come into daily practice as I'm coaching people, as we're trying to solve problems, we'll go back to those values. And we'll say, "In the spirit of EOS or in an effort to be actionable, if we don't know this outcome, let's be accountable. Let's go find it." And so the revamping of our values to really describe and how we want to be in culture and in community together, and then utilizing those as we're coaching each other, has been a big game changer.

Mike Paton:

I heard two things that I'll echo and I'm going to clarify some EOS terminology for the listener who may not be familiar. But what I heard was number one, acknowledging that you sometimes have to make a decision when you don't all agree is in and of itself moving you forward more quickly. You're not waiting around for consensus. And two, when you've already done the hard work of agreeing on things like core values and core focus and your ideal customer and other marketing strategy things, those tools hasten the decision-making process and increase the chances you're all going to agree. Or if you don't all agree, you're at least able to use those tools as clarifying determinants of what you're going to do. And so, as a result, the cadence or the pace or the forward motion is picking up. Is that a fair restatement?

Deb Minton:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that we found early on that we were confusing being heard with group decision-making and we were able to get really clarified that we want to make sure everyone around the table has an opportunity to contribute and be heard. And at the end of the day, we are going to make a decision and we may come to a decision together or somebody may need to make the call. And this is the play calling on the field, right? So, somebody has to make the call and then that's the play, that's the decision, and that's the way we're going to move.

Mike Paton:

Has that been an easy or difficult transition for most members of your leadership team?

Deb Minton:

I think in my particular perspective, I come from a teaching coaching background. So the analogy for me of it's late in the fourth, we're going to go deep, we're throwing the ball, here's the play, comes very naturally. I think for others, it has been an acquired taste because we have practiced in more of a consensus environment. But I do think that members of our team are beginning to appreciate the need, the business case for us, not to pull rank and make a call, but to make a call for the good of the organization.

Mike Paton:

So, anchoring this in the leadership lessons you learned early on, how has this helped you or other members of your leadership team lead in a way that more encourages and empowers and brings people along on your journey versus telling them what to do or ... How's it helping from a leadership standpoint?

Deb Minton:

I think from our leadership standpoint, our group has gotten better at peeling back complex issues and engaging employees in helping get to root cause. Oftentimes we were, now that I look in retrospect,

oftentimes we were talking about symptoms and not necessarily a strategic about asking two or three questions down, as we peel back, to maybe then help folks understand that we're solving for root cause here and getting decisional and moving forward versus spinning around in symptom.

That's probably a key thing that our employees are seeing from us and they're starting to begin to do themselves. Gosh, that's so fun to see. Just so many changes in the workplace as we continue to progress. Literally there's a lesson that we'll call out literally every day. Like, "Oh, this was a moment here. This is what's happening."

Mike Paton:

Thinking about your career as a leader to include the current experience, give us a story where you walked away saying, "Boy, that was a tough situation, but I made the right call and I felt like I lead effectively."

Deb Minton:

I think there's been numerous instances in my career where I have internally known that there is a core body of work and values and direction and vision that really needed to be unwavering, whether it was stated or not. And I think bringing just some good intuition, commitment to knowing oneself, some good common horse sense sometimes, that I've really pushed a group to believe and to step out where the outcomes have been very, very good.

I spent nearly 10 years as a consultant in capital campaigns, and I can tell you, every time board of directors were ready to gavel a project forward, that gavel was shaking and they hit it and we move forward. But there's a leap of faith there. And I think from a positive perspective, always trying to find a way and really leading and pushing groups to do that, which they think they can't do, but with good structure, good process, good coaching, really making sure that we're focused on the right things, trying to eliminate things that are complex or additional, but not [inaudible 00:19:10], I think those are kind of the key things throughout my career where we had what seemingly might be a challenging situation for an organization, the current situation we're in right now in terms of the COVID environment.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I'm going to turn the tables on you. This may be a little unfair. But what is it about leadership that you've always struggled with or had to work really hard to get good at?

Deb Minton:

Get better at listening and understanding that I process information at a rate that is different from others. And not only listening, but also recognizing the different pace and way that people learn. And I see that with my team and I've seen it throughout my career. There are ways in which people consume information at different rates and paces and it's incumbent upon me, to help them reach their highest value, to be ever conscious of that. And then I think there's also those social cues, just in terms of being able to read where somebody is at. Sometimes there's more being spoken than what people are saying.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. So in other words, when someone's not exactly like me, it doesn't mean they're wrong. Is that what you might be suggesting?

