

[00:00:00] Well, greetings everyone. Phil Buchanan back with part two of A Great Conversation, uh, with U. S. Navy Captain Retired Dave Adams. Dave, I want to welcome you back for uh, session two. Thank you for rejoining us. It's great to be here with you and your audience and, uh, opportunity to talk a little more about, uh, leadership and, uh, things that can apply to real life that have impacted my life throughout my time in the military and beyond.

Well, you know, Dave, as we, uh, as we talked last time, your journey. Your leadership journey has been, uh, I would argue anything but linear. [00:01:00] You have had some very unique experiences. You have worked under some, some very, very great leaders, you know, in our, our last session, we talked about the experiences that you had on, uh, the Santa Fe and how you and the entire team, uh, of Santa Fe collaborated to really go from.

Worst to first to turn a submarine that had numerous challenges, numerous issues, and over a relatively short period of time, turn that around, remind our listeners. What for you were the one or two biggest takeaways from your first experience on the Santa Fe? We're going to hear about that, that second experience a little bit, uh, today, but tell us a little bit about your first experience and the one or two, just, just key takeaways from that.

Well, I think the biggest takeaway was the way the new captain, David Marquet, came in and he, he instilled in a pride on the ship, uh, just naturally [00:02:00] by allowing people to own their piece of whatever the ship was by truly allowing people to understand their scope of responsibilities and to make decisions and using language like I intend to by giving orders and, and repeat backs.

Although we did all those things, it wasn't through orders. It was through the I intend to culture. The number one thing. Captain, I intend to submerge the ship. I've checked safety. I've done sort of, Captain, I intend to fix this piece of equipment. Here's my plan. Uh, just that I intend to language is the number one thing that kind of turned the ship around, uh, and created a pride when people would have that ownership.

And when you would talk to them, they would naturally. Convey how much they enjoyed their piece of the ship and how they were going to make their piece the best that it could be so that I intend to own your piece. A piece of that was absolutely critical in order to do that. And then the other part was this, the truly, um, [00:03:00] as people on their piece, really creating the competency, uh, to make those decisions because decisions without competency will not go well for any organization.

So creating the clarity of what someone's role was and the competency and providing the tools, the training, the individual mentorship, uh, to really ensure that People were competent to take on that ownership. And so those two things are the biggest things that really over time turn that ship around.

And we talked about many of the other examples, but I think those are principles that we can carry in our daily, uh, interactions with people. How do you, how do you help people get ownership? for their piece. And that means you've got to be willing to give that ownership up as a leader. And then how do you make sure that your workforce, you have the right people, the competent people who've been properly trained to actually have that ownership?

Well, you know, Dave, you and I have talked about your experience first time on Santa Fe. Quite a lot. Uh, and every time I pick up on, on something more, but you know, that experience [00:04:00] obviously was one of those big moments in your life, one of those similar moments that you, you take it, you use to, to, to launch into other things.

And so I've got to, I've got to just imagine that when you're tour of duty on the Santa Fe, uh, came to an end that it was, it was somewhat bittersweet. What was your, and I literally you're jumping off point, uh, from, from the Santa Fe. What did you do with, with all of that enthusiasm, with all of that experience?

Where did you go next? Well, I ended up being selected to be the aide to Vice Admiral Big Al Koneczny, a friend of both of ours, who selected me to be his aide based on the performance of the ship, the performance of that, my riding ability that I built at Naval Postgraduate School. So I went, he was the Deputy Fleet Commander of the Atlantic Fleet.

And I went to work for him both as his aid, but also as a special projects officer working innovation issues. So it was really a fantastic [00:05:00] experience to work with a three star level leader, one of the most best in the world. And then to learn from him, and then combine the things that I had taken from Santa Fe and my previous tours and kind of build that into a.

A more deep, deep leadership model for command, uh, that I, that I was hoping to do. So, walk us through, what does, what does an aid to a three star general, what, what was, what was a day in your life like during that period of time? That must have, uh, it, it, it times been perhaps mind numbing and other times completely exhilarating.

What, uh, how would you, how would you characterize it? Well, normally what the aid does is he's the he runs the schedule. He gets the animal traveling, make sure the animals on time. He helps the animal meet priorities to ensure schedules right with the executive assistant and other folks. Um, and he's like the AIDS right hand man.

The benefit of that We're not really right hand man, but he's the eight. He's but the benefit of that is you get to [00:06:00] be in very high level meetings, you get to see what's going on the Navy at the high level and doing that. And then with Admiral Koneczny, who's one of the most fantastic leaders. I also led his innovation team.

So I wasn't just doing the normal aid things. I was helping do a study of mine warfare and how you fix that. Helping do a study of ASW and how you fix that. Helping with the maintenance plans and helping with the electromagnetic railgun, which we could have a whole podcast about. So it was an innovation.

So he wanted me to be the aid, but he more wanted me to really help him. And I did the speech writing, which he didn't need much help with, but those types of things. So it was just, a very broad and very engaging, um, experience to learn how the Navy really worked at the highest level and then support a great leader in trying to, um, get the Navy to do some of the right things, which he was pushing, like ensure we had enough submarines, ensure our ships were maintained.

And ensure we [00:07:00] didn't give up on areas like mine warfare and ASW. So it was just a terrific experience for me. Got it. So, uh, again, this is, this is another one of those elite experiences. The, the ability to, uh, to, to be inside the, inside the curtain, to hear firsthand, a lot of the strategic conversations and, uh, discussions that were ongoing, how did that experience then transition and propel what you did next?

