

Something Extra EP 087 – Rich McClure

[00:01:29] Lisa Nichols: I'm excited to have Rich McClure on the show today. Rich's leadership spans both the public and private sectors as well as leadership in the philanthropic and community realms. Rich, I am so excited to have you on the podcast today. Thank you so much for making the time.

[00:01:47] Rich McClure: Lisa. It is a thrill to be here. Sharon and I have loved our friendship and our chance to do life together with you and Greg. I just can't tell you how excited to have a chance to have a conversation.

[00:01:57] Nichols: Absolutely. Well, I was thinking about it this morning and you and Sharon, we have called you on more than one occasion. [laughs] We consider you guys trusted advisors and dear, dear friends, so thank you. I'm so excited for the listeners to hear your story today and I just know that you're going to have some great insights for us. So, without further ado, we need to get into it.

Growing up, what was growing up like for you? I know that you did not grow up here, but you did grow up in Missouri. Right?

[00:02:23] McClure: Right. I grew up in Springfield, Missouri down in the Southwest part of the state. My mother was a high school teacher at the high school where I attended, which makes it hard to have too many incidents that don't get known to her.

My father was a World War II vet, an electrician's mate on a Navy destroyer and came back, married his sweetheart, and began to have a family. He was an appliance dealer. He owned a minority. I didn't know this until he died along to just a minority share in the Maytag dealership in Springfield. He was known all over town and certainly around downtown Springfield as the Maytag guy and the treasurer at our church for so many years, and just having parents who affirmed me.

My love language happens to be words of affirmation. My parents figured that out long before it was named and realized that that was a way to motivate me and to give me a foundation in faith

and life. I was active in Boy Scouts growing up and so it was just one of those gifts. I didn't get to choose where I was born. We all have that part of our heritage that is not what we choose and I am so blessed that I was given the parents and the place to grow up that I had.

[00:03:35] Nichols: If any of our listeners are out there and you don't know about the Love Languages, Gary Chapman has a book. There's five love languages. I say all the time, we need to know that. We need to know that about our children. We need to know that about our employees. There's a lot packed in there.

[00:03:50] McClure: Sharon's love language is quality time. Obviously, my being words of affirmation. For Sharon, I can't love her with my love language because to her, talk is cheap. What about the time? [chuckles] What about showing up?

[00:04:03] Nichols: Exactly. No. We do try to do that sometimes. Don't we? We try to love the person with what our love language is and that's not the way that it works. Talking about Sharon, here's the way she describes you, Rich, "Rich has had three lives."

I want to dig into that a little bit because you've served both in the public sector and the private sector, and now, you serve in all kind of ways in the community. Can you talk about your time with Governor Thompson and Governor Ashcroft and give us just a little bit of insight into that?

[00:04:36] McClure: The blessing of the life that God has given me and then when Sharon and I got married, given us, we have had the opportunity to have a variety of experiences.

Coming out of college, I determined that I was probably going to have the best chance to have more responsibility earlier in my career if I was in government service. I went to the best graduate school in the country and got a degree in a master's in public administration.

Then, from that, came back and worked in the Jim Thompson Administration in Illinois from '78 until '85. He was just a magnificent mentor. I didn't know him when I hired into, except just to have a tangential friendship in the administration, but later got to work very closely with him in the governor's office and was deputy chief of staff.

Then, ultimately, at age 29, he made me a cabinet director of the State's administrative agency. We had all of the States IT, Lisa, relevant to you. I was purchasing mainframes back when

mainframes for what you did. [chuckles] I pivoted the state from one major vendor to another. It was quite controversial actually.

I had 2,500 employees, real estate personnel, all this stuff. I had no business running when I was 29. I went back three years ago to see Governor Thompson. I said to him, "Why in the world? What were you thinking when you gave me that responsibility?" [laughs] He said, "Well, Rich, it was hard for us to get people to take those jobs. Older folks with more experience knew better. They could make more money elsewhere, so we had to go with the young people who didn't know any better." [laughs] It was a huge gift.

