EPISODE 68

[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]

[00:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth. And welcome back to 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with individuals who have made a choice to raise their hand and lead on some very difficult challenges in the world. And our purpose here is to have a conversation with those folks and learn what we can learn from them about their experiences and also understand the work that they do in the world to have impact.

Today I have a nice opportunity to have a conversation with Elvis Frasier. Elvis and I have known each other for, I'm going to guess, Elvis, about seven, eight years in a different world than we both inhabit today. But I've always been impressed with Elvis's work and the way he's led. So I was natural that I would want to see if I could corral him on the podcast. I'm going to give him an opportunity to tell us what he wants us to know about his firm. But first, Elvis, welcome to the podcast. It's great to have you.

[00:01:09] EF: Thanks. Thanks, Rick. It's great to be back in connection with you.

[00:01:12] RT: Let's give people context opportunity here. What do you want them to know about Elvis Frasier that helps them track a little bit about what we'll talk about in the work that you do?

[00:01:22] EF: Well, I think some of the most important things to know about me is that I was born and raised in Jamaica and grew up there. And until high school, I left. I am a parent. I have two boys, which I'm proud of. Two grandchildren. Not important. I trained as a socioeconomist and focused on international development. I have had careers in academia, in applied research,

in philanthropy. And now I'm leading a consulting firm that I founded focused on issues of advancing equity through data-informed insights. And so, I'm active in my community, and different boards, and such. Those are some key features that will be important for folks to know.

[00:02:10] RT: Okay. In the world that you live in now, you started a firm since you and I sort of separated ourselves based on geography and moves, you left the organization you're with and you started a firm called Sankofa Consulting who has a very interesting mission and purpose in the world. And so, would you help people understand what the work is that you're doing through your consultancy and the team that you've brought on board? And why that work matters? And why you've oriented your career in this direction inside this firm?

[00:02:41] EF: First of all, the name Sankofa comes from Adinkra people in West Africa. It's a symbol of a bird reaching back behind it to pick up an egg, which is wisdom. And it's oriented forward, which implies that the deeper meaning that you have to go back to your past to find wisdom in order to go forward. It's a very powerful symbol and a very powerful concept for the Adinkra people for centuries.

Now that epitomizes what we do and our work. Because my interest in this work is helping organizations to explore and extract wisdom from their past experience in order to improve the impact of programs that are focused on social mobility and equity for those who have historically been left out. And so, it's really about evidence-based insights that help to identify what works. What does not? And how to improve the use and stewardship resources to benefit those who need it most. That is kind of the story of Sankofa.

[00:03:54] RT: Okay. Let's dig into this a little bit. In the work that you do – and, honestly, you were the one who introduced this to me in a prior work life. The work of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. MLE, which is as it's known for inside the business. It's a core part of what you do. Again, another orientation piece for listeners, when you use the phrase monitoring, evaluation, and learning, what is it that you're referring to? What does that work? And why does that matter?

[00:04:23] EF: As you know, the social impact work, poverty alleviation work, any work that seeks to address the social challenges or address the issues faced by people that are most

vulnerable in society is very important work. And billions of dollars each year are spent on improving, in developing and implementing programs to serve the most vulnerable in society.

A lot of those programs have historically been rooted in the belief that they are making a difference. Monitoring, learning, and evaluation is about demonstrating that indeed the investments which have been made in the philanthropic and development sectors are indeed accountable for making a difference and results.

MLE is about monitoring part of it. It's about ensuring that you are actually implementing the programs in the way that it was intended to ensure that you're setting it up for maximum impact, right? And that you're making adjustments based upon the early feedback on how things are going to make the tweaks to ensure that you are going to be hitting the outcomes that you want.

Evaluation is about the ability to say, "Did it make a difference? And for whom did it make a difference? And what aspects of the programs are optimal for what the change that you're trying to seek?" And so, it's really gathering evidence to ensure accountability for results. At the end of the day, programs are about improving people's lives. It's not about just the operational aspects of the work. And so, MLE is about, one, ensuring that there's good stewardship for resources. But most importantly, that people are benefiting. And if programs aren't benefiting, then you make the adjustments either to change them or get rid of them.

[00:06:18] RT: I can imagine people listening here would be thinking, "Well, wouldn't the organization itself have these systems in place and do this work themselves versus having somebody from the outside come in?" What is the scenario by which you are able to exist as a consultancy offering you services that distinguishes that from doing it internal?