Well, uh, two things happened and one was I was selected to go to the Royal Navy's Submarine Command Force, which is role renowned. So Admiral Canizzi let me go early because the submarine force had asked me to go do that. Um, and it was just a fantastic experience seeing how other, uh, Another Navy approached command problems, and they're considered to be really good at it, and they are really good at it.

And so going through that course, um, was just a magnificent experience, which [00:08:00] shaped me to go on and be a good XO on the USS Honolulu, um, and then, uh, To go and to be the speechwriter for the head of the Navy, the

Chief of Naval Operations. So those were the next sort of steps. Okay, so I want to unpack this deal with with the Royal Navy, because one of the things that I have often encouraged Uh, leaders in the wealth management space to do is to, uh, and we see this with, with, uh, sports leaders.

A lot of times they will, they will go and learn from one another. You know, I know, uh, you're a big, uh, big fan of, uh, University of Texas Longhorns. Of course, I love University of Georgia. You know, both coaching staffs, you know, routinely will go and visit one another, and they'll study film together. And, you know, they'll think through some of the, some of the challenges and issues that, you know, when I was a younger guy, that, that really amazed me that people would be willing to do that.

It's not so much [00:09:00] of the, you know, inside information that you glean, but it just, it spurs you to think in different ways and to see, you know, small tactics that maybe you could repurpose in another way. Is that, is that a fairly routine, uh, process that happens between countries, militaries? I mean, obviously it would have to be allies, uh, but is, is, does that happen a lot?

I think it happens a lot more people coming to our elite courses and our elite, uh, but not as much going to theirs. But with the Royal Navy, who has a very good submarine force, um, um, and we had had some problems going to get those lessons from them was really important to the Navy. So I was the fourth person to go through the joint course with their, to take their course and they do things very differently.

You know, we have, um, everybody on a U S nuclear submarine is an engineer. And a nuclear trained officer. First, they have nuclear [00:10:00] trained who don't do the tactics and all their warfare officers are not nuclear trained and they focus on navigation and periscope safety in those things. So it was a completely different system.

And it was great to see that system and some of the techniques that they do. Um, are embedded in our Navy today because of this cross training. I, I fear some of them are understood very well, but they really help you understand how to keep your ship safe in very intense situations. Uh, they drive ships very close to you.

Things we don't do in the Navy, you dive underneath ships. You take risks with nuclear powered submarines, and I'll be honest, we generally don't take it unless we need to, you know, to get an operational mission done. So it was just a great course to learn about, and it enabled me later on Santa Fe the second time to do

some things that, that we would have done no matter what, but to be a lot more comfortable doing those things because I was a graduate of that course.

And then implementing some of those processes, having experience in my place that made [00:11:00] sense. And was able to really use those, uh, to help keep my ship more safe in the toughest operational situations. I gotcha. Okay, cool. Well, uh, again, I'm, I'm just such a big proponent of wealth leaders spending time with other wealth leaders.

I think that there is a, uh, I'm trying to remember exactly how the individual described it. Coopertition, uh, cooperating with the competition sometimes is, uh, is a great way to, to, to build knowledge and perspective. So, uh, again, Thanks for that, uh, that insight. Another thing that has emerged is your, your speech writing and your, your, your critical writing.

As you think back on your, your time and in all aspects of the Navy, how important was your developed skill of critical writing of speech writing? How, when you look back, how did that help propel your career? Oh, it was a total [00:12:00] game changer. I think in some ways it's not a skill that necessarily is valued at the junior ranks, but because I was able to develop it at the Naval postgraduate school at the junior ranks.

And really, the ability to communicate my ideas very crisply and effectively. And, um, so it really propelled my career when the more senior admirals needed those kind of skill sets in both the writing studies and writing speeches. And so it definitely propelled my career. I went a different track, as we've talked about along the way, in order being aides to admirals and speech writers and, and running, um, commanders, action groups or innovation teams.

Um, the ability to effectively communicate and write and publish, uh, reports with classified, unclassified, it definitely drove my career, which came off of my experience in Monterey. So between My experience early in Monterey at the Naval Postgraduate School writing, where I developed those skills and won several writing competitions, and then [00:13:00] my ability to do that through the different, um, innovation teams, uh, definitely changed my career.

Still Having a huge influence on my career to this moment. Sure. Well, you know, I, I think today about the, the business world and we have become so accustomed, uh, in business to the PowerPoint presentation deck, some slides, a few bullet point words, maybe a graph or two, and people talking through a concept that, you know, I, I really do worry that.

An entire generation of perspective leaders is not being developed with that, that critical ability to write, to put their, their ideas in words. And, and, and I love your term in, in a crisp format with a, with an active voice that, you know, really can just in a, in an elegant way, communicate thoughts and ideas much better than, you know, any slide deck [00:14:00] ever would.

So, um, I'm not surprised to hear how it, uh, how it propelled your career, nor, uh, how it is still important to you today. I have, uh, I have often said, uh, that Mary Jo Eubanks, my, uh, my senior year composition professor was the most influential and fundamental person in, uh, in developing me from what writing skills I do have, uh, they don't, uh, they don't match to yours, but, uh, I do think it's, it's critically vital.

