

Something Extra EP 093: Dennis Muilenburg

Lisa Nichols: Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins, are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes but each year in the United States, about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome making them a person with Down's syndrome. If you've ever encountered someone with Down's syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you'll ever meet. They truly have something extra.

My name is Lisa Nichols and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners and as the mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word. I have been blessed to be by her side as she impacts everyone she meets. Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world.

While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are. Join me as I explore this something extra in leaders from all walks of life and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities and in themselves.

I'm thrilled to have Dennis Muilenburg on the show today. Dennis is the past Chairman and CEO of Boeing. Dennis, I am thrilled to have you on today. I'm so excited. Thank you so much for making the time. I just can't wait to dive into our conversation.

Dennis Muilenburg: Well, Lisa, thanks for the invitation. It's great to be with you as well.

Nichols: You and I have recently met because you joined CEO Forum and I'm on the board and you've recently joined the board of CEO Forum so we've gotten to know each other through that. We've got a lot of crossovers that I have found since meeting you [chuckles] initially.

Muilenburg: Well, CEO Forum has been a great one, as you said, a wonderful ministry and a great network of CEOs and an exciting way to invest in each other. It's been a pleasure to meet you there and all of our other connections as well.

Nichols: Absolutely. Well, I'm excited for our listeners to get to hear your story. You did not grow up in St. Louis, you grew up in Iowa, right?

Muilenburg: That's right. I grew up in the northwest corner of Iowa. I grew up on a farm there about a 300-acre family farm just outside a little town called Sioux Center. I spent my growing up years there and a wonderful way to grow up, in my opinion. I learned a lot from my parents about

the value of hard work and integrity and how we invest in other people. I still have a lot of fondness in my heart for the state of Iowa.

Nichols: Right, for sure. Well, you and I've talked about that and I said Greg and I over the years have hired a lot of kids that grew up on farms. I'm telling you just the work ethic. It's hard work, isn't it, Dennis? You got to push forward every day and it's not always clean work either. [laughs]

Muilenburg: That it is. It's hard work. The chores around the farm are things that have to be done every day. I remember as a kid with my brothers and sister, milking the cows and feeding the animals, gathering the eggs, working in the fields. It's good hard work. You enjoy the fresh air and there's a certain freedom to working on the farm, but it also teaches you a sense of responsibility, things that have to be done every day and done well.

Nichols: Absolutely. You grew up on the farm but then you ended up going to, was at Iowa University? Is that where you went, the University of Iowa?

Muilenburg: Iowa State University.

Nichols: Iowa State University, and you majored in?

Muilenburg: Aerospace engineering. I'd always had an interest in airplanes and spacecraft growing up as a kid. I guess in the state of Iowa, you get a lot of open views of the sky so I could see the airplanes flying over. I always had a great interest in that and managed to find my way to Iowa State University and Ames. I'm a Crowd Cyclone. I did my undergrad work there in aerospace engineering and I got my Bachelor of Science degree there.

Nichols: I know you've got several degrees and you've got a doctorate.

Muilenburg: I went to Seattle to start an internship with Boeing and when I was in Seattle, I got my master's degree at the University of Washington in aeronautics and astronautics. Also, I came back and got my Doctor of Science honorary degree at Iowa State.

Nichols: That's great. Let me ask you this, was your competing career at all? Did you ever think you would farm the family farm?

Muilenburg: Well, I always wanted to be an architect or an engineer. I had that design desire inside of me. I love to design and build things. I actually at one time thought I might be an architect but went down the engineering path instead. I had a chance coming out of school for internships at

various companies. That included McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis, General Dynamics down in Texas, and then Boeing in Seattle. I ended up taking the internship opportunity at Boeing.

I still remember that 1985, I jumped in my 1982 Monte Carlo, I drove from Iowa to Seattle. It was the first time that I saw the Rocky Mountains. When I got to the Seattle area, the first time I ended up seeing the ocean and thoroughly enjoyed that summer in Seattle with Boeing. I met some amazing people, worked on some great projects and really got hooked on the company at that point, and then ended up coming back full time after my internship.

