

Something Extra EP 005 – René Vidal

[00:01:24] Lisa Nichols: On today's show, we're excited to welcome René Vidal. René is a six-time NCAA championship tennis coach, turn leadership expert. He works with leaders, teams, and organizations who want to create cultures of high performance, resilience, and execution. Well, I'm so excited to have my friend René Vidal here this morning with us. René and I have known each other for a little bit of time now and I have read several of your books and he's a multi-time author and just a good friend and as a coach. René, tell us a little bit about you growing up in your family and then a segue into how you got into tennis.

[00:02:07] René Vidal: Sure. Well, first, Lisa, thank you for having me. Absolutely, I'm a huge fan of yours. Your spirit is contagious. Your commitment to excellence is recognized, not only here in St. Louis and in Missouri, but nationally, and I know globally as well. It's awesome to be here. My story really started when I was five years old. My dad put a tennis racket in my hand, introduced me to this wonderful sport of tennis, this amazing sport.

I played my first tennis tournament when I was seven and I lost 6-0, 6-0. It did not go well. But I had a dad who believed in me and he surrounded me with some great teachers and great coaches. By the time I was 12, I was nationally ranked in the country. I was traveling throughout the US from Chicago to San Diego, to North Carolina, to Florida. It was a great experience. Then a year later, my dad who actually was an entrepreneur, his business was in commercial printing and he was also a diabetic.

Unfortunately, when you have a work ethic like my dad had and you have this health challenge, when you combine them with being a workaholic, things don't always turn out in the best way. That was tough. That's when I started asking questions around leadership, started asking questions around how do you continue on this path that you were put on at a very young age, this path of high performance, this path of becoming the best that you can absolutely be.

My dad was Hispanic in a time when there were not a lot of Hispanic entrepreneurs building their own businesses and he did it very successfully. He was my hero and that's really where the game for me started with him. My mom was there as well and she was a great influence in the background, but it all started with my dad.

[00:03:58] Nichols: You bring up a good point. You love business today. You've transitioned your tennis more into business. You got both of those loves really from your dad. Your dad obviously was pushing you to be excellent. Did you ever question that or did that ever get tiresome to you, René?

[00:04:17] Vidal: That's a great question. My dad was born in 1926, so I'm the product of a second marriage. I joke around and say, "Look, not all divorce is bad. It actually worked out for me." He was old school. You think about the coaches like Vince Lombardi and some of those guys in the NFL. My dad didn't play around too much, so I didn't have too many questions growing up for my dad. He was a stickler on remaining positive while you're competing, competing with class, competing fairly. If he felt that I strayed from the path, I would definitely hear about it, let's put it that way.

For me, it was who I was designed to be. From the beginning, I felt like the seeds were planted very, very early in my life. I also went to private school starting in Pre-K, I believe. My dad had a specific vision for my life, from tennis to education, even going so far as to not teach me how to speak Spanish, which even though he was a visionary, he wasn't perfect. If you look at our culture today and you look at society and how things have changed on a global level, how I would love to be fluent in Spanish to this day.

[00:05:33] Nichols: Sure, I love that. I'm just thinking about for you today, one of the things that you talk about with leaders is a lot of people have the desire to win, but a lot of people do not have the will to prepare. That is something, obviously, your dad really taught you at a very young age. That to win, you've got to prepare. Sometimes it's that, that really the journey of getting there, not necessarily the destination is what's really important.

[00:06:00] Vidal: Well, I think you hit it right on the head or on the sweet spot so to speak, to use a tennis analogy. I grew up, literally, we lived in Queens, New York. My dad's business was in Brooklyn. Every single morning, we would commute from our home in Queens to, we called it The Shop in Brooklyn. The school bus would pick me up in front of my dad's business. I'd go to school and I'd be dropped off back at the business. Every single day, I had the opportunity to see my dad's work ethic, to see how he interacted with his team, to see how he interacted with clients, and to see this business grow.