So Dave, I'm going to add one point there, Phil, is that the communication is important, you know, but it's what you're communicating that's more important. And so, uh, when you do that PowerPoint. What is the intellectual information that backs that up? So the approach I've taken since very since working for animal kinesthesia is to write a solid intellectual paper booklet that lays out the argument, the math.[00:15:00]

So once I get that PowerPoint, it's a lead behind and, you know, it's hard to, uh, for people to counter that if you have a solid intellectual framework and they don't have one, if they have one, great, then you can work on it. So in every position I've had, I've been able to solidly. Develop written intellectual products to back up the ideas and then use those to drive those ideas forward.

Um, so I think it's really important. Communication is important, but it's what you're communicating. It's to think critically. Intellectual arguments will win. Might take you a long time, but if you continue to make them and they're solidly challenged, and you've challenged your own arguments, in the end, they usually bubble to the top.

Sometimes it takes a long time. Well, you know, you just, you just gave a, a wonderful suggestion and I want to call it out that the next time any of our listeners are called upon to prepare a deck for a, uh, a presentation at a meeting, having a, [00:16:00] uh, short. Crisp thought provoking document is leave behind that supports the ideas in that, uh, in that presentation deck.

If you develop that as a, uh, as a routine that, uh, that gives you that opportunity to establish yourself, uh, as that, that thought leader sharing critical ideas. Love that Dave. So Dave, you, uh, is a kind of a, uh, next transition piece. I believe you found yourself with an opportunity to go to the Middle East.

Spend some time in Afghanistan. How, how did that come up? I normally don't think about a US Navy officer, boots on the ground in a, uh, in a war zone, but that's, that's exactly where you found yourself. How does, uh, how does the Navy captain wind up in Afghanistan? Well, as a speech writer to the CNO and um, there was a tank and a tank is where all the, the joint chiefs meet to discuss issues and uh, so of course the [00:17:00] chief of naval operations at the time, Mike Mullen, went to this tank and we had established these teams in Afghanistan and we were starting to do in Iraq called Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

Teams that would go in and mentor the governor of a province, And his team on how to really connect the people with that government. It's a counterinsurgency philosophy. Uh, the special forces in the Reserves had run those at that time for about five years. So it's 2002 to 2007, and those resources were, were drying up in that you can only send a reservist overseas so many times.

The special forces were busy, uh, doing other things. And so, uh, the Navy and the Air Force said, Hey, we will send leaders to lead these teams and, uh, and we'll send part of the teams. And so Admiral Mullen, there were 12 American, uh, Provincial Reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. Air Force took six, Navy took six.

And, uh, the [00:18:00] first year those guys were over there, you know, I was writing about them in speeches and things like that, and an opportunity came up for me to go. I tell the joke that I wrote a bad speech. Admiral Mullen doesn't appreciate that. It wasn't true. But I was asked to volunteer to go and, um, had a discussion with my bride, which wasn't great.

But I decided, um, I decided to, to, that we were going to send, um, you know, half of these teams were going to be Navy enlisted guys and a few officers. That I couldn't say no. So, uh, on top of that, I had a passion for counterinsurgency from my dad's time in Vietnam, and I had a passion for Afghanistan, given I had been part of several efforts to, you know, target Osama bin Laden inside of Afghanistan.

So I volunteered, and we put together this 87 man team, and we ended up spending a year in Host Province, right on the border of Afghanistan, and the Akhuni Network's home, right across the border of [00:19:00] Host. And, uh, went and led that pre provincial construction reconstruction team for a year. So many of our listeners are vaguely aware of the reconstruction efforts that, uh, was ongoing in, uh, the latter part of the, the, the first decade of, uh, of this century.

But, uh, Many of this may be the first time that they've they've heard about what was happening. What was what was the role? What was the responsibility again? A lot of it is is coaching leadership. I get that. But but what was really happening boots on the ground during that period? So, you know, the most of the army leaders were on there about third round in Afghanistan.

You know that the guys who started off as sort of a company commander than a battalion commander than a brigade commander. So some of the guys had been a company commander, battalion commander. Now we're back as the brigade commander. Um, my boss was a guy named, uh, [00:20:00] became General Marty Schweitzer. And, um, at, by that point, he had understood that we weren't going to kill our way out of Afghanistan, that we needed to really fulfill our promise, um, to, to, to rebuild the country.

And, uh, there's lots of different models for that. But the model that David Petraeus had come up with at the, was this counterinsurgency manual, which says you need to number one, separate the enemy from the people. That's a military function. Number two, connect the people to their government. And how do you really do that?

And then number three, transform the environment into an environment where the government was solving people's problems and even if they were reluctant to the government, they were more supportive of the government than the insurgency. So there's a book, you know, there's a counterinsurgency manual that's available that lays this out.

It has been learned in practice in just about this time was being conducted fairly successfully in Iraq. Uh, so that's the philosophy when we went into Afghanistan with. So my [00:21:00] role as a provincial reconstruction team commander was to use my 87 man team to mentor the government, to do those second tooth functions, connect the people to their government.

And then transform the environment, and we did this through, um, a variety of activities with the tribes. It's key with the tribes, um, in order to understand what their problems were and help their government meet those problems. And then through projects, uh, which were engaged from the people really to get the people to to really be supportive of the government.

And, um, we had a great year in host province, um, actually being successful with that. And some of that leads back to Santa Fe, not all of it because the Army had a big role. It wasn't just just my team, but the way I approached my team was to try to apply many of those principles that I learned from Santa Fe

and then from Admiral Koneczny in a completely different environment where I wasn't sure it was going to work at all.

