

Lisa Nichols: I'm excited to welcome Dr John Townsend to the show. He is a NY Times bestselling author, business consultant, leadership coach and psychologist. He has written over 30 books, selling 10 million copies including the boundaries series, and his newest book, leading from your gut. He is also the founder of the Townsend institute of leadership and counseling and the Townsend leadership program. I'm so excited today to have my friend and my favorite psychologists and authors, and business consultants, and leadership coaches, Dr John Townsend with us.

Lisa: Welcome to St. Louis. I was thinking about all the things that we could be talking about. There are so many different subjects. As I was travelling today, I was thinking, maybe I'll just bring my top 5 challenges.

Lisa: Let's go on ahead and get started. I want you to tell us a little bit about your background. About your family. How you got from here to there and what you're doing today.

Lisa: That feels good, doesn't it?

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Lisa: Talk to me specifically, I know that you have said that you're mom and dad, really, they were 4 of you guys. They really equipped you for life. Talk about what that means and that I think might be helpful to our listening audience.

John: Talk about great leadership training. So much of what I study in leaders is their insides, their character. Skills are great but you got to have character. I think my parents raised 4 great people. I'm going to have to ask my sisters about that. They're all people of great relationship, finding their passions. I think my parents kind of had a laboratory that did that. When you look at what I call the Meta studies of what creates a good person. These longitude Meta from birth to like 7 years old to find out one of the best parents is always 2 factors. 1 is warmth. To be emotionally warm, kind, affectionate and all that. 2 is appropriate structure. Discipline, boundaries and this sort of thing. The family is like an oven to create an adult. That's what creates a great adult. My parents did a really good job from that. They were really good models for me.

Lisa: That's wonderful. I'm sure that you carry that forward with your 2 boys. Were there any other things that you added to that that were specific to you?

John: I would say, if you look at those 2 as the big factors, there's a lot of subsets I added underneath those 2. For example, warmth can also mean, not only playing with your kids, or being affectionate but also listening very well. Especially if you have to talk about negative things. Parents sometimes go, well don't worry about not getting on the team. Maybe the kids need to talk to somebody about it. Barbie and I had a lot active listening. The structure side, we were very intentional about, why are you on the planet? You got to think about this. Don't go day to day and so what your purpose? Talent? Big picture? We kind of pushed them the purpose idea.

Lisa: Today, you do a lot of business consulting and leadership coaching for leaders. How did you get into that? Can you give out a particular story?

John: The book I was writing. I was writing a lot of books with Henry Cloud. Parenting, relationships, personal growth. If you went to the Barnes and Noble, we were all over the self-help world. Leaders started coming in, saying, I like your stuff but you don't have anything for me? I've got a decent marriage. My kids are okay. I don't have kids on drugs, I'm not depressed. You got nothing for me? I said, yeah, you're right. I took a page from Jim Collins's good to great,

and I started thinking, okay, how can I apply what I've learned so much about, the science, technology, what makes a great human being and apply it to organizations and leaderships. The same things, when you contextualize why. I began writing, speaking and doing videos about how to be a good leader who wants to be great. A good org to go great. That's where all the materials has been since then.

Lisa: That's wonderful. That brings me to my next question. Dr. Townsend, I have one of your books with me today. Leading from your gut and in there, you talk about leaders really about being a better person. That can make you a better leader. Can you talk a little bit about that? Talk about the observant ego?

John: Have you ever been around a person who was not aware of the train wrecks they cause in their lives? People around and there's these bodies and carcasses. And they go what went wrong? They have no observing ego. We're supposed to be able to scrutinize ourselves. The team meeting just happened, how did I do? Could I have done something better? A good leader has a very strong observing ego. Their always sort of managing how's my impact to my company? For good or worse. That's how they change. The book came from all my studies in the brain and how it comes down to 2 things that make great leaders. 1 is we have to be rational. Understand objective reality. Numbers, KPIs, ibota. You've got to understand that to become a logical, rational person. It doesn't stop there. We know we have a left brain, we have a right brain. That's that intuitive creative passionate part. Leaders tend to spend more time on the rational objective part. Which you kind of have to. The book is about how the great leaders, historical leaders, are really good with rational, logic, numbers, but really good with people skills and emotions as well. I talk about in the book, don't go into leadership with half a brain. Go in with the whole brain.

Lisa: Go into it with a whole brain, wonderful. Can you dig into that? It's almost self-awareness too, right? There are some specific things that you look at. You look at how you are affecting other people. Can you talk if someone was trying to develop that skill more? What would you tell them? What are some of the things that they could do to really develop?

