



Graham Moore talks to:

Deb Calvert

Graham: I'm delighted, right now early morning, Central Time USA, to be talking to Deb Calvert. It's bright and early in her timeslot today and in fact she is nearby a wonderful little town which is delightfully called Peculiar, and it's in Missouri. So I'm really pleased to be talking to Deb in Peculiar, Missouri. Hi there Deb, how are you doing?

Deb: Hi, I'm wonderful Graham. Thank you very much for this opportunity to tell a little story.

Graham: It's my pleasure; I'm pleased to be with you! Now, most of us would know or if we don't, we should know that in the recent months, a book was published that Deb co-authored with two gentlemen we both know – Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. The book, for those of you who can't see this video at the moment, she has shamelessly lifted up and found the camera – Stop Selling and Start Leading. And I know sales of the book are doing really well. I want to come back to that in a little while but before we get to that, I want to ask you about your journey to The Leadership Challenge and how that started.

Deb: It was a really interesting start, very happenstance. I worked in a sales training role – sales and management training at a newspaper – The Kansas City Star. One day the

publisher came to me and said, ‘We need some leadership development training around here’. Frankly, I didn’t know what that was. This was a lot of years ago so I looked up on this bookshelf. I had a huge office I inherited with all these books on the shelves and there was one, and only one book about leadership and it was called The Leadership Challenge. It was the first edition. So because I didn’t know any better, I read the book and I developed my own little leadership development program out of it. I’m sure that violates a lot of ethics, I know better today. But we conducted that program at The Kansas City Star and later I went to a corporate role with a parent company called Knight Ridder. They’re no longer in business but at that time were the second largest media company in the US. And across 31 markets I had an opportunity to again introduce some leadership development but now, I was surrounded by people and I knew better. So we began looking at The Leadership Challenge, went to some forums. We got to see small forums at Santa Clara University. Saw Jim speak. And we got the budget. Everything funded to take this program The Leadership Challenge, to bring in facilitators. But then the company announced it was going on the auction block and so I didn’t get to do it there. I then went into business for myself and my very first client that was interested in leadership development – that was Driscoll’s, the international berry company - and we continued for years, eight or nine years, to do The Leadership Challenge with one after another leadership development cohort that was coming through. And as I saw other trainers like Dan Schwab conducting the program, I knew I had to become someone who could conduct a program that way and that’s how I became involved.

Graham: Wow! You mentioned when you started telling me this that the one and only book that was on the bookshelf was The Leadership Challenge. And of course I’m

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sure that there would be many people who would say that there IS one and one only book on leadership and it is called The Leadership Challenge.

Deb: Well, that's how it framed out for me and I feel very fortunate that it did.

Graham: Absolutely! There's a huge message there, isn't it?

Deb: Yes.

Graham: This is it! So, what was it about Leadership Challenge that you really thought, 'Yes, I've got to take this on'.

Deb: Well, at first it was just how common sense it was. Even when I read the book, I could recognize that this was easy, it made sense, it was common sense but not in a common way. And the idea of behaviors really appealed to me because behaviors, being a choice, makes that accessible to everyone. But later as I watched in this program that we did at Driscoll's, is I watched people understand themselves as leaders and take the LPI and challenge themselves to choose differences that they could make and opportunities that they would seize to take up leadership for themselves. I saw transformations. I saw people within the course of a year in this program become different people and that was powerful. How do you not want more of that?

Graham: Well, could you give me an example?

Deb: Absolutely! There are so many but I'll tell you one of my very favorites, a guy by the name of Luis Ferrero who came into the program. It wasn't our first; I believe perhaps it was our third year that we were offering that program at Driscoll's. He was the person nobody wants in training – surly and closed off. Even though he was in a leadership development program he was just completely, well, unfriendly - I don't think he would mind me using that word. I couldn't seem to get through him the first couple of times that we met. The time we got together, when I saw something different, we were now a few months into the program. It was the session where we brought The

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Leadership Challenge and Dan Schwab was the facilitator then. I saw sparks from Luis, the interest for the first time and he didn't present as being quite so closed off. You could tell he was paying attention, that he liked this content. Well, now flash forward the end of the year of the

program so eight or nine months after receiving The Leadership Challenge. And I had coached him, this was a program that involved continual coaching and I had seen that he was opening up. I was getting to know him a little bit better and he was working through his action plan from the Leadership Challenge. But I had no idea how profoundly it had affected him until I went to the graduation ceremony where these 24 in the cohort were graduating from the program. Board members and senior executives from the company attended as well as their own significant others; they were invited to bring a guest. As I walked in the room, I saw this woman running toward me. I didn't know who she was but she sort of threw herself at me, she hugged me and she said, 'I'm so glad to meet you! You've changed my husband's life. He's not my husband right now but we're going to get remarried'. And I had no idea who she was talking about!

