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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 188: MANO WATSA – THE COMMITMENT-BASED ORGANIZATION

Mano Watsa

Every new staff member in our company creates their commitment statement. It's not what they're going to do. It's not their goals. It's who they are committed to being. What we've discovered is that results come from behaviors, but behaviors come from who you are. Who you are drives what you do, what you do drives the results that you get.

Female Speaker

From William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business, produced by the William & Mary School of Business and its MBA program. Offered in four formats the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. For more information, visit wm.edu.

Ken White

Welcome to Leadership & Business, the podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. Sharing strategies, information, and insight that help you become a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. There are countless parallels between business and sports. Teamwork, sacrifice, expertise, winning and losing, innovation, leadership, and commitment. Our guest today is the President and Owner of PGC Basketball, the largest education basketball camp in the world. PGC has camps across the United States, and Canada dedicated to teaching young people how to succeed on and off the court. While the PGC camps are spread out geographically, so is its staff. It's fully remote and has been for years. Yet the organization's president, Mano Watsa, has built a highly successful team by creating a commitment-based organization. He joins us today to talk about the commitment-based organization, the people it attracts and retains, and why it leads to success. Here's our conversation with Mano Watsa.

Ken White

Mano, great to see you. Thanks for being with us and sharing your time today.

Mano Watsa

Pleasure being on the podcast, Ken.

Ken White

Yeah, well, tell us about, first of all, your organization, PGC Basketball. It doesn't sound like a basketball camp that I went to when I was growing up. Very different.

Mano Watsa

It is very different, and PGC stands for Point Guard College and our founder, Dick DeVenio, who passed away now, many years ago. We just completed our 30th year of running our camps, or we like to think of them more as courses, as players hear it in the classroom, they see it on film, and then they go on court and do it at our five-day, four-night overnight camps that we put on over the course of the summer. And we put on over 150 camps through the year across the US and Canada. But Point Guard College was really founded on the premise of teaching players, not just point guards, but any player who wanted to learn how to think the game, to teach them what it actually takes to run the show for a team and to be the coach on the court. So really, we're training players how to be leaders for their teams.

Ken White

Yeah. And, you know, you hear that about point guards, right, and quarterbacks all the time, how they're leaders. Well, you grew up playing ball and playing other sports. How did that affect you and your leadership development? Were you putting the pieces together as you were a young athlete growing up?

Mano Watsa

I think I was putting some of the pieces together, playing a variety of sports, and really competing. I lived for sports growing up, but it wasn't until I actually attended Point Guard College as a high school athlete that then the light bulbs turned on for me in terms of the impact that I could have on our team through my leadership. It really revolutionized for me how I thought about playing sports and the impact that I could have.

Ken White

And then transitioning that from leading on the court or on the field, or on the ice to leading in a business environment.

Mano Watsa

Absolutely. Because one of the things I learned at Point Guard College is to lead. It wasn't just a basketball concept. It was a way of life. If you're a point guard and you're running the show for your team, figuring out how to make your teammates better, how to create a winning championship culture, how to be a great communicator and facilitator, and how to make your teammates stand out, well, that's not just something a point guard in basketball has to be able to do. A quarterback on a football team is the point guard. A CEO of a

company is the point guard. And so, really, what I had to figure out as we began growing PGC when I came in and helped to take over for our founder, what I had to figure out was what does it mean to be the point guard of our company?

Ken White

It's interesting over the many podcasts that we've done, how many leaders and CEOs grew up playing sports, of course, and how the vast majority of them are so committed to their workouts as well. So those connections are pretty obvious between the two.

Mano Watsa

Definitely.

Ken White

So you and I were talking right before we started to record about your organization being a commitment-based organization. Can you tell us about that?

Mano Watsa

Sure. So we've attempted over the past 15 years to build a commitment-based culture. And I'll contrast that against a behavior-based culture. In a behavior-based culture, employees and business owners relate to each other based on their behaviors, whereas in a commitment-based culture, we relate to our staff and to each other based on our commitments. And so the way this plays out is this every new staff member in our company creates their commitment statement. It's not what they're going to do. It's not their goals. It's who they're committed to being. What we've discovered is that results come from behaviors, but behaviors come from who you are. Who you are drives what you do. What you do drives the results that you get. And so we pull all the way back to who are you committed to being? And with most sports teams, even with most companies, it's typically the leader setting the expectations for everyone else and everyone else trying to live up to their bosses' or their coaches' expectations. And what we've discovered through creating a commitment-based culture is that when we empower our staff, our employees, to create their own commitment statements, they actually create commitments that far surpass even anything I would attempt to create for them. And so they create these two or three-paragraph commitment statements of how they're committed to showing up, who they're committed to being. And then what we do is we coach them into it. When we see them living out their commitments, we celebrate them and encourage them. When we see them falling short of their commitments, we remind them, and we come alongside them and say, how can we help you to live out everything you're committed to being? And it's created this culture of camaraderie, connectedness, a sense of we're all in this together. Whereas in a behavior-based organization, Ken, what typically happens is we see somebody falling short of our commitment that we had for them, or I should say, our expectations that we have of them, and then we get frustrated with them, and then we're