In fact, I literally my routine, my winning habit after school was to use one of the walls in the business to play tennis up against. That's how I honed many of my tennis skills at that young age. I was in a culture of winning and of high performance from the beginning.

[00:07:01] Nichols: There's just so much packed in there. The other thing that you've said that I really love is that obviously, your dad had a vision for his business, but he had a vision, not just for his own life, he had a vision for your life.

[00:07:12] Vidal: Look, the old book says without a vision, the people perish. I think everything starts with a vision. Here's the trick though. Yes, my dad had a vision for my life, but I think all of us need to understand that we need to come to a point where the vision is our own and whatever we decide to do, whatever direction we decide to move toward, that it comes from something that's deep within us. Something that we see, something that we believe is possible, but you're absolutely right, a lot of times it starts to extrinsically.

It starts with someone else in your life who expresses faith in you, who expresses their belief, their confidence in you. I've been fortunate to have many of those people pop up, it's funny how that works, at different stages in your life who just speak into you and invest time in you and investing what they see. I think that's what a great coach does, that's what a great CEO does, what a great parent does, whatever role or whatever hat that you're wearing at the time to be able to empower those around you and help them see something that they might not see fully, help them see a little bit clearer, is just a game-changer

[00:08:28] Nichols: Yes. Well, we could spend a lot of time unpacking that. Tell me about the jump. When did you jump more into business and business coaching? Tell me a little bit about that transition, if you would,

[00:08:42] Vidal: About 10 years ago, I was the head coach at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. That's what brought our family to the Missouri Valley region. It really started there. I just had the inkling. I think as a coach, you typically, when you're highly passionate, you're looking forward to the day-to-day, you're looking forward to the practices, you're looking forward to recruiting, which is sales. You're looking forward to making those calls and building those relationships so you can keep your talent pipeline full, you know, and you can build towards that vision that you have for your program.

I wasn't feeling it anymore. I started to feel, I think a little bit boxed in just being in a university in a college environment. I look back on it as a time where my entrepreneurial roots started to take shape. Where I really wanted to make my own decisions, I really wanted to be more selective around the people that I surrounded myself with, be they clients, friends, whomever. It was just time to fly. What I say, once you turn down entrepreneurial road, there is no turning back.

[00:09:53] Nichols: There's no turning back.

[00:09:54] Vidal: There's no turning back, for good or bad. You charge ahead with that vision, as you mentioned, and with the passion around what your greatest talents and your strengths are. You look, I think most importantly, for as many ways as possible to bring your unique genius and your talents to as many people as possible. That's where it started. It started in 2007. I officially launched around 2011, 2012. It's a slow build.

[00:10:25] Nichols: It's a slow build, right.

[00:10:26] Vidal: It's been an incredible learning curve. For me, it all starts with creativity, I think, as a writer, I'm a writer and teacher first, and if I'm doing those things well, then I'm able to serve more people I think, in a more powerful way.

[00:10:41] Nichols: I've heard that a lot from different people. It doesn't mean that everything that you do in life, don't you think it builds on each other? When you were doing that in Carbondale, you were doing the best that you could do, right? You were doing everything with excellence, you were learning, you were gleaning as much as you can. It just, I think, prepares you for the next step along the way.

[00:11:02] Vidal: You're absolutely right. They say it's not so important to be great to start, but it's absolutely vital to start to be great. The commitment to lifelong learning, which I think is one of your true pillars, how you approach your life, how you approach your work is key. Because if you're on that continual learning path, then different doors are going to open up and some doors are going to close, and you don't have to figure it all out in the moment. You just have to keep moving forward with your faith, with your belief system, with the vision that you have for who you want to be for the vision that you have for the impact that you want to make on your people, the people that you're best to serve in your unique way.

