Lee: My name is Lee Rhyant, Lee [Ranis 00:00:02] Rhyant. I like to be identified as Lee. I’m from Fort Pierce, Florida. I was actually born in Georgia, Dalton, Georgia. At the age of five, I moved to Fort Pierce, Florida. That’s where I was raised. That’s where I went to high school. My mother and father were actually sharecroppers in Georgia. My mother met my father as he came from Sasser, all been in Georgia from Eufaula, Alabama.

My mother’s parents passed early. It was a very interesting lifestyle. I’m one of the few people that is really on their birth certificate you will see sharecropper. My father’s background was when we moved to Florida became a migrant worker. They became migrant workers. That’s how I like to be remembered in recognition of them. Lee Rhyant, son of a real life sharecropper and proud migrant workers’ kids. They moved up. That’s where I care to be remembered. Both are passed now. Both were great people.

Speaker 2: Tell us your story.

Lee: My story is a very interesting story you’ve heard a lot about life. First, I truly believe that you have two advantages in this world. My Mom once told me that at a very early age. One was to be born in this country and the other one to be born to good parents. I had both of those advantages. At the time I thought she was absolutely out of her mind. I thought she was the most bizarre person; because her life hadn’t been easy. She kept telling me I had those two advantages. I lived that life with that subliminal thought in my mind. It came true.

At the age of … We were born in Georgia. Mom did a lot of … Life was so difficult in Southern Georgia that Mom paid off our debts to shareholders and sharecroppers and moved us to Florida. At the time my uncle had said Florida was a land of milk and honey. Florida turned out not to be the land of milk and honey. His eyesight and his mind was drastically flawed. Mom and Dad, they became migrant workers which was only an elevated form of sharecropping which at that time was just amazing. We were around migrant camps, a place named Ideal Holding.

The most interesting thing was Mom had heard that you could get over with an education. Mom became obsessed with us getting an education. She saw education and the church as the only way that we were going to survive. The only hope was that we would get education. She forced us to start reading, learning and going to church.

When that portion of my life began at six years old, we joined Mount Moriah Primitive Church. I was very fortunate to at that time meet my peers that I grew up with. Throughout the years we stayed in church, Eddie, Calvin. Calvin went to another church, Eddie, Delores, Mildred. Also a very interesting thing, my lifelong mentor Mr. Little would go to the church.

The most fascinating thing in the world, the NRSC was the choir director. He ended up being my high school teacher, my choral teacher and everything. As we went through that part of life, the other structure that was thrown in there was that Mom didn’t play about school. She didn’t play about school. She didn’t play about school to the point that she hadn’t finished high school. She would go to night school. She was just fanatic about school.

I told a guy, a guy said, “Why would you sit up in class and pay attention all day?” I would tell him, “Sir, it has nothing to do but I’m scared of my mother, because it can be snowing or hurricane can be outside. When parent/teachers night come there’s going to be one lady going to show up. If I haven’t done right, all hell is going to break lose. I’m going to do right.”

Mom was that type of person. We went to high school. We went through elementary school. Mom would always show up. Education was paramount. I’m one of eight. To show you how education was paramount, if I’m not mistaken, all eight are college grads. Seven of the eight have post gradual degrees. Mom did not play. Education was what was almost the vessel of life.

The other thing was during the formative years, I was fortunate enough to meet my other lifelong mentor Mr. Hines who taught us in sixth grade. Mr. Hines was more than a sixth grade teacher. He was over the Boy Scouts. The amazing thing about that was that the Boy Scouts became a way of giving me a structure, trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and [inaudible 00:05:57]. I do my duty to God and my country. Mr. Hines is the one who enforced it which was different than for most African Americans. Mr. Hines was also my sixth grade teacher.

Now I have these different folks in my life, Mr. Little, the structure at Mount Moriah, these friends that are raised pretty much the same, Mr. Hines and the school system, a very almost prudently fanatical mother and a father who would work hard. My Dad was not, my mother was the leader and Dad was the person that just worked. He just worked. I understood his work ethic. He never would not go to work. He always would go to work.

I’m developing this whole what I would call psychoticness about success, hard work, education, follow the rules, fanaticism. I had this very good structure with Mr. Little, Mr. Hines and the Boy Scouts played a great role. That’s what I considered and the social institutions which I considered to be the best in the world was Means Court Elementary School, Frances K Sweet, Chester [Armor 00:07:24], Lincoln Park Academy. It was almost like a village at that time was raising me.

A lot of my skills began to be open. The thing that Mr. Little taught me that was just plain funny was that I developed a cultural skill with very Biblical knowledge but because it was music, I also learned how to sing correctly. I learned the definitions. Mr. Hines taught me about how to act, how to take challenges, how to live nicely. Mother taught me so many life lessons. It was unbelievable. It was very interesting.

From that point on in high school I started becoming the leader. I was Student Council President. When they merged the African American to the White Student Council, I was the first state vice president. All of a sudden I was in the Honor Society. I was comfortable because all the time it was Eddie and Calvin. I was in school plays. I was culturally brought up.

Also I was allowed because my cousins and my friends to be brought up on the streets. I had this very interesting dichotomy that my wife says, “The thugs would follow me because I hang around with them.” They had a respect. I was big. That gave me a lot of leadership skills with how to handle the 17th Street Group as they would call it now a gang versus the project group which they would call a gang versus the Means Court Group which they would call the gang.

In those days you just fought and went home; most of the time you played basketball, football and pool against each other. It was very interesting. That’s how my life started. It was a very … I look back over it now, it was almost a perfect storm where I started off at the lowest point that anyone can start in this country and through a very interesting thing of having those two things, being born in this country where I can get into the right social institutions and being born to what I call outstanding parents and a mother who literally I thought at times was either going to raise me correctly or kill me. One of the two things was going to happen.

A very good social group, very good peer group, that’s how Lee Rhyant developed, came out of high school, honor student. I was given offers to a lot of schools. I found it very interesting at the academies, the guy that was recruiting us from the academies.

At that time, the states, the US Senator was Smathers. I’ll never forget he insulted me. I had done very good on a test and stuff. He kept saying, “You will have to go to the prep academy.” I kept saying, “Why would I have to go to the prep academy?” I don’t think he was comfortable being from the state of Florida of nominating an African American unless he nominated him with a caveat that he would go to the prep academy.

I will say this; a lot of the whites were very upset with him because they realized that the reason that I wasn’t nominated to the academy wasn’t that he wouldn’t nominate me. He was not comfortable with nominating an African American as an equal which was turned out to be not good for me because I don’t know if I could have stood the 9:00 curfew or the 9:30 curfew, I don’t think socially I would have adjusted to that ballgame anyway.

In high school, one of the most interesting things happened. There was this young lady, a very beautiful young lady walking down the streets. She had an apple. I was standing outside a shoeshine stand and I took her apple. I expected her to run off. She came back and hit me in the back with a rock. A series of very psychotic events by her when I saw her at the school she was trying to fight me. That ended up being my wife. We’ve been married 41 years.

That lady who ended up being a career school teacher has a master’s, is going to get a doctorate, honorary doctorate this weekend, it’s interesting how that was the other part of the puzzle that just seemed to have fallen into place. Probably the greatest person like my Mom, almost identical even named Evelyn like my Mom. Her house number was 517 which was my birthday.

It was almost like it’s inevitable for this lady to be my wife. She became my wife. We’ve been married for 41 years. We have physician sons, both sons, twin boys, both are medical doctors. I said that the power of a rock, someone throwing a rock in your back is everlasting. On this rock I will build your family. That’s what happened with my family.

The interesting thing is that I went to the Bethune-Cookman University and took a lot of courses. My freshman year because of academics, I was in this excel group that they were having. We got all our freshman English, math and all this stuff done in real quick sessions. I’ve been schooled. I was taking all these courses. I came back with grease and everything.