And I will [00:22:00] just tell you, it worked magnificently over time and ended up having a lot of success. And just to get to the punchline, you know, over time. The violence in that province dropped to one of the lowest violence and it's right on the border of Pakistan, uh, with where the insurgents were. The violence dropped to a level and then the number of projects that were completed, um, dwarfed anything that had been done.

We built 52 schools, including 26 girls schools together with the Afghans. We paved over 100 kilometers of road, 300 wells we drilled to help the people out. Just a magnificent amount of projects. Which which really put the insurgents on their on their heels and the people most importantly came to support the government in huge numbers and in the first province on the border.

Secretary Gates came to visit a lot of people came to visit was a little bit distracting of the mission. And he wrote a couple of lines in his book, which I like to highlight that it was the model for how to do this coast province was the model for how [00:23:00] to do insurgency between the army team. Which was building the security and the reconstruction team, which was building the development and the connections with the government.

Well, that is a fantastic story. And B, I think it's, it's really important what you said that you were able to take some of the learnings and I think we all do this intuitively. And I guess instinctively we take our, our, our mosaic of learnings that we've had throughout our career. Sure. and we attempt to apply them to new situations that we find ourselves in.

Sometimes we're successful. Sometimes it's, it's, it's not as successful. You discovered that what you and Captain Marquet developed on the Santa Fe was, was easily, and I'm putting easily in quotes, easily transferable to, to this type of situation. Was that a, was that a surprise to you? I know that was your [00:24:00] intent, but was it a surprise that it was as effective as it was?

Yeah, I would have said about 20 percent of the things we thought about when we were training to go were going to work. And I think the hit rate was more like 80%. And I'll give you examples. For security, normally the sergeant would brief the team on what the threats were, how they were going to set security.

On our team, the youngest guys briefed, hey, the threat today is a blue Toyota Corolla, which might be a suicide bomber. Here's how we're going to set

security. So that was from the very simple level to the large envisioning of the, the, the incident who was in charge of public affairs, came up with the idea that he was going to build an extra radio station and distribute hand wound radios throughout the province shouldn't have power in order to get the message out.

Um, we built three radio stations and distributed over 20, 000 radios. Uh, that [00:25:00] was just his idea. When I. I gave him the problem and says it's yours. Um, in order to do that, the civil affairs teams came up with this idea that they were going to go out and embed with the communities in these little what we called civil military operations centers applying the counterinsurgency theory.

Didn't know if we could do that in terms of safety and security. We pushed three of those teams out in the first six months. By the end, we had 12 teams out, one in every district, helping the local district government do What we were doing at the provincial level, uh, that came up from the team being empowered to come up with these ideas.

In order to do that the way we did our medical, um, outreach, uh, we had a young nurse who, practitioner who came up with this whole program and um, so it was just amazing how the same principles and it took time. especially on security. Might have take six months before they really believed in this process.

Six months of it working and us being safe. Um, I remember him telling the command sergeant major of the army, [00:26:00] Hey, we thought this guy, this Navy guy, we didn't like him too much, but we're all here, you know, and I brought every single member home, uh, which was the number one goal. Um, uh, so, and sometimes You know, I would say my leadership wasn't as soft as it could have been because so many lives were at risk and we did lose some Afghan friends.

But the power of empowering people and embedding them in the mission and then believing in the mission really was powerful. Now we could talk a long time about whether that that faith in our government was founded in Afghanistan. But I could tell you today. Despite the Taliban being there, those roads are still those, those girls schools are closed, unfortunately, but those roads are still there, which have really helped a lot of people.

They can get their families to medical. They can, um, those wells are still providing the people and people don't forget. I still get messages from Afghans of thank you. I don't think they'll look bad upon the United States. They won't forget because of that experience. [00:27:00] And, you know, to get into that,

because I want to make sure everybody knows, um, people have this view of the Middle East and the ideology of the Middle East.

Afghans, are warm and welcoming people. They're deeply religious, but they're not ideological. Um, you know, most of the suicide bombers are not coming out of the Afghan population and they want a better life. Um, and so we were able to capitalize on it because they were willing to go with us. But some of these techniques from David Marquet, I was surprised at how well they work and how we overachieved in every area, in my view, because People really took that empowerment and the, and the cause of the mission and really went out and, and did some great things in that year.

Uh, so, uh, just, it was just a wonderful experience. Well, you know, and we talked about this in our, our first episode, when you empower people with, uh, responsibility with identifying an appropriate course of action. The [00:28:00] ownership that most of those individuals take with that produces fantastic results.

That doesn't mean you don't have to coach. Doesn't mean you don't have to lead. Doesn't mean you don't have to validate and verify. And that is that is a switch that we have seen in In corporate America over the last several years, moving away from that, as we talked in the first episode, that command and control, uh, into more of an empowering at a, uh, at a local level, I'm curious, I'm going to run a, a, a scenario by you.

What are the things that I hear from a lot of leaders in the wealth management space is today they are hiring some, some very well educated younger people. who want to proceed at a, at a, at a faster clip, I won't say fast clip, but on a faster clip than perhaps a lot of today's leaders progressing [00:29:00] themselves when they were going through and it, it's creating a bit of friction.

And so one of the things that I have. I've been suggesting to leaders is to, uh, find ways to, to be able to empower these individuals to, to lead projects, to, to champion activities that develop that, that skill set that develop that decision making so that it's, it's benefiting everybody involved. Uh, you know, some organizations, it, it, it does take some time to get up to speed on all the nuances that could, uh, could take place.