[00:11:45] Nichols: I love that. We talked a little bit about this, but for the listeners out there that are starting to feel a little bit of that, what I would consider restlessness, don't you think, René, that it's so important to understand for the listeners out there that may be feeling that, every job that you do-- Being the head women's coach in Carbondale, you learned a lot of things that you're carrying forward with you. Now, everything is almost like a stepping stone building on one another. Don't you think, no matter what it is, whatever job that you're learning, there's things that you can glean that you can take forward with you?

[00:12:22] Vidal: Absolutely. I think it begins with committing yourself to being a lifelong learner, because if you do that, then you're going to approach every situation, every person, every circumstance with an open heart and an open mind. When you come from that place, that's where all possibilities exist. You're not always going to be able to see around the corner, but I think the more important thing is to continue to move. Even if you're on the right road, you'll get run over if you're standing still.

I think for me, the principle of proactivity of always taking initiative, of swinging in the racket or taking a cut if you're at the ball if you're a baseball player, you got to be in movement, you got to be in motion and you're going to make mistakes. I mean, you look at the best tennis players in the world, they're winning tennis matches and winning the most important tournaments and making a ton of what we call unforced errors, a ton of mistakes, but they're also hitting winners and also figuring out the mental side of the game and they're doing other things to offset those errors. It's not a game of perfection. It's a game of success and just figuring out what works best for you.

[00:13:35] Nichols: I like that. Talk a little bit about, you mentioned the word mistake, but you've got to try and you're going to-- you're not going to win every time but talk a little bit about that. What's the importance of at least trying?

[00:13:49] Vidal: Well, if you're not failing, you're not trying. If you are not failing, you're not trying. Look, I mean, I grew up in tennis, there's a net and there's lines. If you hit the ball in the net, you lose the point. If you hit the ball outside the lines, you lose the point, there are clear consequences, but I think the best athletes whether you're in sports or in business, understand that mistakes are inherent to the game. You have to decide what kind of player you want to be, and if you want to be the best player you can possibly be, you're going to learn from those mistakes and try to correct them as quickly as possible and continue to move forward.

[00:14:29] Nichols: Great advice. Tell us a little bit about your goal. You have a goal, a pretty big, hairy, audacious goal of meeting or breaching one million leaders. Talk to us a little bit about that. Talk to us about the origins of that vision that you had and then how are you going to achieve that?

[00:14:47] Vidal: At Vidal Training Group, our mission is to impact one million leaders worldwide by year-end 2023. I think the origin started with myself. I mean, we've talked about the importance of having winning habits, but the thing about winning habits, habits follow, whatever vision you put out in front of you. I went through a period, ironically they say, whatever it is you want to teach, you end up having to study it pretty hard for first and foremost.

As I was doing research, which you so kindly took part of for the new book, on winning habits from morning routines to how you interact and motivate your team, I just realized that gosh, there were so many little things that I was doing that were not moving myself forward personally, we're not serving my business and the people around me. I needed to set something, a goal that was going to help me jump out of bed literally every single morning. Five to seven-year vision that was inspiring to me.

It's inspiring to our company. It's not so much it doesn't-- your mission doesn't have to be inspiring for other people, it's yours. It just resonated with me because I believe in creating value on as many different platforms as possible, impacting one million leaders worldwide, that doesn't just come from selling books. It doesn't come from giving seminars and speaking engagements. It certainly doesn't come from one on one coaching, that you'll be doing one on one coaching for the rest of your life. You're trying to impact one million leaders.

[00:16:25] Nichols: Right. 24 hours a day.

[00:16:27] Vidal: Exactly. For me, I wanted to create a mission that was going to allow me to play in a lot of different areas where we could excel, and it's been working. It's moving along at a good pace.

[00:16:42] Nichols: I want to pick up on something that you said that I think is so important. You said that what you did, you did a self-evaluation and you saw that there were some things that you were doing or you were participating in that we're not moving the needle for where you wanted to go. Talk a little bit about that. I think it's so important to do that, right?

