

Something Extra EP 007 – Dr. Richard Lytle

Lisa Nichols: On today's show, I'm privileged to talk with Dr. Richard Lytle. Rick is the president and CEO of the CEO forum. He holds a PHD from Arizona State and was dean of Abilene Christian University college of BA for 17 years. Rick, I'm so excited to have you on the podcast today. We've grown to love you and your family and you're the CEO of an organization that Greg and I are very passionate about. CEO forum. Let's just talk a little bit, I would like to for you talk about your upbringing.

Rick Lytle: I have a little bit of unique upbringing. Grew up in Detroit Michigan. During the race riots. I remember that vividly as a young guy. A lot of stories to that. I would say the most unique thing was I was raised by a set of parents who lost their hearing about 12 months old. I grew up in deaf household where the mom and dad are both deaf. 2 other brothers who are hearing. All 3 of us boys were hearing. That particular experience some might have seen as handicap. I never saw it that way. What's interesting today is I look back and think, the only difference between my parents and other folks is that their handicap is much more evident. We all have them. There's was very easy to spot. Out of that came a variety of experiences and blessings for me and our family as we grew up. And challenges because of their limitations. Grew up in Detroit. Went to high school there. From there, I met the bride of 37 years as of today. Great story there which I won't go into. Jeannie is her name. 5 years in pursuing her, Lisa. She just wasn't as excited about this marriage thing as I was.

Lisa: You stuck with it though!

Rick: Maybe that's why a PhD in marketing. This sales, it's not working. We've been very blessed. 37 years. We followed our graduate education across the United States. We have lived for most of our married lives in Texas. We have 3 daughters. Kelly is 28, Hannah is 26, and Michele is 25. For most of my life, I've been a college faculty person, dean of a business school, consultant, and speaker kind of guy. Jeannie got a couple of master's degree. Education has been a big thing for us. Our children have been blessed to be fairly well educated into the graduate realm as well.

Lisa: We'll get back to some other questions but you just welcomed a little boy in your family.

Rick: We did. Tatum Lytle Smiley was born July 14. 1 day after my dad's birthday. I was hoping he'd be born there but he wasn't. He's been a great blessing and they're doing well down in Houston.

Lisa: I want to go back to your parents. Tell us a little bit about how your mom and dad and what was their approach to raising 3 boys but talk a little bit about your dad with Ford Motor company. What was their approach to life? How did they get through that limitation?

Rick: I would say first of all, a lot of people around them. Great sets of parents who paved the way for them in a lot of settings, challenges that they would experience. I would also say a very simple faith in God. Mom was educated the 8th grade. Dad 11th grade. That's as high as they could go back then. There would have never been a time in my adult life if Mom and Dad ever sitting down with me and sort of teaching me bible lessons or anything like that because they didn't have in essence the capacity to do that from an educational learning standpoint. But their simple faith stood out in the way they approached life. I never heard my mom and dad complained. Never.

Lisa: And they could have.

Rick: Let me tell you lisa, One Christmas I could remember this very well with my dad. It was maybe Christmas Eve or the day before. Cold in Michigan there up in Detroit. We were going Christmas shopping. I can't remember for who. I remember it was a cold day and dad and I were out. I was probably 13. I was starting to develop a bit of sensitivity to folks who needed help. There was a guy panhandling and he had a sign that said I'm a deaf mute and he had his beanie out and he wanted some money. I had a paper route at that time and I had money. I was convicted to help this guy. I went and reached to my pocket and I went to give something in the guy's hat and my dad just grabbed my arm, ripped it down to my said. He can work. Put that back in my pocket. I don't understand this right now but okay. There were a lot of challenges in the home but let me tell you the story.

Lisa: Yes, Please do.