Nichols: Well see, you and I, we had a crossover. I didn't realize you started in 1985. I interned for McDonnell Douglas in St. Louis in 1984. [laughs] Greg and I are originally from a little town in Kentucky called Paducah. We went to Murray State, and I ended up interning there in 1984 and then they said, "When you graduate, if you want a job," I'm like, "Yes, great company." At the time, McDonnell Douglas was huge. It was the largest employer in St. Louis. about 45,000 employees. A huge company but still the culture was so amazing there and like you met amazing people and I said, "Yes, sure [laughs] It looks good."

Greg had a degree in software engineering, sent one resume out to McDonnell Douglas, and got hired so that's what moved us here. I was thinking about it and Greg and I were talking about it last night, we started at about the same time. I don't think I ever thought though, about being the CEO [laughs] of McDonnell Douglas. Talk a little bit about your journey and then at what point did you say, "Maybe I could be the CEO of Boeing."?

Muilenburg: It certainly was never my plan to be the CEO of Boeing. I didn't even think about that or even have that as a concept when I started as an intern. I was an aerospace engineer so I joined the company as an aerodynamicist. I loved to design airplanes. That was my passion. I spent the early part of my career in Seattle working across commercial and defense programs, designing, working on every conceivable kind of airplane and spacecraft, and just loved it.

I did that for about eight or nine years as an engineer and then I took my first management job on a program that was called Joint Strike Fighter. We were building a new prototype airplane called the X-32. That was my first management job. Once I got a taste for management, working with teams, and creating a multiplying effect with people, that really captured my interest and my career moved down that path from then. Frankly, I never planned on being the CEO. I just always poured my heart into every job I had, tried to find the hardest things I could work on, and then invested in the people around me and everything worked out.



Nichols: I think it did. You said you tried to find the hardest things to work on. You did not shy away from those things. A lot of times people get comfortable with what they know, and it's not really comfortable to take on those hard tests, but it sounds like you didn't shy away from that.

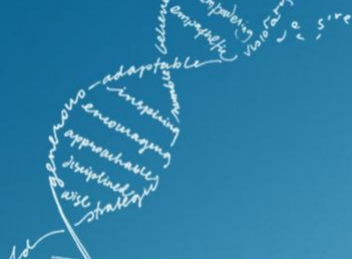
Muilenburg: You got it. I think that's an important part of a career is you have to make the best use of the talents that God has given you. I am a strong believer that God has given us talents to us and we need to make the most of them in the purpose that he's given us. Taking on the hard tasks at Boeing was a wonderful career experience. We worked on some of the biggest, hardest things you can imagine and I just loved that. The challenge of it, the fact that you'd have to build teams and rely on other people so teamwork is at a premium, and having that combination of courage and passion and teamwork, you can accomplish amazing things. That's what I enjoyed about Boeing.

Nichols: Right. Tell me this, you said you were in your first job for about nine years as an engineer before you took on a management role. A lot of times, what we see is top engineers, top software engineers, or whatever the case may be, they're put in that role but they've never had leadership training. It's like how do you even manage a team? How did you learn that? Of course, you had your MBA by then so you'd gone through and you'd had some leadership classes, but did you have mentors? I will say this, one of the things I remember even at Mac, and I know Boeing took it a step further, the training. I could go to leadership, I could go training all the time to fill gaps, which was just phenomenal.

Muilenburg: Yes, I received a lot of training while I was at Boeing to build up those skills. I think part of it is recognizing where your strengths are and where your weaknesses are and on your team, you're surrounding yourself with people who can fill in those weaknesses. I was very conscious about that. I took full advantage of the training that Boeing offered right here in St. Louis. It's Boeing's Leadership Center, our Global Leadership Center. It is a world-class facility with a world-class curriculum. I took great advantage of that and I enjoyed a lot of great mentors along the way.