But but this idea of empowering people to to make decisions and to, uh, to lead from their position on the organizational chart, um, that really doesn't have a ton of downside, does it? It really doesn't. I mean, there is some risk. I mean, when, um, in that in Afghanistan, that risk is highlighted. And I think the Army

[00:30:00] is more conducive, you know, on a submarine or a ship, the captain's not far away to intervene to coach.

And it actually takes a lot more restraint. Uh, when you send a staff sergeant out with a convoy to do a mission, um, he has that authority and he's going to come under fire and he's going to have to make those decisions. So as a leader of your company. What's the risk are you taking when you unleash that person?

Is it, is it life or death like it is in Afghanistan? Uh, so it was hard for me, even though I believed in empowering people to understand that once, if I didn't get buy in from those sergeants on what the philosophy was, you know, they were the ones who had to face fire. They were the ones who had to make the decisions.

So giving up that decision making authority is really hard. Giving up that power and understanding what is your risk? You know, if it's the risk of your entire company financially, well, you're going to want to scope that responsibility. But, um, is the risk really as high as you think it is? And I would tell you, you'd be [00:31:00] surprised And when you give decision making down and you've done the appropriate coaching, how good the decisions are and how changed you are as a leader by not having to micromanage every decision by allowing that decision.

And now you're in a coaching and cultural building role. Um, and it's, it's an amazing thing and I'm not saying it works all the time and I'm not saying it's not going to be, it's going to be easy because it's not going to be easy. And Afghanistan was the hardest. I mean, I think it was six months with the security piece to get the army national guard in.

Kind of buy into a philosophy that was different than what they were learned easier on. Hey, we're going out to build roads and schools because nobody had any experience doing that. So it's not always easy. And you think you know the answers. I always tell people I'm stubborn on first approach. You know, somebody comes and says, Hey, here's a problem.

And I'll say, here's a solution. And I have to restrain myself to say no. And I don't want your solution or my solution. Let's work our way through. What's the best solution. Um, and, uh, and then, you know what you get to [00:32:00] decide. Uh, that's tough on any leader, but the results I could tell you from Santa Fe the first time to Afghanistan to Santa Fe the second time, um, each building at different levels of success.

and higher levels of success. Um, I just became a big, a big, big believer in, and then I got one year to apply in industry, which was also very successful. So I think, um, these principles are tried and true and they're not based on personality or characteristic. They're based on your ability to really create the clarity of someone's ownership and the competency In that ownership.

And then they, when they own it, if you have every employee on it, I'll take it back. If you have 60 percent owning it, you're going to be amazed that you get, you're absolutely right. Well, that's a great, uh, great segue and great lead in Santa Fe the first time, Afghanistan, Santa Fe the second time. So [00:33:00] how did, how did a, uh, how did a captain who is boots on the ground in Afghanistan with the The reconstruction, uh, project wind up getting called back to his old submarine to, to take over command.

What, what happened there? Well, when I left Afghanistan, cause I want to end this story and there's a lot to it. Um, I used to tell Afghan parables, uh, which my interpreter, I, as who's now an American citizen would help me develop, um, and when you think about Afghanistan, uh, and I do think about it and it's hard on me sometimes.

You do have to realize that people do own their own destiny. no matter what the situation is. So when I talked to the, the, all the tribal leaders came when I was leaving, and here's the story I told them. There were two young boys, and they wanted to make the mullah, they wanted to show that the mullah, the lead mullah, was a fool.

And you know, so their idea was they would capture a bird, and they would have in [00:34:00] their hands, and they'd go, and they'd say, wise mullah, what do I have in my hands? Is it alive? Or is it dead? And if the mullah said it was it was alive, they would crush it and say, look, you're a fool. And if they said it was dead, they would let it fly away and say, look, you're a fool.

So they captured the bird and they took it to the mullah and they said, wise mullah, you know, what do I have in my hands? Is it alive? Or is it dead? And he said, that is in your hands. So to me, Afghanistan was that bird, and I still have hope that the people will, will, will make that bird fly and make it live.

So leaving there was very emotional to me and going straight to, back to my favorite ship, the USS Santa Fe. Um, and being completely honest, um, um, I thought I was going to go to the USS Texas, which was a brand new submarine, uh, but a good friend of mine was naval aid to the president. He got the Texas.

So for whatever reason, I got to go to the Santa [00:35:00] Fe, which was great, um, back to the Santa Fe.

Hey, remind me of something, and maybe I'm, maybe I've got this wrong, but the USS Santa Fe was not David Marquet's first choice or intended choice of submarines either, was it? No, he was going to the U. S. S. Olympia and got switched over. Okay. So I've been told I was going to Texas, but they called me and said, Santa Fe.

And I said, it's good with me. So, um, so it was great. And the thing about Santa Fe ships tend to have a character and a performance level, and it never changes a lot. It might change a little bit. It might go from below average to average or average to above average shortly, but it generally doesn't go from average or below average to excellent.

And so it had gone from excellent under David Marquet and it sort of maintained an above average level. So I took over a very good ship. The culture wasn't exactly the same anymore, but a very good ship [00:36:00] in USS Santa Fe. Um, uh, and so we, we had a year to prepare for deployment and I had had about 10 years now to think about, um, these principles and to apply them um, in different places, especially in, on, on my XO tour and on the, And on which we didn't talk about much, but my XO tour and then on in the reconstruction team.

