

Trixie Whyte:

One of the things I learned was cost versus benefit, and that's become my way of decision-making. "What's the cost? What's the benefit? Are they tipped on one side? What are the risks?" I look at it. "Worth it. I'll go for it."

Mike Paton:

Hello, everybody. This is Mike Paton with the EOS Leader Podcast, and today, I'm really excited to introduce my friend, Trixie Whyte, the founder, visionary, and chairwoman of the Q2 HR Solutions Group of Companies, a fully-integrated provider of solutions that help good, hard-working Filipino people find work and help employers find and retain great people. Trixie also spends a lot of her time giving back as a board member of the EO organization in the Philippines and the Asia Bridge Forum or ABF, as an active member in many industry organizations, and as an investor or advisor to several other businesses. She's passionate about life, learning and uplifting people, the companies they work for, the communities they live in, and ultimately, her whole beautiful country. So, Trixie, welcome to the show. Thanks for being here with me today.

Trixie Whyte:

Thank you, Paton. I'm excited to be here.

Mike Paton:

So tell the listeners about where your entrepreneurial journey began, if you would.

Trixie Whyte:

I'm a late-bloomer, they say. I should have known early on that I'd be an entrepreneur because both sides of my family, my dad's side, my mom's side, my grandparents, they're all entrepreneurs, including my mom. But my entrepreneurial journey started with my husband many years after my corporate life. So I was 32 when I became an entrepreneur, and that was after I left my mom's business. Being in a family business, people told me, "Don't ever join a family business. You're going to ruin your relationship." Did I listen to that? Yeah. But did I keep to that? No.

My mother was adamant to get me into the business because she said, "The business is yours anyway." Well, I should have listened to my gut, but again, things happen for a reason, and I decided to leave my mom's business because I wanted to preserve my relationship with her rather than always fighting about how the business is going to be run. She was running the business for over 30 years, so it was very difficult. So then, my husband and I, because I had a blueprint of an executive search company when I started my mom... when I joined my mom's business. She's into the HR business. She does contract project work and overseas placement. So it's very capital-intensive. So when I joined my mom's business, I said, "I need some capital. Where do I get it?" Right?

So the banks, they're not very good here. So I needed to be creative, and I said, "You know, great margins in the executive search business," and the Philippines at that time needed professional corporations like what I did to encourage talents and to bring talents into the foreign place then. So I got a blueprint of that. I set it up in my mom's business. It was highly successful. So when I left my mom's business, since I was the one who set it up, I said, "Look, I'm going to carry this over." My husband... Actually, we were in Hong Kong, and we weren't sure what we were going to do. We're overlooking the bridge... the river, and Brendan just said, "You know, we had a blueprint of an executive search company. Why don't we set it up?" I looked at him. I said, "Seriously?" "Yeah. You set it up yourself. Why

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don't we do it?" I was thinking, in my head, I was thinking, "Oh my god, yeah," and then he said, "You can do it. You can start tomorrow if you wanted." I was thinking, "Oh my god." Putting it in someone's psyche suddenly, "Aaah."

Mike Paton:

So a couple of clarifying questions. So your mom ran this business. Is she still running the HR consultancy that she was running at the time?

Trixie Whyte:

My mom passed away about three years ago, but no.

Mike Paton:

Oh, so sorry.

Trixie Whyte:

When I left my mom's business, shortly after, maybe I'd say two years later, my mom shut it down.

Mike Paton:

Got it, but she was running the business while you were growing up?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

So I would say your entrepreneurial journey began at birth if you were born into an entrepreneurial family because there's...

Trixie Whyte:

That's true.

Mike Paton:

Because there's one thing about an entrepreneurial family that I know is true because I come from one as well, and that is you're running an entrepreneurial business at the dinner table every night. Am I right about that?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

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Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Oh, yes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. So how...

Trixie Whyte:

Yeah. I met my mom's clients when I was very young.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Of course. Of course. Of course. So how old were you when you joined your mom in the business?

Trixie Whyte:

I was 28.

Mike Paton:

Then, when you left, you spent how many years there?

Trixie Whyte:

I spent about two and a half years there.

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), and at the end, it was, "Either preserve the relationship with my mother or stay in the business," right?

Trixie Whyte:

That's right.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

That's right.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

The people that my mom had, they saw me grow up. So it's very difficult to get into an organization and be in a position of leadership when all of them saw me grow up and not being in the business.