Rick: It's very unique and if we want to go after that we can. My mom's side. My mom was about 12 months old. She came down with scarlet and romantic fevers and she lost her hearing. Her eardrums were broken. From 12 months on, she never heard a sound. She was born in Tennessee, dirt floor. 1 room. TN cabin with a great mom and dad. A lot of people died because

this fever came through and lost relatives and didn't understand all that. When she was 7 years old. She needed schooling but it was during the depression time. My grandfather pop, he didn't know what to do and he didn't know how to feed the family. I have writings of his, hand written notes about his faith in God and how he didn't know how he was going to feed them the next day. He travelled to Michigan because he heard Ford was hiring. He went and got a job at Ford Motor company. In order to get my mom up to Detroit because there was a day school for the deaf in Detroit. He did that, he would go back and forth with the family. My mom finally entered school at 7 years old. She said she felt odd. She didn't know she was deaf until she was 7. She didn't even know there was sound. I would see people's moving but my lips moved. She had no concept that she was any different than watching other people. It's just a fascinating thing. He got her in school eventually was able to move the family up there but the story that I'll share is in the 8th grade. She was at the top of her education. She was valedictorian of the 8th grade. Back then, there was a slogan as I was growing up that people used to describe my mom and dad and that was that they were deaf and dumb. Dumb can mean silent or muted. But most of the time it meant in that culture. They're dumb. They're ignorant. They have no brain. They have no really use to society. We have pictures of my mom. She was very gifted and worked real hard and they took her. All through the state of Michigan and Illinois, in front of state legislators who were trying to prove that deaf people are smart. They can function in society. They can add value to our society. Mom would literally close her eyes. Put her hand on the throat of her teacher. While another boy was pointing to the words on the easel and the teacher would read the words. My mom with her eyes closed would feel on her throat and would tell you what she was saying. It's phenomenal. My mom and dad used total communication. They were brought up that way where they sign. They do speak. If you listen to them would wonder what's going on. And they read lips. They were able to use all 3 of those. That's a bit of Mom's story to that point. My dad grew up in Detroit. A little bit higher socio economic status. His dad was Detroit police officer. He lost his hearing, around 3 years old. They're not exactly still sure. I never knew. My dad never knew how he lost his hearing. Some of that because people didn't communicate with the deaf. Even parents. They were left out of the conversation because nobody knew how to talk to them. Henry Ford Sr., Dearborn Michigan, Came in to the Detroit day school for the deaf and my dad was in the 7th grade and Henry Ford and talked through an interpreter to all of the boys in the class. He made a promise to them. If you will finish the 11th grade and get an education at Detroit day school for the deaf, you come and see me and I'll give you a job at Ford Motor Company. My dad clung to that. He took it to heart and that drove him. After he was done with 11th grade. He and his mom went down, he applied and as far as we know, he was the first deaf person ever to work at Ford Motor Company. So that's an exciting story. Became a journeyman. He apprenticed in the factory and all that kind of stuff. He met my

mom and they started dating a little bit. He thought, okay this might get serious. It did and they got married. My dad knew that getting a job at Ford as a blue collar factory men was a blessing. But he wanted more.

Lisa: He had a dream.

Rick: He did. He wanted to be a white collar worker which back in those days. You're an office worker. You wore a tie and you had a white shirt which means you weren't in the factory. He thought that's the guy I want to be. He just thought that's impossible. It was almost impossible that he got a job at Ford in the factory. He signed up for trade school that was an engine design, drafting kind of trade school. He went for 4 years. 2-3 nights a week and back then they didn't have interpreters. Dad said, I just saw the back of the guy's head. They're writing on the chalkboard all night, and so he's worked a shift. He's in his class. After class, he'd have to go up and just kind of try to ask the teacher to write down. He didn't know what he was talking about. He did that for 4 years. He failed on the final exam his senior year. He told me that it was probably one of the most discouraging times in his life. But after a little bit of pouting and kind of getting through that, his mother took him by the ear and marched him back down to that trade school and he re-enrolled for his last year. Passed within 80%. And one of my favorite pictures that I have is a picture of my dad in a white collared shirt and tie in the world headquarters, drafting design room at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn Michigan. 1st deaf white collar man ever to be in that position. Phenomenal story, when he retired. 42 1/2 years, never missed a paycheck. When he retired, he was a supervisor and he had 26 men working for him. His boss told me one time when I was in colleges. If your dad was hearing, I'd be working for him. My dad was a very kind, humble, guy. Nothing "special" about him but a simple faith in God. And a belief that he could achieve his dream and he just went for it. That was a platform then for my dad to be able to help his deaf friends. They watch dad go to Ford and be a journeyman and be a blue collar worker and then they watched my dad become a white collar worker. So they followed in his footsteps. Most of the deaf friends that I grew up as a boy being around were all white collar people who were working for Ford, GM, or Chrysler. The big 3 back then. And largely it was because of mom and dad's example to these people. For me what even takes it more than that is my mother's father thought, they need to have a church home. He went searching in the US for a deaf preacher which didn't exist. By God's grace, he found a deaf preacher. Brought him to Michigan. They started a deaf congregation. So then, because of mom and dad's influence. They just started inviting their friends to church. They had the credibility of the life that they lived. Long story short, after about 10 years there were 50 deaf people on the largest deaf

congregation in the state of Michigan and all these people have come to know Jesus and had a faith. I'm not saying it's only because of mom and dad. But I will sit here and tell you.