Uh, so I was pretty confident in the approach and taking it back to Santa Fe. And the ship was really ready to embrace it. So it wasn't a year like, um, like it was in the, uh, PRT to really get everything rolling or six months. It was almost instantaneous that we were able to rekindle the culture, uh, and triple down on that culture.

Um, and to see those results of using that idea of empowering, uh, the wardroom, empowering the petty officers. to really own their piece. Um, the officers had been used to getting permission for everything. Um, we established that [00:37:00] I intend to culture. Uh, we established rules like, you know, there would be a, every ship at around 2, 800 8 o'clock PM.

Uh, they call the CEO to tell them what's going on. And, uh, and then we were still in the pager days, um, believe it or not. Uh, so it would be Yeah, and then we call maybe we had phones too, but maybe it was a text for me. But a text of three was like, I've got it. I don't need to talk to you. A text with two is like call when you can.

And the text of one was like, I really need you to come to the ship. And I'd be at meetings with all the CEOs and they'd be on their 20 minute call with their officer. And I'd be like, my guy's got it. Um, and that culture really took off. Um, one more story was, um, um, we assigned ownership to a piece of equipment to a young, a young enlisted person on their first tour.

Generally, sometimes it was second tour if it was a highly complex piece of equipment like our [00:38:00] oxygen generation system. Uh, but we, they, we assigned those. And if there was a problem with those, you had to go through that person. And if it was broken, that person would brief me, the captain. With his division officer and his chief petty officer with him, but that person had the ownership and, um, some guys took to it, some guys didn't take to it, it was this one guy named Smith who really didn't take to it, you know, who's the type of guy that's like, well, I do what I'm told, I only do what I'm told, you know, and, um, You know, and I talked to him a lot when I was walking through the ship.

I always walk through the ship three or four times a day. And so we get ready and we're a year into this and it went, the first year went really well. We scored very high on our tactical inspection, did very well on our, on our, on our engineering inspection, did very well on our preps for deployment. So we're going out to deploy to the Pacific.

So things went really well, and, um, there was a huge, you know, the culture was just very strong. I, I felt like [00:39:00] we were at our top night before deployment. I get a call at two in the morning, phone rings. Normally if you're the captain of a ship and you get a call at two in the morning for a deployment, somebody's drunk, somebody's dead.

Somebody has a fight with their family, but it was Smith. And he said, Hey, captain, this is Petty Officer Smith. I said, Hey, Smith, what you got? He goes, sir, my refrigerant plant, he owned the refrigerant plant that created the, the refrigerant to keep the freezers cold to keep the food cold for deployment.

We had loaded a ton of food. So what that means is you got to offload the food, you got to fix it. You're not getting underway on time. And, you know, one of my principles was you always get underway on time, period. We did pretty good with that. I think once in three years, we didn't. Smith's like, hey, sir, my, my refrigerant plant is broken.

I've called my chief to come in and supervise. I've written a procedure to fix it. I've got the parts standing by and we're getting underway tomorrow. And I knew we had won [00:40:00] at that point. Uh, and that's the kind of ownership

that you can create with every single member of your team and you're going to beat everybody.

when that happens, and we did. We, uh, won the battle efficiency award for the best, for the best ship in that squadron, like 10 ships. We had the best mission, which I represented the team in the White House briefing. I can't talk much about that here. We had no personnel incidents on deployment, which is rare because the team was so bought in and backing each other up.

So round two Santa Fe, uh, only because I had 10 years to work on it. The team really bought in and it was a magnificent that three name rule I talked about last time. We had a four star Admiral walk through and he couldn't even talk. He couldn't even inspect the ship because kids were telling him about their role and what they were doing and it was just very special experience similar to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was a lot more clunky. Uh, so just a magnificent, [00:41:00] um, example of how this, this philosophy that I've been talking to you guys about, it can be really, really powerful. As a, as a leader back on your old ship, I suppose there were a lot of things. Obviously the principles that we've been talking about that that you carried forward.

What to you was the biggest change of having been the weapons officer the first time you're on the ship to now being the uh, the commanding officer. What was the What was the biggest shift for you again? You're 10 years older, 10 years more mature, 10 years more experience. But, uh, there had to be a bit of nostalgia, uh, being back on, uh, on that ship again.

There was a ton of nostalgia and kind of a feeling. I think I would have done the same things on any ship in the ships aren't that different. Um, but the ability to go back to Santa Fe to know the [00:42:00] history of the ship, which I always embedded it into the culture to understand that history. And then my knowledge of the ship, like the way the ship operated, um, the equipment, that was a huge advantage, even though they're all similar.

I mean, it's just a huge advantage to know that ship so well. So I think that was an advantage to me. And then, you know, to try to implement this culture again, it just felt natural, nice feeling, forced. Like it felt a little forced in Afghanistan, like really getting people to understand. So I felt like it was just natural.

The crew was ready for it. They took it on and it just, um, it was like a dream from the deployment to the, um, so it was kind of a culmination and, and the

right circumstances, you know, I, I can't underestimate that. The right circumstances of the team I was with in Afghanistan, the leadership team. You know, the colonel Schweitzer, who became a general, who was ready to do reconstruction and development as a main line of effort.

[00:43:00] Santa Fe, a crew that was ready to really take on this empowerment and to buy in and just the right team around me. Um, Steve Falk, who was the executive officer and Rons Brooks, who is the chief of the boat. There just wasn't resistance like there is. It was just almost like I said, like a dream. That was hard on a day to day basis.