Mike Paton:

I think a lot of people who are in family businesses don't understand how much harder it can be for the next generation to have independently created credibility because the perception is that you're in a position of authority because you're a family member, not because of your ability to contribute, and so...

Trixie Whyte:

Absolutely.

Mike Paton:

Even when other people aren't feeling that way, we have a tendency as leaders to feel a little self-doubt about that ourselves, which doesn't help matters, right?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes, and what I did when I was in my mom's company was I hired my team because it was very difficult to move in the direction I wanted with the current people that my mom had. You would call it a generation gap between my mom and I.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Her style and my style were very, very different.

Mike Paton:

Well, I encounter that every day, right, in that when you have built a successful business with one set of rules, and priorities, and approaches, a new person coming in and suggesting a completely different set of rules, and priorities, and approaches has a bit of a hard time being heard.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

So it's not exclusive to family businesses. That's for sure.

Trixie Whyte:

I agree.

Mike Paton:

So the start of your journey with your own company involved you and your husband talking about this business you had built inside your mom's company and saying, "Why don't we build that same type of organization ourselves?" Right?

Trixie Whyte:

That's right. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Mike Paton:

So this was when? Roughly, what year? 2000?

Trixie Whyte:

So this was in the year 2000.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

So we actually, last year, 2020, celebrated our 20 years of uplifting lives.

Mike Paton:

Ah, lovely.

Trixie Whyte:

So very proud.

Mike Paton:

Right. So it started as an executive search business and has broadened to a number of people-related businesses where you're helping match great talent to companies that need great talent. Is that a fair way of summarizing everything?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes, yes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Absolutely, it is.

Mike Paton:

Tell us about the early years, starting a business with your husband. You left one family business and immediately started another family business, Trixie.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes, and that was another thing that many people said I shouldn't do. But this time, I did, and it was successful. Thank God.

Mike Paton:

That's great. that's great. What was the secret to it being successful or different than your last experience?

Trixie Whyte:

The reason I think that it was very successful was we understood and we respected each other's expertise. I was very much the front-end of the business and sales marketing, client/customer service, and my husband was very much into the finance, the administrative side, ensuring that the office was safe and protected. So he was a very, very strong finance person. So there would be... As you know as an entrepreneur, when you start, the finances don't look good right away.

Mike Paton:

Well, and in my entrepreneurial career, it wasn't just at the start. You and your husband may have appreciatively more talented than me, but yes, I'm quite familiar with that feeling.

Trixie Whyte:

Yeah. So every night, we'd talk about the business. Being finance as he was, he would look at the bottom line and would get so nervous like, "Oh my gosh, where is... How are we going to feed the kids first, and then how are we going to give the salaries to the people?" when he can see the bottom line. Because I was sales and marketing, I saw what was coming in.

Mike Paton:

You saw the potential.

Trixie Whyte:

What he didn't see... Yeah, so he didn't see. All he seemed to see was at the back-end. He would only receive the bills and all that, but I would talk to him about it at night and say, "These companies would just close, and we can see that the market is growing, and so on, and so forth." So that was my relationship, and it was so nice because I started bringing him to sales meetings, and he was a natural. He was a natural salesperson, and then at night, he would talk to me about finances, and I would learn about finance and all the things I need to know about finance. So it was a great combination and everything, and we talked about this. We said, "Look, the decision would have to be if both of us don't agree about something, we've got to talk about it and say, 'Who is more passionate about this?'"

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

Right? "Who feels very strongly about this? Because if you feel more than me, you will take that lead on that decision." So that was how we worked on decisions that didn't match.

Mike Paton:

Interesting. So you had a process for how you would make decisions when you didn't all agree long before EOS ever entered your company's life. I commend you for that.

Trixie Whyte:

Interesting, right?

Mike Paton:

I commend you. Well, and it's so vital in a family business where a fractured partnership with a business partner that isn't also your spouse is expensive. A fractured partnership with a business partner that is your spouse is a crisis. It's awful. So good for you. How long were you and your husband working together to grow this business? Seven years or so if I remember correctly.