The interesting thing is as you know when you look back, that really doesn’t matter that much the undergrad. What I really remember about Bethune was the cultural advantage I got. The teachers were very cuddling. I was able to develop my leadership skills, the choir was a family which I would attribute to saying kept me out of trouble.

The choir was a major fundraiser for the school. I had to spend a lot of my time traveling with the choir or rehearsing with the choir. The people in the choir were outstanding. They were also family. It cut down on some of the bad stuff I would have probably done while I was in school. Mr. [Demps 00:14:25] was an excellent friend and leader. Being the president required more than just the obvious things because you were the leader. You were part of the family. You made sure everything went right. That gave me a great advantage.

Then I pledged to the Fraternity Omega Psi Phi which had a lot of people that emerged throughout their lives as great leaders. The thing about Omega, it gave me the opportunity to learn poems and forced me to do academics. It also forced a social part of me that I didn’t know I had in me.

I give Bethune a tremendous credit first of all for a great educational core component of my life. The next thing I give the Bethune credit for was allowing me to develop my social and leadership skills and for a nurturing environment that would take a first generation African American through school, through college which is a difficult plight. It takes a lot of nurturing to do that.

When I finished there, General Motors was on campus interviewing people. I went to pick up my roommate who was interviewing. He was dressed very well. In the interview, they had the General, GM at that time this is 1972, they went out to look at finding African American students. They went to African American students that they were going to bring into the industry. They had made a commitment because Civil Rights was becoming, had taken I would say foothold and being more open and being a better citizen of United States. General Motors was very active.

They came and they set up. They brought a bunch of recruiters to Bethune-Cookman College at that time. My roommate and a couple more folks signed up. I came up on campus to talk to them and to pick them up, not part of the interview. Outside came a guy named [Weiss Eckler 00:16:48]. He smoked. He asked me for a match. I don’t know why I had matches but I had matches. I gave him matches. We began the conversation.

The other recruiters would come out, I’m standing outside. They were talking to me. My Mom had always told me, “Always speak correctly. Anytime say the right thing.” She says, “They can look at you and think you’re a fool. When you can open your mouth and remove all doubts.” I said, “Every time they would come over to say to me, I was like, here we go, I got to talk real good and correct.”

The thing that was [Eckler 00:17:24] kept going in and he would invite, he was sending the other recruiters out to talk to me from the different parts of General Motors. I got 14 top interviews, the other kids they got [inaudible 00:17:39]. It’s [inaudible 00:17:42] thing I’d ever seen. After the interview, I started getting these letters in the mail you are invited to come up to interview. I’m sitting there saying, “Hell, I didn’t even have a suit on. I was standing outside in some good old pants and a damn shirt, think top of that.”

A lot of the kids, they thought I had done some [hawkers pokers 00:18:02] or something, but really, they would come out to smoke. I’d been standing over there. He said, “If you go outside there’s this guy outside.” I was the guy outside. I got these interviews. I took several of them. I went up to interview with GM. I would give GM credit. They were outstanding how they had it set up.

Jim [Durrell 00:18:25] was the one and [Weiss Eckler 00:18:27], I hope I’m still pronouncing his name as an Indianapolis. I got to go to some of the other GM plants. Remember at that time, GM was very large, two or three million people, AC spark plug, [inaudible 00:18:40] all these different companies, New Departure, all these great places.

I went and interviewed with them. Out of that, I got five or six job offers. To show you my logic, I decide to take the one closest to Florida thinking that I could be closer to Mom but also a little more selfish, it was the warmest of the two, Indianapolis which turned out to be the biggest lie I’d ever done. I took a job offer to do a job. I accepted a job in Indianapolis. I remember telling Mom, I don’t want to leave her. She told me, “You take your butt away from here. You get up there and go where God is sending you for your opportunity.”

My first day as a quality engineer at Detroit Diesel-Allison Division General Motors, my supervisor was Bob [B. Sacker 00:19:42], he starts me off by showing me writing routings for quality engineering. The first routing that he gave me was this little part that was for a T56 engine used on a C-130. Who would have ever thought it? Who would have ever thought, my very first job assignment was to write quality engineering routings for a part used on a T56 engine which was sold by Detroit Diesel-Allison to a place in Marietta, Georgia for an aircraft named C-130. Who would have ever thought it?

The other part about that too that was so interesting was I came to … I always say this out of just showing you destiny. On my frat, there was a place in Atlanta named Morris Brown. I’d be in Omega and Bethune would play Morris Brown football. We came up here for a football game. We came in Thursday night which all good frat students do so they can hang out with their frat brothers.

One of the frat brothers from Morris Brown told me, there’s a place north of … [inaudible 00:21:11] that might be hiring. He gave me a shirt, a tie. We drove out here. The place was Lockheed Martin. I remember filling out the application. I remember giving it to the guy. I remember before the ink was dry, the guy told me he didn’t have a job. I remember they were very polite. They let me fill it out. They had this process where you, some kind of way they let us in that day. I don’t know what … Before the ink was dry the guy told me he didn’t have a job for me.

What really got to me he said, “I don’t know if we ever will.” That’s what really got to me to the point that while I was on the way back, I took out, I think it was a quarter back then or a nickel. I called my Mom [Cholet 00:21:58]. I told her. She said, “If God be for you nobody could be against you. One of these days he’s going to regret that.” It’s so funny how that played out; how that whole scenario played out some 40 years later I would retire from Lockheed Martin with one of the greatest situations in my life.

I began work at Detroit Diesel-Allison. My Mama had told me to make sure that I always be attentive and look like I’m working. She asked me, “How would they know you?” I said, “They know my name.” She said, “No, how are they going to know what you’re doing?” I was in this hotel. I didn’t have any money. I had $200. I said, “I’m always going to look like I’m working. I’m going to be to work on time. I’m going to look like I want to learn.”

I had this little strategy. I’m sitting there at my desk. No matter what they would give me, I’d always act like I was working. I went to lunch five minutes late. I came back from lunch five minutes early. I left work 15 minutes late. This guy, superintendent from out in the shop, obviously kept walking over.

A year later, my boss calls me, [B. Sacker 00:23:26] who was God knows one of the greatest, nicest people, told me that the superintendent had asked for me to be a supervisor for him. Now, let’s face it, I’m 23 years old, all those folks out there are 40s, they’re 50s and somebody wants me to go out there. I said, “Is this [inaudible 00:23:58]?” That’s what I’m thinking, this is a joke. He said, “No, this is serious.” He said, “He’s asked for you and [Calskey 00:24:07] our boss had said, Dr. Foley said you have to go.”

I went in there and said, “Can I talk to Mr. [Calskey 00:24:13].” He said, “No, the person you need to talk to is Mr. [inaudible 00:24:18] superintendent [inaudible 00:24:19] who asked for you to work for him.” I went and said, “Mr. [inaudible 00:24:25] why did you?” He was big, [inaudible 00:24:28] one of those mean GM superintendents, some rugged looking man, God awful looking man. Every other word that came out of his mouth was a curse word back then.

He told me that, “Every time I passed your desk you were working. Every time I looked at you, you didn’t have an assignment you were out there trying to learn something. I heard you’re always on time.” I’m saying, “Damn, this is going to come back to haunt me.”

That’s when I started to make a long story short, I became a general supervisor at 28, a superintendent, a general superintendent and one of the plant managers at 33 years old. All of that was, I attribute it to my upbringing and the ability because as you know that was a very, very, very young age to be in those jobs.

I might say that 17 times, I’ve been the first African American. I always say that three things that had to happen. You had to perform. You had to have those that didn’t look like you; somebody had to root for you. The other thing is that you also had to have … You couldn’t fail which was looking back at that, I had some precious moment because if you failed you didn’t fail yourself but you failed the succeeding generations.

I have so much respect for those who didn’t look like me that decided to help me because I knew they went through a lot within their racial groups because that was not popular to do it. I’ll give an example. I remember the first time I ate in the cafeteria when Ted [Hartley 00:26:18] walked across the floor to invite me, a white person to walk across the floor to invite me in to eat with him. I said to him, “You don’t have to do this.” Because I knew what he was going to get. He says, “Yes I do.” You have to respect that. You have to respect that. The other thing was that you had to work hard.