[00:06:41] EF: The organizations do have systems, learning systems to capture data and information and on the programs they're doing. Many nonprofits or philanthropic entities are focused on ensuring accountability for the funds that they are investing. And their systems internally track information.

However, it's always an important I would say philosophy to have a third party to help you think about that and to give you an independent perspective that is not biased by the internal – I would say the internal politics or other internal values, if you will.

And so, we work with clients to help them to think strategically about the right choices they make at the front end. The design and the strategy development. But we also help them to operationalize their work into specific measurable changes that they want measurable results.

And so, that third-party independence helps to blunt some of the political, I would say, and internally focus, I would say, priorities of an organization. I do believe that having someone other than your internal team helping you to check and hold the accountable is an important part of being good stewards of resources and ensuring that you're getting the maximum unbiased perspective on philanthropy or any kind of development investments.

[00:08:20] RT: Seems to me then, as you're brought into an organization, it sees the value of using your resources, and your skills, and your experience to do the work you just described. That there's a kind of – might be a kind of tension maybe or need to actually integrate your services with the organization relationally. So there's a level of trust and openness to share information. How do you go about actually creating the human connection so that you're able to work together with the people internally so that information flows and you can help them?

[00:08:52] EF: Yes. That tension is right, Rick. I think that you are a critical friend in a sense. You are both building relationship, a partnership. But you also want to be able to be a truth teller and to offer organizations some, I would say, critical assessment of their work. It's a delicate balance to strike, because most organizations like to think that all their work is well-meaning and is doing good. But as we know, that's not always the case. And sometimes good intentions to improve people's lives may not pan out. And sometimes I find that organizations need that critical perspective.

And so, you have to assure them that you are going to be an honest broker in the conversation and that you're going to build evidence that stands on its own. And that you're going to offer insights that will help them to do the best work. I think we're aligned on the similar value of trying

to do good in the world. To be part of the solution and part of the problem. And that shared value in committing to change is where the trust is built.

Now sometimes we're at difference in opinion in terms of whether or not the data indeed tells the story, is interpreted in the right way. And we can defer on that point. But at the end of the day, they know that and there to help them to achieve their strategic goals of making change. Right? And that that is the basis that this relationship or partnership is built on. We agree sometimes to disagree on things. But we want to make sure that we're adding value and giving them as unbiased a perspective as we can.

[00:10:54] RT: Talk then about the way in which you and your team do the work of actually getting connected to their mission and their purpose so you understand what it is that they're trying to do, so you're eventually able to be the honest broker, the truth tellers when things are little field. You've had lots of experience at this. You probably have some hard lessons learned and et cetera. Knowing that we have people listening who have difficult conversations in their lives either as leaders or in partners, how do you go about doing that work? And what have you learned about it that helps you do it better today than you did, say, back in time?

[00:11:30] EF: Yeah. I think as I've journeyed in my career almost 30 years postgraduate career, I have learned that it's one thing to be a scientist, a social scientist, symmetry in social scientists, and to come at this with the technical rigor. It's another thing entirely to come at this as someone who is committed and passionate about the work.

The work that I do, that we do at Sankofa is work that has both a professional value and importance to me. But also, a personal one. We work on issues that affect, especially in the US, the most vulnerable, which often times are black and brown communities. As a man of color, a black man, it's really important to me that when we're dealing with educational disparities, for instance, we're in this country that affects black and brown communities, I come at this from someone who sees and works with people who look like me and for whom I want to see change. Right? That sense of bringing both my professional as well as my own lived experiences to it is a starting point.

When I enter a situation, I enter it to listen. I enter it to understand more about the organization's values, its commitments. Oftentimes, because we work with foundations, I want to understand what the foundation's commitments are to social change, to equity. So that listening and that understanding of what is if they are the theory of philanthropy? How do they see the world? And what motivates the organization is a starting point. Right?

And that's where you can find the difference in organizations in terms of how do they want to engage with people. We bring the science to back that. To say this is about testing models that can be scaled to have maximum impact. As opposed to doing a niche program to benefit a few. That understanding of their vision of the world helps us then to engage with them in the most appropriate way.

An organization that is committed to big transformative change in the world, their goal is to have rigorous evidence to help them to basically promote a new approach that can maximize impact across the globe. We have to then think more strategically about the rigor of the evidence.