[00:17:02] Vidal: When I started looking at my routines, I mean, for years I've been a 5:00 AM guy where I wake up early and we've talked about morning routines, and I love your morning routine. Every time I think about morning routines, I think about Lisa Nichols, but I mean for me, it was actually I became overly ambitious with how many things I wanted to accomplish in the morning before the kids got up. You know what I mean?

Realistically, you can only do two or three things between five and seven in the morning. I wanted to do 10 things and I was fighting with myself to get all these things done and by seven o'clock, I was actually more stressed than in a flow and really high energy state. It started with my morning routine. I think that was number one for me personally.

Number two, and this is sort of embarrassing to say, but as an athlete and someone who's been committed to fitness for as long as I can remember, for my entire life, I mean, I kind of let it go. I let my diet go, I put on 10 to 15 pounds about two years ago, and just wasn't feeling good and you feel it in your productivity, you feel it in your attitude and your self-esteem. Those were the two things I really needed to get control over and say, okay, what's going to work for me, and I figured it out.

[00:18:24] Nichols: Make some adjustments.

[00:18:25] Vidal: Make some adjustments starting with the mission. What's going to help you jump out of bed in the morning. Then once you're up and ready to go, what is that morning going to look like for you? How can you start the day like a champion every single day so you can bring your best self to others?

[00:18:41] Nichols: Great advice. We're going to take a quick break and then we'll be back with René.

[00:18:47] AD: Hey, everyone. I want to tell you about something so cool going on right now in the Nichols household. Ally, our wonderful daughter and the inspiration for *Something Extra* is competing in the Dancing with the St. Louis Stars event this January. Ally will be the something extra for the night and we need your help. Please go to lisagaylenichols.com/vote. Watch a video of Ally's story, and get all the links to vote. Each vote is \$10 and you can vote as many times as you like.

All of the proceeds support the Independent Center, a community-based rehabilitation program for adults with severe and persistent mental illnesses. This is a fantastic organization and voting for Ally is a great way to support the important work they are doing, and we want Ally to win. Pause the show, go over to lisagaylenichols.com/vote and join team, Ally.

[00:19:41] Nichols: Talk to me a little bit, René. We had said sometimes you have to eliminate some things or make adjustments. I know in your latest book, *Execute to Win*, one of the things that you say that is a failure sometimes, or why leaders fail to execute is because they have so many things that they're wanting to do. The objectives you can't have 10 different initiatives that you're wanting to do this quarter, and you're a big quarter guy, aren't you?

[00:20:08] Vidal: Yes.

[00:20:09] Nichols: I mean, planning for a quarter. I mean, you can have that three to five, seven-year plan, but I like that because where's the same way at Technology Partners, we plan in 12-week increments. What are we going to get done this quarter? What are we going to get done this month? What are we committing to as our top 10s? Talk to me a little bit about that because obviously, you have interviewed some leaders and you've seen like if they've got too many things, it's better to have fewer things and execute on those as well.

[00:20:38] Vidal: I have two stories there. The first is Don Shula and the second is tennis. I mention it in that order so you don't let me forget. When Don Shula was hired to coach the Miami Dolphins back in the late '60s, they had a press conference in Miami and the media asked him, they said, "Hey coach, what's your three to five-year plan?" He said, "You know what? I don't have a three to five-year plan. My plan is day-to-day," and that's always stuck with me.

Now, understand that Shula had a vision and he had a vision of perfection, and he said, if you don't strive for perfection you can never reach excellence. This isn't about not having a vision, but it was much more his response to the media was what's going to make the difference is how we execute on a day-to-day basis, what our practices look like. Because in the NFL, and the 2018 season has just started, guess what? Every team has the same goal which is to qualify for the playoffs, qualify for the Superbowl, and walk home with the Lombardi trophy. The vision doesn't make these teams different. What makes the teams different is what they achieve on a day-to-day basis and the way they achieve those goals.