Trixie Whyte:

Yeah. So we were excited to have this business. He was with a corporation prior to joining me in the business, and he was doing some project work with a big corporation prior to finally saying, "Okay. I'll join it 100%." So although he was at the back-end working with me, it was few... maybe a few months later that he fully joined. So from a spare room of our house with six people, we had one PC amongst us and one laptop, and we had two tables shared amongst six.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Then, we had our Golden Retriever coming in and out of our room because it was in our spare room. His name was Monty. He was our stress-buster. That's how we all started in 2000, right? So very humbly, and then we moved to our office in the central business district shortly after that, and things were going well when we started in 2000. Clients of mine would come to me and say, "Trix, I've got this problem. I don't think anyone else is doing this right now, but would you be open to helping me out." Ching, entrepreneur in me, "Don't say no. Look at it first and see." "Sure, I'll be there."

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Say yes and figure it out later. Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Exactly.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Exactly, and so I got there, and I said, "Yeah, I'm going to help you." He said, "Oh, do you have the people?" "I'll build them." So we were with a company that was a pharmaceutical distribution company in the Philippines. Basically, from executive search, they were asking me to do a totally different kind of business model. It was contract project, but not just that, but it was productivity-based. They would not pay the people on an hourly basis, but rather, on the results, on the output, right?

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

If it was going to be successful, it would be better for the worker because the more productive, the higher their salary. Better for the company because they're more productive, and better for me because I get a percentage of it. Everyone wins.

Mike Paton:

But if it doesn't work out, you and your husband are holding the bag, if I'm not mistaken, right?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes, that's right. That's right. It is, right? That's how it is.

Mike Paton:

That's great.

Trixie Whyte:

But I wanted to share this story because this is a story that fully changed me in the way that I saw the business. So my husband and I, when we started, he said, "Look, Trixie, the Philippines has so much talent, and there is so much unemployment." It's very sad for someone like him coming from first-world country. Although, loving the Philippines, he wanted to have some way of helping out. So the business was the way to help out. In a country where there's so much unemployment, he said, "We have a noble cause because we are providing jobs for the people. We're not giving them the fish. We're giving them the fishing rod so that they can be independent and they can have a livelihood to support their family." So I said, "Yeah, I love that." So that was really the center of when we started our business.

Mike Paton:

In 2000, what was the...

Trixie Whyte:

2000.

Mike Paton:

What was the unemployment rate in the Philippines? What percentage of the population wanted a job and didn't have a job roughly?

Trixie Whyte:

It's basically I would say upwards of 20%. I mean, that was... It's worse now, obviously, but it's about... I'd say 27% would be the unemployment rate. It's really high. The reason why... It depends on which statistics you're looking at because they include the self-employed in the statistics. That's why it makes it less, right?

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

Less unemployment.

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

Because the people on the street, they're not unemployed. They're self-employed.

Mike Paton:

Right, right.

Trixie Whyte:

Selling flowers on the street. So it depends on who you're talking to, I guess.

Mike Paton:

Got it. Got it.

Trixie Whyte:

So I was mentioning about this experience with the pharmaceutical company I was doing a time and motion study myself, and I was going to this company every day. You must understand that my business at that time included this contract work in the factories and people would do labor, heavy labor. So I was doing their time and motion to shift them from hourly to productivity-based. So this lady came to me running, I came out of my car, and said, "Ma'am, ma'am, ma'am." This is all in Tagalog, in our dialect, right, or language.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

She held me by the hand, and she said, "Ma'am, are you Trixie Whyte?" I said, "Yes, I am Trixie Whyte." "I just wanted to come here and say thank you. Because of you, I can feed my three children," and then she just looked at me and walked away. Up to now, she doesn't know the effect of her words that day to me. It changed the way I saw my business. This is a person who's earning minimum wage, who's got three kids, and all she can think of are the basics even, feeding her kids. Not buying shoes. Not traveling. Feeding her three kids.

Mike Paton:

Fascinating. So in your business, you're not only leading and managing your team, but you're also interacting with the leaders and managers of all these organizations whose people you're helping hire, helping train, helping redirect, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So given that this is a podcast about leadership, I really want to dive into your experiences, your opinions about what works and what doesn't work with leadership, and I want to start with your earliest recollection of watching someone lead anything in your life. Who was it? What was the situation, and what do you remember about it?

Trixie Whyte:

Well, you said it earlier. I come from an entrepreneurial family, and therefore, it started very, very young for me. I saw my mom as the leader. In fact, even before that, my grandma who was also in the business as the leader, but my mom was my first recollection because it wasn't just about the business. It's the way that she carried herself as a leader. Our house was always a congregation place of people where... She would be in many organizations. She would be the president of this and the chairman of that. That's on top of her business, and I love the fact that at a late age... At the age of 57, she decided she was going to take a law degree, and so she did. That's on top of her master's degree already. So growing up, I thought, "Wow." It was just normal to me. It's only now very different when I look back, but it was normal to me. "Oh, my mom's gone to law school, master's. Okay." So it's really the thirst for learning, right?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Amazing, and her influence, her charisma was just... She was a big part. She's not a big person, but she had big influence.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, it sounds like she opened her home and her heart to the people she interacted with from all these various enterprises and that that was a big part of her success, connecting with other people.