Then the next thing was that regardless of whom you were, once you get to those positions, you have to stay there. That’s the hard part, staying there and getting those skills. If people ask me about the hurdles and the things I learned through that, first of all, I would say that labor. Being a supervisor on the floor, I learned to work with labor unions and hourly workers that taught me so much.

I found out that if I could communicate which came from me being from as I stated earlier this common person and having worked in a power plant during the summer, it was, I will say this about the power plant; I was working in the power plant as a maintenance helper.

The thing about the power plant, they were working on generators. The guy from Western House would come down during the summer and work on turbines. I would get to be his assistant. Naturally, when I went to Detroit Diesel-Allison or aircraft engine, it was like being home, people gave me a hell of a lot credit for being a hell of a lot smarter than I was. I was just doing what I had done throughout high school.

The thing that was so interesting was when I went on the shop floor, I realized that skills wise and age wise that I had to humble myself. I had to be this leader. I had to always let them know that I respected their experience and their knowledge because that’s what they expected me in the challenge.

When they would ask me something and say, “You don’t know what the hell you’re doing.” I would say, “No, would you help me?” This guy [inaudible 00:28:29] this guy is like, “What can I do now to him” He goes, “Okay I’ll help you.” “You’ve never done that?” I said, “No, I’m willing to try the first time.” I took away all the guy’s fur. This guy said, “Damn Lee, you won’t let a guy get mad at you?” I said, “You’re supposed to get mad. I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Tolson and those folks, they taught me so much. One of the things that really helped too was that I was assigned the committeeman and the alternate my first year. They were the labor committeeman and alternate. Everybody thought that was the worst thing.

Back then, there was this constant fight between management and the union. My committeeman and alternate was constantly getting in trouble. I was constantly being told to go get them. They had been some of the dumbest predicaments because they got voted not by looking good for management but looking good to their people. That’s one of the things I learned that you have to … There’s a different between you getting deported and them getting voted.

They would just stay in every little thing their little minds could get them into. The labor relations people were always calling, threatening to fire me for not keeping them out of trouble which was impossible. I fired them. In the middle of that process, they taught me a lot about labor. They taught me a lot about working with people. They taught me a lot about respect for what they had to do. That was the thing about labor.

Then I was fortunate enough to have mentors that would allow me to do labor contracts. I actually did the negotiation. I would think about Wilson Barnes. I would think about Bob Brown and those folks that were mentors and Rod Gill. They forced me into situations where I was actually able to learn. That ended up giving me great people skills, great people skills.

I also say this, the GM of Rolls-Royce were probably the greatest developers of skills and teaching. I was a GM scholar. I got to go to, my mentors made sure I went to Gill and Dr. Wallace and all those folks. They made sure I went to all those great schools. MBA from IU, management schools at London Business Schools, MIT, Harvard, they were very special.

I look back over the years and I realize that was very special. The amount of money, the amount of time, to allow a person at my young age particularly to be an African American at that particular time to move and advance that quick in corporate America. To take the [backlash 00:31:43] that they took forth from their peers which I found out later about, was amazing. It was amazing.

I remember the first time; an example was the first time I ate in an executive cafeteria, one of them had told everybody in there, “If you make him feel uncomfortable, I’m going to knock the hell out of you.” It’s easy for me to walk in there and talk smack. That talks a lot, especially when you leave and you go to their churches and to their golf courses. I remember Robert Brown for that.

By developing those skills by training, that’s how I got through, that’s how I got the education. I would say this, I’ve probably had some of the greatest mentors, some of the greatest learning opportunities that any one person could have been afforded.

Back to what mother said about those two advantages, good parents and this country, I don’t know anyone that would have started my plight, that would have had those types of folks in your life with that particular mindset. You have to say you had the best of those two things, to be born in this country and to be born to good parents.

We talk about education. We talk about skills. I want to touch on two things that I’m going to be very honest about. It was raising my kids, my twin boys. When my twin boys were born, I had to go back. They were born and my Mom told me, she says, “Tell me now if you’re going to raise them. If you’re not going to raise them then I’m going to raise them.” She said, “If you and Evelyn are going to raise them, that’s fine. If you’re not I’m going to raise them.”

My Mom had experienced life without her parents early and the difficulties. Mom was going to [inaudible 00:34:01] and she says, “A lot of your buddies don’t want to raise their kids.” She says, “I think they’re cowards.” She says, “I think they’re taking the easy way out.” She says, “If you don’t want to raise your kids you tell me, if you take these kids, you tell me you’re going to raise them.” I’m saying to myself, “I think this lady has got me.”

Here I am with these two twin boys, a young marriage. I had to develop a way to remember that I have to be a father to them. I just couldn’t be a daddy. My Mom, she had said some pretty harsh things about my buddies. I said, “I’m not going to let them call me Dad or father, I’m going to let them call me my first name.” Every time they called me my first name, I’m going to remember I got to live up to it.” They grew up and everybody said, “That’s your Dad.” I said, “Lee.” They grew up calling me Lee.

The older they would get the more they would start slipping in father. When they got to college, it was Dad. It was papasita. It was almost everything that had the connotation of “You’re my Dad.” I’m hearing Mom saying, “You’re doing right.” I remember my changing and going to church. One of the times I didn’t go to … The boy got up and he asked me about why didn’t I go? I was staying home watching football. I started going.

I remember just the events. I remember outside on Friday evenings, coming from long trips, going to their baseball games and their softball games and forcing myself not to go drink and not to go play golf. I remember that sacrifice because work was hard, work was all consuming. I just remember that having had that total commitment to them, to Evelyn and to work. That became something I had to do.

The culmination of that was as my kids would get up in public, I would learn from people that they would talk about their Dad. Their night of graduation from medical school, they had the honor’s program. I’m there thinking there’s an honor’s program about the students.

It just so happens, the first two characters were my two boys. My picture pops up. They were talking about their Dad, Moms, Dad. I’m saying to myself, “Damn I won, she won.” They were saying things like, “A lot of folks said their Dad wasn’t around. I can’t say that. I never experienced not having my Dad. All we had are moments with him. He always made us do right. My Dad is a special Dad.”

I wrote them a letter that I thought they had thrown away. The characters still had that letter. I remember here’s the punch line about that. I remember making conscious decisions of them versus doing other things, conscious decisions of going to their events, just respecting their mother, working, taking stuff at a job that I probably wouldn’t have taken. Going that extra mile and not giving up as a commitment to Evelyn and to Rod and Brod.

I’m sitting there now and I’m realizing that what were the difficult choices were the right choices. I’m also realizing that I am being role modeled by them; how I treated their mother is how they treat their wives. My attitude on work, getting up going to work, all those things and I learned that what mother said I had to be more than a daddy, I had been a father.

I say that by saying the same scapegoats and reasons not to be it that come to my mind. I chose not to do it. Now as they are very, their academics, their achievements, I attribute to Evelyn their mother and I attribute that to me being the father that my Mom wanted me to be versus what I probably would have been, because that’s the dichotomy of it.

Part of my success at work I think had a lot to do with you’re not going to fire me. I got to take care of those kids. I’m not going to face my Mama whether she’s on earth or in heaven. I’m not going to let her down. I’m not going to let them down. Over that period, your personal life does have something to say about your work life. Your personal life will drive you to do things that you wouldn’t do, because I go back to saying being 17 times, being an African American.

I always tell people, there were three things that happened when I normally took a job, three people that didn’t know what the hell was going to go on. The first one was white folks. They had never seen an African American in the job. The next one was African Americans who had never seen an African American in the job and the third one was me because I had never done the damn job. It was three people that was totally shocked every time that that occurred. There had to be a social adjustment for that.