Lisa: They were trailblazers. Yes, they were.

Rick: They were trailblazers, What's amazing to me is their extraordinariness is not based on deep knowledge of scripture. It was not based in the great books and the halls of an MBA program. It was a simple faith in God. A dream and a vision. Actually, not being inhibited by their handicap because they knew nothing else. We might have seen them as handicap, but they didn't see themselves as handicap. My mom stayed home and took care of us 3 boys. Raised us primarily because my dad said, I don't want you to have to work. I'd like you to take care of the boys. When I went to college, they didn't have any money still. We were middle class because of Ford. I'm thankful to Henry Ford and for business because of the value that businesses bring to people's lives across the globe. Anyways It's a tremendous story of faith.

Lisa: How did you think knowing that about your mom and dad. How would you articulate that that shaped you?

Rick: I think you don't come to that realization till you're older. Growing up in it I knew they were different. Their voices were different. I have told stories in different settings. The squeals, the voices that the deaf people were trying to make downstairs were a little strange. I would have times where I would get into fist fights with young boys because they were calling them deaf and dumb, saying mean things. I remember one time at a grocery store. There was a woman and I was helping my mom grocery shopping and this woman got stuck behind my mom in the car. She just kept saying excuse me and she was in a hurry. Finally, she just shouted excuse me. I turned around and just looked right at her in the face. It was probably a 5 year old. "Excuse me I said. My mother is deaf and she can't hear you." This lady, it wasn't the right thing for me to do. But she just crumbled this lady just felt so badly. There was a lot of those experiences.

Lisa: That's a good lesson isn't it? You know, don't just presume something.

Rick: It's a good lesson for all of us. Here's another thing Lisa that I'd tell you about how I developed. At 5 years old, I was on the telephone. Ordering meat for them, talking to plumbers. Talking to a variety of people because they couldn't do it. There was a burden there of like I've always felt like I was a parent of my parents. Even still, when I look back from a handicap perspective. That was one thing that I realized later that boy I took a lot of responsibility really young which was a blessing.

Lisa: I was going to say, you grew up fast, you learned things at a younger age than typical.

Rick: I grew up fast. Because we were in the auto industry. My dad was buying cars all the time. I don't know for some reason. This will probably sound pejorative, sales car guys, there's a stereotypical reputation for a reason sometimes, and I could just tell that they were trying to take advantage of my mom and dad. They'd look at me like this 7 year old boy and hey, and I would tell my parents. I would walk out sometimes. It was a fascination upbringing, looking back on it. During those days. I just felt so loved and blessed and so cared for. I had this great family of faith. My kids today are 6th generation Christians walking faithfully. It was a blessing to be raised by them.

AD: Wow! We're going to have a quick break and we'll be back with Dr. Rick Lytle.

Lisa: So Rick! Talk to us a little bit about your career journey.

Rick: Going back to the fact that my parents never experienced college education. My older brother did do some schooling. My middle didn't. I chose to do that. I did an undergraduate in business. Small private school in Arkansas. Harding University. I went back to Detroit to marry Jeannie. I told you before I pursued her for 5 years. I broke her down and she finally said yes. We got married. We started in Volkswagen of America at that time. The headquarters were in Troy Michigan. They were just bringing production of the VW products and Audi products to the US. I came in. Spent a couple of years in engineering and purchasing. Just a rookie coming out of school. Jeannie and I both went back got MBAs. I got the MBA, she worked on a Masters in English. At that point I had a group of guys start talking to me about getting a PhD. I didn't know what that was. I just didn't know what that was. They talked to me about it. I said, my favorite professors in my schooling to that point were men and women who not only have the pedigree and the degree and the learning. They were actually out in the market. I knew I wanted to be a businessman my whole life I just loved business I want to be in it. I worked for 5 more years. We moved to Denver coming out of my MBA program. I worked in oil in Denver for 5 years. Jeannie became a pretty gifted writer at TRW and Mark Marietta. We left Colorado. Had a great season there. These guys kept coming back to me saying we want to build a business school. I will tell you that was the first time in my life I felt called. It really was. It sounds self-serving but in my own little world. I gave up everything. I had a great job, I had a great future. Jeannie had a great job. We loved Colorado. But I really felt like I could make a difference because of the experience