Trixie Whyte:

I like that, big heart, because that's what she had.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

She was, I would say, generous to a fault, and I guess that's one of the things that I learned to manage, the generosity to a fault, because I saw that in her, and I said, "Okay. When I have my own business if I ever do, I'm not going to be like that."

Mike Paton:

You're not going to give to the point of hurting your own business or your own family.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes, that's right.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Interesting.

Trixie Whyte:

It's not... Yeah.

Mike Paton:

What would you say the quality of hers that you most hope to emulate is?

Trixie Whyte:

I would really like... It rubbed off on me her thirst for learning because I think that's one of the most critical characteristics of any leader, knowing that you don't know everything, and you've got to be able to... resourceful to find solutions, and never really stopping where you are, like continuous improvement, and things like that. That's why I'm in EOS, right?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

If I had EOS in the earlier days, I would have done, and it's not because I'm in your podcast. To me, it's really continuous improvement, always wanting to be better.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, that's great. With all the leaders you're surrounded with, give me some other phrases or adjectives that describe the kind of leaders you see being most effective. What are they doing that make them better leaders than the average person out there?

Trixie Whyte:

I would say... and this is what I experienced with a colleague of mine many years ago when I was in a corporate life, right? I was in a hotel industry. Her name was Sally, and she was amazing as... She was my supervisor, and she trained me. Most people, when they train and probably they see a potential, they either get feel threatened and keep things to themselves or grab some of the attention and credits on to them if they do something good, right?

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

But this lady, she was the one who really... She's not selfish, and she trained me. She mentored me. She gave me everything that she knew, and she had very high standards for herself. So she elevated me because of her own standards. She elevated me to her standard and being so humble to... If it's a mistake that she made, she will actually say, "That's mine." In one of the meetings, she said, "You've got to say thank you to Trixie. That wasn't mine. It was Trixie."

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

So giving credit where credit is due.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

She was strict as... She was very strict with me, but she was fair.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Strict, but fair. So these are the characteristics that I felt were so important because it was my real experience of someone mentoring me, someone sharing with me, and I said, "You know what? I'll be the same."

Mike Paton:

When I asked a room full of leaders who the best coach, or mentor, or grower of them as individuals was, almost everybody can think of somebody right away, and the second question I asked, "Were they the nicest people you ever met?" Almost always, they all say, "Oh, no." Honest to a fault, right? So that's good stuff. Tell me about the biggest challenge you've faced as a leader in your own business.

Trixie Whyte:

I think decision-making is definitely one of the most important roles that I play as an entrepreneur and nobody... When someone says, "Okay. We've got to learn how to make decisions," nobody teaches you that in university, right?

Mike Paton:

No.

Trixie Whyte:

How to make decisions. But one of the things that I learned... Again, I'm a sponge. When I was growing up, when I was in the corporate world, I loved being sent to workshops, to training, to all those things. I just loved it, and one of the things I learned was cost versus benefit, and that's become my way of decision-making. "What's the cost? What's the best? Are they tipped on one side? What are the risks?" I look at it. "Worth it. I'll go for it." The biggest challenge I had, and it was a personal one in terms of it became personal because I didn't mention earlier that in 2006, my husband who was my business partner and my life partner fell ill. In 2007, I became a widow with three children. My nine-year-old, my five-year-old, and my one-year-old. So I was with him, looking after him in Singapore whilst the business was running, and both of us left. So when I came back fully to the business, I expected it to be where I left it, but boy, was I mistaken. It was a shock of all shocks, you know?

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

Our clients ran dry, our AR was... We can talk about ARs, and we're a capital-intensive business. 150 days is going to kill us. So many things were wrong. Five of our senior people at that time were leaving by coincidence. One of them was our five-year finance manager. So these were things that were happening, and when I came, it all just... all crashing down like, "Oh my God. Really? What do I do? Do I continue with the business, or do I say, 'I'm young enough. I can go back to the corporate world. I can be safe and comfortable because I'll have my monthly salary. I can look after my three kids?'" That's why I had said to you. My three kids were very young, right?