The interesting thing was that, the easiest thing could have been to give up. I also think that my commitment to my family, my commitment to personal excellence for my boys because I wanted to model personal excellence for them. I don’t know if I would sacrifice that for anyone else. The characters that were in that play that were named Evelyn Rhyant, Evelyn Engram, Engram Rhyant which was my wife, one was Evelyn Rhyant which was my Mom. Evelyn [Tombs 00:41:51] Rhyant, Evelyn Engram Rhyant was my wife, [inaudible 00:41:56] and Broderick and Roderick Rhyant which was my kids; those characters were such a great influence. I had such a commitment to them about their personal excellence that that flowed over into the work place.

I say this too, one of the summers, one of my sons worked in the plant. I had a lot of trepidations about my son working a summer job in the plant. Jim [Hammerson 00:42:29] and Wilson Barnes hired my son against my and put him right there in my plant. I wanted him to go to another plant. He worked so hard that I would get feedback about his work ethic. I asked him one day riding home, he said, “I would never embarrass you. You never embarrassed me.” I’m shocked.

In that same conversation, I remember when the doctor told me my Mom would die. My Mom died early. She had pancreatic cancer. I remember the doctor telling me she’d die on the phone. She’s like cancer was going to kill her. I started crying. My son tells me that when that happened, he didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know whether to go outside and fight. He didn’t know whether to run. He didn’t know whether to fall on the floor.

He said, “I had never seen you cry. Here was this guy, I’m thinking invisible.” He said, “I didn’t know what to do.” The same conversation, I said to myself when he told me that, I’ve got to show more emotions. I’ve got to quit being … Because here is the guy that’s telling me he did not know what to do. He had never seen this guy cry.

That changed and my emotions not only with him became more obvious but my emotions to people at work became more obvious. I let them know what made me happy along as what made me sad. I let them know that I wasn’t this mythical non-human character. It’s amazing how as I began to show that vulnerable side or that human side, how my relationship not only with work changed but also my relationship with them changed. They felt that they didn’t have to live up to this almost totally unhuman thing.

I always tell leaders at work, one of the things you have to do is that you have to be that strong leader but you have to be that vulnerable leader so that some people would feel it’s okay to learn. It’s okay not to be perfect.

The thing I learned with my son, I remember besides telling me that he would never embarrass me because I had never embarrassed him, in the same conversation he’s telling me in my darkest hour. Here is this lady who had done all this for me, sacrificed her whole life, I’m finally at a position I can take care of her, all of a sudden she’s taken to a hospital and got pancreatic cancer and she’s going to die.

The doctor tells me I started crying, my darkest hour, my son has no idea what to do. He said, “I didn’t know whether to run. I didn’t know whether to go outside to try to fight somebody. I didn’t know whether to fall on the ground.” He said, “I had never seen you cry. I didn’t know what ….” He said, “I know I was upset. I didn’t know whether to touch you. I didn’t know what to do.”

I said, I learned from that that I had to be more open with my feelings but not only just with my son but with people at work as a leader. I couldn’t be this mystical, unemotional person. I had to let the organization know when I was happy. I had to let the organization know when I was sad. I had to allow them to give feedback, give feelings, emotions to me because when they were doing that I was allowing the organization to grow. I was allowing them to be part of me and to be able to associate with me. It was the most interesting thing when that boy told me he had no idea what to do.

The other thing that I remember about the family is that my wife was a school teacher. I really think my wife personally remembers the guy that she grew up with. She didn’t think this guy could ever take care of her. She said no way that I’m going to trust this character to ever be my total livelihood.

She wanted to keep her job. Plus I think she also said, “I’m going to be my own person.” She has a little sass about her. She says, “I’m going to have my own career.” She ended up being a school teacher. Wherever we would go, we made sure she had her career, outstanding school teacher, outstanding, I tell folks probably one of the best, teacher choice awards, just outstanding, also equally an outstanding mother.

I think that the two plights, her job was as difficult as mine or more difficult. The interesting thing I would go to some of her events, chilly cook offs and all that stuff. The patience, the preparation and the hours that those folks put in I find it, I say this, only the casual idiot will underestimate what they do. She had this little sign, it matters not how much I get paid and all the good stuff and how big my bank account. She had touched the lives of a child.

I find that very interesting because there are students 30 and 40 years still come back and see her. I’ve never had anyone on Christmas morning call me or on any holiday about something I did. The thing about that was that back to how it affected my leadership style, I learned teaching was more communicating and each person you had to communicate to different as she would talk to me about her students.

I also learned that education took people that had skills in educating. I would always when we would have trainings, I would say get somebody here that’s a teacher because people tend to trivialize that these are trained professionals. That always helped me in organization. I would spend more time with the training department making sure we had the right staffing, the right resources.

The other thing that I realized too was that having a plan was different than the planning I had been taught in strategic planning. A teacher’s detailed lesson plan would be phenomenal. I would sneak around and read her detail lesson plan day by day by day where she would get certain outcomes.

I learned that the strategic plans I had to get more into those intricate milestones which I hadn’t done. I was skipping over. I would put a yearly and a monthly plan and say go for it. I’d been learning to get those what we call burn down charts now, the day by day little intervals. I cut those intervals into smaller little segments. I became very successful piggy backing off of her plans. It was amazing which I hadn’t learned at any of all the schools I had gone to.

The other thing too that she taught me was strength. Teachers have a lot of strength. I was amazed at the strength. By talking to her I learned more about females. I learned that females are valuable to the workplace, tremendously valuable. Their approaches might be different but they’re intellect is equal.

I also learned that their sense of accomplishment and all they want is a fair chance from talking to her because what would hurt her more is that when some person would come in and say, “Oh by the way you’re a woman.” She would have wanted just to compete with them straight up. She would say, “Forget that, let me take your bat on one-on-one, just ignore that I’m over here.”

In the work place, I would always imagine that if she was in the workplace, how would I want her to be treated? It was amazing how that changed how I treated females in the workplace because my relationship with her, my understanding of how hard she worked and how much input she would say, “if they would only listen to me and be truthful.” If they had listened to her, she would have some creative ideas. When we would take walks, I would learn so much about the female population.

When I would talk to my sons, I would learn a lot about the generational gap because there was a gap. I learned how to communicate and I learned all that. I cannot just sit here and say family does not dictate who you are. It also influences how you behave in the workplace. It really did and so much of my success was that. That’s part I wanted to … I knew it seems like a different approach to family.

I always say, “At the end of the day, half of everything I got, my wife can have at any time she wants to divorce me with no problem. My sons, they can get theirs”, because I can attribute a lot of my success is growing up with them and understanding them and also understanding how to be more of a servant leader versus a dictatorial, inconsiderate leader.

The other thing I might say too is technology. You’re talking about a character that grew up with me that you remember when I grew up we’re talking about starting with the damn telephone. I mean literally party line telephone. Do you remember when the phone, somebody on there, you’re talking to the person and the other person gets on there and says, “Will you get off the phone so we can use the phone?” Television channels were, you’re talking about black and white television with two or three channels. You’re playing with the antennae.

You’re talking about progressing to maybe six channels. You’re talking about 45 records. You’re talking about all this stuff that now seems straight. Remember I’m going through the typewriters. I remember this. I remember literally threatening to fire half of the people in clerical because they would use the word processor, half of them, literally had a boycott. I remember trying to put the computer in and people taking baseball bets to where we’d put them.

I remember getting promoted because I got a package to the West Coast in three days. Hell, they do it in milliseconds now. My benchmark is totally different. I say this to say as I would talk to my sons, I began to realize that there was only one person that really had to make the change. There was only one person to make the change. There was me. They couldn’t go back and relive all this old stuff I had lived. They’d sit there when I’d tell them about the good old days, they smile but they were saying, “I got a smile but I don’t know much more about it.”

The person that had the bridge of communication gap or the technology gap was me. By them I was able to bridge the technology gap. Then I found out at work I would have younger mentees and they would hit me to the latest and greatest. I’d come in, I’ll never forget this. I was sitting up there with a cell phone. She’s playing with my cell phone. She’s put my email on my cell phone. She has put [inaudible 00:55:15] half of the world on my cell phone. I’m sitting there saying to myself how remarkable.