that I had at my undergraduate institutions. We left everything and my family thought I was nuts. We just picked up. West Texas is not the most beautiful place in the world.

Lisa: This is Abilene, right?

Rick: Yes, Abilene Texas, at Abilene Christian university. Great school. We went and ASU and started working on my doctorate. Jeannie got another master's degree. First day I remember of class, I go in. Remember my parents are deaf. Here I am. I don't even know what a PhD is. I'm in a program. I'm starting a PhD. The first day, I'm trying to get my driver's license at the Mary Copia County License Bureau and the line is forever. My first class, I can tell I'm not going to make it.

Lisa: You aren't going to make it.

Rick: I wasn't getting out of line, I was committed. I show up a half hour into this. I'm scared to death and I go on there. The gentleman was an awesome guy. He was not from the US. I could not understand him. It was a high level statistics class. Literally, there, I thought what I have done. I am a nut. My family thinks I am crazy already. I've got a wife. It was very difficult.

Lisa: You had a little fear

Rick: I had a little fear there. What's wonderful about a wonderful spouse? I came back and I was all pity partying and she looked at me with loving eyes and said, we moved all the way out here to follow this dream. I don't care if after if you will want to work in agriculture or waste management or be a janitor, whatever you want to do. You're getting your PhD.

Lisa: I love that. I love Jeannie.

Rick: It's kind of like my dad's mom grabbing my ear. We persisted through that and was very difficult. But was great. Coming out of there we went to ACU was the place where I felt the call. I had universities like Pepperdine which was a beautiful university in Malibu, coming after me with a job offer and I knew the provost there because he had mentored me. I just said no. We went to west Texas, we spent 27 years there. We raised our 3 children. Another struggle along the way, we never thought we would have children. We were unable to have children. Jeannie kept. We miscarried twins, we miscarried 2 other babies. This was another what is going on here. With adoption and all that. Finally, we were just blessed with our kids. We had 3 girls and we are

blessed to work at the university. We were a college family. I was in campus all the time. It was my life. I gave 25 years of my life there full time and served as the dean of the business school for the last 16 years I was there. I'll tell you about a mentor right now that was part of that experience. There's a couple named Dr. Jack and Ann Griggs. When I came, here's the other thing about that story. I went off to school based on the promises of all the guys that were back in the business school and my first semester away after I left everything. They all left the university because there was kind of an implosion with the president and the college of business dean. Everything was wrong. I was freaked out because I didn't know if I could pass. This place that I really didn't know very well, everybody left. When we came back, this wonderful couple had stepped in and became the dean. Jack and Ann Griggs took Jeannie and I literally into their family. My wife came from a broken family. Alcoholic father. I had a wonderful family, but mom and dad were limited with their handicap. Jack and Ann, even today, I just talked to them last week. Out of all the people in the world that aren't my family, they're my family. They adopted. Jeannie went to Ann when we had Kelly and said, I really don't know how to be a mom. Would you mentor me? Of course Ann was humble and said, I don't know what I'll tell you but I'm telling you they raised 4 great kids we knew that. If anybody is raising 4 great faithful kids.

Lisa: How much older were they?

Rick: 15 years. It's maybe to some people the strangest things. They're some of our best friends even though they're 15 years older than us. We go on family vacations because they brought us in. On our opinion, we offered nothing they took us in. Jack helped me as a young faculty member but he was also a bank president and CEO of pretty large banks in Texas, still is today. He just took me under his wing. He just worked with me and they loved on us and they showed us how to raise kids. He showed me how to be a professional. How to be businessmen. How to be a faculty member. I eventually took over the Dean's job from Jack was honored to do that. Served for 16 years. Even today, when we go back to Abilene. Jack and Ann are first on our list to get with. It's been a great blessing.