calling them into our office, and we're having a conversation about the standard that we have. We're trying to pull them up to our standard. And what we found is it tends to lead to writing off an employee tends to lead to employees getting discouraged or frustrated. And we found that a commitment-based culture has just given us a significant edge from a business standpoint in terms of how we do business day to day and how we relate to each other day to day.

Ken White

Are there goals in the statement or metrics in there?

Mano Watsa

No. So all goals and metrics would be separate from that. And it's within their onboarding process. Every employee, they'll see a few examples of commitment statements, but they will create their own commitment statement. And then, in our week-to-week meetings every week, employees have the opportunity to share their commitment statement. So it's not just something that's one and done. They share their commitment statement. And then, whether it's within their department or a larger staff-wide call with our 40 or 50 full-time staff, we'll have two or three staff members every month share their commitment statement in front of the whole company with all the staff. And then, we take time to acknowledge how we've seen them live out their commitment statement. We call them celebrations. So part of our culture of commitments is a culture of celebrations because most employees are not encouraged enough, are not recognized enough for their good efforts. And as much as we can try and do it as a business owner, it's like a head coach of a basketball team. They can't provide all the encouragement that their teammates need, and they don't even see all the good efforts of their team. And so, as we help coaches in basketball to create a culture of celebrations, they're actually training their players to see the best in each other. And so at PGC, we're actually training our employees to look for and see the best in each other and to highlight it, acknowledge it, celebrate it. And so it really creates a special culture where everyone seeing the best in each other. And when somebody does fall short, everyone's coming alongside them, saying, how can I help you win? How can I know this is who you're committed to being? I'm not seeing you live it out in this way, so how can I support you? And it's really created a supportive environment.

Ken White

Yeah, one of my questions when you started talking about it, was, they don't share them, do they? But that's part of the backbone of the whole thing is I share my statement with you.

Mano Watsa

100%, 100%, and then we know what we're all committed to.

Ken White

Yeah.

Mano Watsa

And when we see others living out their commitments, we celebrate the heck out of them. It's not only affirming, but for everyone else, it's aspirational as well. When we see somebody else and hear about someone, how somebody else is showing up, I think it inspires us to raise our game and raise our standards as well.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Mano Watsa in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. The world is changing like we've never seen before, and that means change for business and your career. You can sit on the sidelines and watch things evolve, or you can play a role in the future. If you want the tools and education needed to succeed in the years ahead, consider the MBA program at William & Mary. Wherever you happen to be in your career, William & Mary has an MBA program for you. The full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA all taught by the number one ranked faculty in America. Take charge of your future. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary at wm.edu. Now back to our conversation with Mano Watsa.

Ken White

Now, you mentioned a couple of people will share at the meetings. Is everybody's statement available to everyone else?

Mano Watsa

Yes, at any time and within departments, commitment statements get shared. And then within the larger company, as I mentioned, on our monthly staff-wide calls, because we all work remotely. And Ken, one of the things we had to figure out, the pandemic has caused many companies to shift over to working remotely. We've been working remotely for 15 years, and so we had to figure out how do we build a world-class culture remotely. And it took us many years and me working with a top organizational culture coach to figure out how do you create a culture that everyone feels a sense of belonging that no one wants to step away from. That's not easy to do. And so we've had to work really hard to create a world-class culture even though we're not together in one place.

Ken White

Something that companies and organizations all over the world are struggling with right now. The fact that how can I lead the way I've always led when people aren't coming in

and meeting on a regular basis? Interesting time for leaders right now. You seem to be ahead of the game.

Mano Watsa

Well, we've had 15 years of trial and error and figuring out what doesn't work and what does work. And you have to communicate much more effectively when you're working online. It requires more touchpoints. We have everyone in our company has a weekly coaching conversation with whoever they report to. Every week there's a department call, and then every month, there's our staff-wide calls, which are celebratory to appreciate everyone and connect with everyone, to keep everyone together. And then, we have in-person department meetings and an in-person yearly celebration as well because those are critical to helping to ensure you're creating a strong sense of camaraderie and community.

