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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 132: PHIL TUNING – LONG TERM SUCCESS WITH ONE EMPLOYER

Ken White

From William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average professional changes jobs 10 to 15 times during his or her career. For most people, that means changing employers, too. But for others, like Phil Tuning, the changes occur within the same organization, and they often lead to a terrific career and organizational success. For 20 years, Tuning worked for John Deere, where he held a variety of leadership roles in the U.S. and abroad. In his most recent position, he was president of John Deere Financial Canada. Throughout Tuning's tenure at John Deere, he adopted strategies that helped him successfully move from one opportunity to the next while reaching or exceeding team goals. He joins us on the podcast today to discuss those strategies, including the say-do ratio, just say yes, and perform and connect. Here's our conversation with Phil Tuning.

Ken White

Phil, thank you so much for joining us, and thanks for coming back to William & Mary.

Phil Tuning

Thank you very much. I'm happy to be here.

Ken White

How long's it been?

Phil Tuning

Gosh, I graduated in 2002, and I've been on campus once since then. So at least ten years.

Ken White

How about it? And you just spoke to a group of undergraduate students. What was your kind of reaction when you met them?

Phil Tuning

I enjoyed it. I was really pleased with their interaction and engagement. You know, lots of times when you go into these situations, you just don't know what to expect. But I was really pleased to see their level of engagement and really good questions and their thoughtfulness was really impressive.

Ken White

You mentioned, you know, you wonder if you had to start your career now. It would be pretty competitive when you see those kinds of students. Right. I get it. They're good. I mean, they're really quality people.

Phil Tuning

They're very good. And boy, it can be intimidating as well, because you know that what you thought you knew when you're in college, and you see these guys, and you're going, wow. New day, new game.

Ken White

Yeah, no doubt. One of the students asked you about your approach to leadership. And you said that you like to consider yourself, and you strive to be a servant leader. And we know the term. But can you talk about how you approach that? What that means to you?

Phil Tuning

Yeah. So from my perspective, being a servant leader is making sure that I'm investing in others and trying to understand what's most important to them to be successful, what are their aspirations and where they need what skills they need to develop and make sure that I'm really focusing on them. I'm investing in them so that they can build their competencies. So that they can actually contribute more to the business, and it helps sustain our business. You know, one of the things that lots of times people talk about, what's the legacy of a leader? To me, the legacy of a leader is the people that he invests in. And so for me, taking the time to support them, advocate for them, and ensure that they have the resources that they need to be successful is how I would term a servant leader. Additionally, I tend to look at them holistically, not just who they are from a work perspective,

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

but additionally, what's happening in your family so that I can better understand what situations we need to help them be successful.

Ken White

You also have a bottom line. You've got things that need to get done. How do you balance? Because that takes time. Right.

Phil Tuning

Yup.

Ken White

Being that close with your team. How do you balance that?

Phil Tuning

So for me, the approach is what I call the three p's people, process, and product and the product, p. Part of it is around the profitability.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

So again, from my perspective, I think balancing investing in people is going to drive the results because a business ultimately is about the people. And again, if we build their competencies, build their confidence, empower them to be successful, we will get the business results. And as you look at the different groups, I've had the opportunity to lead, that's absolutely been the case. Invariably employee engagement goes up, and invariably we are a much more sustainable operation.

Ken White

One of the things you talked about was the say-do ratio. I love that. Can you explain that?

Phil Tuning

Yeah, that's one of the things that I learned early on. In fact, from one of our colleagues that went to William & Mary as well. It's one of those things where people want to know that they can trust you. How can I trust you? Did you do what you say you're gonna do when you said you were gonna do it? So the say-do ratio. And I think that's how we all are measured. We just don't know it because people looking at you as a leader and say, can I trust this person? And the one true way to know if you can trust them is that they do what

they said they were going to do. And that's to me is the say-do ratio. And you want that to be high.

Ken White

Yeah. So what does that mean for you then? You're paying attention to the say, paying attention to the do, to both. How does that guide you?

Phil Tuning

So I'm paying attention to both because I want to make sure that whatever I say, I know that we can deliver. And if there is stretch in it, I want to let people know that there is stretch in it. And then we've got to make sure that we time-box it. So that we know that there is a time period in which we should make a deliver what we say we're going to do and then we go back and measure it. And in general, I'm not a big measurements guy because I believe that if you do the right things, you'll get the results

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

and the measurements are just an outcome. But if you time box it and then you've got the right things that you want to work on, then you can have a very high say-do ratio.

Ken White

In your career, you've had a number of promotions, a number of different jobs and titles, and opportunities. How do you decide? Yes, I need to take that. This is good for me. How do you make that call?

