

[00:00:00] Well, greetings to everyone in the Cannon nation, Phil Buchanan here. You know, it is said that he who has friends is blessed indeed. And I feel that way every day. And I especially feel that way today as one of my, uh, one of my good friends that I've developed just a wonderful relationships and learned so much from, uh, is joining us for the first of a three part series on leadership.

Captain Dave Adams is a legend within the Navy. Uh, you'll understand why shortly. Uh, he is a submariner by background and [00:01:00] anyone that chooses that path, uh, in military service, not only deserves respect. But deserves the, uh, the platform that we're providing today to, to learn the story, to learn the story that led him on the paths of the Navy, that put him in a position of leadership that saw him, uh, not only operate in environments on the city, but, uh, also, uh, as we'll, we'll learn in a later conversation, operations in the Middle East, Captain Dave Adams, welcome to Cannon Curve.

Well, thanks for that, Phil. And I'm really honored to be here with you, my friend today, I cherish her friendship and, uh, really excited about talking about Navy experiences that, uh, really shaped, shaped my life and made it where, and, uh, it really defines the meaning of service, uh, which I hope will speak to a lot of people on the podcast.

Absolutely. So, uh, Dave, we've got to jump right in. [00:02:00] At what point in your journey did this happen, uh, between ages five and 10? Did it happen as an early teenager? And at what point did you say yes to the military? Uh, that's a direction that I want to go. And then once we plow through that, I want to learn what got you so interested in submarines.

But, uh, let's start first. When did, when did the idea of service to country through the military first become attractive to you. Well, it's a, it's a family tradition. Uh, my father was a command sergeant major in the army. And so I grew up army living on army bases. I grew up really interested in the civil war and interested in the Vietnam war.

And we had great libraries and great books to read about it and things like that. I would go to the library. So at a very young age, I decided I wanted to be an officer in the military. I wanted to lead troops in combat. So at a very young age, and then it just, it just moved on from there. Um, [00:03:00] I moved a lot around the world, but I ended up in, uh, the Army ROTC in, in El Paso, Texas, where I live now.

And, you know, that ended up leading me to, you know, really want to go to West Point, but I ended up in the Navy. So, um, I I went to New Mexico military to prep for West Point, decided to get married at that point. And, um, I looked around and the Navy had the best educational options and the best, um, You know, so I decided to join the Navy and, uh, the rest is history.

I got you. So, you know, I, growing up, it was always my, uh, my perception is the best way to describe it. My perception that if your, uh, your family members were in one branch of the service, then it was almost, uh, expected that if you were going to go into the military, that you would follow in that branch, did your dad ever give you the raspberries because you went the Navy route, uh, how did that work out?

When I was looking around, you know, he was actually being honest. He did [00:04:00] not want me to enlist in the military at all. He wanted me to be an officer or do something different, you know. Um, but when I decided to get married, I decided to enlist. And once we looked at the options, he was very supportive of the Navy.

I'm the only Navy one, but he was very supportive, uh, because of the educational opportunities. And I had a vision from the beginning of, you know, going in enlisted, but, you know, going to college and. Having the Navy paid for that. And I was just very fortunate that I actually turned out. So I enlisted in the Navy.

I became an operator on nuclear submarines and then I applied for this program and they sent me to the University of Texas, which I thank God every day. They did that sort of other places. And, um, and the rest is history really is history. So I was just very fortunate to go from enlisted to get to go to the University of Texas and then get commissioned and then become an officer in submarines and, uh, You know, when I read about this as I was getting ready to enlist, I would just.

I'm really interested in, you know, how nuclear energy [00:05:00] really revolutionized the military. And so I got my minor in nuclear engineering and so, and then went on and did three decades in submarines. All right. So let's, let's talk about the submarines, right? So there, there obviously were some other options available to you, even with your nuclear engineering focus, but, uh, you pursued the submarine route.

What was it that, that just captivated your interest there? Well, um, when you study history and how platforms evolved, and I'd always been interested in

warfare. Um, it was clear to me and still is that the submarine was a very impactful in World War II and then its role in combat at sea in particular was going to be even more so because of the combination of the submarine and the nuclear reactor had very, um, incredible capabilities within the nation and, uh, would be, would be the premier platform in war at sea.

You know, [00:06:00] not carriers, which we need to project power on the land, but warrantsy. And so I really liked that idea. And I started really studying all the previous submarine heroes. And so I really fell in love. So as I went through college, it was clear to me, yeah, I had other choices, but it had to be something.

All right. So you, uh, you get your degree from, uh, the University of Texas, Hookham Horns and all that, uh, all that fun stuff. You and I are now, uh, foes in the SEC as Texas, uh, came to the SEC for the first time this year. But let me ask you about the, the initial experience post, uh, University of Texas. You had, you had been enlisted, you do the education route.

Now you've graduated. Tell, tell us about the commissioning and what happened from that point. So in the enlisted world, you go through nuclear power training, you go to prototype and you go to, you go to a nuclear power school in Orlando, Florida, and then you go to prototype it's changed a little bit now, but you go to prototype.

So you get that, the [00:07:00] academic experience and you immediately go and apply it for six months and qualify. So I knew that experience is very similar in the officer side. So because of the nature of the program I was in, I had to, even though I was in ROTC, I had to go to OCS. Officer Candidate School at the time in Newport, Rhode Island, and then I went through Nuclear Power School as an officer, and then the prototype, the hands on piece.