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

I needed to think about them. So that was the biggest challenge for me at that point in my life. Do I continue with this business, or do I not? I wouldn't be here if I didn't, right?

Mike Paton:

Obviously. What did you rely on to make the final call?

Trixie Whyte:

I called my senior leadership team, and I was very honest, and I told them... I showed them everything. Vulnerability included. "This is where we are. We have a runway of three months. What do you do? If you were me, what would you do?"

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

So I asked them because I knew that they were mature enough to be able to handle the situation. I said, "Look, I will not take it against you if you feel you can't handle this, but this is where we are. This is what we do. We uplift lives. We have a bigger purpose, but, but we need to be profitable. That's our air. That's our oxygen."

Mike Paton:

No margin, no mission.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes. Absolutely. So we might have a noble vision, noble purpose. But if today we can't look after ourselves, we can't even breathe, what's the point tomorrow?

Mike Paton:

Wow.

Trixie Whyte:

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One by one, they came, and they said, "We're in, Trixie. We're with you. Let's do this," and so I did.

Mike Paton:

How long did it take for you to feel like you were no longer in crisis?

Trixie Whyte:

That was in 2008. The crisis extended because we were in the red, right?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

In 2009, we went back to equilibrium.

Mike Paton:

That's excellent. At the time that that was right corresponding with the meltdown on the financial markets as well, did that complicate things for you?

Trixie Whyte:

That's actually one of the reasons why it was very tough because I had a personal crisis. I had to look after my husband.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

When I came back, there was a business crisis because the business wasn't doing well. Then, there was a country, financial, global crisis in 2008.

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

It was a perfect storm.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

So when people ask me about this question because there's many challenges in my life.

Mike Paton:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

As an entrepreneur, huh, hard to pick which one would be... So when I was asking myself, "What would be the biggest challenge?", I would say that's one of them because it was really at that tipping point, to continue, not to continue. The market out there wasn't great, and great thing about it is I've had the people, the support of the people around me. It's the people that could make a difference.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, I love that your answer to the question, "What did you rely on?", was you asked the people around you what they thought. I think that's a very humble, but effective way of leading, being honest with the people around you, telling them the truth, and working together with them to make the right decision for the team and the business. Great, great story, Trixie.

Trixie Whyte:

Thank you. I actually hired my integrator. At that time, she wasn't an integrator yet. I hired a number two. I called her my number two.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. That's good. I like that. I've always liked that term. I've always liked that term. Coincidentally, that's the highest I can count without the aid of a calculator, so it really works for me. So a more global question for a second because you've interacted with organizations and leaders all over the world.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Are there different leadership qualities in Asia, for example, that are effective where they may not be effective elsewhere, or are there a set of standard leadership qualities that can be applied in any culture, in any region in the world? Have you noticed any differences or similarities regionally?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes. Yes. It is a very interesting question. I love that question because it's making me think, Paton. So I deal with Asians and Europeans or Westerners, right? So definitely, in Asia, it's very different. Less direct way of managing. Their style is very much respect, very collective. On the other side of the world, very direct, right? It's, "Don't beat around the bush. Just tell me how it is."

Mike Paton:

Right. But with those differences, how do effective leaders in both regions get everybody on the same page because I know they do that, they just do it via two different roots?

Trixie Whyte:

Yes. In my view, there is... The way that I've seen it is that people do it through... In many of the entrepreneurs, because I'm part of EO, is that it's through the people through a system, right?

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

Which is why people look into different kinds of tools. So the difference in... I would say the cultural difference is that because we are more collective, more... I should be careful about this. Not that the other side don't care about the people and things like that. Here, very much a collective part, right?

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

You're part of collective, and the leadership is very much a people-centered, centric, and the... I would say the cultural divide is not so much on the style, but the understanding of cultures. So for example, I'm very direct. I'm Filipina, right? But it doesn't mean just because I'm Asian, I can't be direct, but I can be direct in a subtle way.

Mike Paton:

Right, as opposed to in-your-face, "I don't really care what your reaction to the thing I'm about to say to you is going to be."

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, and I think those in the States, those regional differences exist as well. I'm in Minnesota, and one of the things people say about folks from Minnesota is we're Minnesota nice, which means that we sometimes act like we agree and act like we're all good, but we don't really feel that way inside, which I would call less direct than someone in a more aggressive region of the country, and so what you're sharing is a...