The second story, it's simply if we're working together in a tennis coaching relationship, how would you feel as the student if you come out at the beginning of a lesson and we've got 30 minutes to work together and the coach says, "Hey, we're actually going to work on six different things today. You're going to learn how to hit the forehand then I'm going to teach you the proper grip for the serve. After that, we're going to bring you up to the net. We're going to teach you the forehand volley and the backhand volley and then after that, we're going to talk about the importance of tactics and strategy." You would be so overwhelmed.

[00:22:26] Nichols: I'd already feel defeated. [chuckles]

[00:22:28] Vidal: You'd already feel defeated. Exactly. If you're smart, you'd fire your coach right away and go find somebody else. In order to have a high-performance session whether you're on the tennis court or in business, you've got to identify those vital few objectives. The question that's really helped me and I think it's helping my corporate clients is going into every scenario asking what's our outcome here?

We're recording a podcast right now. What's the outcome for the podcast? We're heading into a meeting with a prospective client, what's our outcome? What's the outcome from their perspective? What's our outcome as a service provider, as an entrepreneur, as a business? Being really clear about that endgame. How you want this match, so to speak, is key. That should drive everything that goes into the time that you spend together.

[00:23:26] Nichols: That is a great question that we should all be asking ourself before every engagement, I believe. Great advice. Tell us a little bit about something extra. You have coached thousands of students, college athletes, now business athletes if you will. Tell us maybe a couple stories of where you saw something extra in one of those people that you've coached.

[00:23:51] Vidal: Sure. I think recruiting, at the college level, was a joy for me. I always loved selling someone on the university that you were affiliated with and the culture that you were trying to create. As a recruiter, you travel around the country to these junior tennis events trying to find the right fit so to speak. Trying to see who you want to hire and bring on your team. When I think about something extra, what I looked for in that role as a head coach and recruiter was poise. Absolute poise under pressure. The questions that I was asking and I think the questions that a lot of my buddies ask at that level is how does this person respond to

mistakes? How do they respond when things aren't going their way? Do they maintain their poise or do they lose their temper?

I think how you conduct yourself as an athlete, as a leader, CEO, again, in whatever role that you're in, just speaks so much about who you are as a person, what your belief level is and what that outcome truly is for you, and your ability to keep your eyes on the ball so to speak will make the difference at the end of the day.

I think poise is number one but another word that comes to mind is presence. Presence not how I think we hear a lot today about the importance of being aware, which is key, and how vital it is to be in the moment. The presence I'm talking about is the presence when you walk in a room, how that room changes. I feel like when I coached at the college level. Hopefully, I bring a little bit of this now to my clients and the people that I work with is when you're interacting with someone, it's about changing the game.

Whenever I stepped on a university campus with a new team, it was all about, "Look, it doesn't matter what happened in the past. We've come together for a reason and that reason is to figure out a way to win and to optimize our potential." That's exactly what we're going to do. That will happen. You call it forth before it actually happens. I think presence is that something extra where people, they can feel it and you raise the level of belief, actually, before day one or you wouldn't get the job.

In college coaching, you got to sell the AD, sell the athletic director that you're the right person so there's that presales process, but then when you meet with the actual people that you're going to be working with and developing, from the first moment they see your face and they see how you walk and they listen to how you talk, you need to be speaking the language of high performance, the language of winning and painting that picture of how you're going to succeed.

[00:27:01] Nichols: I really love that. Talk about even in some of the contemporaries out there where you have seen something extra missing.

[00:27:10] Vidal: Funny that you ask that question. I think what's gone viral over the last couple of weeks is the US Open Women's Final with Serena Williams. Let's just get it out there. Serena Williams is the GOAT. She's the greatest of all time. She really is a fantastic role model on and off the court but in that final that we saw a couple of weeks ago, unfortunately, she took her eye off the ball.