So it's a year long graduate level program, and then you go to submarine school where you learn about the submarine, and then you finally get to work Arrive at your first submarine. Okay. So the, the whole concept that in the military, you just, you just jump right in. No, there's, there's a lot of academic work that goes in, in preparation for this.

So, uh, you've now gone through that, that year long advanced education process. What was your, uh, what was your first posting? And take us, take us through it. So my first posting, and there was a little bit of a switching of assignments, but I ended up on the [00:08:00] USS Tennessee in Kings Bay, Georgia. So the Tennessee is a, is a ballistic missile submarine.

It carries 24 long range sub launch ballistic missiles. Um, it goes on patrol. There are two crews and it goes on patrol. And I was assigned initially to be the reactor controls assistant, which is, you know, You take care of all the electronics, you have all the guys that take care of the electronics for the reactor.

Um, it was a great submarine and it had just been newly commissioned maybe three or four years before. And it had, you know, the first new, uh, Trident II ballistic missile. And the crew was great. So it was a great submarine. It was a great experience. Uh, and then I moved through assignments there from Reactor Controls Assistant.

For short periods, the Electrical Assistant in charge of the electrical portion. And then I was the Damage Control Assistant, which was in charge of all of the auxiliaries, the damage control of the ship, uh, forward and aft. It's a big job. Uh, and so that was kind of my [00:09:00] formative experience. And then I went on to be the assistant engineer.

I never got an assignment forward, which is the sonar or the navigation. Or the weapons. Um, I was in engineering the whole time, which is uncommon. Uh, wasn't able to break out of that. But, uh, had a fantastic captain by the name of Don Homfelt. Um, um, and it was just, it was just you knew what a submarine right looked like when you were on that submarine.

And, uh, you know, and the younger guys would tell you, you know, that's not the way we do it. We do it right here. And, uh, so it was a great culture and I learned so much from that assignment. All right, so you said that there were two crews. So, uh, you were part of one crew and a crew would, uh, would deploy with a submarine for how long?

It's about three months. So they would take it for three months. You have about two weeks of turnover and upkeep and then three months at sea. And then you would take it. So three months on three months off and three months off is a lot of training and stuff, it's not just like a kick back, but it [00:10:00] is relatively nine to five.

It's a great thing for families on the ballistic missile submarines. And I had a young family by that time. So I had, um, two children at that time. So it was, uh, I chose that assignment because I thought it would be, you know, more family, uh, oriented and it really was, and it was a great experience. All right.

So your path at this stage of the Navy is, um, it sounds relatively linear to, to what you would have anticipated, what you, you would have expected at what

point do you reach as a, as an officer in the Navy, or did you reach as, as your career where it's now time to make a decision of what comes next and, you know, what was that decision and how did you go about making it?

Well, at the end of that tour, because I had been enlisted for five and a half years, including college. So at the end of the, by the time I breached the end of the Tennessee tour, I was approaching 10 years of service in the [00:11:00] Navy. And so my decision came earlier than others. It's like, you know, 20 year was a full retirement and halfway.

So it kind of had to make a decision. Now for me, as someone who had always wanted to serve, it wasn't much of a decision, but it did shape my life because, you know, some people would want An assignment like going to be in our, in our TC instructor or, uh, a lower, less intense assignment, but the, the key assignments are to go work at the nuclear prototype because we're the nuclear Navy, you know, or that's the main thing, or go to the nuclear power school or stay in the engineering track.

Um, I chose another track. Um, my CEO had been to the Naval postgraduate school in Monterey, just about a hundred miles South of where that bridge is. And, um, he said. You know, you should go get your graduate degree. They can't take it away from you, no matter where you end up, because I never selected early for anything, but I'll never regret doing that.

So I chose to go to Monterey and get a graduate degree. And that kind of changed my life because I began reading really [00:12:00] intensely. Writing intensely. So I had some award-winning articles and uh, you know, worked really hard on that craft. I knew the ideas, but, but communicating those and then, uh, you know, and I really loved it there and it was really good for our family.

Um, but halfway through I was selected to go work for the think tank for the CNO Strategic Studies Groups, is what they called it at the time. And so I left and went to Newport. for six months and worked on things like the electromagnetic railgun and strategies and, uh, and that became kind of a, it kind of changed the rest of my career, um, at that point.

All right. So help those of us who, you know, haven't, haven't been in the military. Um, the, the, the school at Monterey, that is, that is something only for the military. And it's a, you know, post grad degree. What's involved in getting accepted there? Who goes and [00:13:00] what is this the Ivy League of the military?

How does how does that a whole thing play out? I would tell you a few things. They do allow civilian like federal civilians there and we love foreign students and their army, Navy, Air Force and Marine students across the board. It's very competitive to get in for it. The aviation community, submarine community, they want you to fly or go to prototype.

So they have a couple of slots. So I, I lucked out and got one of those slots. You would not have been considered career enhancing to go there for, for, for an aviator, for a submarine, you know, so it was some risk going there, but, uh, I knew that, um, I wanted to write, I wanted to explore strategic issues. Uh, so I took that chance, uh, and went to the, uh, And went to the graduate school and it was probably in some ways the best best assignment of my career in order it impacted everything from there.

So, having gone to that graduate school and the writing awards [00:14:00] and the strategic thinking and all of that, it affected everything. Well, of course, those are the those are the, you know, very positive derivative byproducts of that. But the decision to go because, as you said, and I think this is one of the things that are our listeners deal with quite a bit is, you know, the The story on the street is, is always, uh, we, we'd love to joke about that.