John: First and foremost. You've got to get around some honest people, say, I'm not sure what my impact is on the company. Don't give me smoke and mirrors and tell me I'm the next whoever. Tell me how well I'm doing. If we walk out of the room and you tell me about nothing but how great I am. This doesn't work. I need the piece that say, sometimes you don't listen. Sometimes you make excuses. Sometimes you get too hard on people. Sometimes you're

chaotic and you're not really structured. Get around somebody who can give you that feedback in a nice way. That would more than anything else, will build up an observing ego in you. Because you begin listening to it, and say, I didn't say that. It's building up memories in your brain. When that person leaves, you're doing that function for yourself. You become a self-scrutinizing person if you're around other scrutinizing people.

Lisa: I do believe that that is so important. I call it your blind spots. We have blind spots, don't we? And we don't even realize maybe how we're coming across to other people or how we're affecting other people, their words. Does that resonate with you? I mean I think we have blind spots and we need those people.

John: As a psychologist, when a board asks me to come and work with a leader, first thing I'll do is find out how self-aware they are. People that say that everything is great, people is marvelous, I go, is there anything else that they don't. I know they have blind spots they're not looking at. It's so important. You don't want to be negative, but you have to be realistic. It can take your career and your company if you don't handle attitude problems. Behavior problems. Blind spots are a big deal. My theory about this is if you look it at the abbreviation for blind spot its BS. You don't want BS in your company.

Lisa: Exactly. To have these people that are going to speak truth into your life like this, requires some humility. Doesn't it? On the leaders part. It doesn't probably always feel good when somebody says, this is the way that you come across. You come across as brazen or whatever the case may be. It requires humility on the leader's part.

John: I don't go from a physical to my doctor to feel good either, if I don't, there's going to be bad things happening. It's a surgery of growth. Mature people. Let me make it harder. It's not that you're aware of them saying things to you. WE have to seek them out. We have to find out who's honest, perceptive and cares about me and the company. Who will shoot straight with him and find them and vet them. We don't wait for them. The great ones are always saying, how am I doing? Shoot straight with me. That's a great statement about the last 10% where they say, don't leave a meeting until somebody has that last 10% of what really is the problem here. Is there a problem? It might be a small problem like the drapes are wrong or could be a big thing like an elephant on a rug and nobody talked about it. That's what the great leaders do.

Lisa: There's a story that I have never forgotten. I'll be 90 years old and hopefully won't forget this particular story. You were talking about, sometimes there are people in your life, could be a

child, family member, employee. That person is really struggling. Just talk about the well story. I want you to tell our listening audience the well story.

John: I remember when I was speaking, I think you told me you were impacted. It was really fun. The gist of it was my family and like a lot of people have another other favorite family love to do stuff with. People you get along with. Kids like each other, all that. We would go on vacations together. Several families like these. Just a great time. One of them, one of the gals of somebody else's kid, she came up to me and wanted to talk to me. I said sure what's going on. She said, I got some problems. I said I'm sorry. What are they? Well, I'm a senior in college with no job prospects. I'm a communications major, it's kind of hard to get a job. I'm going to be in the street in 5 months. I'm kind of panicked. I said, I'm really sorry that's hard. She goes, there's something else. She says, Spencer and I broke up. I said oh my gosh. I love spencer, we took him out to dinner. We loved the guy, we thought he was the one. I can't believe this. Our favorite guy. I asked what happened. She goes, it's a long story. It's over. I'm just kind of a mess. I thought he was the one too. You got a couple of bad hits here. Let's call her, Erin. She goes, there's something else. I say what else? She says, I'm not sure what my purpose in life is anymore. I don't even know where I belong. I said, okay. I'm really sorry. I love you, knowing where you are in life, what can I do to help. She says, fix my mother. I thought, how did we get from life problems to fix my mother? I said, what? She goes, well, let me tell you what happens. Whenever I tell her about this, she looks at me, you're a strong person. And you're going to make it. Go for it. Then she looks at me. I say, that's kind of lame. I know that's why I ignore her. How did your dad do? Dad and I talk about all the time. It's not a parent problem. I'm doing my psychologist right? Okay, it's a mom problem. When you're doing these talks, you got to be private. Vacation is one of 3 places, backyard where the swing is. The 3rd bedroom upstairs where you're by yourself or the kitchen where everybody is eating. Went to the backyard with swing. I said, we got to talk about your daughter. She says, yeah what's up? I say, she's got a job problem, boyfriend problem, and a purpose problem. She goes, I know. And she says, when she tells you about it, you tell her that she's strong and she's smart and she'll make it. She goes, I know. And she tells me that it doesn't help her. She goes I know. She goes, fix my daughter. Now, I'm stuck in 2 places. I said, what do I have to fix? She goes, I have to talent and gift for encouragement and advice and I'm a good encourager. I say, you're great. She goes, so fix her so she can take these nuggets of advice and encouragement and put them in her brain with a hammer so that she feels better. Doesn't quite work like that. What do you mean? Let me use a metaphor. Your daughter fell down a well. A 40 foot well, and it's dark and damp and it's a well of no boyfriend, no job, no purpose, and it's awful and sad and she's overwhelmed. She's in a bad place, she's on the bottom as well. Don't even know what to do. You lean over at the top of