And then as the captain, just balancing that courage and compassion, the courage to ensure we did it right and the compassion to ensure you tried. And I learned a lot since my weapons officer tour about that compassion piece. How do you convey that? that you care by just showing that you care, which is how I used to think when I was a weapons officer.

Hey, I'm showing you that I care. No, you got to tell people you got to reinforce it. You got to actually even inflate it. I remember Captain Marquet, I may have mentioned it said, Hey, If you and I can't fix this, nobody can. Using that philosophy of positive talk to help people. The truth, but maybe just a little over the top, setting a [00:44:00] bar for them to achieve.

So it was totally different, but I prepared for it. I knew what I wanted to do. I didn't hesitate. To help the team get there. I met with a lot of the team before I even took over to kind of explain the philosophy. And so, and I would say it's not that easy. I enjoy a great circumstances, which I think that's the tough part for you leaders out there to evaluate exactly how you can do this.

But the biggest obstacle is not the other people. It's not the resistance. It's you. You're the biggest obstacle to this kind of culture. Well, and that is, that is true at most things that are worthwhile, uh, is getting out of our own way. Dave, it, it goes without saying that any, uh, Any great leader is going to have the highs.

They're going to have the lows. They're going to have the challenges. They're going to have the successes. As you look back on your leadership career in the Navy and, uh, in our, in our next episode, we're going to get [00:45:00] into, uh, some of the, some of the work that, that you've done with drones and other types of things, some of the more creative and leading edge issues.

You know, or impacting society today. But I want to wrap up this piece with maybe a couple of lessons that you learned from those times that, Hey, it didn't

go exactly the way I did it. Not necessarily through the, the, the practices that, that we've been talking about. But every great leader is going to have those times when, Hey, it.

It doesn't work out. It went away that we didn't anticipate. And it's I think it's what we learn and how we apply those learnings on a go forward basis that can be incredibly instructive to others. Are there are there one or two instances that when you now look back on it reflecting, uh, years later, uh, you say, Hey, that didn't, that didn't go the way I intended.

And, you know, [00:46:00] here are a couple of things that I learned from that. Anything that you've got the ability to share with us. Well, I think, um, I think I'll talk a little bit about U. S. Georgia, and I wasn't there very long as a commanding officer. But, um, what went wrong? You know, you have this philosophy.

You're a believer in the philosophy and whether because of time or you can make a lot of excuses. But, um, There's a couple of things that I learned in the toughest times of your life. Number one, measuring where you're at on that competence and clarity curve. You really have to understand that if you don't have the competence, either you personally or your team, all the clarity in the world isn't going to help you.

So you have to build that competence and you have to know how to, you have to know how to do that. And I, you know, I've been in situations where we hadn't built the competence. I think I knew we hadn't built it. But how do you deal with that? You know, when faced with, you know, you got to do the mission or the things you have to do.

So how do you, how do you mitigate that? And when you do mitigate it, you got to make sure you go deep. on the mitigations. You [00:47:00] can think you mitigated it when you didn't mitigate it. So I think that's number one. But even worse, if you have a failure in your life, um, I think the key is how you handle that failure.

How you, what did you really learn from it? Like, so I thought I knew from Santa Fe the first time the value of personal relationships at the highest levels, but I don't think I developed those as I was switching coast as good as I could have. How do you develop the so you can be effective communicating what your concerns are.

So it's always about relationships, especially the relationships up and the relationships down, but you have to be able to communicate, uh, very clearly, um, and, and, and influence and be influential and do that and able to do that. And third is, um, accepting responsibility. And I think we all have a hard time doing that.

If something happens, and we learned this in the nuclear Navy very well, we tend to look at all the reasons why. Something bad could have happened to us, but the only ones you can change are the ones [00:48:00] of yourself. So, you know, what, a couple of things I learned is, um, humility, accepting responsibility, taking care of the people around you, um, when something goes badly, two examples of that is on Georgia, I worked very hard to take care of the people around me when we had an incident, uh, and those people all went on to higher levels, which isn't all that common.

And then Afghanistan, I lost two. guards in front of, in front of me. And so that was extraordinarily challenging. Uh, first of all, finding resources to take care of their families, uh, which wasn't that easy. The army. Would provide a little bit of money. How do you so I reached out to other equities to get resources to take care of those families who had literally given their lives from for my team, you know, weaving in front of the convoy.

And secondly, how do you build a team up in the midst of they just lost? Two people, you know, um, and you know, they were attacked. How do you, all those other guards, how do you get them to roll back out the gate? [00:49:00] Um, you know, so serious conversations with those and on the advice of good people. Hey, we got to get out the gate tomorrow.

We can't, we can't sit here and and mourn because we have a mission to do and it'll cause paralysis. Um, so how you self examine when you've had problems, how do you measure Uh, how do you pull the sword out of your chest and how do you move forward with your head up? Uh, because, you know, failure is only failure if you let it be permanent.

Um, and you have to deal with reputational issues. You have to deal with all those things, but all you could do is press forward. And if you put the mission of your organization, whatever that mission is, if you put that first, which is how I tend to look at every day, look in the mirror, you know, how am I forwarding what we're trying to accomplish?

What decisions have I made that were a little bit selfish and how can I not make those decisions and how can I make it about the team, um, and everybody

having joint success in any [00:50:00] situation, positive or negative? Oh, I hope that helped a little bit, Phil, answering the question. Oh, it, it, it absolutely does because, you know, one of the things We all realize as humans is, you know, we're not going to bat a thousand and, you know, major league baseball.