You know, conventional wisdom holds that if you're going to be a submarine or, uh, you, you even made the comment that this wasn't necessarily going to be viewed as career enhancing. So what was it that, that told you that, you know, instinctively, intuitively, intellectually that told you, yes, this is the path for me.

How did, how did you make that decision? I was just thinking hard about what would be the most thing I knew I was going to stay in. And I knew a [00:15:00] graduate degree was valuable, and I wanted to have that. And I just kind of had my own thought of the pathway which would be to become an expert in warfare and it was fed by my brother who was an army officer attorney he said look.

You know, this is very prestigious in the army in particular. And you could become, you know, they had had these Jedi planners in, in operation desert storm. And he goes, you could be a Jedi planner and that appealed to me. And so I decided to kind of take that vision and try to make that vision true. Uh, you asked about the Ivy league.

I wanted to make sure I answered the question. It's a middle level school. It's a real graduate school. It's one of the Navy military's only real graduate school where you have professors who write books and these, you have to write a thesis and, uh, but it's not It's not Stanford, right? A lot of professors teach at

Stanford, but you know, a lot of mid grade military officers would never get into those places and people miss that value.

So it offers mid grade officers a chance to get a high level education, a real graduate degree with a [00:16:00] thesis and really, uh, it propels, it propels the Navy. A lot of people say, well, we'll send them to Stanford, we'll send them to MIT and we do some of that, but those are really the exclusives. Uh, so it's a very.

broad group of officers who go there and take advantage of the school. And just to jump fast forward, every time I was involved with a senior Navy officer who had a team working strategy, working technology, About 75 percent of those people went to the Naval postgraduate school. Okay. All right. Well, I love your, I love your description of not necessarily bucking conventional wisdom, but doing your own research, uh, taking the opportunity to talk to others, your brother being one of them.

I'm sure you, you spoke to, uh, to a lot of other, uh, commanding officers and, um, in, in some ways charted your, your own course and it, uh, to your, your point. It played out beautifully. So you're now through, [00:17:00] uh, the, the, the post grad, uh, education. Uh, what was your, uh, what was your next assignment? So, um, you get your next assignment based on You know, your first assignment and then what you're doing and who you're connected with, to be honest.

And so going to postgraduate school made it where, um, I wouldn't necessarily get the most attractive assignment. Uh, because if you're the admiral's aide, you know, and you're not at graduate school, you know, you have a better chance, or if you're working at the nuclear reactor with the people who know other people, you know, so, so there are three assignments on a submarine for the second tour, there's the engineer.

You know, the engineer, the person who's the engineer gets a promotion immediately, a spot. And there's the navigator who runs the forward part of the navigation of the ship. And then there's the weapons officer. And the weapons officer has always been considered the least of those builds, like the least percentage of people get selected to be the weapons officer.

Um, I requested [00:18:00] to be a weapons officer. Um, And my theory was I'm going to be the best weapons officer that ever existed and that's going to what's going to propel my career again, um, a different path in order to do that. And I got the USS Santa Fe out of Pearl Harbor. And, um, and I, and I went

through the school at six months school and then you go out to do your, uh, to do your department at two.

Okay. So, again, Uh, we've got an example of you, uh, if you will, bucking conventional wisdom. Uh, you fought for the least of the three that most people would, uh, would consider, uh, choosing. You fought for that spot. That, that's the thing that, that you wanted most with the, uh, with the intention of being the best weapons officer around.

And so again, it has this, uh, Is this bucking of conventional wisdom or taking the road less [00:19:00] traveled? Is that, uh, has that been kind of your MO, uh, all along your life? Or did you develop that through the military? Where did that come from? Well, I think, I think our family kind of had that. air about as possibly, you know, that we, uh, you know, Southerners who very proud about the military, but weren't afraid to speak up.

I didn't talk about this, but I published, you know, about 17 articles at the Naval Postgraduate School. And none of them were disrespectful, but all of them were like, well, the Navy needs to do better than this. The Navy needs to do better than that. You know, and then some of them won very high awards. A lot of them were at the strategic level.

Um, and, uh, so. That was a little bit of buck in the wisdom, you know, um, when I got selected for the strategic studies group, the Dean of students told me there was no way I could get selected. Uh, but the guy running it said, this guy's, he's got great ideas. And so it went on to be in strategic studies group.

So, and that's kind of how I felt. I wasn't confident and I didn't have to fight hard because nobody wanted those billets, the weapons billets, but, uh, I [00:20:00] wasn't confident that it would work, but I just, I had studied a lot about weapons and what we needed to do. And, you know, There wasn't enough emphasis on weapons, which are warfighting.

I knew the reactor well, but I wanted to bring more knowledge, more experience, and more ability to actually use that nuclear reactor with those weapons to defend the nation and deter those. And it really wasn't a kind of a mission driven, not a personally driven decision. I'd become really like, well, we take tests on the reactor, but we don't take tests on the weapons.

So it just became a little bit of a crusade and, and maybe that's a fault, but that's how I ended up there. I got you. Well, you were, you were very fortunate, uh, because the submarine that you joined, uh, was by all accounts, the top

performing submarine and all the Navy, right? I mean, everything was going perfect on it.