Every step of the way I could think in my career where I had leaders that invested in me, gave me a shot, took a chance on me, stretched me and I gained a lot from that. It reminded me of the importance of giving back. As I went up the leadership ladder at Boeing, always thinking about who was I investing in, who was I taken a chance on? Making sure that I was giving other people an opportunity to excel, so I think the mentoring dimension of that was the most important of all.

Nichols: Yes, for sure. When you took that first management role, I mean, how many direct reports did you have? Do you remember Dennis at the time?



multiplying effect we could have. That was my style, I guess. It's difficult to describe it in one word, and I learned a lot from a lot of other great leaders, but that's how I'd characterize it.

Nichols: Sometimes you learn what to do and what not to do. [laughs] Right, Dennis? I mean, you can learn both ways. It's like, "I don't want to be that." That is awesome. You're purposeful, your people first. How did you keep to that, because sometimes, you can start out that way and then go down a slippery slope of not being that way? I mean, but you had to do something to ground yourself. What was that for you?

Muilenburg: Well, for me, my faith is very important to me and that's really what keeps me centered. I always reminded myself that, ultimately, I was the CEO of Boeing, but first and foremost, I'm a servant of God and a follower of Jesus Christ, and that kept me centered. My faith was important and whether we're in good times, we are in tough times, that faith is what kept me on the right track.


I had a great family, so, having a strong family framework, I think is important, but to always keep in work and perspective. I always told my team and said, "Even as the CEO of Boeing, there are more important things than work." I'd pause and repeat that, "There are more important things than work. While you're working, we expect excellence, but keep balance in your life, and remember there are more important things outside of work, and when you invest in that, you're better at work as well."

Nichols: That is so true and such great advice, and I know your team appreciated that about you because we're holistic people, and to your point, everything we put our hand to needs to be done with excellence, but it is not the thing at the end of the day.

Muilenburg: Exactly.

Nichols: Well, very good. There's a lot more I want to talk about, but we need to take a quick break and then we'll be back with Dennis Muilenburg.

Placements: Are you a rising IT leader? Could you benefit from a network of like-minded peers? Let me introduce you to the St. Louis Technology Leadership Experience, this one of program that gathers cohorts of IT professionals for three workshops. Peers, small group problem solving, one on one mentoring by IT executives, and multiple networking events. You'll be prepared for your next steps as an IT leader by gaining core leadership competencies and a strong, powerful network of peers. To apply for our next Tech LX Cohort, visit tpi.co/tlx.



Nichols: Dennis, there are so many other things I want to talk about, but I want to tell our listeners that you're a cyclist and you're on track to make 15,000 miles this year. Right?

Muilenburg: That right. It's my favorite sport still. While I was at Boeing, I'd often take employees out for bike rides as well. I've just passed about 7,000 miles so far this year, planning to do a ride across America later this year.

Nichols: That's amazing. Well, I told you, Greg, my husband loves to cycle too, and I'm like, "Hey, maybe you could do that ride across America?" He goes, "I don't think so."

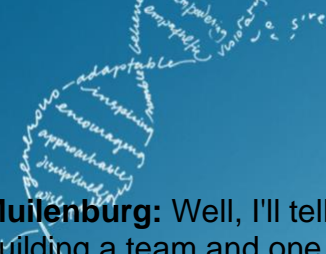
Muilenburg: Let's sign him up.

Nichols: Yes. Sign him up. We've got a lot to talk about and I still know you got a lot of miles to ride, about 50 more miles to ride today, but I wanted to pick it up where we left off with you and your assignment at Boeing, but you continue to move. Continue to tell us a little bit about that journey in your accent to CEO.

Muilenburg: Yes, great opportunities after the X-32 assignment that I mentioned that was my wrap up assignment to Seattle, then an opportunity to help Boeing start a new air traffic management business that was headquartered out of Washington DC. That was a little bit of a difficult time because we started that business and I moved to Washington DC with my family in September of 2001, and, of course, 911 happened at the same timeframe and completely flipped that model from not enough space in the skies to not enough security in the sky.