Graham: They're going to get remarried?

Deb: Remarried! She and Luis had gotten divorced. No wonder he was very down, in fact he later shared with me on video - he tells the story quite a bit - and later shared that he was actually thinking of taking his own life when he first came into that leadership program. And he says - and she agrees - that what he learned through The Leadership Challenge and the choices he made to do things differently starting with some Encourage the Heart for his children - that changed his life in every way that was meaningful and restored their marriage, their family. He later on went on to form a not-for-profit foundation. He helped children in his high school to get scholarships that they would become leaders using The Student Leadership Challenge. He's done some other wonderful philanthropic work with The Leadership Challenge since then. He's a true believer.

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Graham: Wow, that's fantastic. What a wonderful story! If ever anyone wonders why we do what we do, there's a wonderful example.

Deb: Yes.

Graham: So, well done to you for making that life-changing impact on him.

Deb: Well you know, better give that credit to Dan Schwab – he was the facilitator that day. I was the program architect and the coach and I coordinated the pieces of the program but Dan's the one who reached him that day. Who knows what I have would anyone else have? I just think things happen for a reason and that was all the right people and the right place.

Graham: And then you were supporting him beyond that, weren't you, in the coaching process?

Deb: Yes, it was a 12-month intensive; it was an immersion program with a development plan and many other pieces of the training to build folks as leaders to increase their self-awareness and to help them develop business acumen to move up in the company.

Graham: Which leads me to one particular aspect about what we do as facilitators of The Leadership Challenge and that is - What happens after the workshop? What happens after we've had that intervention or that interaction with them and the lights go on and they think, 'This is terrific and wonderful' and they've got their LPI and they make these promises do things differently but for me, what you've mentioned about the ongoing coaching is very important. It's unfortunate that many of their clients don't always either see the benefit of that or have the budget for it. Have you had other experiences with clients where coaching after the workshop becomes part of what you do?

Deb: I try to build it in every time. I don't get a 100% rate but very close. And if it's not coaching, if it's not going to be one-to-one coaching, maybe it's a small group

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coaching – I do webinars and I have one that I developed for each of the thirty behaviors but also a series that can take you through The Five Practices. It is a way for a small group; if I bring about six people together, a small group to be able to talk about their own needs, their own questions, their own struggles that they might be having. It gives them a little bit

more accountability, and a little bit more relevance and personalization. So I think anything that we can do, anything at all that we can do, even if it's just equipping people internally to reinforce – it's worth it, it's so important.

Graham: You're right, it is so important. Sometimes it takes just that something that may have happened in that workshop with the man you mentioned with Dan Schwab facilitating the workshop in his case. It showed that a light went on for him and changed his life. And sometimes it can be a little bit later through probably a follow-up or even the coaching process that it finally hits them. I'm really pleased that you're incorporating that in most or almost all your proposals so that the clients know that this is not just 'We'll do the workshop and the place we reach should transform forever'. It doesn't work that way. Somebody once said leadership requires ongoing practice. Someone said that it even requires deliberate practice and it's an ongoing process. And of course, we know who that was. I wrote an article some years ago which I called 'Have You Ticked the Leadership Box'? That came out of my perception of people who were saying, 'Leadership? I did that. I've seen the pyramids and I've been to Paris and seen the Eiffel Tower. Leadership? I read a book on leadership so I'm fine!' or 'I did a workshop on leadership ...or maybe three years ago'.

Deb: What a wonderful world it would be if that's all it took and everybody can so easily become strong leaders.

Graham: Absolutely, wouldn't it? But in fact, what a wonderful world it is that we learn as leaders everyday. We learn and the people who 'get this' also learn everyday and that's why it's one of the reasons it's so exciting. They then say, 'I tried this and

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did that and wow! Look at the result I'm getting from this person'. Very good, keep doing it.

Deb: Yes.

Graham: Come back now to what you spend a little bit of time on, I believe, and this is tied-in to your sales background, coupling that or bringing that together with leadership.

So what was it behind you thinking that 'Maybe there is another approach to sales training that we can link leadership into this?' Which is essentially, as I understand, what you have done with the book. Correct?