There was really nothing for you to do when you got there. And I, uh, I say that in jest because, uh, I think you got out of the [00:21:00] frying pan and ended the fire. Did you not? Yeah. So I told you that the first submarine I was on really was the best. I mean, we got the top scores in engineering five years in a row, which never happens.

You know, we won the battle efficiency award, which is for the top submarine in the squadron. We had the top enlisted. So I came from, and I came to the Santa Fe, um, and it literally was the worst submarine in the fleet. Um, we had integrity issues. We had watched any issues we had maintenance issues. Um, and, um, you know, the leadership.

including myself, you know, it was about four or five months. We're very discouraged. Um, um, about the way we're heading. We're working hard. We're trying to fix it. Uh, but then our new captain showed up, uh, um, the guy named David Marquet, the book is called Turn the Ship Around if you want to read it. And, uh, uh, that ship became what Phil, uh, described.

It became the best submarine in the fleet by far. Uh, and I learned so much in that experience. So up till [00:22:00] But before he even came, I had already rewritten all the procedures for launching Tomahawks. I've rewritten the procedures for, um, ADCA, you know, the advanced capability torpedo, I tried to do a bunch of innovative things.

I wasn't doing them, but I had the groundwork laid, uh, to do some innovation. And, um, uh, David created an environment where we can actually do it. Well, that, uh, that environment you, you and I have had numerous. anecdotal conversations about, uh, your experience with, uh, Captain Marquis. And, and, you know, as, as you mentioned, just a few minutes ago, wrote a great book, Turn the Ship Around.

And it, it really is a narrative of a wonderful partnership, uh, between you all and, and how you, uh, you actually were able to take. the worst performing submarine in the fleet. And I'm not talking about, you know, from a speed in the water, but just, you know, the day to day operations. [00:23:00] And over a period of time, you turned it around literally, uh, into the best performing.

So, Walk us through, you know, how, how did that happen? How do you take a disastrous situation where morale is, is so low, where people want off that sub

as, as quickly as they can get off? They weren't reenlisting. You couldn't talk a lot of people into joining, uh, that submarine. You intentionally went there, but I, I, I think, How did, how did you and, uh, and Captain Marque and your other officers, uh, how'd you pull it, uh, literally from the depths to, uh, become the top performer?

I'll try to walk you through some of it. We obviously couldn't talk through all of it here, but it just started with the first principle of that. Um, if all you're doing is trying not to make a mistake, you can't do much. And so believe it or not, uh, David Marque came into it with a very open approach [00:24:00] to making mistakes.

And recovering from mistakes and not dwelling on them, but, but actually making it a positive experience and teaching us how to deliberately go through, how to create a culture where mistakes are not made as often. But it's about success. It's not about mistakes. And it's about empowering people to own their piece of the submarine, which means you assign them the P a very junior person would have a piece of equipment that they owned, and they would talk to the captain about it and just creating an environment where maybe talking to me personally would help.

You know, I developed these procedures. The previous captain had not been interested in, in, in doing those. So he comes on board. Uh, David does, we have a tactical inspection in about three weeks. Uh, we haven't done a lot of training and drills on the weapons department side. So I set up some, some simulator type training time to go practice these new procedures that I wanted to do.

And I told the [00:25:00] captain, David, I said, sir, I've created these new procedures. You know, I want to go practice them. Then I want to show them to you to see if you think they're worth anything. And he says, I want to go watch. And I'm like, sir, you know, I don't want you to go watch, but he came and watched, he didn't say anything.

Um, and we practiced those procedures. And then we met back on the submarine and he said, you know, if Dave, if you and I cannot do this for this inspection, nobody can, you No, it's fake confidence a little bit, but, uh, uh, we did these new procedures and, uh, in front of the inspection team, they loved them.

And you don't just get to write procedures in the Navy. What I was doing was again, going against the grain. Um, well, when you, uh, yeah, actually, you

know, when you first said that, I was like, so you're, I understand you're the weapons officer, but you're writing brand new procedures by yourself. For a submarine.

Is that normal? And I think you have just, uh, you've just indicated that's not normal operating procedure, right? And it's one of the reasons I wanted to be a weapons officer because you would not do [00:26:00] that in the engine, you know, period, right? Uh, because you can't take that risk. But, uh, These were things that made things more efficient.

They weren't changing the technical part of it. And, um, so he walked us through, he reinstalled confidence in a number of other ways, but just in me personally, and then I, I mimicked that, you know, um, I had a young weapon control operator. was struggling a little bit. And I, you know, I had a competition for who was going to control the torpedoes and he won it.

And then, you know, I told him, you know, you're going to be the best weapon control operator in the fleet, you know, and we had some ways to get there. And, uh, on that report, they took our procedures and had them adopted by the entire Navy. Um, and, This kid in the report was listed as the best weapons control operator they'd ever seen.

That's how just by instilling confidence in people, things can change. Now you got to do the work to be confident. I mean, I worked months on those procedures that we had a simulator and this [00:27:00] weapons officer spent hours and hours trying to become the best, you know, so it's not just magic, but it is giving, uh, it is giving the authority.

to be innovative, we call it above the waterline innovation. So the things we were doing weren't going to sink the ship or blow up a weapon. And then there's below the waterline innovation, which you're not allowed to do because it will sink the ship. Uh, so that innovate, the acceptance of innovation, uh, the critical thinking, we made a mistake to really go through.