Trixie Whyte:

Like New York.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, like New York would be a great example. At the same time, sometimes I feel like people in New York aren't genuinely sharing their real feelings. They're masking them with aggressive behavior and bravado as opposed to really getting deep and really letting people around them know what they really think and feel, and so I think this... Well, I love what you said is that you can be direct, but you might do

it in a slightly different way in one part of the world than you would in another part of the world. You don't have to change who you are. You just have to change your approach and the way you deliver the message.

Trixie Whyte:

Yes.

Mike Paton:

Interesting.

Trixie Whyte:

I think this is where a lot of people talk about authenticity in the way that they lead.

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

What I've seen and if you would ask someone how I am as a leader, authenticity would probably be one of those descriptions.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

One of the things that... I guess because this is like a confession in this box, the two of us, right? Authenticity always used to worry me on the other side because it can also show weakness, right, and vulnerability because you're authentic?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Where do you draw the line from authenticity showing... For example, the challenge that I had where I had to tell everyone, "This is where we are at."

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

People would not necessarily want to do that because it will scare many people away. So the authenticity side could be a good or a bad thing. Not bad, but could be a source of doubt for some when they see, "Okay."

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

So, again, to me, I've heard this, and culturally, authenticity is a cross-cultural leadership that I've seen in many people. Yeah.

Mike Paton:

Well, I believe there's a way to be direct and respectful, and direct and collective, right? There's a great book by an author by the name of Dr. Henry Cloud called Integrity, and the subtitle is genius, "The Courage to Face the Demands of Reality." So I think of this book often when I think of the tough moments as a leader where you have to be vulnerable with the people around you because it's the truth, and you're a human, and you're scared, and you're worried about the future. I believe that the best leaders are able to be honest about their concerns without eroding everyone's confidence around them and sending them scurrying to the hills, panicking about what's going to happen next. So that's the tough mission for me is how can you tell the truth, be a good collaborative listener with your fellow leaders, but not terrify them into wanting to quit tomorrow and go find a job at a more stable organization. Right?

Trixie Whyte:

Absolutely.

Mike Paton:

That's the challenge we've all got, Trixie, and the thing... What you said earlier about decision-making. You don't learn decision-making in university. You learn a lot of processes for making decisions. You don't learn what the right decision is every time in university. You can follow a process and still come up with the wrong answer, and I think one of the keys is when all of us just get comfortable with the inevitability of our failures from time to time. We are going to make the wrong call. we are going to fail, and we need to own it, learn from it, and move on.

Trixie Whyte:

Absolutely. This pandemic has really shaken many people, and when we talk about telling people the truth without scaring them away, I remember when we went on a lockdown. As you know, the Philippines has the longest lockdown, and we're back into lockdown again now. Okay? So in March. So I was doing my town hall just before the lockdown, and thank God I did that because I knew that... I moved my town hall a week in advance thinking, "In case we are unable to come back to the office temporarily, let's do the town hall early, so we can tell everyone what to expect." Since then, we've been doing our town halls every week through Zoom.

Mike Paton:

Right, just to keep the connection there even though you're not in the same facility.

Trixie Whyte:

Just to keep the connection.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

But what to tell them, right?

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

What to tell them? Do we tell them the truth and let them know the gravity of this? We needed to. I felt I really needed to. It was my responsibility as a leader to tell the truth about what was going on because if I didn't, people will take it not so seriously. They would go out. What did this mean for them to keep them safe first, and keep everyone in their families safe, and keep the company safe?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Right?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

So it was really the balance between tell them the truth.

Mike Paton:

Right.

Trixie Whyte:

Use that truth to convince them that this is the right thing to do, so.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. One of the best pieces of advice as a leader I ever got had nothing to do with leadership. I had to deliver some troubling news to my children, and I asked a counselor for advice about how to do that. She looked at me as though I was smart enough to figure this out myself, which happens to me a lot, by the way. She said, "Tell the truth. Use as few words as possible, and then shut up, and listen."

Trixie Whyte:

Nice.

Mike Paton:

About as good as it gets from a "How do you deal with this stuff?" standpoint.

Trixie Whyte:

I love what you said, "Listen," because that's one of the leadership skills that... Again, you go to university. You don't get told how to listen well, effectively, properly. They assume that you listen because you were in class, you're taking down notes. Right? That's experiential.