Lisa: He showed you what you needed to do to do the job well right Rick?

Rick: Yes, A lot of people at that time were younger probably looked at me like, what are you doing hanging out? Don't you have friends your own age? Jack would say some things sometimes in the moment, I thought that's a little weird today. I look back, there's so many things that Jack told me in his office. At 6:31 one night when we were working on a project. I

was associate dean for a while under him, he asked me to join him. It was just a blessing. Here's something extra that Jack has that I hope I have. Jack and Ann Griggs, are the most positive, encouraging, concept building people for other people that I know of. They always thought the best of you. They modeled that in their family, in their parenting. They were intentional. They had plans still today. I have an easel in our house where at the dinner we do lessons. What's the question of the day on the table? He pours into people and he thinks the best of people and they were times in my early life, in my career. I remember one time. I was so negative on Abilene TX, to me it was so ugly. I grew up in the great lakes. I had a student come to me who really thought highly of me but she came to me and said. You were so negative? I said Negative? I think I'm pretty positive. You cut down Abilene all the time, you cut down west Texas all the time. She said, some of us live here and grew up here. So the next day, I went home that night. I got poster board from our girl's room and I took crayons and I asked the girls would you build me a sign that says ski Abilene. Even though it was west Texas, there's no snow. They did a rainbow and I posted it above my dean's office door to remind me, that this is beautiful and is a great place to be. From that day, I was a pro Abilene guy. The thing I learned out of that, I had a lot of leaders that work drowned me at the university. It was a big. 5000 students. 110 years old. It's a quality place. There were certain leaders on the campus that were so negative all the time and I would say to them. You will never have followers if you're predominant lead personality is negativity. Who wants to follow a negative leader? If Jesus was negative, I'm not inspired to follow anybody that way. Jack helped me model that. A student at the University called me out and taught me a great lesson. Jack and Ann were that something extra and that positivity was certainly was something extra that has worked to my favor.

Lisa: Goodness Gracious, there's so many things that are going through my mind but one of the things that triggered what you were saying. If you do have areas or blind spots, you didn't even realize. You're like No, I'm a positive person. You had that blind spot but you can change that trajectory didn't you. You intentionally put things in place like visuals and things like that to make sure that you change that.

Rick: On the spot. I carried that further in my family. What I started doing, every year as the girls were growing up. This is a little extreme but it's what we did. We would do an annual retreat.

Lisa: Your family?

Rick: Jeannie and I and the girls. I would try to make it fun. We didn't have a lot of money because I was a college professor. We'd do one day at Schlitterbahn. Or SeaWorld and the 2nd

day was always we had retreat time. Every year since the girls were little, they've all had a set of goals based on Luke 2:52. What are your spiritual goals? Intellectual goals? Social goals? Physical goals? All of us. We would write our goals and then we would share them and get them laminated. And I still do it today. I have 2018 goals that I carry with me and so do the girls. We do that and we would review how we did because we're usually we're coming up to Christmas time to fall. I did 360s as well. I had 3 questions. What should I keep doing as a dad or a husband to Jeannie? What should I stop doing? What are some ideas that I could begin doing? Those 3 questions. We all shared. I evaluated everybody. I remember one time my girls called me out in the review. They talked about the fact that I was pretty busy at that particular season. I had made some goals and commitments to them about what it looked like to be a great dad for them. It was hard to take but I took that and I changed. There's also a time, Jeannie said, I was kind of into it. I was speaking in chapel. I was trying to publish. I was teaching a bunch of class. I was all in. I was mowing the lawn one night at 10 o'clock at our house. And I thought, this is out of balance. I made a commitment. She talked to me about it. I've tried. I know I'm still blind. We do that every single year. We just helped each other walk the journey.

Lisa: I think that's the thing. It's the journey. We may be working on something today. We can work on that and get through that and there's something else. I think the goal is to always be looking for those things. I had a friend say to me recently about the question should be not how I can be a better wife or better mother or better businesswoman. How can I be a better woman? We need to be asking our question every day. You need to be asking yourself how I can be a better man. That's the point, right? Every day we know that we can be a better version yourself today than we were yesterday.