That was a tough career point for me but led to some real growth that always happens when you're under stress. Coming out of that, we ended up moving to St. Louis for some new assignments. I ran the defense side of the company for several years, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and then ended up moving up to Chicago for the last five years of my career when I had the opportunity to be the CEO of the company. I will always treasure that assignment. It was just fantastic and a great opportunity, again, to see the incredible people at Boeing at work across the globe.

Nichols: Before we go into more about that though, diversity and inclusion is so important and I told you, I was so excited to see that Leanne, a woman is running the defense side of the business, and, of course, Ted Colbert, I knew that he had taken over for Global Services as a CEO. He was the CIO and, with us being in technology, I mean, I've been to a lot of CIO conferences and heard him speak, so excited to see you had done such an amazing job. Tell us a little bit about how you did that and why it's important.



Muilenburg: Well, I'll tell you diversity inclusion again is one of my core values for building a team and one of the principles that we built on at Boeing. During my tenure as CEO, that was a big area of focus for me, and I'm a big believer that when you can bring diverse perspectives and experiences to a team, that's what really makes for a great team.

I tried to surround myself with people who brought those different experiences and backgrounds, and I was proud to say that during my tenure, as CEO, that we went from a Exco, an executive committee, direct report committee, that was mostly white men, people that looked like me and had experiences like me, to a team that was more than half minorities and women. I think it made us a better, stronger team.

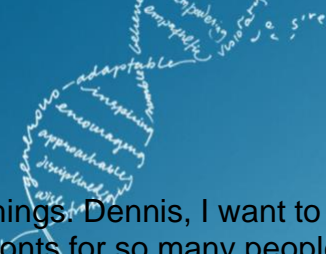
I was so proud of those folks that you mentioned, Leanne and Ted, two great leaders who have done fantastic work in their assignments, running their business units inside of Boeing. Our leader of manufacturing and supply chain, Jenette Ramos was another great example, our leader of human resources, Heidi Capozzi. It's a fantastic team and diversity and inclusion brings real power to the company.

Nichols: That is just an amazing accomplishment. I want to talk to you a little bit about AI and we talked a little bit about this and I laughed because sometimes people think, it's the new thing, but it's really not. McDonnell Douglas was using AI on the shop floor 35 years ago, but Elon Musk talks a lot about-- he believes one of the potential great threats to our society is AI, and what AI can do. Do you have that same fear? I mean, what were your feelings about artificial intelligence and machine learning in that?

Muilenburg: Well, I have a bit of a different view on that. I believe AI and all the associated technologies are going to be a real benefit to our businesses and to society. As you said, the idea of having intelligent systems helping us do our jobs, that idea has been around for a long time. Now, the algorithms and the technologies are accelerating and getting more sophisticated, but we see the advantages of that. I know at Boeing, it gave us improvements to our products, it made our airplanes smarter so that we could improve maintenance, for example.

That produced new ways of running our factories, so, we could optimize our supply chain as an example, and we even had technologies where we had robotic capabilities and humans working together in our factories building airplanes and the result was that our people had a safer environment to work in, and we could have some of the robots do some of the very difficult and dangerous jobs. I think there are opportunities to leverage the technology, to create better capabilities, and to benefit society. We have to be thoughtful about it, that's our responsibility as leaders. I think the upsides very much outweigh the downside.

Nichols: I couldn't agree more. We say it all the time, there has never been a better time to be in technology. You see technology improvements in healthcare, all kinds of



things. Dennis, I want to talk about this a little bit. 2020 has been hard on so many fronts for so many people. However, you and I've talked about this, there's been a lot of silver linings. I'm always looking for the silver linings in the clouds, and there have been a lot of silver linings.

This whole last year has been a little difficult for you and you've faced some crisis, not the first crisis. We've had crisis, but you talked about 911. That was certainly a crisis but this last year has been hard. What would you say for somebody who's going through a crisis? What kind of advice would you give them? How did you get through it?