From that transition, we got to come home to serve as chief of staff for Governor Ashcroft for most of both of his terms. I came in the first eight months of his first term and it was such an incredible experience to serve with that team, talk about something extra. I think about that team and the way the governor led us. He challenged us with our faith. He challenged us to be the best we could possibly be. He gave me a lot of responsibility and in effect, as to be the chief operating officer of the state and help formulate the state budgets because he was casting vision.

He was setting bold goals and telling us as a team, "All right. Now, it's our job to figure out how we get those goals." We had a legislature of the opposite party. We had to work in a bipartisan way to come up with real solutions to the problems facing the state.

Many of you are in the state and you guys live very close to it, Lisa, the Katy Trail is actually one of the things that came out of one of our initiatives, A bold measure that went against the core constituency that the governor had, but it was something extra and leadership that he had the vision to say, "This trail could mean something for the state of Missouri rails to trails conversion all the way across the state."

It was an incredible time, but I had a mentor who said to me, "Rich, by the time you're 40, determine whether you're going to stay in public policy or whether you're going to move to another life." I did that at 40. Sharon and I were given the opportunity after a transition role that I went to a bank holding company for a year or so to come over and join UniGroup.

Again, a visionary leader saw that governmental leadership experience was relevant to the business model of UniGroup, which is the parent of United Van Lines and Mayflower Transit. That gave me responsibility running the United Van Lines side of the equation when Mayflower

was acquired, that most leaders would not have taken a risk on somebody like me and put me in that responsibility, but this one did and I'm immensely grateful to Bob Baer, who's now deceased, for the risks that he was willing to take on me as a young person and the risk that Jim Thompson was willing to take on me as the governor of Illinois.

Here's a Missouri kid, what are you going to do coming across the river and being a carpet bagger? Governor Ashcroft, the same way, when I was 30 years old, making me chief of staff and for eight years, letting me ride a great movement with him.

[00:08:30] Nichols: Right. Well, and then you became the CEO of UniGroup. Those leaders saw something in you, Rich, and there's a lot packed in their right. As leaders, we need to be looking for that. Did you ever go to Bob and say, "Why did you pick me?" What were those leadership tenets? They saw something in you, Rich, that you may not have even seen in yourself.

[00:08:52] McClure: In government, you frequently have to lead by influence and not by authority. While governors have a lot of authority, they don't direct the legislature what to do. They don't direct the courts what to do. They don't direct local governments what to do. You have to cast a vision, have people aligned with that vision, and then by persuasion, collaboration, influence, and frankly, the strong relationships, then be able to execute against that vision even with folks who may just by virtue of position or outlook, not fully agree with it.

In that experience that we had in government for those years of service, I think Bob saw that in the UniGroup business model, which is an affiliation of 400 agents around the country, a hundred of them voting shareholders, two of the leading brands in the moving and storage industry, United and Mayflower, yet we had to get that agency family all moving in the same direction around a common vision and frequently, by influence, not by feat. I think that perhaps was a key characteristic that I had a lot of experience with that perhaps was relevant at UniGroup.

[00:09:59] Nichols: Totally makes sense. Your experience at UniGroup, you also got the opportunity, Rich, to be on *Undercover Boss*. [laughs] I remember one of the first times that I had met you, I think it was a United Way event and you were talking about that experience. What were the things that you learned in being a undercover boss? For those who don't know, maybe just give a little snippet about what that was.

[00:10:25] McClure: *Undercover Boss*, the basic premise is that the CEO goes undercover in a usually, a pretty bizarre disguise [chuckles] to work frontline jobs and that the workers don't know generally who she or he is. They work the jobs. They learn them. It's easy to show that the CEO can't do the frontline jobs because that certainly was absolutely true with me. Then, they come back and talk about it in a reveal and what they've learned and along the way, honor employees with rewards that honor what they do.

The wonder of that show is that it does lift up and honor frontline workers. The people that make things happen. We had a convention speaker one time who said to us, "Frontline workers don't lie." They particularly won't lie to someone who they think is a new trainee or just showing up to learn the job, but I found that they would absolutely tell me the truth, even as CEO, when they knew who I was.