And understand the, why we made the mistake and put actual things in place that would help us as a team apply forceful backups, one another and not make mistakes, uh, was just, it was just golden and then simple things like talking our way to success. Um, they didn't know what he really means. So we need to talk our way to success, but we came up with this idea that when someone came on the ship, we would introduce them as, uh, Admiral Caldwell, I'm Dave Adams, a weapons officer.

Welcome to Santa Fe. [00:28:00] That person's name, your name, and the ship's name. Uh, it became very, very powerful, um, in terms of people having confidence. Now, if guys didn't, they did it because they were ordered to do it. It wouldn't work, but if a guy was really excited, uh, years later, we had an inspection and very senior Admiral, the guys would talk to him the whole inspection, so they didn't get to inspect much.

So, uh, it was good. And he loved talking to them and they were excited about, they own their piece and they would describe it to him. So this type of thing is very effective. Uh, it's not all in the book. So some of the stuff you're getting is not all in the book, but the book is great. I would definitely read it.

But, uh, It's really hard to really imagine until you do it. Gotcha. Now, you know, you're, what you're describing right here again, a bit unconventional because again, this perception right here, but the military historically, um, and forget the branch, right, has generally been thought of as a command and control [00:29:00] kind of environment.

You know, everything rolls up to the, to the next higher ranking individual for, you know, certain level of decisions. And It seems that you all almost inverted that and you, uh, you gave control to the person closest to the action, you know, the case of, uh, the, the young man that you mentioned just a few moments ago, uh, you gave him, it sounds like, you know, quite a bit of, uh, of autonomy and ownership over, you know, his part of, of the submarine, were there, uh, There had to have been.

Were there hiccups at getting that type of mentality enmeshed into the crew, given the fact that none of them probably ever lived in an environment like that before? It wasn't as hard as we thought it would be, to be honest, because when a commander, this is something I've learned over the years, You know, military people, if you say, here's how we're going to [00:30:00] do it in the end, they usually embrace it.

There was some resistance, you know, not every person would do the three name rule. Initially, not every person would, you know, some enthusiasm. There are some people who do just want to be told, I can tell a story about that in a minute, but it just grows quickly because of that giving control. It's exactly what you said.

It's giving, it's, it's more than empowerment. It's giving control to people, taking your own control away. Operating by you back them up. They don't back you up, uh, eliminating orders. I mean, David Marquette did not give orders and we,

as officers get very few orders, uh, we would use intent. I intend to submerge the ship, you know, um, which means I intended.

Make the ship go underwater. And the CEO would say very well, he would rule by compliance, but you know, you'd have to give him a little more, sir, you know, we're in the correct water depth. We've verified the charts, you know, we've taken a sounding, the ship is all rigged, so it won't leak. You know, I intend to submerge the ship very well.

Or did you think about [00:31:00] this, you know, uh, in that intent based leadership, which is what the Santa Fe was all about, it's truly revolutionary. And it took about a year. To really get going. Um, you know, for really to start to jive. I mean, it was a year later that we from when he took the ship that we started scoring really high on inspections.

But people love it to a degree. At first they don't like I think you're trying to give me control so you can tell me it's my fault when it goes wrong. Which is partly true. Um, you have to have that ownership of good and bad, but then they just started enjoying it and being part of it and recognizing that they really did own their piece.

And it wasn't, uh, it wasn't a top down relationship. It's a, it's a bottom up, but you have to have the environment to do it. The people you give control, they have to be competent to do it. So they have to have the right training. The guidance of what their responsibility is has to be very clear. So they know what decisions they can make and which [00:32:00] decisions that they cannot make.

I mean, the ones that maybe are below the waterline, um, and so forth. And once you get that environment going, you have 130 guys, we're all thinking independently, they're all owning their piece, they're all backing each other up, you cannot, I've never seen a beat on this when you can get it going, it ain't as easy as I'm saying, but when it gets going, it's a really powerful thing and it changed my life.

You know, the ability to learn to do that and to emulate that. And it wasn't about charismatic leadership. You know, there's lots of charismatic leaders and people will follow them. And there's reasons that work. This was very process driven. I mean, if you meet David, he's not a super charismatic leader. He said, here's what we're going to do to be great.

And we're going to process. We're going to make processes that, that work and make us great. And, uh, but we're going to accept mistakes. We're not gonna

crucify people. We're gonna learn from those mistakes. We're gonna give people, uh, control and power. We're not gonna just focus, because once you get [00:33:00] mistake focus, you make more mistakes and, uh, that, and that's where we were when he came on board.

And, uh, we made some huge mistakes after he got on board. I mean, huge. I mean, ones that the Navy would, was not happy about. But our leadership was, um, Admiral Al Kanetsi, you and I know him, and he, he allowed it. He said, let's, let's, let's, let's lay off. Let's see if this works. Not everybody went. So we had some leadership that reinforced our ability to actually do this.

And it was like no other submarine in the fleet. Now, some people would tell you who weren't on there. Yeah. It was just gimmick, but I could tell you, um, you know, most of the leadership who was there stayed the Navy because it changed, not that hadn't changed. We probably wouldn't have stayed. I mean, cause it was a very bad situation.

Uh, and it was day in when you fast forward on that story, you know, Of those department heads, all of them became commanding officers, and that is very rare. The J. O. s, a large fraction, All of the chiefs, I think 11 chiefs [00:34:00] became the head enlisted of the boat. That's the real legacy of, of David Marquet. Not, not the, not the, not the two and a half or three years we worked in had excellence, but that was carried over in a lot of places.