There are others who want to demonstrate that how it affects people's lives. They want to get into a family, a case study that shows the richness of what it is like to make a change. And then we also work with them at that level. We are listening and understanding how do they want to show up in the world? And what is their theory of philanthropy for changing the world? And then we connect at that point and we adjust our engagement based upon that deeper understanding. We are listening and understanding our client as a first entry point into a relationship.

[00:14:41] RT: This craft of listening that you're bringing to the conversation is significant. Would you mind sharing with people what your view is about how to listen? Because we're living in a world right now where listening is in short supply, it seems to me. What do you know about the craft of listening? And how can you advise people about how you can improve your listening when something big is at stake?

[00:15:04] EF: Yeah. I make a distinction between passive listening and active listening or deep listening, which is, one, our job is to explore. To ask questions that helps our clients, our Partners to go a little bit more deeply. You're not just there sort of as a passive listener. You're actively engaged in bringing your experience of this craft of monitoring and evaluation to raise

questions, right? And about how do you get a client, for instance, to explain to you how they define a problem?

You have a framework in mind in terms of helping a client to identify what is the problem that they're – how do they define a problem that they're solving for? That, you have to ask questions such as inequity in what form? Who are the ones affected? Tell me more. You're probing in a way that allows you to allow the client to give you insights that help you to hear clearly and articulate their problem for whom they think the problem exists. Their solutions that they're crafting. And what are the values that they want to inculcate as part of that?

You're kind of probing and collecting insights by allowing the client to walk through that journey with you. And so, for me, that deeper listening is bringing experience to bear, experience from the art of and science of evaluation. But also knowing that their organizations are also imbued or influenced by their own cultural and other historical biases. So you're trying to make sure that you're kind of figuring out where those biases are. It's not a question of if bias exists. You know they exist. But what are those biases? And how do you get a client to sort of make sure that they're speaking truly about where they're coming from? And, therefore, what it is that is the most important to them as you're building and helping them to learn about the effectiveness and impact of their programs?

[00:17:24] RT: Okay. Let's keep moving down this engagement process for a little bit. You've had your conversations. You've listened. You've established a bit of a relationship or a decent and good relationship. They want to partner with you. How do you go about structuring the processes and the elements of monitoring evaluation inside the work that they're doing so that you have this capacity to actually collect the data that you're going to need to help them? How do you do that?

[00:17:51] EF: Yeah. Our work is rooted in having – the key starting point is having clear questions. Clear questions, learning questions that are most critical to informing change informing the practice or the work that they're doing. The way we approach this is, first of all, to ensure that there's conceptual clarity to the work that they seek to do. Is it logic in their program design? Do these assumptions they're making about, "If we do X, then it will lead to Y. And then four people's lives will be improved."

We want to make sure that that theory is conceptual logic in the way that they expect to change the world. And oftentimes, in that conversation, you can see where they're making certain assumptions about change. And those assumptions miss key factors about the challenges, the barriers and even potential enablers that are part of the work that they're doing. They may skip a big piece to say, "If we do give people X amount of resources, then they will change their behavior and take these actions that will improve their lives." But there are a whole lot of systemic barriers, for instance, right?

Our processes to make sure that they're making all of those connections and that they are not having inconsistencies in the logic. Once we get the logic, then we get clear on what are those sort of results that would be important? And how do you ensure that those results have measurable indicators that you can hold them accountable for? It's not good enough to make sweeping claims.

In the recent conversation about advancing equity, we saw for instance post George Floyd incidents that everyone's familiar, and George Floyd murder, and the global reckoning with inequities, racial, and gender, and other inequities, organizations across the globe were making sweeping claims about their commitment to equity. You could count the number of organizations and institutions that we're talking about equity.

But for me, what are those explicit and intentional ways in which they're going to advance equity or reduce in equity through the work that they do? We help organizations go from clarifying exactly what it is that you're solving for. What inequity you're going to address? Then we get to for whom is this going to be important? What are those specific changes that we'll see if you're indeed making a difference in advancing equity? And then how do we get valid and reliable insights that is not biased to ensure that we are actually seeing change and we can hold ourselves accountable for those changes?

We follow that logic from conceptual clarity to measurable indicators. And then to the methodology that we can collect data and information that can make that connection up and down. Often, we hear people talk about a theory of change. Is that theory of change, which is that idea of how you expect the world to change, has conceptual logic? And does it has

empirical supportive insights that are valid that can make that connection? That's kind of how we do our work.