the well because you love her and you're a leader and you're a mom and you look down at her. Where you are, the sun is shining and the birds are chirping and all this. And you lean over and say, honey! You're smart and you're a good person. You'll make it. Come on up. Like Bob Barker and she doesn't. Let me tell you what else happens. Your husband, he looks at his daughter and he looks over the well and he jumps in. 40 feet down. Lands 40 feet down and what he does when he lands is he picks up his daughter and he says. It's really scary and it's overwhelming. It's dark and it's confusing. I've got you. I've got you and I want to get you here and we're going to stay here till you're ready to get out. That's why she listens to him and not you. The mom is smart is a person, she's no fool. She said, you're telling me to jump in the well. I said yes I am. She said, it's so hard for me. I'd rather her encourage, give advice. I said, you have a gift. But your sequence is just wrong. Nobody can give encouragement advice that's useful until they've been in the well with somebody. We don't listen to people who don't get us. You don't have to spend your whole time there, if you just be empathetic and throw about how hard it is, she's going to listen to your great advice. I have been advised by people that didn't give a rip about how I felt. I didn't use their advice. We just are that way. I checked in almost 6 weeks later, the young lady says Mom and I are talking all the time. Mom said, we're fine. That was the whole message. Every leader needs to learn how to get in the well. The post script is, but every leader needs to ask before who am I inviting to my well because we don't do it. We provide, guide, lead, mentor, and develop people. We have to have somebody in our well as well. That's what the story is about.

Lisa: Absolutely.

AD: We're going to take a break and we'll be back with Dr John Townsend.

Lisa: So, Dr. Townsend, What do you feel like is the something extra that every leader needs?

John: After all the other stuff we got to have a mission vision, core values, and strategy culture resources. The one things that I've found that has been the missing piece and is the something extra that makes all the difference is kind of a strange word or term, leadership vulnerability.

Lisa: Can you expound on that a lil bit? What does leadership vulnerability mean?

John: It's kind of an oxymoron. Leaders are supposed to be strong. Superman or Wonderman. Vulnerability sounds not that way. I've seen it change organizations. What I mean is, the habit of being able to talk about your weaknesses and your mistakes. Leaders around the country go,

no, I can't do that. I've got to hide those. There are reasons why we need to do it. I'll give you 3 reasons that I've seen it transform companies. When you can admit your mistakes and weaknesses with your people, I screwed up on the Smith account and I was asleep at the wheel and I'm sorry about that. Or I have not been giving you guys' clarity and I've been a seagull leader. I haven't been giving you the clarity you need. I haven't been listening well. I haven't been giving you a focused vision or whatever. 3 good things happen to your people that make all the difference. 1, you develop trust. People aren't dumb. They know if the leaders walk around with a big S, superman, or W, wonderman. They can see through that and go, you're not being real. There's no trust there. 2, identification. Identification means, we found that research says that a leader who admits they've got feet of clay, people go, oh you're like me. If the leader says, I wasn't on the ball. I didn't people right. On the team meeting that person goes, I'm that way too. I feel identified and connected to that person. Very powerful. The 3rd thing is loyalty. If you find in any kind of company, your b-players will stick around forever because they need the job. You're a-players who will take you to scale. There's a revolving door, if they don't feel like you're being vulnerable and real. They'll find somewhere they can get their talent expressed. If you get loyalty, identification, and trust, you win with being a vulnerable leader.

Lisa: That's certainly will increase engagement. Let's take the anti-thesis in that, do you have a story where that vulnerability was missing? Can you talk to us about that?

John: It's a really good story. I love your concept of something extra. We all need to know, what are the nuggets I can put in my leadership hat here? I love how you position this. Working with a company, there were doing pretty well. They were probably managing 4-5b worth of assets and really good people. Hardworking, strategic, smart. SME's but they weren't engaged with each other. They kind of went into their own desktop. Got on their desktop. Did their stuff. They'd come out for coffee break and say hi, and go back. Basically a silo company. The leader, CEO, I've been coaching him for a couple of years and he knew that there was more to life. He kept saying, I'm not optimizing my company. I want you take what we're talking about and our problem into bringing it to my company and consult with us because we're doing well, but we're not optimized. I worked it out with him. They had a team meeting. I met with them for a while. Got to know them. He got up and I'll never forget it. He said, I've created this company years ago. Love working with you guys, you're great. Let me tell you on a deeper level why I'm really here. He said, I came from a family that was intact. Nice people but they weren't engaged in a vulnerable level. They didn't really talk about real things to each other. Where you're struggling. Where things are hard. We didn't talk about it. They were just mainly, do well in school. Be a nice person. Do well in sports. That was fine I really had this vacuum. He said, that's why I