Rick: I agree with you 100%. I would share this. I think you need to look at the long arc and I would say this, I've tried to teach myself and my girls this. I do believe that you become just like that while you're in love with. Martin Luther said it this way that upon which your soul relies and which your heart delights, is your God. That's just who it is. You're crafted and forged and shape by what you love. If you love yourself. You're going to become a pretty small package. If you set your heart on things that are grander and are above, and are excellent and are praise worthy. You have the opportunity to become somebody over the long arc, much better than you ever thought you could possibly be. With even a simple faith. I would tell my girls, if they knew me when I was young man I fell in love with motorcycle racing. If you came into my bedroom when I was 15 years old. There were posters all over the walls. Guys jumping, dirt flying. It is that kind of stuff. What's interesting and what I'd tell them is. If you took a snapshot of me before I fell in love with motorcycles and took one 4 years later. I was totally a different man. 4 years later. I

had a motorcycle. I had jerseys. I had helmets. I had leather gloves. I had it all because I just was captivated by this thing. When you fall in love with God, that's what happens to you. You just become more like him. I've always tried to check my heart and make sure what it that I'm in love with is. I think it's a little too close to me than my arc. My arc is a little bit small.

Lisa: Rick, you're no longer in ACU. You're now the CEO of the CEO forum. Talk to us a little bit about the mission of CEO forum.

Rick: The formal mission of the forum is to disciple CEOs and senior executives of major companies so more employees can experience the touch of God by a Christ following leader. In essence, we exist as an organization of about 200 right now. 200 Christian CEOs of major companies. You have to have at least 100 million dollars of revenue that you are responsible for. Or if you're an asset manager of a billion or more. That's not to say other segments are important but this is the mission of the forum and the nature of the forum because we really believe that we can make a difference for good in our nation and across the globe with men and women of faith who really live that out daily in the marketplace in the way they treat they employees, where the shape the values of their companies and it's an exciting opportunity to equip leaders of influence to change the world. I've been blessed now for the last 2 years to come along and try to help to provide leadership for the forum. I'm still on faculty at ACU and I direct a center that was actually there was very nice gift given called the Lytle Center for faith in leadership. We do distinguished speakers, the reason I have a team over there that works a little bit. My main job as CEO of CEO forum. What's marvelous is to watch when God brings people together in an intentional way, overtime just to watch leaders begin to grow, to blossom, to see their call. The leg of the race that they're running. The position that they've got. And the baton that's been handed to them. What are they doing with that? There's so much good that's coming out of this organization. I'm super pumped about the future because I feel like our only limitation is me. The reality is my only limitation is my surrender to God and to just invite him in to help us do what we need to do. The other thing I'd say about the forum that I really love and it's authentic. They're a lot of organizations that do a lot of good things. You could come to our conferences and spend 2-3 days with people and you'd never know what they did. We don't flash job titles, we just put names. It's an awesome organization. You're part of that Lisa. You're on our board. You've been an awesome addition to the board, seriously. Watching your leadership. I watched you in one of our programs called SLI. Matriculate through SLI and watched you grow and you're leading many efforts in STL and across the country. It happened. I saw it happen. We're excited about that work and praying that God will bless that. We hope to be at about 500 members in about 4 years. I think with God's help we can be that.

Lisa: Impacting about how many employees? I know you guys have done the metrics on that.

Rick: We did a calculation a few years ago. Here's what we came up with. If we had a bout, 800 Christian CEOs at that level that have an influence over about 17 million people. If we're 20% of that, depending on what, we've got influence over millions and millions of people in the US. The men and women that are in this, take their positions of influence very seriously. From a competent standpoint, lead their organizations well. What we want to do. There's a character in the Old Testament named Daniel and lived in Babylon which was very secular time. What's cool about Daniel is that he served God in Babylon but he served Babylon for God. He was a blessing even though he may not have accepted all of the values there and that's what we want to be. We want to be CEOs and Leaders in our country. We want to be a blessing to the people of this nation.

Lisa: How can they find you? Can you share the URL with our listening audience?

Rick: I think its theCEOforum.org. You'll get some information because there's a big privacy wall because of the nature of the clients that we serve. You can certainly find out about the mission and our work.

Lisa: Thank you so much for being with us today. It has been a delight for me.

Rick: You're awesome. Thank you for honoring me with this time.

Lisa: Very good. We'll see you next time.