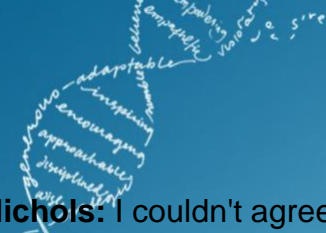
Muilenburg: It has been a challenging year with what occurred at Boeing and the difficulty around the 737 Max accidents and the families that were affected by that. That'll always weigh heavily on me and I know it weighs on the Boeing team. Through all of that, you can also see this strength and the courage of our people and the commitment to things like safety and integrity in everything they do.

I talked earlier about the importance of values as a leader. I think those come to the surface even more during crisis as they should. Now this year with COVID and the pandemic and has had a horrendous impact on the airline industry, in our aerospace customers and the traveling public. Again, in these times of crisis, it's important as leaders to remember where our foundation is.

I talked earlier about the importance of my faith. That has been a constant through all of this. In everything we do, we need to pay attention to excellence in how we do it, and the integrity in how we do it. Some of this goes back to what I learned from my parents growing up on the farm. The value of integrity and excellence, and the importance of how we treat people around us.

Nichols: I know that was an awful, awful time and our hearts go out to those families who lost. I watched that and I read and I know that you approach that very humbly and contritely. The year before that, Dennis, I know Aviation Week in 2018, they named you the person of the year.

Muilenburg: I was humbled by that. I give all the credit for that to our people and our amazing customers. We had a great robust growing business at Boeing. We were transforming the company. We had some record-setting yours in 2017-2018. Along with those great times, you end up at times of difficulty and storms come and you have to be prepared for those as a leader. I will always treasure my 35 years at Boeing. As an incredible company and we have accomplished some amazing things. There's a lot of transformations still to come.



Nichols: I couldn't agree with you more. We've already talked a little bit about something extra. I'm going to ask you what is the something extra every leader needs and I know what your answer?

Muilenburg: I go back to this theme of being purpose full. I think that's so important as a leader. I mentioned earlier about in the business having a mission, understanding the importance of it. At Boeing, we knew that lives literally depended on the work that we did. That gave us a passion and commitment and excellence for the business. As a person, as a leader, the same thing, knowing what my purpose is in life, it goes back to my faith.

I said I'm a servant of God and a follower of Jesus Christ. My purpose is to glorify Him and honor Him in everything I do. Those two come together. That business purpose and that purpose as a leader can come together. When they do, it gives you great power in an organization and people can accomplish a lot more than you can ever imagine when you can get aligned on purpose. I love that theme of being purpose full and investing in the people around you.

Nichols: You hear that a lot that there's a segregation between your faith and your work. I think there's an integration [laughs], don't you Dennis? You bring your faith to work.

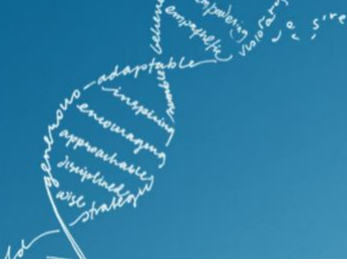
Muilenburg: I'm with you, Lisa. I think it's important as a leader to know who you are and to be genuine. You're a whole person. You bring that whole person to the workplace. Being able to bring your faith to the workplace as a leader is important, I believe. One of my favorite organizations and you know it well, but locally Biblical Business Training, BBT.

A great organization, I have the privilege of serving as the chairman of the board there but that team is producing applications and training materials and coaching for leaders in the workplace, to help them bring their faith to work in a way that's productive and effective and builds others up. If I could, I'll give a little plug to BBT and suggest that people check them out online. A lot of great opportunities there to leverage those materials.

Nichols: Great resources. It makes it easy to do that in the workplace. It doesn't take up too much time and great questions and makes it easy to bring a group together.

Muilenburg: It does. It's a wonderful way to have a meaningful discussion and again, to invest in the people around you. I think, in the end, it builds better teams and a better business as a result.

Nichols: Very good. Well, Dennis, I cannot thank you enough for making the time. It's been such a delight for me and I just feel like it's full circle. 35 years ago, I would never have dreamed



that I would have been talking to the CEO for Boeing. Thank you so much for the time. It's been a delight.

Muilenburg: Lisa, likewise thanks for the time today. I very much enjoyed it.

[END OF AUDIO]