Sharon actually was on the show. She was the first spouse. We were in Season 3, which was in 2011 of the United Van Lines brand and the show had gotten a little bit predictable. The producers met Sharon, who's had some on-camera experience, as you know, Lisa, and is very thoughtful in her comments. They asked her to be on the show. She agreed to do it. She didn't have to. It was a huge gift to our company and to me, personally. She saved the show, literally. For those that have watched the episode, they know why it's too long of a story to go into here, but the point is that while the experience for me was surreal in lots of ways and it is true you can edit the stories to tell lots of different angles and that happened with one of our stories.

The bottom line is at the end of the day, frontline workers are spotlighted. They're lifted up. You get to show a company appreciating them and loving them and that's important to do. That's an important leadership principle. For that reason, I'm grateful for the experience.

[00:12:15] Nichols: Yes, appreciation in the workplace is just paramount. You hear that old adage. People don't care what you know until they know how much you care. We don't really talk about love necessarily in the business setting, except if you're Southwest Airlines, you do.

[00:12:30] McClure: [chuckles] Exactly right. It's worked pretty well for them.

[00:12:32] Nichols: It's worked very well for them, but it is. It's really important to appreciate people and those frontline workers are the ones that make it happen.

[00:12:39] McClure: In the current time, we're sitting here in the middle of a COVID crisis that we've been in for now three months and we're learning to appreciate people that are willing literally to put themselves at risk of being affected in order to make sure that we get our groceries, that we can pick up carry-out food, and with great importance, that we can be cared for in hospitals and settings where there's great risk. It's just astounding and the fact that many of those frontline workers, just by virtue of where they live, by their socioeconomic, the social determinants of health, they're more at risk at home and at work.

[00:13:13] Nichols: That's right.

[00:13:13] McClure: So, it's double important.

[00:13:15] Nichols: Very good. Well, I want to talk about your next life, when we come back, but we need to take a quick break, and then we'll be back with Rich McClure.

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[00:13:57] Nichols: Welcome back, Rich. You ended up retiring from UniGroup. I know because Greg and I were with you in that period. I know that you and Sharon really sat down and you talked about what was life three going to look like. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about that process that you went through?

[00:14:18] McClure: We had the great blessing of planning the transition to life three. We determined, really, almost 5 years out that at age 60 that would be a good time for us personally. It would give us an opportunity to have life three. We began calling it that and naming it that.

I worked with my board. I worked with my executive committee and my chairman to prepare three successors internally and to have a very thoughtful planned transition, succession

planning process. At age 60, I was with the company for 20 years, 12 years as CEO, which is a long time to be a CEO. It was a huge opportunity for Sharon and I to step back. We went through a long planning process before we actually moved out and then we continued it for six months afterwards. We came up with five criteria to measure how life three would look for us.

Those five criteria very briefly were, first of all, to have less stress in our lives, which was actually more directed at me than Sharon. Secondly, to make sure we were doing meaningful work that had a kingdom orientation, that was orientated to eternal values and things of God. Third, we would do more things together in partnership. Specifically, that we would do more things where Sharon was in the lead and I was the supporting player because most of the time, prior to that, it had been the other way around, that we would focus on legacy, not in the context of broad, big capital L legacy, but we would focus on our family and the legacy of our family and creating memories worth repeating for them as grandchildren started coming along.

Then, finally, the fifth one was that we would have fun. We would just try to focus on making sure that we had fun. So, that led us-- I thought, when I retired, that I would probably go do something else. I would run on faith-based, not-for-profit, and it would be one thing in terms of my focus. The more we looked at it, the more we determined that probably didn't fit those five criteria, at least some of them. So, what we did is begin to focus for me on a lot of things, three or four things that took my focus during this time.

For Sharon, it turned out to be the same thing. She's more active in roles that I can support her in, at church and in public service. She chairs the St. Louis County Board of Elections than I could ever imagine for her and more than she could imagine. It really played out in a way that for her, it was not one thing, but a lot of things and the same for me.

[00:16:45] Nichols: Think about what we're in right now, none of us could have planned where we are right now. Right? I do believe it's intentional living is really what it is. You took a step back and you're intentional because if you're not intentional, life is just going to go by and you may have missed the best part.