Phil Tuning

That's a really good question because I've been asked that question a lot. And what I can tell you is trust is how I make the call. Because generally, I've been approached by a leader that I admire and trust, and they're asking me to take on the role. And I almost always say yes, in fact, I've always said yes, because I trust a leader that's approaching me. And then, when you look back, you realize that you're being prepared for a path because I could not have mapped my career together the way it was mapped. But obviously, someone had a vision, and I just had to have trust in the organization. That they're going to, they're going to have one the best interest in the organization. As well as the best interest in me and supporting the organization. And so my assessment has always been, do I trust a person that's approached me? And if I do, it's an easy yes.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm. Now, if it's a position or a division. You really don't have any expertise. What do you do in that situation?

Phil Tuning

Panic.

Ken White

Yeah. Right.

Phil Tuning

So no. Yeah, that's. Yeah. And I shared that experience earlier today where I took a role. I didn't know anything about it, but I knew that it was an opportunity. And as an opportunity for me to stretch, and it was opportunity for me to build a competency I didn't have or to fill a gap in the organization. In a way, I prepare for it as I do a lot of research. I talk to people. I talk to my predecessors. I talk to the people that are in the organization. And after I've accepted the role, the other thing that I do is I make sure that I get to the key stakeholders, and it could be a direct report, it could be someone else in the organization. And I develop sort of an interview format that I ask people the same questions. And then I'd come back, and I'll look at what are the themes that I learned.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

And then, I share those themes back with the organization. I say, is this what we need to work on? And then I just really focus on what the team thinks is important and plus what I've learned. And then, how do we map a path for us to be successful? And then I have to continue to work on my competencies. And the other part of it is, is really challenging sometimes as a leader. But there I have to say; I don't know.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

And so then you better trust and that empowers the rest of your team. That's been sort of a ticket to success if you will.

Ken White

When you're going into a new position. How much do you recommend that you speak to the person who's leaving that position? How much insight do you want from them?

Phil Tuning

I want a lot of insight from them because I want to understand what were the areas of focus for them. More importantly, I want to see what they know about the people, because, again, my approach is always start with people. And I talk. We will do a transition to make sure that we're transitioned appropriately. And then I ask, what are the key themes and what are the issues? And then I'll take a step back and make a determination from there.

Ken White

Same way when you are leaving, and you're bringing someone up, you approached the same way.

Phil Tuning

Same way.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

Absolutely.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with Phil Tuning in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at William & Mary's School of Business. If you want to think and lead strategically in your division and across the organization, the Center for Corporate Education has the program for you. The Certificate in Business Management is a five-day program taught by William & Mary's world-class faculty. Each day is devoted to one important topic, including effective communication, managerial accounting, operational effectiveness, business strategy, and executive leadership. The next Certificate in Business Management program takes place next month at William & Mary from April 20th through the 24th. To learn more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation on long term success with one employer with Phil Tuning.

Ken White

When you look back on your career, good leaders, you've had people you've looked up to. What qualities did they have? What made them good and effective?

Phil Tuning

So the good leaders that I look up to invariably they're inspirational. They understand the business. But they don't necessarily just talk about the business. They talk about the why. Why are we doing what we do? Because so often it's easy to talk about. You've heard Simon Sinek talk about this. It's so easy to talk about the how and the what, but the why is important so if they can connect the dots on the why that makes it inspirational. Those are the leaders that I look up to. Secondly, I believe and feel that they care about my development and my career. And that's very, very important to me. And then the other part of it is what is even more important? They are people of integrity. And they and they almost always unless there's some reason that they didn't know that they were doing it. Walk the walk.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

So whatever they say, they do. And so that's really important. And then the other part of it is they are very capable people. They are people that have demonstrated success, and they've demonstrated that they can lead an organization. And those are people that I've always looked up to as my leaders.

Ken White

You've been so many words mentioned without mentioning the word authenticity. And we talk about that a lot. What's that mean to you? How is a leader authentic?

Phil Tuning

So for me, a leader's authentic. When you can observe that person, even when they're not in the key role and see how they respond under stressful situations. And then again, it kind of goes back to their say-do ratio. Did they say what they were gonna do, and did they do it? And then do we have observed behaviors that are very, very consistent throughout time. So that authentic piece comes through over time because you want to have an opportunity to sort of measure the proof points

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

and then you build from that.

Ken White

You've lived, you grew up in Virginia, you've worked in the Midwest, you've worked in Canada, you've worked all over the world. What was that? What are those instances like when you're in a brand new land, new people, new culture? How did you get rolling there?

Phil Tuning

So probably the most extreme was when we moved to Thailand. It was invigorating because, one, it's an opportunity to learn about a new culture and to learn and test yourself in that environment. And so we again spent a lot of time just making sure that we understood the culture. My wife and I we did not want to live in an ex-pat community. We wanted to live in a community with tight the local Thai people.

Ken White

Yeah.