[00:21:29] RT: You're reading over my shoulder at my questions here as you go along. Let's keep going with it. I noted in your website and the projects that you work on, you do reference this theory of change. That phrase for a lot of listeners is probably not necessarily familiar to them. Let's begin. Because it's a pretty important part of how you're helping organizations and what you deliver on. When you use the phrase theory of change, what is it that that means specifically? And why is it important for you to help them establish a theory of change?

[00:22:04] EF: What theory of change is exactly as it implies in the name? It's a theory of how you see, believe the world will be different. And what are the factors that will – the sequence of events and the key elements that will need to be changed in order to reach some future state?

For instance, if you believe that low-income families can improve their access to education and achieve better outcomes for their children, we want to know – a theory of change is how do you expect the sequence of things that will result in that outcome, which is families educating their kids who've gone from high school into postsecondary and such. Your theory might be, for instance, that it starts with families. Families having access to good schools. Therefore, if you help folks to access information about how to navigate the educational system. And then if you give them wraparound services in terms of making sure that they have nutritious meals. And then if you also expose parents to engage in schools, that is a theory of change.

Getting family access to education. Giving them access to services for all of the health and otherwise, and proper nutrition, the confluence of those things will lead to the outcomes. That's your theory of change. But in that theory of change, you believe that there's a time sequence to that. That you cannot get to those things unless you first build the systems to break down the barriers to access to information, the barriers to access to other services that families need. nd so, your theory then is if we invest in these things in this sequence, in these phases, then that will lead ultimately to a world where we have better-educated kids and for low-income families. That is a theory of change.

Not every organization have the same theory of change. Some based on their values, going back to values again, believe that it's all about, I would say, basic education. That if you don't start with basic education, you're never going to get the later education. Some believe that it's all about family life, and family structure, and family values. Some believe it's about the systems and community. What communities living? Good housing and such. What is most salient in your theory of change is influenced by sometimes maybe your politics, maybe your religion, maybe just your experience in the world. Theories of change vary by organizational, I would say, history, culture, and context.

[00:25:06] RT: And you have a diverse experience working with multiple kinds of theories of change. Because I would imagine every client, every organization has got some customization or unique qualities to their theory of change. When you first hear their description of it, are there some bits and parts of a theory of change that must be part of the process in order for it to have a chance? Or is it possible that each one can be unique in itself and still hold together as a whole theory?

[00:25:37] EF: Some clear constants in theories of change in my view. I think some of the things that are common in theories of change is the ability to identify whether your theory is built upon individual changes, or institutional changes, or system changes. And you will be able to sort of track in theories of change what is the anchor within them. But they all have some element of individual-level intervention, institutional change, or systemic change. Right? And you will find these – and sometimes theories of change is a combination of these. Some theories of change emphasize the individual. But I think you'll find across theories of change these different, I would say, units of analysis or level intervention are common. And people sometime are explicit that we're focusing on an individual level. Or we're changing institutions how they operate. Or we're changing the systemic forces that are bigger. And so, you can find these buckets or groups of types of theories of change or types of approaches, the theories of change, often times.

[00:27:02] RT: Okay. You're in a client. Your new client, you're hearing about their theory of change. You've got vast experience in this conversation. Your value add to that conversation is, I'm imagining, either to streamline it, or build it out, or amplify parts, or set something in the background. How does that exchange go so you can arrive at a mutually agreed upon theory of

change that you can support as a consultancy to the client without them feeling like they gave up something essential to what they're trying to do? How do you navigate that in your role?

[00:27:39] EF: It's an iterative process, and that it's a back-and-forth. In a conversation with a client, you are listening, as we said, and you're pressure-testing for logic. And so, does it hold water? Does it have logical consistency? And so, oftentimes, you listen and you take away from that conversation a set of insights that then helps you to articulate both visually and otherwise. And, narratively, what the client said is their theory of change.

Now you bring that back to the client with some questions. Well, I heard this part of it and that. For instance, I've heard you say that if you intervene with families or individuals by giving them skills training and whatever, that then will lead to, for instance, them accessing jobs. But how do you deal with the lack of resources, for instance, to show up transportation? Those are systemic barriers. How do you deal with that? You probably will put those as questions. Because you see a missing middle as we often call it. You'll see an individual-level intervention with the assumption that if you build skills and build competency in an individual, then that will help the individual change their lives.