Deb Minton:

Yeah, absolutely.

Mike Paton:

Also a difficult lesson for me to learn, truth be told. Have you ever been stuck as a leader and you didn't know what to do and you couldn't get yourself unstuck?

Deb Minton:

I don't think so. I've always believed that it's okay not to know what to do, but it's not okay not to do something.

Mike Paton:

Well said.

Deb Minton:

And so as long as we continue to push the sled and take a direction that we think might be the best of several choices that might not seem so attractive, I do have a bias toward action. And sometimes it makes people crazy and I laugh about it and they laugh and probably curse about it a little bit too. But I do try to create and participate in an environment where people do want to move forward. And I think this other piece is just knowing yourself, knowing how you work, knowing how these things impact you. I can work in real quick spurts and then I need to recoil and think, and then burst out of the blocks again.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Interesting. Have you ever in your effort to encourage and empower people and bring them along with you on this vision you're seeing, have you ever had a situation with somebody where it felt like you had more faith in their ability to go with you than they had in themselves and you just couldn't get them there and you had to call the question?

Deb Minton:

I think there's been numerous instances throughout my career where, and now I understand, I think in EOS language, that they either didn't want it or didn't get it or didn't have the capacity. And that's such a wonderful way and a tool and a methodology to think about. About people and where we're at. And instead of making it about a performance or a character issue, it's really thinking about it in those frames.

But I recall on many occasions, several occasions where I knew in my heart, for whatever reason that this person probably wasn't going to come along. I think one of the things that EOS has given me, the ability to dig down in each of those areas. Do they want it, do they get it, do they have the capacity? And if two or three of those are good and I can help, especially on the capacity side, build that up, we can work with that.

Mike Paton:

And when it doesn't work out, what's your approach to letting somebody know there might be a job or a organization elsewhere that would be a better fit?

Deb Minton:

Yeah. I think that there's an opportunity to have a conversation about that fit exactly. And oftentimes they feel it too and entering a neutral space and having the ability to talk about that fit and what a gracious exit or another opportunity might look like, and having a period of time in which to do that, I think is a positive way to go about that.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, well said. And for the listener who hears that and doesn't really believe it, I can't tell you how many times in my 13 year career as an EOS implementer that somebody who had a particularly fractious exit from one entrepreneurial company reaches back out to me a year or two years later and said, "That was the best thing that ever happened to me because it opened this door, that door, helped me become a better person, et cetera." And so I try and remember those moments when I'm having the tough conversations with people myself.

Let's transition away from business leadership and just let me ask, as you've grown and evolved as a business leader, how has that affected your life outside the business with your family, with your faith, with your other passions? What have you seen change in yourself?

Deb Minton:

I would say early on in my career, the professional development and the time and energy spent there was probably at overload. It was very ambitious and bias for action and let's go, go, go. And at times to the detriment of other aspects of my life. Whether my personal life, relationships, my fitness. I do think that ultimately we have to know thyself, right? And manage around ourselves. And early on, probably for my first two long-term roles, it was always work first. And then the consulting role pulled me out of that really just frenetic accountability and allowed me to step back and be more reflective in my work.

And then I think coming to the Phoenix Society, they were a client of mine for quite some time before I came on staff, I really did take to heart the way in which they coach people to their highest potential after burn injury. And many of the things that we share with our clients, we also live out in our workplace. And so in this COVID environment right now, we have been able to really provide care and flexibility and keep our people healthy and working very productively from home and enjoying knowing what's happening at home with the cats and the dogs and the kids and all of that.

And so I've given myself some grace and when I give myself grace, I also give people that I'm working with more grace. And this has flowed into ... I was talking with our implementer David about this a few weeks ago, that I'm now beginning to migrate and learn just how this EOS life concept really works in terms of doing what you love and having an impact, getting paid and compensated well for the work that you're doing, and then also being able to put it down and really walk deeply into other areas of your life.

And part of it is I'm getting older, right? Hopefully wiser. But I'm getting older and I do think this role that I have is the last big thing that I want to do. And it requires, right now, everything that I've done up to this point. And so the experience in the business world has been helpful, but the biggest leap forward has been the personal growth and the character growth and the ability to just sit back and provide better leadership because I'm providing better guidance for myself.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Thank you. That's a very reflective answer. I really appreciate it. I've been thinking for a while in this conversation that the support your organization is providing to a burn survivor could run the gamut. And I'm guessing I'm like a lot of our listeners that think we might know a little bit about what you're

helping people through, but why don't you share with us? What are the challenges and issues that you're helping burn survivors contend with and work through and thrive through in your organization?