Mike Paton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Trixie Whyte:

But listening to me is one of the characteristics when you asked me earlier what would be a characteristic that a good leader should have in the beginning of our podcast, and listening skills is at the top for me because for me, as a leader, we tend to... or we tend to preach or talk about things, and we forget that we're not the only ones who have great ideas. In fact, many people have better ideas than us, this... people of different levels and ranks. It's not just because of your position or your role. So I love the fact that you talked about listen because listening skill as a leadership characteristic is critical, critical.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I couldn't agree more. For me, a tough lesson in my life as a leader was remembering that listening means listening with a purpose of understanding as opposed to formulating your response, and I struggle with that to this day. So I appreciate you drawing attention to that.

Trixie Whyte:

I love that because it... Sorry, it just reminded me about...

Mike Paton:

Yeah, please. Yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

In my company, what I've started doing 2010? Yeah, it began in 2010. I have what we call a President's Hour. So they sit with me. It's random. Five people sit with me in my office, and we talk about... I structure it in a way so that there is vulnerability from all parts, and there is confidentiality and trust in the room, so people won't... Anyway, I love listening to their stories not because I'm going to ask a question, but because I really truly want to know and understand, "Where are they coming from? Where's the motivation? Where's the drive? What's their story?" I love hearing stories because in these stories, I get so inspired. Their stories inspire me. So when I come back home, I bring all these nuggets of stories to my kids. It becomes like a bedtime story, but for us, "their-time story." "Do you know so and so? Do you know so and so? This is..." and what they've learned from it. So, to me, listening with not just your ears, but your heart because the heart is what tries to understand.

Mike Paton:

Well, I am fascinated in this podcast as a great opportunity for me to do this with some amazing people, but the people around us live truly amazing lives and have truly amazing stories to tell. What gets in the way of us understanding and appreciating that is often that we don't take the time to ask or listen. As a result, they seem like employees, or team members, or people driving poorly in traffic in front of us and

annoying us, and we forget that they're human, and they have families, and all of that stuff. If there's one good thing that's come from the pandemic, it slowed everybody down a little bit and forced us all to contemplate that we're all in this together. Kudos to you for having a habit since 2010 of taking time to do that without waiting for the pandemic to force you to do it.

Trixie Whyte:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

So one last question before we conclude because I could talk to you all day in the Philippines and night here in the States. There are a lot of young, new leaders listening to this podcast, working hard to become the best leader they can be every day, and you've gotten mountains of advice in your career, and you've sifted through all of it, and I'm asking you to pick one little nugget you've learned that makes you a great leader and share it with the young leader that wants to be great. What's important for us to know, Trixie?

Trixie Whyte:

It's one of those things that, you're right, we've learned so much and condensing it to one, like what's that one thing that a young entrepreneur, and I'd say don't dwell on setbacks because there are many setbacks in an entrepreneurial journey. I get setbacks all the time every day, and to dwell on them is the worst thing that I could do. Instead, I would say use it as a platform to improve and get better.

Mike Paton:

Hmm, yeah.

Trixie Whyte:

Invest in a system. Invest in a system that enables continuous improvement because we go through life not intentionally. But if we have a system, it allows us to be intentional about what we want to do and making inroads to make that happen. Even if we have setbacks, the system allows us to see it and turn it into a positive thing for us, a learning platform. So again, because it's inevitable, every one experiences setbacks, and instead of... Those are challenges. I would call them challenges, but they're adversities that are gift. They're allowing us to see what's not right and fix it, but it can only be done that way if there's a system that allows us to see it for what it is. So, yeah.

Mike Paton:

Great. Great piece of advice. Thanks, Trixie. Before I let you go, tell the listener who wants to learn more about you and your company where they should go to learn more.

Trixie Whyte:

Please come and visit my website, q2hrs.com. So that is our website, but again, thank you for having me here. Yes, I'm in the Philippines, but it's easy to connect with me on LinkedIn. It's easy to... I used my Facebook on personal stuff, so I don't. So it's just LinkedIn and Instagram really.

Mike Paton:

Great.

This transcript was exported on May 05, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Trixie Whyte:

So thank you for your time.

Mike Paton:

My pleasure. Enjoyed it immensely. We'll have all that information in the show notes, and once again, this is Mike Paton with the EOS Leader Podcast. Thank you so much for listening. I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Trixie Whyte as much as I did. Please review us on iTunes. Give us some constructive feedback or say great things to attract other people to this important program. Thanks.

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