[00:17:02] McClure: Right. You react to things that are in front of you, becomes opportunistic choices as opposed to thoughtful choices. Speaking of the climate in the time that we're in right now, the first year the calling was to serve as co-chair of the Ferguson Commission.

As the business and civic community looked at ways in which they needed to respond to the significant racial inequities that were exposed by the death of Michael Brown and the aftermath, we spent 13 months in a group that's very different, racially diverse, different social-economic views, different political views. Yet, we together, my co-chair and I, decided that we would model that you don't have to see eye to eye to walk arm in arm.

We heard from 3,000 people in the aftermath of Ferguson about things that were on their heart. As we experienced the current unrest following the death of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, it brings back to mind all of those things that I was taught during that time because I had to deal with my own issues and with my own heart and go back to scripture and see what God said about loving your neighbor and who He said your neighbor was and is. That's another example of how I needed to be intentional and accept that calling, but it was not something that I would have seen coming.

[00:18:21] Nichols: Right. We are in a time of crisis right now. I know that you and I subscribe to the belief that we are all created in the image of God and that there is no one person, no one race. We are all precious in his sight. You have to listen more. Something you said recently that I think is so funny and I say it all the time, "The longer you live, the more you realize you don't know." [laughs]

[00:18:51] McClure: That's exactly right.

[00:18:52] Nichols: It's so important to engage and to listen so that you can seek to understand before being understood.

[00:19:02] McClure: Well, I think it's particularly important for those of us in the white community and who grew up with the life experience that I grew up with, to really work hard, to listen, to understand, and not respond. We all have preconceived notions and things that we want to say, "Well, what about that? What about this?" The culture just feeds that sometimes.

I think the more we step back and say, "You know what? We're told that we learn a lot from people who are different than us." When Jesus defined who is our neighbor, He defined someone who is very different, different life experience. The challenge for us is to get out of our bubbles and to have our circle of friends and deep, long-lasting trusting relationships to be with people who are different than we are and to learn from them and learn from their life experience.

One of my best teachers that I've had during this time of my life is a 40 something, African-American female leader. Bethany is her name. She was the executive director of the Ferguson Commission. She is one of the most extraordinary leaders, visionaries, executives that I have ever met in any part of my career throughout decades.

I'd sit at Bethany's feet and I ask her to teach me patiently and to deal with what I don't understand with preconceived notions that I have. She works in health equity issues as the highly visible leader in that space in our region and is a person of deep faith. I can't tell you the amount of love and insight and knowledge Sharon and I both have gained from our relationship with Bethany. We had to get out of our bubble and make sure we took the step because that's on us. It's not on her. I think frequently in the white community, we say, "Well, we don't understand, so somebody has to help us understand." It's on us. We have to reach out to understand other life experiences that lead to the deep grieving.

On everybody's mind now are violent protests and looting and things like that, that are happening and that's abhorrent, wrong, and terrible. We cannot let that overwhelm our understanding of the racial inequity issues that are there and that lead to senseless deaths, that lead to health disparities, to life expectancies in ZIP Codes just 10 miles from where you and I are sitting, are 18 years less than they are where we're sitting. That's an incredible inequity that just is happening on our watch and we have to pay attention to that.

[00:21:33] Nichols: To your point, Rich, I heard Mike Matheny speak a few days ago and I love what he said, "To be strong is to stand up and fight for what is right, not just to sit back, but just stand up and fight. We need to take every opportunity we can to speak out."

[00:21:48] McClure: It's true and it's incumbent upon us to do that and to do it in a way that is not episodic, it doesn't respond to the crisis of the moment. One of the things we talked about at the Ferguson Commission is for all of us to think in our lives about applying a racial equity lens to what we do, from just the very simple question of who are my friends and who are--?

If I look at my last 10 emails and my last 10 texts and phone calls, what does that look like? Are they all people like me or am I consciously and intentionally working to have relationships elsewhere to all of our public policies, to things that are happening in our hospitals, and our medical schools and more and more institutions in St. Louis led by institutions like the United Way and BJC and many others are applying a racial equity lens to their policies and their

programs, so they say, "What's going to be the impact? Is this going to help reduce disparities in inequity or is it going to make it worse?"