Deb Minton:

Well, I think there are a number of things that we see and we feel. One is, I think the whole world understands this right now, is that burn survivors once they leave the burn unit, they go home often to a community where there might not be another burn survivor. They may live hours and hours, depending on the severity of their treatment from their injury, they may live hours and hours away from the burn center in which they were treated. Depending on what that scenario looks like, they could have incredible amounts of isolation. And now we talk in the COVID environment right now that we all know what isolation really is now, and people have appreciation for it. But we field calls every day from people who feel very isolated and alone with their injury. And so we try to provide 24/7 support, a listening ear on the other end of the phone, peer support groups on the internet, peer chat, peer support is really a big thing.

We have people who have invisible scars, they're not visible to others, but they have scars that are equally difficult in terms of their own self care and love. And as they begin to realize the difference in their bodies before the injury and after, depending on the type of injury people have, if it's an accident, a lot of children have burn injuries reaching on the pot, the supervision in the kitchen, lot of burn injuries in the home.

But if there happens to be a situation where a couple may experience some type of an injury, a fire, an explosion, there may be guilt. There might be survivor guilt to that. There's such a tremendous amount of not only personal recovery, but also at the same time, depending on the injury that they have, there might be incredible, indescribable personal loss, depending on how that injury occurred. And so the one thing that we do know is that anyone, anywhere, any time could experience a burn injury and we want to be there for them. And depending on what it is that they need in terms of that social and emotional re-entry back into life once they leave the burn center, that's where we are and nobody else provides this type of support. So, it's one thing to have the physical healing and it's quite another then to have the social and emotional healing.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And so you mentioned you were working with the organization as a consultant and then decided to join full time. Was there anything else that brought you into this unique kind of work?

Deb Minton:

So I think the thing that really brought me into the organization, obviously at the beginning as a consultant, really capable organization ready to do some challenging work. There's a great match with the CEO, Amy Acton, who is a great representative, a great spokesperson, she's a burn survivor herself, a burn nurse, and an outstanding individual. So, there was that piece of it. But ultimately what brought me into the organization was the profound impact that we have on people's lives and the amazing people within our burn community that have not only survived, but gone beyond and thrived despite their challenges to go on and do things I don't think they could have thought they would have done or they could have become, but they're tremendous people. And I want to be a part of something like that and contribute to it. And knowing, I think, as we drive forward, that there are many, many more folks who have experienced burned across this world that have yet to find us.

And so for me, that's a personal mission in terms of making sure that we're available to those who need us and making sure that those who do need us can find us and that they can connect. And I would say across the board, if you talk to our staff and our board of directors, there is a level of 10x passion around this mission and commitment to get it done and so when we are able to understand where we wanted to go and we brought our EOS framework and laid it right over the organization, the synergy and the energy and the commitment to move forward was transformed and accelerated at a pace I could not have even imagined and we're having some real great early success.

Mike Paton:

Great. Thank you very much for sharing that and I'm sure, like me, our listeners would like to learn more and like to see if there's something they should do or could do to help. So, where can they go to learn more?

Deb Minton:

Well, our website www.PhoenixSociety.org and people can find all kinds of resource information there, whether you're a healthcare provider or a burn survivor or a family member or someone in medical. There's a rich trove of resources there available. And certainly our staffer are on call and ready to go. And it's very surprising to me, even this past weekend, I was engaged in a conversation with a woman and she asked me in polite conversation what I did for a living and we found out that two of her siblings were burn survivors from a very early age. And so you never know in this work how people are going to find you, but the best way to get ahold of us is to jump onto our website. There's a ton of resource and a ton of referral there.

Mike Paton:

Thank you. Well, your organization and your leadership are an inspiration to me and I want to start by saying thank you for spending time with me today and helping the listener understand more about the great work you're doing. I also want to sign off by thanking the listener for being present and remembering that the world needs all of us to lead right now more than ever. So, here's hoping the time I spent with Deb Minton today, thank you again, Deb, helps all of us get better every day.

Deb Minton:

Thank you, Paton.

Mike Paton:

My pleasure.

Thank you so much for listening to the Lead Now Podcast, to learn more about the podcast and share it with your friends, please visit EOSworldwide.com/podcast.