Deb: Yes, so a little bit more background to give context. I have been in business for twelve years ever since the company I worked for shuttered its doors. During those twelve years, I've had two tracks of business. I've had sales training and sales management development, and I've had leadership development. I've worked with different people inside organizations, I have called on different decision-makers, I've got up in the morning and said, 'Oh, today's a sales day' and put on my sales-trainer hat. As if these two were completely separate and sort of like on a toddler's plate where the mashed potatoes and the peas can never touch each other. That's how I operated for a long time. Then I was working on my Certified Masters status and Barry was my mentor. He and I had done some work on youth leadership and I was now at the point in my process of becoming a Certified Master where I was just doing some really heavy thought work. That's what I put on to my own development plan was that I wanted to recognize leadership more often and be able to see it and capture examples of it very easily. That's what I was doing. It was a very ponderous sort of exercise but I was fairly disciplined about it. And I literally, in the middle of the sales training one day, had this thought. And the thought was, 'What would happen if sales people adopted the behaviors of leaders?' because sales people get beat up for their behaviors – all those stereotypical icky, pushy kinds of behaviors. Clearly there is an opportunity for something different, but what? And that was just my question – What would happen

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if sales people adopted the behaviors of leaders? I took that to Barry and Jim, they were interested and curious so we commissioned a study of verified buyers – people who, in business, that’s their role. They are involved in decision-making for purchases so they have sales people who call on them. And we did that survey, we asked them ‘Of the sellers that you all choose to do business with, how frequently do you see each of these behaviors?’ And we took the thirty behaviors from the LPI, changed the language

just a little bit to what made sense in a buying-selling relationship, how frequently we got our baseline. And then we asked about the ideal frequency and in all cases with all those buyers, it was higher than the baseline. So I see this much in the ones I choose to do business with but I’d like to see even more of all thirty behaviors. And then we asked, ‘If you saw this behavior, would you be more likely to meet with?’ And then also, ‘If you saw this behavior, would you be more likely to buy from?’ And again all thirty behaviors, all the buyers significantly more likely to take a meeting with the seller who exhibited that behavior and significantly more likely to buy from them. So that was Phase 1 of the research and it was compelling. Very clearly buyers want sellers to behave differently as leaders. The next thing we did was we went out and we gathered stories. I just put out an all-call on social media and through my network and it went like this: Sellers tell us the story of your personal best in selling – your personal best. We didn’t tell them the word leadership, we didn’t talk about the buyer research, we didn’t want to stack the deck. What we got were over 500 stories and we culled through them to look for leadership behaviors. And sure enough, when sellers were making these extraordinary sales, those leadership behaviors were pronounced. They showed up in those examples.

Graham: Wow! Well, this is fantastic and with all the years of sales training I’ve done I would say and still do, that the buyer buys from the personal that they like and trust. Trust is such an important part of the relationship and when things get tough in the sales context, and by that I mean when budgets are tight, when you compare this price to the competitors and it’s the same, then they will choose to buy from the person who they trust the most, right?

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Deb: Yes, absolutely.

Graham: Because that's what we talk about in leadership – that trust is so much important. As Jim says, 'Trust trumps everything'. And that very much applies in the sales process. So what about some of the other Five Practices? Can you give me some examples of how that relate directly in the sales context to success for sales people.

Deb: Absolutely. I have spoken to a lot of sales audiences and I've found that there's a disconnect. See, we also asked those buyers to rank order the behaviors just because we wanted to know if any were significantly more important than others. And it turns out there was one practice - the behaviors added up - one practice that buyers strongly put at the top. They want all five, we cannot unbundle them, but there's one that buyers put right at the top. When I talk to sales audiences, I survey them and I ask about the five after I describe The Five Practices, I ask them to predict which one the buyers thought was most important. Sellers pick one that is where buyers ranked at number 5. And the one that buyers put number 1, sellers put at 4 or 5 consistently. So there's just this misunderstanding about what buyers even want. So what sellers think buyers want are the behaviors of Inspire a Shared Vision. That's the one that sounds most like sales work. 'I'm going to paint the picture of the future, I'm going to sell you something that gives you that future state that you are looking for'. That seems most like sales. Buyers want it, they want it more frequently but not as much as the other 4 Practices. So a seller who only focuses there misses out on so many other behaviors that could differentiate them and build that trust. The one that buyers put right at the top - do you care to take a guess, Graham?

Graham: I'm going to pass on that.