If I hadn’t become open and they would show me how to use the iPad, I’ll never forget this; I go and I’m going to buy these tapes. This little mentee comes in there with this little thing. I’m saying, “What the hell is that?” She said, “That’s an iPod.” “An iPod what’s an iPod?” She said, “Stick it in your ear.” “I’m not going to put that thing in my ear.” She said, “No, here are the earpieces.” She has all this songs on this little thing that I’m in technology and I never related it to.

I’m saying over and over, if it wasn’t for the young generation bringing these new ideas, the thing that had to happen was I had to avail to them that I was willing to learn. I also kept remembering with my own kids. There was only one person that had the opportunity to change, it’s that previous generation. I thought my kids taught me with the technology. Evelyn taught me the new ways of teaching, the new ideas. They also made me understand exposure. I also say that they also kept me very diverse in my thoughts, very diverse.

We’re through with the family. Both of the boys became medical doctors. They dragged me along technology. They dragged me along on the social trends. I’ll say this too, my social trends were different than their social trends. Evelyn’s work environment about teaching skills taught me that you have to have professionals in areas to do things.

I realize I had to keep myself abreast. I had to constantly reinvent myself. I have reinvented myself seven times purposely saying that Lee Rhyant won’t survive. What I had to do was I had to reinvent myself by looking out to one of the best ways I’ve had Ralph [Hiff 00:57:34] describe, Ralph [Hiff 00:57:37] said, “You have to learn to skate to where the hockey puck is going instead of where the hockey puck is.” I learned that now that I’m up there, I had to get to where that hockey puck was going and get my skills and talents and my mindset there instead of where it was or I wasn’t going to survive.

Remember I’m not going to retire in five years. I’ve got to survive this for another 27 years. I also learned that I had to put myself around people that thought different than me because remember Evelyn and my boys and some of their friends, when they were talking, I’m saying, “They think different than I think.” That’s a good thing because if I don’t go into that environment I won’t learn and grow. The workforce is getting every year younger from a different culture with different skills just like the rest of the world and different expectations.

I remember hearing this guy they’re creating something called a micro process all these nuts out there in California and Silicon Valley and all these fools coming up with stuff I couldn’t even pronounce. It was very interesting when I came up with the term I had to reinvent myself to say current and to stay within the rhythm of the world, I had to reinvent myself.

I had to not look at youth, not look at differences as negatives but something I had learned to embrace. I wasn’t going to survive. I wasn’t going to survive. Remember now being 33 most of the people I’m hanging around were 55 years old. There was sure a big gap there.

I say that to say that it became a conscious decision that I would sit down every once or twice and I would take a vacation day. I’d go off and I hate to tell you this, go for sandwich and maybe a bottle of wine. I’d sit down. I’d evaluate Lee Rhyant.

I would write down everything I could think of and say, “Five years from now could he survive it?” Because remember I’ve got to survive it. I’m surviving it from a level where the competition about the nature of it is extreme. I’m in a job where if there’s 25,000 people in the company, there’s only three of those positions of 25,000 plus everybody else is trying to interview for those jobs outside the companies trying to get it.

I came up with, “I’ve got to skate where the hockey puck is going.” I would find myself joining younger groups. I would also find myself going to places where I remember somebody said, “You’re the only black guy there.” I’m sorry to say but I’m not here to be black, I’m here to learn. I said, we would go to the younger groups and they would say, “Why is that old man hanging around the young folks?” I’m trying to learn. I want to stay employed.

I’ll go sign up for courses. They say, “Why are you taking that course? You already got a good job.” “So I can stay with the good job.” I found that in the process I was meeting these interesting people. I was able to come up with a strategy of how I could stay in front of that hockey puck. I knew working hard would differentiate me from a large portion of the group. Working hard just wouldn’t keep me there.

I knew that I’m not going to come off and in any way try to insult your intelligence. I have a certain level of intelligence. I knew I had a certain level of intelligence. I knew there were a lot of smart people in the world too. I had found that out at that level. Now I’m saying, “Damn working hard and being smart and being different is just not going to get me there. I’ve got to have and I’ve got to take my skills and cultivate them within the rhythm of the generation that they are being used.” I can’t wait to get to that gen, I’ve got to cultivate them. They either got to be equal to or further than the generations there use.

A lot of people were trying to bring that generation of skills requirements back to where they were. My strategy was if I was in the year 1985, my skills would be equal. I would get my skills by 1980 to where 1985 skills requirements would be or better. Consequently by doing that, people thought I was some type of genius or some type of phenom.

It was only because I realized the stage where I was. You can only do that by putting yourself around those who think different, those who are different and allowing yourself to grow beyond where you are and realizing that the prior generation is the only one that can make the adjustments.

A lot of times in leadership people don’t realize part of your job as a leader is to continue to make the organization grow. I’m an example of a guy that got up there real quick and was like humpty dumpty on the wall. The only thing is humpty dumpty had a whole lot of people to push his butt off and make him fall. In this particular case, by doing that … I’ll tell you another person that was very interesting to me, when I call names I don’t mean it’s like they’re the great people in my life.

There was a lady named Alice [inaudible 01:03:53]. Alice had the ability to be able to communicate whatever you were. She was the first person that I’d ever seen. If we were doing speeches and someone had written a speech for me; most of the time I write my own speeches, if someone wrote one and said I suggest Lee says this. If Alice read it and she wrote it, she would rewrite it and it would almost be like I had written it. I’m saying this; I’m spooky about this person.

Alice had the ability to sit in a room and to be able to pick out the personalities and the individualities of each person in the room. I began to sit with this Alice character. I said, “There’s something I need to learn from you.” I said, “I don’t care if I listen to Alice.” If I get up and I talk to a group of people, it can be 500 different type folks in here, they all seem as some part look up and say, he said something I recognize.

It’s because of that I learned that communication was a science. It was a pure science. You just can’t walk in a room and arrogantly think you’re going to communicate with everybody. You have to give everybody in that audience the respect of saying, “I’ve got to understand that audience. I owe them the respect of being able to talk to them in a way that they would understand.” Alice taught me that by the way she would rearrange things based on the audience.

I say that as a leader, if you are a 60 year old person walking in a room with people in their 18 to 25 and you are speaking 60 years then they have a right to look at you and say, “You’re out of your rabbit mind.” It’s just like you owe them something. You owe them to say, “I need to understand where they’re coming from. I need to understand where they are”, because they are going to try to understand you. They’re really going to try because they want to gather that knowledge.

As the sender of the message, you owe more to them than to arrogantly just walk in there and say, “Here I am listen to the garbage I’m putting out and oh by the way suck it in.” You owe it to them to say, “I’ve got the understanding.” You owe some forethought. You owe an honest effort to communicate with them with no preconceived notions. Alice taught me that. I don’t know. Alice taught me that.

It cut down all kinds of barriers. It cut down racial barriers. It cut down sexual barriers, intellectual barriers or professional barriers because you are talking about the arrogant bunch of folks. You get these folks from certain discipline. I am an accountant. I am an engineer. I am an HR professional. I am an environmentalist. You’re talking about some labels out there. I am from the school of sociology. I am from the school of business. In other words, they are giving you their criteria to say if you’re not you’re the dumbest sucker in the world, some level of arrogance.

When you see that, in my profession you see that all the time people certify themselves and all that. Alice taught me whether you were talking from the school of sociology, the school of business, the school of religion and science, the school of engineering, accounting or public relations, you owe it to each one of them to make an honest attempt to speak their lingo because you want them to get to where you are and understand what you’re doing.

A lot of times people try to make their audience adjust to them. We’re not talking about lowering standards. There’s a standard that you must maintain, a professional excellence. You also owe to say to the person you are talking to, I’m going to communicate to them within the rhythm of their understanding. I always get so upset when I had an engineering buddy. He’d come and put mathematical equations on the board. I’m sitting there saying these are preachers. What are you proving other than you wrote some stuff on the board? Come on. That’s the other thing too.