But then, oftentimes, there are a bunch of systemic barriers. How does a young person get from a part of town that is poorly served by transportation then translates that skills training into taking a job that's across town when they don't have access to transportation and even the resources to get there? Those are some of the inconsistent that oftentimes show up in a theory of change.

Now we pose those as questions to a client and to an organization that says, "All right. You've done training and you've done skills development." And this person passes all the tests and acquires all the skills. Now you have an employer across town who has opportunities open up. But here is a person who lives in a part of town that's underserved in terms of internet, in terms of transportation. What are you going to do directly? Or what are the partnerships that you need potentially to help that person translates those competencies built into the acquisition and retention of a job? They show up on time and not late. Right?

I think those are the kinds of ways that we go back to a client and say, "This is what we heard in the first conversation. And this makes sense. But here is something that we know from experience that is a barrier to low-income folks acquiring skills and translating those into successful and sustained employment. Is that part of your theory and how you're handling that?" That iterative process of probing on unpacking then gets us to – then sometimes they'll say, "Well, that's not what we do. But we're going to have a strategic partnership with Metro to get discounted cards so that they can ride the bus. Or we have a service provider who help people with transportation. And we're going to bring –" now they've added partnership development to broker and address this structural and systemic barrier there about the lack of Internet or the lack of transportation to bridge from skills development into acquisition and retention of employment. We're constantly shining a light on in some gaps in that theory of change or in that logic. And therefore enhancing the client's programmatic intervention so that it maximizes the impact, which is acquisition and retention of employment for low-income clients.

[00:31:44] RT: If I follow what you're saying, I'm imagining that they hire you to help them develop their theory of change, to establish some monitoring evaluation and learning process so that their programs can have impact. And you come in and your process wakes them up to blind spots to some degree. Misses that they have unexplored assumptions. Just flat gaps they haven't thought about. Therefore, I'm imagining that there could be times in this relationship where they're thinking, "Man, why did we have these folks in here? They're making our life way more complicated than we thought we needed it to be." Given the possibility of that, as a consultant and a partner, how do you shepherd them along relationally while you take them on this rigorous journey to build their capacities to do this work and have impact and be efficient in their work? What have you learned about the nurturing of the relationship when you have those truth-telling moments and how you take care of them and keep them moving?

[00:32:41] EF: Possibly built on trust, Rick. And when a client hires us to help them, we have to spend the time building that trust. First of all, they hire us because we have demonstrated experiences and a track record of successfully working with others. They know that. But that ability to be thought partners in a trusting relationship is the next level.

And so, you have to indeed establish that with a client that, at the end of the day, that ability to you know have that, to navigate that tension when you're are kind of pointing the glaring gaps or

challenging them. It's like in any relationship, the bedrock of that relationship is that we're all out for the same thing. And that this is built on a trust that we're going to be authentic in that exchange.

And so, yes, the conversations are often fraught with tension. And sometimes you're calling out things that they are either uncomfortable with and/or that exposes the level of investment they're making is not sufficient. But we're not just raising those issues. We're also helping them to problem, right? Which they appreciate.

For instance, in the case I just referenced where a client realized, "Oh, our job here, we're a training entity. Job training. And for minority youth. We don't have money to send buses out to take people to jobs. We can't give them stipends and such." Then part of what we are doing with them is that is helping them to realize that they don't have to do it all.

And so, we also help them to see the opportunity for partnership development or for accessing other services to enrich their program. We are bringing things to the table. Or we're going out and we're researching it and helping them to navigate that. In a sense then, we're not just exposing weaknesses and gaps. But we're also doing that with the intention to help them to problems solve around that by either bringing data and insights to the table or helping to appoint them to resources that can strengthen their position.

At the end of the day, we remind them that it's not about us. It's about the people, the beneficiaries. Those who are – whose lives we want to make better. We're in it to basically contribute to that. This is not about ego. It's not about us. It's really about people. And I think that shared commitment to that change that those beneficiary is what blunts some of the potential ego or potential tension that comes up in the conversations.

[00:35:44] RT: Because you do a good job of creating a relational basis before you get into the hard stuff that may come and the iterations that they know that you're on their side trying to – it's a very leading question here, by the way, that you're on their side to get the outcomes that they're trying to get.