Deb: Buyers put Enable Others to Act. Way up there at the top. And the behaviors that make Enable Others to Act so important to buyers, because we have their comments to give us context also, it has everything to do with 'Did the seller give me a chance to have input? Did I get to put my own imprint on the solution? Did I get to participate in creating what I wanted? Was my voice heard? Was my opinion

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respected and dignified'? Buyers want to be involved and sellers often don't understand that. They go away and they create a solution unilaterally and then they bring it back and they can't understand why buyers don't want it. And it's because you have to have buy-in before you can buy something and Enable Others to Act lets that happen.

Graham: So often as we know, sales people believe that they've got all the answers and, as we used to say, they show up and throw up. And that lesson - that 'work for what the customer wants' and don't tailor a solution to what the customer is seeking. So, very much it comes to what you are saying about the customer wanting to be valued in that aspect. Would it be reasonable to say that some buyers might be feeling disempowered?

Deb: Absolutely yes. They are feeling disempowered. They're feeling dismissed and it doesn't feel like 'it's about them'. It feels like it's about the salesperson which, of course any of us as buyers, is what we resist. That's what we don't want. Those are the sales behaviors we need to set aside.

Graham: Yes, we want someone beside us. We want someone understanding what our problems are and providing a solution for those problems.

Deb: Exactly, and the thirty behaviors, The Five Practices are a blueprint for how to do that - for how to help your buyer feel that way, for how to give them a meaningful experience and to build trust. So that the solution you offer them is one that they have participated in creating, truly meets their needs, they want it, they're going to work hard inside their own organization to champion it and make sure that it goes all the way through.

Graham: Okay. How about Encourage the Heart? Explain how that works and did it rank highly for buyers?

Deb: Encourage the Heart is an interesting one because when I speak to sales audiences, that's the one that they think, 'No, no, I say thank you after they sign the

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contract and that should be enough'. And so they're missing the mark. It's interesting for another reason, which I will come to in a moment. What Encourage the Heart translates to in sales is something like this: In sales we ask buyers to do something. We ask them to make a change and then we forget that they have to go back inside their own organization and say goodbye to the vendor they're currently using, convince all the people who are affected by

the current solution, put their neck on a chopping block because it's a risk to go to some completely new solution. We forget that their job might be heavily impacted by the decision that they make and that they have a lot of people watching. Well, all through that process where they're making things happen, that's the time when they most need encouragement. That's the time when they most need courage and the wherewithal and the buoyed spirits to carry this through. It's not at the end when they've already done all that work and we'd say 'Thank you for the contract'. We've got to be right there helping them and making sure that they feel positive through all of that process that's internal for them.

Graham: Can I make an observation? Correct me if I'm wrong but I would have thought getting to that point that there needs to be that all-important word that I keep using - trust - so that along the way when we're building the trust, when the salesperson offers that encouragement, that the purchaser knows that it is from the heart – it is genuine and meaningful. Is that a fair comment? Because so often with many sales people, they may not appear as sincere and as genuine as they should be.

Deb: Yes, and even if it's unfair, that's true because we go in with a bias – an anti-salesperson bias. It's a defense mechanism when we're buying, that we assume all sales people are going to do something to us and for themselves. We open the book with the chapter on credibility for this very reason because that is – trust, credibility – you've got to immediately establish that with the buyer before you can do anything else.

Graham: Yes, and then when you've done that, when there is that trust there, then when you Encourage the Heart along the way, it will absolutely, I'm sure, resonate or

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be really well- received by the buyer. And I would suggest in a way that he or she has never had before in this type of interaction.

Deb: Yes. There's one other thing about Encourage the Heart I promised to share with you that's interesting. We segmented our buyers by every possible demographic sort you

can imagine – where they work, where they're from, the size of the sale, the size of the company they work for, how long they've been in their job, their age, gender. And there was only one thing out of all those sorts that popped up and it popped up a little bit. That is that among buyers 30 and younger, Encourage the Heart is more important than it is for the whole group together, for those other age groups. So millennial buyers, we could postulate, especially want to have the behaviors of Encourage the Heart.

Graham: Wow, that's interesting! As you've mentioned the demographics, were there any other disparate observations that came out of the different age groups?

Deb: None at all. We looked for them because you would expect that there should be, but none at all. People who purchase small items, people who purchase long items with very complex long-term sale cycles – no other differences.

Graham: That was going to be my next question because as we know the sales interaction can be brief but it can also be the complex sale, that can have many-layers and various time constraints and it can go over a protracted period of time, if you're selling a jumbo jet or an aircraft carrier, for example, the sales process timeframe may be years. So what you're saying, what you've postulated, and what you've written in the book says that all research about The Five Practices in the sales context is the same across all sales interactions.