It’s also the same within segments of people, within the knowledge base of people, you owe it to that group that you’re speaking to, to have the common decency of interjecting yourself to a point where you give them a fair chance of understanding what you’re saying.

I love this commercial where they have a guy sitting around the table with the kids and he asks the kids a question and the kids give him the dumbest answer he’s ever heard in his mind. The guy says, “Why would you want a turtle?” He says, “I want a turtle because a turtle is so slow the cars won’t hit him.” They were [inaudible 01:09:43] the kid was thinking that. He comes back and says something literally about maybe the turtle just shouldn’t go on the road, wait till the car stops.

That’s what it is, Is that he didn’t sit at the table and try to give all kinds of theories. He interjected him to a place where the kids would understand. He still got that message across.

As I went through corporate America in my GM years, it was interesting. I’m at this level. I come back from a trip abroad. My boss tells me that we’re getting sold. I remember I had spent my whole life 22 years saying I am going to retire from GM. I am going to get this wonderful package that GM would be sending you in the mail all the benefits you would get at 55, 60, 65.

Here I am now 44 years old and the person is telling me that GM is selling off our division when they were going from the aircraft divisions, they’re going totally to cars. I had to be one of the people to help sell the company. I had to be cooperative. That was a nightmare. All of a sudden this great security that I thought I would have forever was gone. I’m too young to retire.

Thank Goodness I had come up with this model of staying there. I’m hoping that the skills I had developed would take me because I’m at this mid-career. The first thought was to punch my balls that told me in the mouth. I said, “That wouldn’t be too good because getting fired won’t look too good on my resume.”

My next thought was to go take my car and drive it into the side of GM building. I said, “No, that won’t make much sense.” Then I said, “You know what? I can do this.” There were people that were literally thinking about committing suicide. When that was announced, there were people thinking literally about committing suicide. Their whole lives were flipped.

They had not been saving because they thought this retirement would be there at the end. There were people that, it was drastic. There was this almost great company that would take care of you the rest of your life that just said, “I no longer want you as my baby. Not only do I not want you as my baby, I’m kicking you out of the nest. You may not be able to fly.” That was a heck of thing. When you’re thinking about your insurance plan, because then you’re forced to replicate, no insurance, no check, light, water, all these things you had taken for granted, the reality sets in.

The interesting thing I’m now thrusting that. I decided to say then I had to market myself. From this moment forward, I’m going to market myself. I looked at that organization. I said, “I’m going to be looking for jobs outside of this organization. I’m also going to be marketing myself within that organization, everybody I meet, everything I do.”

To make a long story short, we were bought by a management group, sponsored by an invested firm. The leaders of the organization chose to make me one of the equity owners. It was just out of respect and hard work. I think going forward and I learned so much, stayed with that.

We stayed with that. We grew the company and we sold it to Rolls-Royce Aero Space. Rolls Royce Aero Space chose to keep me. GM, part of that you just can’t walk away because of all the laws, all the brains of the company you can’t walk away. They chose to keep me. I was with them, became VP. I always went back to that diversity of thought, keeping those skills up, staying to where the hockey puck was going. I keep my skills up. I wouldn’t have survived like most of the people.

Then I got this phone call about some job offers. I had gotten a lot of job offers and then I got this one about for Lockheed. The interesting one about that was that Lockheed wasn’t the best job offer I had. It’s not even close. It wasn’t even close. I figured out that the culture at … Here’s the other thing too is that part of skating to where that hockey puck is, you have to realize when your time is up. If you’re in service, you have to realize your time. The United States Military does a great job of teaching that by the way. They say, “When your time is up your time is up.”

A lot of times people hang around too long, when their regime comes in and out, when their skills or you’re mix-matched for the company, a lot of times people just don’t say, “The time is up, I need to go.”

I realized it was time to go try something else. I had been sending out these resumes. Someone had told Lockheed about me. To make a long story short, I ended up coming to Lockheed. It was a very, very, very good match. I don’t think people realized that being from the engine company I knew a lot about aircraft. Also they didn’t even realize I was the same guy they would have hired years before.

I came to Lockheed … There was nothing in Lockheed that I hadn’t experienced before, maybe at a different time. There was nothing that I saw there that … Because businesses will have this. I always tell young folks, get over this or there won’t be struggles in life. Just take that as a given, just suck that in and go and say, “That warning won’t come hard ball.” It’s going to be uncool. There’s going to be those struggles. The only really thing you have to do is whether you fortify it yourself, financially, socially, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to be able to deal with it.

When I got to Lockheed because of those peaks and valleys of life, I had experienced it. We would have labor strikes being from GM and being from the world I was in, they had two. That made it in a six week period going through diversity issues, I had been through that. Strategic planning, government cycles, skills requirements changing, a lot of these I tell people, don’t mistake that when an invention or a new idea or a new technology emerges over here that that won’t affect your organization.

Those guys out there in the Silicon Valley, everybody took for granted that all that new technology would never affect them. That’s why you ought to look out there and go talk to different people, put yourself in different situations, because most of the people we all know that really got caught up and got defeated was that they didn’t adapt, they didn’t embrace the new technology.

It was so overwhelming until it just changed the whole systems the way we were doing, the processes became different, the business processes became different, the technical processes became different. It all started with this bunch of crazy folks. We thought they were out there in Silicon Valley. People said they’re too far away. In the United States, we got caught up with not making our products to a certain quality level, not using this technology to reduce variation, no matter how you looked at it or the business processes we didn’t streamline them. We didn’t do the lean type things.

The thing is that you have to embrace the technologies. When I came here because I had been forced to do that or I had been a victim of not doing it, I threw it in there, it was a good mesh. I became the executive vice president. I said all that to say social issues, you learned to deal with.

Here’s one thing I tell people, just because you stick your head in the sand like an ostrich doesn’t keep the rest of the world from kicking you in the butt, because it exposes your butt. You just stick your head in that sand, somebody is going to come kick you in the butt. You can’t just say it’s because once you put your head up, the hyena might be real, that’s the mistake a lot of folks make by not going somewhere, learning different things.

One of the things that I constantly harder with schools is make sure you tell these brilliant folks, they will take a hold of that generation because we’re going to die all. I’ve tried everything to stay young. I had more damn vitamins. I had all kinds of crazy fats and all of these would make me live to be older and younger. Do you know what happened to me Dick? I got old. I had so many vitamins, took me a gallon of water to drink, a whole gallon of water. I come in a room and I couldn’t sit through the first two hours before going to the bathroom. I called myself living to eat all these vitamins.

The problem is that change is part of the world. A lot of folks get caught, a lot of institutions do not teach these brilliant minds that they’re going to inherit the generation because the other generations is going to go but guess what’s going to come behind them? Another generation; they’ve got to be able to change and take advantage of technology, take advantage of change and expose themselves to that new brilliance of learning.

Just like they wanted people to embrace their young creative ideas within the rhythm of how they do it, they’ve got to become that person now. A lot of times people will say my way is the only way. I look at my grandson. My grandson is so technologically advanced. It scares me. He’s the dumbest thing I ever seen.

My grandson, I feel awkward when I’m working on the computer, he’s looking at me. I feel inferior. It’s like when the cat is looking at you. You look at the cat and you say if I knew what you were thinking, I think you’re thinking if I was bigger you’d eat me, the cat can’t tell you, it’s like my grandson when I’m around something technological, he just keeps looking at me like, “Oh come on man, you text like you’re 45 years behind time.” You just see that.

The issue becomes it’s whether or not institutions are teaching folks that life learning and life growth is as critical as current learning. I think the academias should demand that they’re taught that. There has to be an honest discussion. People say, “What’s the greatest thing you’ve learned about business?” That I had to grow and learn.