[00:22:41] Nichols: Oh, my goodness. Well, we could do a whole podcast on this, but this is something extra. I know that you've already mentioned Bethany. Can you tell us what is the something extra that you see in Bethany?

[00:22:53] McClure: Well, the something extra in Bethany is not just extraordinary EQ, emotional intelligence, and the ability to have deep discernment about her team and about peers and others she's relating to. Virtually, all of her positions have been positions where she has to lead by influence back to the point that I made earlier.

She has extraordinary relational skills to be able to form deep relationships, but here is something extra. She would call it the ability to make us gently uncomfortable, to put out thoughts and challenges that are not kind of in your face, that are not directive, but are really probing, and really make you uncomfortable but in a way that you say, "Okay. I know I need to face that issue. I know I need to face that prejudice. I know I need to face the bias that is inherent in that as unintentional as it is." She has an extraordinary ability to expose those things and through that teach.

The final thing I would say that I've noticed about her leadership is her care for her team and the ability to understand them individually, their talents, to not put them in positions where they don't have the opportunity to be successful, but to lift them up in ways that they can, in fact, serve to the maximum of their God-given potential. It's just an extraordinary experience to learn that I literally had here in life three that I never would have expected.

[00:24:21] Nichols: Oh, my goodness. Well, I love that because there's people that can make us really uncomfortable. [laughs] Right? They can do it in a way that is just not a good way. Right? Gently uncomfortable, I love that. I've never heard it put that way before. Rich, what do you believe is the something extra that every leader needs?

[00:24:42] McClure: I think it may revolve around this whole question of, "What's your foundation? Where does your identity come from?" I think, frequently, folks in leadership positions that have titles, we get caught up in those titles. It certainly happened to me in the governor's office in Missouri.

When I left the governor's office, no longer did I have this big fancy office in the state capitol and people showing up at my beck and call, calls being returned, and I went to sitting in the middle of a floor learning a new business, learning the banking business. I had to realize that I wasn't in my business card, that title on the card that said, "Chief of Staff, State of Missouri, Office of the Governor," wasn't me. It was a great lesson I had to learn.

Having that foundation outside of work, I think the best thing is the spiritual foundation that comes from your faith, but there can be other foundations as well. I don't think there is good, but the point is this, that we cannot get our identity tied up because when that happens, pride takes over kind of selfish actions, kind of it's all about me, protective kinds of things, turf kinds of issues. You can point to lots of things that come from not having that solid foundation that's outside of the role itself.

[00:25:55] Nichols: We know where that all leads. Well, tell me, is there something coming up or is there something that you want our listeners to know about and how they can get involved, Rich?

[00:26:05] McClure: Well, it does relate to the current crisis and we've been for three months in this COVID virus crisis, but we're also now to a place where racial equity issues are at the forefront. They are actually related. The incidence of the virus in marginalized communities, mostly African-American communities in our region is three times what it is in communities that are white and have higher socio-economic profiles.

That inequity is being addressed by two really strong efforts. The first is the Community Foundation COVID Response Fund, which is a place that folks can support and just put COVID Response St. Louis Community Foundation. I'm part of the group that sapling distribute. They've raised almost \$6 million so far and used it very, very wisely to address, first of all, emergency response relief needs among populations that are falling in the gaps, like seniors with disabilities fits that category.

The United Way has, for years, I've had the privilege to serve as their board chair. They leaned into racial equity issues very early, but now we're in the middle of supporting over 160 agencies that are on the forefront of responding to the virus as well as responding to those that are in the greatest needs.

Those are two things that I point people to currently because they are both very active and very effective in dealing with the current issues before us in racial equity and the COVID virus.

[00:27:34] Nichols: Very good. I love both of those. Well, Rich, here's what I think about you. I think you improve things wherever you are. You and Sharon both, you are just such wonderful pillars in our community. I'm just blessed to call you my friend. Thank you so much for being here making the time today.

[00:27:50] McClure: Thank you so much, Lisa. It's been a real honor and a privilege, and you are a blessing!