Ken White

Do the celebrations are they on a smaller level as well or are they mostly on the organizational?

Mano Watsa

Actually, every call that anyone steps into or any meeting in person, we begin every one with 90 seconds to two minutes of celebrations. It could be something as simple as what are you grateful for today? Or how did you see someone else show up this past week? Or what's an accomplishment you're feeling really pleased with and proud of right now? Or how have you lived out some portion of your commitment statement? We have lots of different ways we do celebrations. We try not to just focus on what everyone is doing and accomplishing because we're not human doers. We're human beings. And so we try and focus on who is everyone being. And it really creates a culture of gratitude and a culture of positivity.

Ken White

Have you seen any differences between genders or generations in terms of the culture?

Mano Watsa

No differences. The only difference is when somebody comes in who hasn't been immersed in it. It's a culture shock.

Ken White

I'm sure.

Mano Watsa

Because most aren't used to celebrating others, encouraging others, most people aren't used to finding each day. What am I grateful for? And so there's usually an acclimatization. And our culture is definitely polarizing. There have been occasions where somebody has come in and said, I think that's not for me. And that's a good thing. When you have a culture that polarizes, you're probably on the right track. And for those who step in and say, I love this environment. I want to be at a place where I'm recognized, appreciated, and valued. And when those people come into our company, they feel right at home, and they say, this is a place that I want to be and that I want to stay and work for forever and for the rest of my career. And as a business owner, you love to hear that.

Ken White

We've seen survey after survey over the last ten years where the inputs are changing. It used to be money was the key driver that just keeps going down the ladder. And what keeps moving up is I want someone to say thanks. I want someone to appreciate my effort. And so you're seeing that first hand, which is fantastic. How do you apply that to the young athletes who you work with?

Mano Watsa

Yes. So we train coaches. We train thousands of coaches each year through our coaching clinics. And actually, over 1500 coaches attend our camps as well to see how we build culture and train leaders. So we teach it to coaches, and then with the players, we actually do it. When we're at our camps, we give them the opportunity to partner up and give each other feedback. What are they doing well? What can they improve upon? So we've created an environment at our camps where there's a high culture of feedback. And if you're running a company and you haven't created a culture of feedback, then employees are going to be hesitant to give meaningful feedback. Not just the encouragement but gaps that need to be closed and areas that need to be improved upon. They won't give that feedback unless you've created a culture of feedback. And you have to create a culture of feedback by creating a culture of vulnerability where everyone is willing to stretch themselves and be vulnerable and to be vulnerable. That all begins with humility and understanding that we're all, I like to call it, a joyful work in progress. We're all a work in progress. We are as business owners. Our companies are, our employees are. And if you can approach things that way and, as a business owner yourself, be receptive to feedback, and then your employees will as well. So within our camps, we create a culture of feedback with the players, and then we train coaches on how to, within a team environment, begin practice and end practice with 60 to 90 seconds of celebrations. And one of the things that celebrations often does is it actually reinforces your culture and standards because what tends to get celebrated are the things that you're actually emphasizing. And so, for teams, it's a really potent and powerful way to actually aid coaches in keeping their standards top of mind.

Ken White

You're working with young people, obviously, all the time, as I am. I feel great about this young generation who's going to be the leaders of the future. What are some of the things you see, and how do you feel about the next generation moving in as leaders?

Mano Watsa

First of all, I often hear adults talk about their concerns with the next generation. But I think every generation has this in common. They all want to make a difference, and they all want to be valued and pursue something meaningful with their lives. I know my three teenage kids are the same way. So what I see from young people, especially the young leaders we work with, just amazing, outstanding young leaders. I see them full of passion and full of a sense of purpose, of wanting to contribute. They want to, I think, even societally, they want to fix things that they see are wrong, and they want to be difference-makers in the world. And we do our best to equip them, to give them tools and inspiration to do that within their own team setting. If they can do that within their team setting, they're going to be really well prepared to go do that in a larger world when the ball stops bouncing.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Mano Watsa. And that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business, home of the MBA program, offered in four formats the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. The new year is right around the corner. Take control of 2023 and your future. Check out the William & Mary MBA program at wm.edu. Thanks to our guest Mano Watsa and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White, wishing you a safe, happy, and productive week ahead.

Female Voice

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