“What was my greatest life accomplishment?” Staying out of jail, easiest thing in the world, easiest thing in the world. They say, “What was your greatest career accomplishment?” Staying out of jail because Dick as you know, the laws and the societal values that when we had, that I had growing up in my time social, political and almost everything is a heck of a lot different than when I grew up. If I hadn’t changed, the things and my way of thinking I would have been put in jail doing jobs the way I’m doing now.

A lot of what I was doing, information is there, a lot of times if I wrote a letter 10 years ago, hell, it’d be 10 years before anybody could see it. Now you write a letter, you put it on the internet the whole damn world can see it. A whole lot of folks are looking at it saying, “What did he say?” Then if you go like on this, I’m on a camera now. I used to deny what I was saying. Now you can’t deny. The guys are, “But Lee don’t you see yourself talking, you can’t say that they did something to the film. You can’t pull that stunt anymore.”

Institutions have to be able to require, more like they just have to be able to take these brilliant minds and teach them not only do you have to learn in the current state. You have to put yourself in the environment where you can learn in the future state. Also you have to integrate that type of knowledge to future generations but communicate it to all those varying generations around you. They’re just not good enough to be smart by yourself. That’s what I take out of life.

I look back over life and business situations and I say, “You’re only as good as your people make you.” Only when they get better do you get better. You have a requirement to make them better. You have a requirement to listen to them. You have a requirement for growth. Every generation has to be better. We have no other choice. I always tell the other generation, “I have no other choice but to depend on you. You’ve got to be better.” Most of the time they are.

The pride generation for comfort zones tend to want to find all the flaws of the next generation because it makes them know that they are needed. They are needed. They’re going to be needed anyway.

The other thing about business environment is that you have to be accountable. We all were talking about Dr. Thompson, Dr. Michelle Thompson. One of the things that she said to me in one of the conversations, she was talking to me about something Reagan said. Reagan is not from our generation and Reagan is from my generation. President said, “Trust but verify.” I thought it was so profound because I can say this for Dr. Thompson, Dr. Thompson is not brush. She’s not afraid to disagree with President Reagan or anyone else, very intelligent.

The thing she was saying about trust and verify was the only thing that she was poignant using that as an example. I was saying to myself, how many times in this generation do we no longer verify something that someone is saying or we just blatantly take it for what it is. We don’t want to put in the research. We don’t want to put in the effort. Everybody wants that instant stuff. We don’t want to take the time to do anything. We just look for instant gratification.

You find that in the corporate world, you have to take that risk. You also have to have some verification that it will work. You have to trust the instincts of your employee. You have to also have something distinctively as some critical evidence that says that it will work. That’s the other thing I tell people. You have to trust. There has to either be a gut feel or some objective evidence that it would work.

We were talking about generational differences. We were talking about changes in the workplace. One of the greatest changes I have noticed in the workplace over the years is in the area of expanding the female role in the workplace. I give a lot of great understanding of that to two or three people. The first one was Wendy [inaudible 01:27:29]. I don’t know Wendy’s name, it was Boyd, it was Wendy Boyd [inaudible 01:27:33] when I knew her.

Wendy taught me so much about … She was the first female supervisor to work for me in the growth on that. Also by having the ability to be able to speak and talk freely, I learned so much about these very brilliant people that my generation had always suppressed. I always thank Wendy for that and so much of my career growth I learned from Wendy, along with so many other of the most talented people I have had on my staff that brought different approaches, tremendous work ethics and almost value systems that just helped me to grow tremendously.

The other one was a very interesting one was when AJ Ann Julia comes into the family. Ann Julia was married to my son, the oldest one, Roderick. Ann Julia was vocal, very vocal. Ann Julia and I were, I would say had a casual relationship starting but Ann Julia was just determined, she was going to make the relationship work with us. She was just determined. She reached out and it was amazing. Bob went to the University of Dayton. Ann Julia has a degree in accounting, went back and got one in elementary education got a master’s. She’s a very great lady.

I’ll never forget this. One time I was talking to Ann Julia and she was telling me she didn’t want any kids. We were lying down talking, just sitting on the floor talking. She said she didn’t want any kids, nine months later Angelia was telling me she was pregnant. It always freaked me out. There was my oldest grandson. One of the things I learned from Ann Julia was that the ability to talk openly with people was that I was able to embrace a generation but also a part of the workforce that I hadn’t really understood.

I remember sitting talking to Ann Julia about going to places and there wouldn’t be always guys always had the ladies had the line and the guys didn’t at the bathrooms. Sitting there, the facilities guy was talking about building, remodeling restrooms. I’m sitting there and I ask him, I said, “What are you doing with the female restrooms?” He looks at me like,” “What are you asking everybody in the room?” I’m saying, “First of all, they were built in the 1960s before we had any respect for the female workplace. How are we going to make sure that they don’t have any lines?”

I remember if I hadn’t talked to Ann Julia, I wouldn’t be … I’m really doing this so I can go back and tell Ann Julia I’m now cognizant of the fact that they are the reasons the lines are longer outside the female restroom than they are outside the male restroom. The growth that has occurred was the growth in my knowledge from talking to her.

He comes back and he says, “To make the lines go away, we have to put in 35% more stalls.” I said, “And?” He said, “You want me to do that?” I said, “You’re damn right I want you to do it.” Because now I’m understanding the biological differences, this doesn’t make that employee any less time any less valuable to the firm. I need this employee to go in there, do their biological duties and then come out and be part of the firm. I would have never thought that hadn’t it been for Ann Julia. I said, “Oh by the way make sure they’ve got somewhere to sit in there and make sure we have mirrors and stuff like that.”

The point behind that was I found just the ability to communicate with her allowed me a greater ability to communicate with Shane, Rania and all these other brilliant minds. When I would communicate, I communicated not from a man to female. I communicated from a human to a human. It was the most amazing thing. Right now I would say, the conversations with her probably 100% of the time will probably leave 70/30, 70% in agreement, 30% in some type of grey area. It’s always that conversation where she will place herself in a situation where she could talk to me.

I found out something else from that too; was that you have to put people in a situation where they can communicate with you. You have to place them in a situation where they’re comfortable. When my wife is walking, she’s comfortable with communicating. I found that with a lot of folks, if I’m sitting behind that desk in the office, they’re not comfortable.

If I sit on the other side of the desk in a chair, they’re comfortable when they’re communicating. I found that a lot of times I had to leave the office and go to where the person, I even stopped and I’ll give this to Ann Julia, I stopped writing to meetings at this big facility. I would walk everywhere I would go because it gave me another way of communicating because she would always find these tactful ways of communicating with me or forcing me to communicate with her.

The point right back to that communication is putting yourself in a situation where people, if you’re the person of authority and you asked a person to come in here and have an open door with me, you’re asking them to bet if it’s a $50,000 job. I’m going to bet $50,000 that this person is an open communicator. You have to place them in an environment of trust or in an environment where they can communicate. That’s what I wanted to say about that.

Also once you get the communication, you start to grow and learn and that’s what I learned about this new person who was totally different that entered into our family. It was very amazing. It had a tremendous change on my approach to leadership my last 15 years in leadership. It made me totally reevaluate and when the other one changed how I viewed the contributions of everyone in the workplace because Wendy was just outstanding, outstanding in getting things done.

The other thing was knowing when it’s your time. We talked a little bit about that. Every leader goes through a different stage in their life, the creative stage, the maintenance stage. You have to decide where you are at that stage. You have to say to yourself in a very conscious way, a personal evaluation. See, everybody can tell every damn body else what they do wrong. I never forget people said, “Why are you so driven? What would make your mother?” My mom would go to Civil Rights Movements and get beat up.

I tell folks, I tell people this one. That was a different day. I asked her at one time that she had come home and she’d been up at St. Augustine. She had gotten beat. I had slipped up there. I knew she was going. She saw me and she told them to hold me back. She knew I wasn’t going to let anybody my Mom, put them dogs and water on her. The guys were holding me. I’m trying to get out there and fight.