If you, if you could bat three 25, you, you get 30 million a year. You know, we need to, we need to be well beyond that, but you are going to have in lives of, of leadership. You're going to have those challenges. You're going to have those things that don't work out as you intended. And, uh, captured your comment.

You know, failure is only failure if you allow it to be permanent. Um, you know, that is the ability to come back from situations and scenarios that did not did not pan out. Uh, doesn't normally happen through arrogance. It, it happens because you accept some responsibility. You, you, you [00:51:00] take a, uh, a humble approach to developing whatever was the, the areas and use, you know, competency there, the areas of, uh, competency or clarity or, or just skill set.

And, uh, you, you re engage. And I, I think that's one of the most important lessons that I've taken from conversations like Like the ones that we're having here is the most successful leaders aren't the ones that got it right 99 percent of the time, uh, they were passionately persistent about pursuing excellence.

And, uh, yes, they would, they would have to retreat, uh, on occasion when, when things didn't go right, but they learned from that. And, you know, I, I think about your, your comment. Just a few moments ago that, you know, your first tour on the Santa Fe, you tried to show people that you cared about them and in subsequent years of leadership, uh, you made sure that you [00:52:00] took the opportunity to talk them through the process that you cared about them.

And, you know, that's, that, that comes from, That's developmental that comes from, Hey, I haven't been getting this across the way that I need to, there's a different way to do that. And I just, I think that's such an important aspect to, uh, developing great leaders is, you know, we are going to have those trials and tribulations.

How do you come back? So that's a, that's a great insight. Tease us up a little bit, Dave, of, uh, our, our, our third and final episode. We're gonna talk a little bit about the world of drones. Uh, there's been a lot on the news about, uh, drones recently. But, uh, tease us just a little bit about, uh, the roles that you've been playing and what kind of perspectives you'll be sharing with us next time.

Well, um, I've been doing two major things since I, since I left the Navy, and, um, they're kind of on the opposite ends of [00:53:00] the, of the spectrum. One is helping build the National Museum of the United States Navy, which we're the last service to get to that. And then the other has been, um, spent a couple of years out in the Pacific, uh, helping the Pacific fleet as best I could develop a plan for mainly for drone warfare.

It's for a lot of other things too, but drone warfare is a major, um, threat in that plan. So I look forward to talk to you a little bit about both of those, mostly about, um, the ethics of drones and where we need to focus as a nation on drone warfare, because it is coming. You can see it out there, um, and how we do that.

Mainly to deter war. The number one thing is we don't want to fight them. None of us who are in uniform really want to fight a war. And I think they have deterrent capability. And then if we, the way we deter is by being ready to fight, being ready for that fight that's coming. And what can the nation do to be ready for that fight?

And then how we honor. The past of the Navy, the future of the Navy with this National Museum. So I really, I'm very excited to, to also talk about the museum [00:54:00] because so many of our listeners are asked from time to time to take on leadership responsibilities in the not for profit or either the mercenary world.

And, uh, this has been a very, very interesting exercise for you helping to, uh, to coordinate that effort. And so I can't wait to, to learn more about that as well. Yeah, and I want to add one piece that, um, on the failure piece, um, that I don't think I mentioned. We had two major incidents on Santa Fe the first time when I was a weapons officer, after David Marquet took over.

One was with the engineering plant, and in some cases that would have been debilitating, you know, because we had been struggling as a ship. Um, and the other one was in my world, in the weapons world, where we literally dropped a 2, 000 pound tray, into our torpedo room, which could have killed somebody. We didn't kill somebody.

But the way that David Marquet handled that, using the same principles of empowerment, asking us how we're going to fix it, you know, taking us through the competency phase of why it didn't happen. [00:55:00] And then the clarity of how we're going to fix both of those incidents. And with the great support of our leadership, which were at the time, Captain Mark Kinney, later an admiral

and, and Admiral Koneczny, the guy who was later the aid for their willingness to accept.

giving us a chance to fix those problems by taking over and micromanaging those fixes. I consider that day that we had that weapons incident as a weapons officer as the best day of my tour because it was right then that I knew that we had to apply these principles and we had to learn to make sure that we did not hurt anybody and even though it was the worst day.

It turned out to be the best day, propelling the training, the empowerment, the leadership. So the worst day turned out to be the best day. So I wanted to make sure we added that in. Well, and that's a fantastic observation. You know, in the moment, it absolutely almost always feels like the worst day. the worst day.

But in retrospect again, how one comes back, how one [00:56:00] learns, how one then is able to apply those learnings. Uh, that's what really makes it that that best day. So great, great observation day and looking very forward to uh, our, uh, our next time together. And so with that, we will wrap up our second episode with Captain Dave Adams, United States Navy retired.

Great insight on his leadership journey. Uh, join us again next time as we conclude this episode with Captain Adams, as we learn about some of his insights into Drones and how they are changing the world of military operations. Uh, also they're changing the world of civilian operations. And we'll also hear about some of his great work with the you.

S. Navy museum in Washington, DC. The Cannon Curve is a production of Cannon Financial Institute. Executive producer of the Cannon Curve is Sarah Jones. Editing and mixing is done by Danny Brunner. Production manager is McCall Chamberlain. Until [00:57:00] next time, I'm Phil Buchanan. Thank you for staying ahead of the curve.