Her vision of becoming the very, very best, cementing that legacy and that's defined as number of Grand Slams won, that's what she's after, that's Serena's outcome right now, was blurred by the challenge that she was facing that was in front of her which was this young, very competitive, very dynamic young lady, Osaka, who was playing some really good tennis. Unfortunately, Serena got distracted. She lost her focus which is something we talk about in Execute to when just the importance of maintaining your focus, making sure you've got your priorities in order and that's where your attention is going. Things didn't work out for her.

[00:28:22] Nichols: What do you think is something extra that every leader needs?

[00:28:26] Vidal: One word is belief. I think belief, not only in yourself but the ability to transfer belief. I think the ability to empower others, that's the something extra for a leader because if you can empower the people around you, success, not only is it a journey but it's a team sport. Teamwork is the essence of life and no one succeeds on their own. Look, as entrepreneurs, we're not lacking for ideas.

There's so many different things that we want to do and they're great intentions but if you don't have the right people around you, starting with your family, starting with your friends and having that support system, it doesn't mean you're not going to accomplish what you want, but I think the road is going to be a lot tougher and the length of time, it's going to take a lot longer and it's not going to be as fulfilling.

[00:29:17] Nichols: The ability to transfer that belief to other people and empower those people because you cannot, let's face it, we cannot do it all on our own. It needs to be a team effort. We always stay together, everyone achieves more is what we say around Technology Partners, and it's so true in every person on that team is vital to making it all work.

[00:29:37] Vidal: Absolutely. You and I, we've talked about leadership not only from the day to day operational approach but the spiritual aspects of leadership, right? I don't think you can ignore, regardless of whatever your religious badges or whatever your background is, the essence of leadership is about maximizing someone's potential and figuring out the best ways to communicate that so that potential is realized. One of my favorite quotes from the old book is that the kingdom of God is within you. Now, as a leader, you can interpret that in any which way that you want. I tend to believe that that's true but it doesn't end there.

My goal as a leader, my responsibility as a leader is to recognize that truth in others and to honor that truth in others and to help other people realize the potential that they have within them. Then if I'm doing my job well, I'm helping them to unlock that potential.

[00:30:40] Nichols: Right. I think that's a great definition of success, don't you?

[00:30:43] Vidal: Absolutely. I think that's how you improve the world. That's how you impact whether it's one million, two million, three million leaders around the world. You do it just like you play tennis. One point at a time. One person at a time. Being with the person that's in front of you. Everybody should leave an interaction with you with a little bit of higher confidence than what they came in with. I think if you can do that as a leader then you're really doing a great job.

[00:31:12] Nichols: That's your sweet spot that you're aiming for.

[00:31:13] Vidal: That's the sweet spot. That's the name of the next book, right? The Sweet Spot.

[00:31:18] Nichols: Yes. Is there anything that you're excited about? You did just launch your newest book, *Execute to Win*, I would highly recommend everyone go out and get a copy of it. It's great. What I love about that, and I've told René, is at the end of every chapter, he gives you next steps. It's things that you can really contemplate and think about, even with your team. You could use that as just professional development for your team even, but are there other things that you're excited about that you want to tell our listeners about?

[00:31:47] Vidal: Yes, I think as our seminar business is growing, what I'm really excited-- I'm excited about that aspect because I love to teach, I love to speak, and I love to meet new people. The greatest thing that I'm looking forward to is developing new relationships with people who truly care about high performance. I've always said even when I was in tennis full-time and working with some of the top athletes in the country, my passion is working with individuals and teams and companies that truly care about high performance, whatever that looks like for you, whatever that looks like for them, I'm excited about that.

I really believe that there are so many good people out there that want to maximize their potential and make an impact in the world. You start with leadership development. Self-leadership precedes team leadership. If you're not developing yourself, you're not going to be able to give as much to others. I think for me, it's just all the people that are out there that'll have

the opportunity to meet, whether it's through the book, through my speaking engagements, that's what I'm most excited about.

[00:32:51] Nichols: Well, they need to meet you because they will be better because of it.

[00:32:55] Vidal: Thank you.

[00:32:56] Nichols: Thank you so much for being with us today!