Phil Tuning

And we did. And so it was an opportunity to learn? And so we moved a lot. But the one thing that we learned embrace where you are is the most critical piece. You cannot duplicate where you came from, but embrace where you are. It will be different. But if you embrace where you are, you will learn a lot, and you'll have a much, much more enjoyable experience.

Ken White

A very other-centric kind of viewpoint.

Phil Tuning

Yes, yes.

Ken White

Yeah. You when you go to Thailand, you look different, you sound different, and you stand out. How do you deal with that?

Phil Tuning

That's a good question, because, you know, one of the things as you travel and many people have around the world, your recognized as an American and in some ways that's a very, very in most ways is a very, very positive thing. And even though you stand out, you look different again. You try to learn about the people and who they are. And so it becomes a point of how do you connect with people. And build from there.

Ken White

You mentioned you just said connect. One of the things you talk to students about was perform and connect. That's sort of been one of your battle cries that's helped you in your career. Can you talk about perform and connect?

Phil Tuning

Yeah. So one of the things that I shared earlier today is performance is number one, if you're going to be successful in any organization, make sure that you're performing as expected. And quite candidly, better than expected. Now, the connection piece comes in that not only do you want to make sure you're performing, you also want to make sure that you're sharing with others and building your network of peers. I talked about peer advocacy today because that's a piece that people sometimes don't think about. Your peers can be very critical to your success and then build on a network with others that may be in a different organization than yours and make sure that you're connecting with people, that you have something in common with, not just for professional growth, but make sure that you connect with them individually and build upon that. So make sure your network is large, both from a peer perspective and also maybe from a leadership perspective. And what I've found over time is that that turns into advocacy, which which helps you develop, and it also gives you an opportunity to help other people develop.

Ken White

You were in a business with, and you're African-American. You're in a business predominantly white, major, major white peers, and others. How did you approach that?

Phil Tuning

So from so maybe what touched on a topic of diversity and inclusion, certainly from a company perspective, there aren't as many people that look like me in our organization. When I go back to is what are the opportunities to build on things where we're alike and where we are alike are on the objectives and goals of our business. And so if people know that you're focus on these same objectives and goals and that you perform, then opportunities will they will show up. And the reason they show up is because everybody wants to be around someone that's focused on the goals and objectives and successful. Then you get an opportunity to learn more about each other individually. And so my approach has always been, what's our objective, what's our goal? How can we build our relationship? And then if there are differences, we'll figure out what they are. But I'm going to spend more time focusing on the areas where we're alike

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

so that we can actually drive change within the organization. And when I first went to Des Moines, Iowa, I was the only one in the organization at my level of the organization. And so what that meant to me was I had to make sure that I was making friends. And that's when I start to get into to cycling. And cycling became an entree for me to learn more about people in the community, actually learn more about the community. It just so happens that some of our senior leaders were cyclists as well. So now I'm cycling with senior leaders.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Tuning

And so is this one of those things where you've got to make sure that you're expanding your horizon.

Ken White

You got your MBA in the middle of your career. What did that do for your career?

Phil Tuning

Having an MBA from William & Mary did a lot for my career, and what I shared earlier today is it really is much about personal development. It gave me the opportunity to test some of my ideas and learn that boy some of your ideas are actually pretty sound, but I didn't have the confidence to share those ideas. The other part of the MBA did for me was he gave me the opportunity to say, you know what, some of the things you thought you knew, you probably don't know as well as you think.

Ken White

Yeah.

Phil Tuning

And then the third category was around just new information. So it gave me the confidence to actually go back to work because I did the executive MBA program. There were things that I recognized I could test and implement today, there are some things I'm going maybe not so much, but from a career development standpoint, it gave me that extra credential to help me demonstrate that I'm one a continuous learner, which is what a lot of organizations are looking for, are people that are continually learning and developing a solid disposition. Me a little bit definitely in the organization, but I would also go back to the confidence piece. It actually gave me more confidence to share my ideas, to test ideas, and frankly test others ideas.

Ken White

And that confidence is so critical in leadership, isn't it?

Phil Tuning

Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Because the reason is it is important because people, again, want to know that I can follow this leader because he or she knows the path. They understand the goals of the objective of the organization, and they have the confidence to deliver appropriately. And frankly, sometimes I tell the team why this is what I promise for you. And they've got to have confidence in me that I've got the confidence that we can do that and we do.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Phil Tuning. And that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the William & Mary School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education offers programs that help you reach and exceed your career goals, including the upcoming certificate in business management program April 20th through April 24th. The program is taught by the William & Mary MBA faculty recognized year in and year out as one of the best in the business. To learn more, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Finally, we'd love to hear from you regarding our podcast. We invite you to share your ideas, questions, and thoughts with us by emailing us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guest this week, Phil Tuning, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White, wishing you a safe, happy, and productive week.