Deb: Yes, we could not find an exception. It's these behaviors because it's leadership, and leadership is for everyone.

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Graham: Yes, and isn't that wonderful? I think it is wonderful that you made this connection with sales and leadership and said, 'Hang on, there's something going on here. These should work together'.

Deb: Well it took me a very long time; I wish I'd have thought of it sooner instead of those parallel tracks.

Graham: Was it a real epiphany when you said 'Wow'?

Deb: Absolutely! It happened in the middle of sales training and it was such an epiphany that although I very much enjoy training, I love being a facilitator, that day I couldn't wait to get it over with so I could go and make my mind work on this and do something more with it. I distracted myself for the rest of the day.

Graham: Well, a very worthwhile distraction. And so what was the reaction on Jim and Barry when you first put it to them?

Deb: Well, interest and sort of a 'let's see'. Barry and I spoke early on at an event called Dream Force, which is put on by Sales Force and it's a large sales event. We spoke in a small venue just prior as people were coming in to Dream Force, to test it out. That being one of the very first times that we tried the theory on with a sales audience and right from the start I saw two things happen even in that preliminary, we were just feeling-it-out sort of a setting. I saw two things happen - the first was that anybody in the room who was in sales, as we started talking about them as a leader, you could see them sit up a little straighter and smile a little bit and be a bit more engaged. It resonated, people like to think of themselves as leaders and maybe don't like to think of themselves as sellers because all those stereotypes. That's the first thing and I noted it, and I've seen it everywhere I've gone since then. The second thing was how many conversations immediately came afterwards. Right then and there were people calling me later or connecting with me on social media and saying, 'I think you're right about leadership and I'm trying to lead and what if my boss doesn't lead'? It was questions of all sorts and that's not typical when you speak to an audience especially before a great

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big event where they're going to hear many other speakers. It's not typical that it sticks and that people want more, and this stuck.

Graham: You know what was just going through my mind, and as some of us doing sales training for 22 years, we know of Zig Ziglar's work all those years ago and so many others,

Brian Tracy. And as we know of Spin Selling and we know various approaches to sales and sales techniques and they have evolved over the years. But now I think we're at a point of a major revolution in terms of sales training that you, Jim, and Barry have come up with in this book.

Deb: I think so. I do think it's that profound. What's nice about Stop Selling and Start Leading is that these are behavioral choices that anyone can access and they fit with any sales process that you might need to abide by in your organization or any of the wonderful teaching of Brian Tracy and others who have come before us that those principles don't go away. This is an extension of them and a behavioral blueprint for how to pick those ideas and activate them.

Graham: Sales training has evolved so much right back from the days when almost 30 or 40 years ago, it was a manipulative sales process and sales people were taught 24 closing techniques, right? And that was the way that's kind of in many ways brought the bad reputation of the sales people, that were pushy and what have you. We know that there's been an evolution since then, things like Relationship Selling and Consultative Selling came about. But here I think you're on to something which will be embraced by sales people across the world. One other comment that I would make and I'm sure you'll agree with this is, I hope so, is that we know that the best sales people are often promoted to the sales manager role and they fail, right?

Deb: Yes, that's true.

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Graham: What you're talking about here with The Leadership Challenge and incorporating The Leadership Challenge in the sales process, I think that would help overcome some of those little issues as well.

Deb: I think so too. I think it will help overcome the issues in two ways. First of all, I believe it ennoble the sales profession in a way that it badly needs to be thought of differently.

So sellers thinking of themselves as leaders, behaving as leaders - that changes the profession. Then some of those top sellers might stay in the role that they ought to stay in which is sales. Not everybody is meant to be a manager. Secondly as you suggest, if people have learned leadership behaviors and are then promoted into management, they have a tremendous advantage and perhaps they'll have a much better shot at success.

Graham: I really think you are a wonderful winner and I hope that I can incorporate this in the sales training that I do. I hope that we could move fairly soon - very soon - to having support materials - and incorporating an LPI designed for sales people - so that this can become a flagship program for sales training around the world - all because of you. And two other guys who we both know.

Deb: Yeah, those two. None of it would happen without them. They started it.

Graham: But there was that wonderful moment in training when all the lights went on for you - and no one else in the room - and you thought, 'I'm on to something useful'. Well done, congratulations. Deb, I want to thank you so much for the time that we spent today. I really appreciate the conversation that we've had and learning from you about what you are doing to make sales people become leaders and be even more successful in what they are doing.

Deb: Thank you, Graham. Thank you very much.

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