[00:36:03] EF: Social science, we call it. We call it rapport building. You have to build rapport with your client. You have to build rapport when you're engaging with communities. More directly, you have to build that trust and build that rapport in order for you to be able to have that honest, truth-telling conversation.

And so, that's one of the reasons why we like to have deep partnerships with clients we work with over multiple years, over multiple engagements. Those are some of our best – I would say, we do some of our best work in those instances, because they know us. And we've invested in that.

We have partners that we've worked with for successive rounds. And so, they they come back to us because, again, they value that deeper understanding of who they are. And the fact that we have been through this a few times and built some credibility and trust.

[00:37:01] RT: Okay. Let's shift gears a little bit. When I first met you and we spent time together working, you were working in a large foundation. You're an employee. You're part of a team. You're in a big, giant operation. And then I find out that Elvis has left the mothership and gone off on his own. I'm curious to find out what – for you personally and professionally, why the shift? What caused you to leave? There's certain kind of security there. Then you start your own gig. What was pulling you in that direction? And how's that been going since you made that move?

[00:37:33] EF: I think I've been in this – as I've said now, I started my professional career at some 30 years ago. And I've gone through – had the experience of different experiences in academia and research settings and such. And so, there comes a point at which that need for change is very palpable. But it's not only the desire for change. It's also what I have to offer is also now different in the sense that all of those experiences and the confidence of those experiences now positions me to be able to bring it together in a way that I could not have done before at a different point in my career.

In other words, I felt that I was at the right point in my career to put it all together, to start my own enterprise. But I also wanted to do some things that was, I would say, different from what my experiences were. Meaning, I wanted to mentor young people and spend more time on that.

Many organizations that don't value that. And there is not funds for that. You just have to do the work of the organization to pursue their strategic goals.

I wanted to choose to work on certain things that had a very strong social justice and equity focus, right? Because I also, I dare say, started thinking about what is the legacy I want to leave in this world? And what do I want to get up for in the morning? And so, all of those things sort of led me to the point where I took advantage of a change in the mothership as an offramp into that new way of showing up in the world.

It's marrying my passion for social justice with my deep experience technically. And also, that desire to mentor and train young people in the space that I work. And so, that led me to starting Sankofa Consulting. And it's been going well. We've grown unexpectedly fast over the seven years since the organization has been in existence. We have grown in the number of clients we've worked for. The depth of the relationship, as I've mentioned, with the partners. Most of our business come through referrals or repeat business. That's always affirming when someone comes back to you. Not just give you the first opportunity to work with them. But come back to you for subsequent support and such. And the size of our team has grown. Diversity of our team has grown. All of those things are things that we didn't expect at the speed in which we've been able to achieve that. But I think that's a testament to the global network that I was able to build in my various experiences throughout my career up until this point.

[00:40:49] RT: Okay. Let's shift yours here. This podcast is called 10,000 Swamp Leaders. Elvis, I'd like to think that we're all in a journey of this conversation of leadership. And there are younger people behind us on the trail. And so, in a tribal sense, the elders would be providing lessons learned to those coming behind. Let's talk a little bit about your views on leading in itself. Let's start with the basic one. From your perspective, what does leading mean? What is your definition? Or how do you interpret the purpose?

[00:41:18] EF: Leading for me is about setting an example that others can follow. In all that you do, leadership is about being authentic about who you are. It's about having integrity that people can emulate. It's about showing up in the most, I would say, honest way and authentic way for me that others can see it in action. It's not about what you say. The old adage. It's about what you do. That's what it is for me. It's about the ability for people to trust you and feel like they are

being well served by following something that you do or seeing what you do, something that they want to take up. That's maybe that's more akin to a servant-type leadership that I model, that I ascribe to. But for me, that's what it comes down to.

[00:42:21] RT: Okay. We tend to learn more from our leadership mistakes than we do our successes. I ask this to everybody. If you would, would you mind sharing some experience you had when you were choosing to lead and trying to lead and it didn't go well? And what did you learn about yourself in that process?

[00:42:37] EF: Oh, my goodness. That's a good one. People matter in all aspect. But what I mean by that is you have to pay attention to the whole person. Not just their professional work or all that. But you have to be attentive to who they are as individuals. In terms of their families, their challenges, and how they show up at work.

I don't think I was as attuned to that as much then as I am now. And I think the areas that I've realized that I needed to pay more attention to is to get to know who it is that I am working with. Who are the people that I'm supervising, I'm guiding as people?