I get home and she comes back later that evening, I’m looking for something stoic. I said, “Mom, why did you do that?” I’m looking for something stoic. I’m looking for this great, something stoic, just something great. She says, “I want to be remembered for what I did instead of saying what other people should have done but didn’t do.” I’m saying, “That’s it?” I’m saying … I lived with that.

How many people can sit around and tell you what everybody else should have done, what everybody else didn’t do but they can’t tell you what they did? That’s the honest debate that you have to have as Dr. Thompson was talking about, that verification of yourself. What is it that I’ve done? How have I challenged myself? What are the goals that I’ve had? What is it that I really will remembered by? Saying what everybody else should have done, critiquing the world or did I get in there and what is it that I really did?

That was one of the things that became interesting to me during my career. That was the other silent thing was like with my kids was that secret promise to Mom. That one was when I leave here; can I say what I have really done? Can I get in a room with Lee Rhyant by himself and say, “Did I really do something?” Or am I going to say, “Here’s all the things everybody else should have done, everybody else didn’t do.”

It was like my mother challenged me about raising Rod and Brod. You’re going to be a daddy. Who’s going to raise them you or somebody else? Who’s going to feed them, you or somebody else? That was our challenge. You’re going to be Evelyn’s husband but who’s going to be there? What have you done? Let’s talk about you.

When I left Lockheed, I want to be able to say that I had done something. I had helped the lives of those people. I had helped the lives of the military. I had created. I had done it with dignity and respect. I had done it within the rhythm of my ethical values. I had done it within the fairness of the society that I was in. If I can say that, I’d be okay.

I tell folks, I also left because I got tired of getting better. I knew every year for that organization to exceed I had to get better. I just didn’t know if I was up to it every year to get better and better. I would see these young folks and all these people and their families, they depended on me getting better.

I said I had to make an honest opinion, honest evaluation of myself to say, “Could I do it?” It’s back to that five year plan. I don’t know if in that five year out Dick that it said that I was willing to skate to where that hockey puck was going because that hockey puck might have been going out the damn door. That came my answer, was the best thing for this organization was to bring someone with the energy and the skills. Luckily they had Shane. Luckily the organization was in the career development.

The other thing was saying on the parent thing was when that evaluation of that young man to me or those kids to me will they stand in front of the audience and say, “That guy is my Dad” or will they stand in front of the audience and say, “I don’t want to be able to talk about that.”

Or the academia when you graduate from whatever university are you graduating from, has the institution prepared the person not only with the knowledge that they have to carry out for their current but the ability to accept growth and life learning? Which I think institutions fail because this is much as a given as we know as anything. Can you accept growth and life learning? Because if you can’t bad things will happen.

Can you accept growth and say the growth of the world and your need to growth and your need for life learning because if you can’t accept that you’re not going to progress things as a matter of fact you and I know you’re going to miserably fail or I sit around and talk about what everybody else should have done or are not doing instead of what you are doing.

Then the other thing is where I wanted to be after, I wanted to be remembered for serving somebody other than myself, maybe that was a … I wanted to have the arrogance of saying, “I helped people and didn’t expect them to give me anything else in return.” I just want to be just so arrogant to say, “I could go help them and they don’t have to give me nothing in return.” I want to be able to do that.

I don’t know whether if it’d guilt trip me, I don’t know whether I’m psychotic that way but I want to be able to say, “I helped them and they didn’t get me nothing in return.” Then be able to say as my friend as it works out for me every morning. “If they give you something be humble enough to say thank you and accept it without instantly saying I got to give you something back.”

We have the Lee and Evelyn Rhyant Family Foundation. We give to schools, we give to colleges, we give to organizations, most of the time we do it anonymously.

I spend a lot of time working with universities. I worked with public groups. People asked me to speak I said I don’t need your money. I just want to get there and … One of them, I’ll never forget this small college, they asked me to speak and didn’t think I’d come. Then I came and the students said, “We don’t ever get to speak to people like you.” I said, “That’s why I came.” They said, “What are you getting out of this?” I said, “I’m getting out of this to say I came and talked to people like you when no one else would.”

I also think that I used to … People found out about this some way. I used to go and feed people. I would just be amazed that what I would feel when I would feeding people at a mission or something and you look across the table. You realize that that could have been you. A lot of times you think about people like my Mom, proud folks and Dad, proud folks. You have an obligation to give. You have an obligation to do something of goodness to society, not the people that don’t want to help themselves but people that do want to help themselves.

I think you have an obligation to talk to the mentally ill and physically people in the old folks’ homes and not laugh at the mentally ill or those that are physically impaired. That’s part of being a good human being. I get emotional on that. People say … It was interesting I took one of swine flu shots. I was one of these people that ended up paralyzed temporarily. I’m now thrust into a world with people with, rehab world with people that are treated God, awfully bad.

I’ll never forget this, my chart was mistaken. I fell. This lady that was in there who was a nasty person to everybody but me because I had a different chart, she didn’t, my chart it fell, she assumed I was somebody else and I fell on the ground and I couldn’t get up. These folks that I had probably subconsciously put on a lower pedestal, they’re over there trying to pick me.

I had spent my life probably looking at them and saying, “You’re ugly. You’re physically handicapped or something like that.” They are coming to pick, swine leg me up. The people I’m paying over there totally ignoring me. Then this other nurse walks in the room and she says, “Do you know who that is?” Then they run over there and try. I’m saying to myself, “I got this picture.”

That little group of ugly people and all the folks that I had laughed at, they are trying to get me up. They’re fighting. They had mandate to protect them. When I left there I began to understand I had to be a warrior for those that I can speak for. That’s the other thing about being … Only when you have to be helped do you really understand the value of helping.

No other obligation and then when you have discredits of helping others like I have which was a form of arrogance and you have to be helped by those who don’t know you then you change that whole philosophy. That’s probably why people would say, he has this little, he got that little chip on the shoulder when those accessible routes aren’t there, when the seats aren’t on the bus. I got a chip on my shoulder about that. I got a big chip on my shoulder.

I found out that those folks were human beings, they had the same hearts. I also found out that I couldn’t handle their plight. You find a lot of respect when you land on your butt. Some people you’ve been laughing at, they’re the only ones who give a damn about picking you up. That’s the other thing that I like about this generation, they seem to be more conscious of that than I was.

The other thing about you can get so caught up in that rat race that you remember that there are people out there just trying to live man. That has a lot to do with institutions, community involvement, social engagement, those that walk away from it, find excuses not to do it or [inaudible 01:47:53]. Ignoring those who want to help themselves that maybe or not were given the gifts or the physical attributes to be able we as a society owe them at least a fair chance. People that have those abilities and don’t use them, we owe them a kick in the butt. Those that don’t have them and want them we owe them the enhancement of given them the opportunities.

Those things are why you have service. My Mom and Dad had a lot to do with it. They didn’t have a lot but they sure helped folks. The only reason they helped folks was just to say they helped them. They couldn’t get nothing from it because they were about as poor as the church house mouse.

As I look back over my career, I’ve been a tremendously blessed person. I wish I can take time to sit down and just thank all the people. I took all my high school teachers out to dinner 60 something years old, went and found them and had people bring them and took them to lunch and just told them how much I appreciated in a very humble way and gave them a token of my appreciation.

People say, “Why do you talk to so many groups?” It’s that I don’t want them to go through what I did by learning from my mistakes, a lot of them brought on by own ignorance by the way or my own selfishness. At the end of the day, you have to want to say like Mom, say, “I want to be remembered for what I did instead of saying what other people didn’t do or should have done.” That’s probably my career, tremendous career.

I had a guy once calculate that the odds of me starting as a sharecropper in Georgia, a migrant worker to reaching the levels that I reached was probably you stand a far better chance of buying a lottery ticket. He said it was something like five or 600,000 in one or something close to that and to beat those odds. The greatest thing was doing it within the ethical rhythm and just being remembered, how I wanted to be remembered not for critiquing but for actually doing. That’s what we got.