And a lot of the remnants of it, Some people don't really understand it, but I intend to is now common. Those procedures are still there. Some, there's some of the mistakes I made still in the manual, you know, like type of, uh, are still there. Every Tomahawk missile that gets launched are launched by those procedures.

Um, You know, it really had an influence throughout, throughout the fleet. Got it. So, you know, I'm thinking about our listeners right now, uh, who are leaders, emerging leaders, leaders at very significant positions who realize in their own organizations, you know, I, I need. I need to instill in the opportunity to, to, you know, get decisions as, as close to the client as we possibly can to, you know, [00:35:00] empower the individuals.

But it's, it's just, it is so mentally taxing to think about the process to get there, unpack some of those early days when. Captain Marquet came on board. Uh, he's gathered you. He's gathered the other officers. Uh, he's, uh, he's gathered some of the, uh, some of the enlisted, uh, senior enlisted men. What were those conversations like?

What, how did, how did he build, I'm going to argue for the word consensus, but at least acceptance of the direction that, that you all were headed? What, what did that look like? Well, I, in every group he met with, he didn't come in and describe it. What I've been describing to you. He came in and presented problems and let people talk about what are the solutions and maybe guided him to the answers, but I don't think so.

Many of these answers that people came up with, like he said, we need to be talk away and success. And I mentioned the three [00:36:00] name rule. Maybe we should do this. Young enlisted guys literally said, Hey, Hey, Captain, you need to listen to us. You need to stop talking. We're the experts. Listen to us. You know, uh, so there was a lot of conversations.

People were ready to get out of the what I would say was not pleasant situation. So they were very open. They were skeptical sometimes. And then as things started to work, maybe getting less skeptical, but they were very open to conversations. They weren't directive conversations. They were principle based discussions, not directive down.

The whole thing was not top down, even though it's kind of top down. It would seem like, well, you're doing this different thing, but it didn't, it didn't feel top down. I felt very good about, and, you know, by the end game, I'd studied so hard. He trusted that I knew the answer better than he did. So he let me do my thing.

Now I had to build that competency and prove that. So we didn't make huge mistakes, but we made [00:37:00] some in engineering and in weapons. We made huge mistakes and we had spotlights on us. And the way he approached that was, you know, very deliberate, like. How do we fix this? You know, what can we do? And, uh, you know, not blaming just, Hey, we're going to fix this and understand the consequences of this mistake.

And, uh, it just, it just took off and it took a while, you know, it took a while, but by the time we deployed the, so we had two deployments, the Pacific and the Middle East, uh, first deployment was a lot of teaching by him, you know, second deployment, you know, the ship was kind of running and he was just watching and making sure we didn't go off the rails.

So it was a wonderful question. No, it does. It does. I, you know, I think back to the catalyst. So it's it's the worst performing sub in the Navy. People are frustrated, you know, with without any other options. almost [00:38:00] any

option could be acceptable. And I'm I'm paraphrasing a quote that I heard one time.

Would this have worked if it were not the worst performing sub in the Navy? Would this have evolved the way it did? Had morale been Fairly decent. Was it? Was it so bad people were willing to do anything? Or was it the openness and the communication and really engaging people that that pushed it onto the right track?

I think there are situations where it may not have worked, but I think in most situations, because I went on for 20 years after this or more, implementing this on another submarine in Afghanistan. Uh, once it takes a while for people to understand it, especially when you know it a lot more. So you're just trying to get it going.

Uh, but once they get it, um, it's, it's gold. I can tell you it works better. I like charismatic leadership principles, [00:39:00] taking care of people. Those work too, and you mix those in, but the leader, leader model of empowering people through a very deliberate process. And, uh, functioning as a team to a very deliberate process, it 100 percent works.

It's harder in business, I believe, and having done in business, it's just a little bit harder because, you know, if a book factory is trying to implement this, the guys operating the machines may not want to be empowered. And so you have to really think about how to do it. Um, but I would tell you it starts with you.

It starts with your ability. The hardest thing is if you want it, you know how you want something done. On my submarine years later, I knew exactly how I wanted the engineering program, spent years thinking about how to train engineers to do their jobs. Well, came on board. I had a master chief, which is the highest rank in the, in the, in the enlisted ranks, and I'm looking at his training program and it's 180 people.

[00:40:00] out from what I would do, but it met all the requirements and he loved it. And you never had to ask him for an exam or How you're going to teach. And I made a delivered decision not to touch that program is he owned it. And I didn't want to, if I told him how to do it, then I'd have to do it. And, uh, and then along the way, we had some discussions and maybe shaped some things and it was maybe only 90 degrees out three years later, but it was a successful program and he owned it So it's your ability to say it doesn't have to be my way as a leader.

And if I'm going to give this person the left and right limits, they get to drive within them. And you might not like the fact they're hugging the left curve, but unless it's going to cause a safety problem. And if you have clear competence and clarity, it won't. Then you have to accept it starts with you.

It starts with you giving up the decision to approve the deal. It starts with giving up. You have to allow people to operate within their limits. And I think that's the [00:41:00] hardest thing, not anything else with the workforce. It's you. You know, and, uh, trying to do that and we'll all fall back. And I did.

You'll fall back into the transactional way of do it like this or this. And, uh, and it's hard to stay in there. But if you can stay in a high percentage of what I call transformational leadership, your ability to empower people. emancipate people, let them, they will be a better, they will do a better job and the team will do a better job as a team than top down directive, which is the military way.