When I do interviews, people know that one of the questions I'm famous for asking is I've seen your resume and I've read it. But I want to know who you are. And so, talk to me about the person in front of me. What brought you here? What motivates you? What drives you? I'm not interested in all of the stuff, your pass jobs, and trainings, and certification, and credentials. That is obvious to me.

And so, I do that because, for me, that is not just – it's necessary for me in order for me to be – I would say, fully lead and fully support someone in mentoring and in their development. I think that is a maturity that I have come into now. And I've seen in the past where my leadership was not as strong. Because I was focused more on the technical perhaps than some of the personal, the whole person. And so, this is for me one of the big differences.

[00:44:39] RT: Okay. We are living in a time and place where cultural, economic, political arenas have elevated the heat in our society. Given the state of the world, how do you take care of yourself, and your family, and your team and help navigate through these, really, for a lot of

us, uncharted waters with a lot at stake? I mean, you've been around for a long time. You know some stuff. What council do you have for navigating this kind of condition?

[00:45:10] EF: Well, I think it's very, indeed, a difficult time navigating so many political and generational challenges. And I think it's that sense being open to constantly upgrading your skills and adapting, right? For instance, in the work that I do and in the role I play as a leader, I am supervising and managing people who are much younger than I am. That generational difference in terms of expectations of what work is and how they should basically show up in the workplace is something that I have to adjust to, right?

I'm navigating issues not only of generational difference. But I'm navigating issues of different political views that people show up with. And navigating gender difference, sexual identity differences, right? Some of these things, when I was growing up, the world embraced these things in completely different ways. Or did not. And so, that constant openness and willingness to see things from different perspective is part of what I have to do to keep being healthy and to keep being effective.

But I also have to take care of myself in the process as well in terms of not only getting new insights. Making time to learn. To listen to great podcasts. To read new things and read broadly is important. And then physically taking care of myself, which is making sure that I am taking care of my health. Taking care of my relationships. And not ignoring any of those things. Being a fully rounded person by staying fresh and aware. Being open to change and showing up as the most whole and healthy person is what makes me happy, but also makes me effective.

[00:47:21] RT: Right. We're coming down to the end here. What's ahead for you?

[00:47:25] EF: Balancing my life as a grandparent with an organization that's now grown. And figuring out how I want to show up in the organization and show up in those different roles that I have in my family life. And so, what is that right balance between how much I want to continue to be involved in the depths and guts of the work? And how much do I want to sort of seed control and let others step up? What is that right structure to the company that keeps me really enjoying where I am in my life right now? Devoting time to being a parent and grandparent.

Having fun cooking and traveling and all those things that I like to do. How do I make it work is the thing?

[00:48:18] RT: Okay. Last question. What gives you hope right now?

[00:48:22] EF: What gives me hope? I think it's the narrowing of gaps in terms of access to information in the world. I believe that while there's lots of things not to like about this internet age, there's a lot of things really to like. I think I travel a lot. And in the far reaches of hinterlands and developing countries, people have access to information. And people have the technologies that they did not have before. I think that's a good thing. And I think that will keep making the world smaller. And I think innovation and ideas will come from the most distant, unexpected places.

And then the other thing that gave me hope was the sense of common values around the fact that we must deal with the remaining inequities and differences among people. The global reckoning with equity was indeed global. And we saw that happening where it wasn't just an American conversation anymore. But it was a conversation that was shared across the globe. The issues may be different. But people have this desire for change. And I think those are things that I continue to believe in. Because I think it will get to a world where people – their shared values connects them and their access to information become easier and more consistent. I think those are things that I latch on to. And I think that will transform and address the issues, be it climate change, and equity, or whatever that there is out there.

[00:50:08] RT: Great. Thank you. Okay. For listeners, we will post in the show notes some resources that Elvis has got. I know in your website you've got some writings and some points of view that are really important to expand great deal on the ideas and thoughts you put forward in the podcast today. We'll make sure that people have access to that information in the show notes in the podcast.

Elvis Fraser, first of all, it's just dang good to see you again and talk to you. I really enjoyed it. Thank you for coming to the podcast. Thank you for doing the work that you do in the world.

[00:50:39] EF: Thanks for the opportunity, Rick. It's likewise a pleasure to see you and to have this conversation with you.

[00:50:44] RT: Good luck.

[OUTRO]

[00:50:45] RT: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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