created you guys. I needed another family where I can be real with each other. I wanted what I didn't get in my family. It got kind of emotional about how much he worked on this business and how successful it was but we're not there yet. I've never told you how I felt about this and how important you are to me. You're very important to me and I just wanted to open up to you a bit. Could have heard a pin drop. Flat organization, maybe 18 people. I'm the facilitator. I said, okay I think Joe said some things that are very important for you guys, you've never heard before. What do you guys think? Lisa, you wouldn't believe it. A gal stood up, she was crying and she said, well you're the family I've never had. Another guy stood up, I've always thought I had to have it together, I'm so afraid of you guys because you're all are so smart and you all went and got your MBAs at Wharton and I didn't. I think I need to let you know that I'm intimidated by you, I want to know you better. Person after person after said, we're going to be a family. Guess what happened to performance, went up the roof. Now you have that something extra of vulnerability. The leader that cascaded down into a tribe. It was wonderful.

Lisa: I was just thinking about this as you were telling that story. This is why leadership is so important and the people that are entrusted to you, you are a steward of those people. I'm just thinking, you have the opportunity to influence people. Certainly for the business, for the better. I bet you, every one of those people went home and they were better leaders in their families because of what they're learning.

John: That was what we got from the field study after that. Everyone that went home had sent, I've always thought that I had to have my act together and not model anything that was negative at all. I have not let you guys get to know me. Mom said that to dad. Dad's said that to mom. The kids and people just went, I feel better now. We're now normal. It cascaded from the business life into the personal life.

Lisa: That is just divine purpose. Really.

John: The funny thing is Lisa, people always think I'll be rejected. Shame me. See me in a negative light. If somebody is crazy or judgmental, maybe so, they're just jerks. Most of the people around you will go, thank you. I feel the same way too. It brings people closer to you, it doesn't make them go away. It's a relationship builder, really.

Lisa: Thank you so much for sharing that story. Let's talk about real quickly before the podcast ends. I want you to tell our listeners, and listening audience you have so many awesome things

going on. I just want you to tell them some of those things and how they can get plugged in if they're interested.

John: On an easy plug in level. We got now the TPRAT. Towns of persona relational assessment tool. We now have a way to measure how you're doing personally. How are you doing in your ability to bond and connect with people? How good are your boundaries? I wrote a bunch of books about boundaries. You just go to the website and go the TPRAT. We also have the towns and leadership program. We're having a good time with that. We have directors all-round the country and people come in for 1 day a month an intensive day for a year's time. With one of the directors that I personally trained. They learned SWAT analysis, stretch goals, they would do groups to learn about their EQ and they emotional intelligence, strategy, vision casting. Homework assignments, very confidential. Leaders need a place to go where they can take the leadership hat off. We're growing very quickly and got lots and lots of places around the country that people can go to.

Lisa: How many cities are you doing that in right now?

John: As of this recording, I think we're in 25 or so. It's getting there.

Lisa: Wonderful, That's great! I'm sure they can find out more about that at your website. Dr. Townsend.com. is there anything else?

John: You're giving me that I know something look. We're really excited about our new online master's degree program. The Townsend institute of leadership in counseling. Fully online. You can get one of any 3 masters within a year if it's a leadership thing. Master's in organization leadership or Masters in executive coaching consulting or Masters in counseling. People are getting really good jobs from it. It's reasonably priced. You can do it at your home. We're finding really good results because the space don't, not only my material, but also neuro psychology. Also, I've got people coming in who are fellows that we recruit who've been there and done that. For example, I've got Greg Brenneman. He was the CEO of United and Continental for the merge. People like that who have done great things that you want to aspire to be. He gives you his secrets. The institute is really exciting.

Lisa: Wonderful. I know that you've said that you even dig into Drucker. The Moses of management.

John: The Moses of management, We draw from a lot of people and my material. Also, the neuroscience. We're finding out that you motivate and aspire people if you know what the neuroscience says about how to get their brains engaged. We train you in that.

Lisa: I may be signing up next week.

John: You'd be our top student.

Lisa: Dr. Townsend, thank you. This has been such a pleasure. I'm so excited for our listeners to get to know you. I just know your insights are going to be incredibly valuable to our audience.

John: That's great Lisa, Thank you.