Um, so does that help? Well, no, it does. It absolutely does. Um, and it's not just the military's way. It's, it's way, you know, Certainly corporate America operated with that command and control environment. Uh, you know, certainly through the seventies, I would argue into the eighties, and, uh, a little bit more teaming approach and, uh, much more of, uh, of, of trying to drive, uh, the majority of the decisions [00:42:00] down to the, the, what I would call the local level.

It's the, the intersection where the decision really needs to be made. The information's there. You know, I want to, I want to unpack something you said, because I think this is a really, really important piece. You talked about this, this, this one Chief Petty Officer who, he, he, he didn't do it the way that, that you would have done it, but he owned it.

Yet, you know, you had spent, you know, at that point, a couple of decades with a very tuned eye on the way to be most effective and most efficient. And, you know, that, that had to have been a, a mental juxtaposition for you because as, as good as this program was, evidently it was, it was working okay. There was there was dramatic opportunity for improvement.

Why not be more? I don't know if the word is prescriptive [00:43:00] right there or was the relationship cost of you jumping in as you talked about just a few minutes ago. No longer be his program. It'd be your program. You'd have to run it. Did you make the decision? The cost of that outweighed any efficiency gain or benefits you could get from being a little bit more prescriptive I just, um, I made a decision on everything that, um, you know, I would tell every

person who comes to work for me and I still do, I say, if you come with me with, for a problem with a problem, you know, I've done this for a long time, just like you were saying, and I, and I will say.

Just do this, you know, and then I say, don't do it. Come back. I'll come back and re engage you, but you come back and re engage me in 30 minutes because I'll give you the answer, which is probably a pretty good one, but I don't want my answer. I really don't want your answer. I want to [00:44:00] strive for what the best answer is.

And by building a relationship with this master chief, who's still one of my best friends, I'm talking about, um, You know, he came my way and I also saw the benefits. Now, remember the baseline was, are we training the operators to meet the standards? And he was meeting that standard. I saw some innovative opportunities, uh, which I think are, would have, yeah, they would have improved things, but I needed buy in to those.

So I just did it in a more gentle way, uh, talking about, Hey, Did you see this? Did you hear about this? And then hopefully this shaped the program. Now, we've been in trouble, you know, may have been a little more prescriptive and may have been a little more. Hey, I need you to come back to me and give me better ways to do this.

But, uh, I tell people you have to, you know, you have to resist. Uh, that tendency, uh, because it's the opportunity cost you're losing. And people don't have real, you know, when you're, when you're [00:45:00] very directive, then they, they don't feel great about their work. Um, no, but once you build trust, then there'll be a cadre who will say, you know, maybe, and we call me old man, maybe the old man's not crazy, you know, and they'll, they'll, they'll listen and they'll do it, but if you just, if you want to be an order, and you can be, I had a, I presented this talk to an old Navy captain the other day, and he had commanded two ships, and at the end he goes, I'm, I'm never doing that on my ship, you know, so, you know, and, uh, I challenged him on it, but, uh, not give orders?

Are you crazy? You know? Covey wrote a book called The Eighth Habit. It's not perfect on us, but he says what I'm talking about, what he saw in Santa Fe is seven habits by the eighth habit. It's the ability to really allow people to, to run their own lives and trust to do that. And, um, so yeah, I think it was the loss of culture.

If I had just come in and said, Master Chief, do it my [00:46:00] way that I would have lost, not. The program may have gotten better. Is anybody going to start on it? I could tell you another hundred times that he came up with very innovative ways to solve problems while we were deployed that would have had me pull into port.

I would have, but if he had just become, so it's that opportunity cost. That's what you're losing. Yep. No, I, I, I, I love that observation. And, um, You know, I have said this to you before you, when you and I first met, obviously I knew you by reputation, but, uh, you know, that the first conversations that we had, you know, all of the, all the leadership traits, all the leadership characteristics come out, you're, you're a confident individual, you know, all the things that are there, you, you, you command a room exceptionally well.

But the thing that that just to me is is a fantastic trait. It's something I want to call out. And I see this in other really, really great [00:47:00] leaders is patient persistence. You you had a vision of where this could go. Yes, it would have been certainly more short term efficient for you to be more prescriptive, but you were patiently persistent and just say, you know what, let's take a step back.

Let's, let's work to develop the culture. Uh, let's, let's get him bought in. And so the price of the inefficiency in the short term was Returned a thousand fold over by all of the ideas that he came back to you later because you built that spirit of trust. That's what I'm hearing, right? That's absolutely right.

Um, you know, we had a major engineering problem that some of our experts said we couldn't solve. And he said, Kevin, let me go work on it. And he got them all in a room and they, they did it the way I would do it, you know, and they came back and said, we got this option. You're going to have to take some risks.[00:48:00]

I said, okay, let's do it. And, uh, you know, we stayed out on deployment. We had a major operational success, which affected the country. Uh, so once you get the culture going, it works. So I like to tell this story for your audience, for my later experiments with this, which when I was a commanding officer, got on board, started assigning everybody pieces of equipment.

And there was one petty officer who was very negative. You know, I would just do what I told, I mean, anti the culture, you know, and, um, but he owned the The refrigerant plant that cooled the freezers, the food. Um, so, you know, a year into this, we're getting ready to deploy. Um, it's the night before deployment and my phone rings.

And, uh, normally if you're a commanding officer, your phone rings at like one o'clock in the morning, somebody's hurt, dead, drunk, you know, it's just. So I answered the phone and, um, he's like, captain, this is petty officer Smith. His name really was Smith. And I'm [00:49:00] like, yes, Smith, what you got? He goes, um, my refrigerant plant is down.

And what that means is without that refrigerant plant. You have six months of food in that freezer that's going to have to be offloaded. It's going to have to be, the fridge in front is broken and he says, captain, you know, I've called my chief, which is his immediate boss to come in and supervise. I've written the formal work procedure to fix it.

And I promised you we're going to get underway on time. And I almost went into tears at that. The most reactive kid on the boat had that ownership. It took a year. Uh, and once you're there, what that day I knew the culture was there. And from that point on, like Santa Fe, and that's the other thing to answer your question.

It was a very good ship when I took it over. very traditionally run after being gone for 10 years. Marquette. And they took, they took all this on very quickly and we achieved those standards much more quickly and won all the awards. [00:50:00] Plus of what Santa Fe had won 10 years. Got it. Well, you know, the next time or Two times from now I want to, I want to unpack your, uh, your, your getting back to the Santa Fe.

Uh, but that was after a, uh, a period of time that saw you, uh, do different things, grow as a, uh, leader and, and have to be involved in, uh, in quite a few, uh, Tense situations, uh, as I understand it, of, of what you can talk about in, uh, in the Middle East. So wrap us up on your, your first tour on, uh, on Santa Fe.

You uh, how long were you with Captain Marque? I was with him for 39 months, so three years and three months. That's a long tour. Um. And so it was really, it was, well, Captain Marquette came into it about six months. So I was with him for three, about three years, a little less than three years. Cause we were struggling.

I was learning what not right. Looked like for a while, trying to [00:51:00] struggle through. So, so three years and that transition went from. a really training mode to a totally in power mode to deployments, which which are six months out in the Pacific and in the Arabian Gulf. We would do half in the Pacific.

Very successful deployments. Um, very successful in inspections to where we got excellent on both the engineering inspection, which is more important in the nuclear Navy and my and the Ford weapons inspection. Um, and then all the The follow on success of the leader leaders that grew under, and even the young guys who grew under David Marque.

So it kind of wraps up there. Um, I made some really good relationships and then, um, so I left there and became the, a de camp for the head of the submarine force, a guy named Malade. So, uh, so the story continued from there, uh, and that had a lot to do with the writing. He asked me to write a few speeches for him when I was in command.

I mean, when I, not when I was in command, when I was in Santa Fe. So that writing back from naval [00:52:00] postgraduate school kind of pops up again. He's a great writer, and we were fighting for the submarine force at the time. So, uh, wrote a few speeches for him and ended up going on to be his aide to camp. And then I went over and served with the Royal Navy submarine force in their perisher course, which is the most, uh, Demanding commanding officer course in the world.

Um, and then ended up going on to my executive officer tour. So, uh, and then I would find myself shortly after that, I think we can talk about next time in Afghanistan, applying all these same principles, trying and modifying and applying. Uh, so I think that's where you wanted me to get to. Any, any other questions about?

No, I, I, I absolutely love it. I do want to, uh, and we, we can pick up on this, uh, the next time I do want to unpack a little bit more on, uh, your relationship with Al and, uh, the things that, uh, you, you observed and learned there. Uh, again, just another wonderful soul. One final point, and then this one's a little, I really don't like to advertise [00:53:00] this, but I think it, it, it sums up the story in that, um, um, the submarine force admiral in charge of all those submarines in the Pacific.

ranked me the number one weapons officer in the Pacific, which led to my vision in writing happened. And, and, uh, if you're the number one weapons officer in the Pacific, uh, you got a good chance of continuing to proceed, which I was able to. So I had that vision that I was going to be number one. And then I, I used innovation, which is that kind of.

David Marquet allowed innovation, but the innovation that I learned about at Naval Postgraduate School and reading all those books about World War II and

applying that and having a lot of success ended up in the vision being fulfilled, which it speaks to all of you out there that, you know, you've got to be able to see it and then work your way to it.

You got to back it out and take step by step, but you got to be able to see the vision. Well, it certainly, it certainly [00:54:00] sounds like the term purpose driven would describe your mindset and at each stage of your, your career. It doesn't sound like anything was, uh, was too haphazard or not, uh, not thought through to the, to the nth degree.

And, uh, having known you over the last several years that you've. made different choices about things that you're involved in and pursuing and not pursuing. Uh, I can definitely associate that phrase with you. Very purpose driven. So, uh, congratulations on your success. You're right. Uh, next time we will, uh, we will pick it up with, uh, and uh, the way that you applied, uh, uh, your leadership principles and, uh, the way that, uh, you developed a, uh, a level of trust with, uh, those from cultures that many of us will never understand, but, uh, that you were able to, uh, uh, to certainly, uh, Defend freedom and, uh, you know, maintain just a, a, [00:55:00] again, a very purpose driven mentality towards, uh, your role in the Navy.

Uh, so Dave, for phase one of this. Oh, our listeners got a lot out of this and, uh, we look forward to talking with you next time. It's been a lot of fun, Phil. Thank you very much, my friend. Thank you. The Cannon Curve is the production of Cannon Financial Institute. Executive producer of the Cannon Curve is Sarah Jones.

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