



Transcription details:

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Input sound file: Jean Francois Cousin MCC, author of Game Changers at the Circus; How Leaders Can Unleash Greatness in Their Organizations

Transcription results:

S1: 00:23 [music] So welcome everybody. Welcome to the Evolutionaries, thought leaders in human potential today. Hello, Amy.

S2: 00:33 Hello, Elias.

S1: 00:35 [laughter] Amy and I are here welcoming Jean-Francois Cousin. Hello, Jean-Francois?

S3: 00:41 Hello, Elias. Hello, Amy. Thanks for having me.

S1: 00:44 Yeah. As for those who do not know, Jean Francois is a speaker, author, and global executive coach. He has an MCC from the International Coaching Federation, the top level of coach certification from the ICF. Jean Francois is speaking to us today from Bangkok, Thailand, I believe, right? [crosstalk]--

S3: 01:03 That's right.

S1: 01:04 And this is home, Jean-Francois. Am I right on this?

S3: 01:07 Yeah. And at the moment it's a home I cannot escape to. Not that I would want to, but as everyone else almost around the world, I'm confined. Yes. And in a beautiful country and an intriguing city. Yeah.

S1: 01:20 I had to ask if you're [listening?] in Bangkok because I see Jean-Francois on LinkedIn saying, "Okay. I am now in France, I'm now in the US, I'm now in Africa." Jean-Francois is always traveling all around the world and it's wonderful to be able to catch you here in this moment and have a conversation with you. Thank you so much, Jean-Francois, for being here with us.

S3: 01:44 [inaudible].

S1: 01:46 So Jean-Francois, we are here to learn from your experience and I think that perhaps the best way to get started here is where it all began. You are a French national, I believe, and now you're living in Thailand. Can you give us a little bit of the story? How did that happen?

S3: 02:08 Yeah. Well, in hindsight, there were a few defining moments, I guess, for that particular story. I guess, as a child, I wanted to be an orchestra conductor. There was something magical in that ability that orchestra conductors have to catalyze beauty from a group of people and then [inaudible] the audience. And I found that magical, inspirational, spiritual, probably, without knowing what spiritual meant. And I failed miserably to become a conductor. So by default, I became an engineer because I had



no clue what I wanted to do with my life since my dream could not come true. And life was good, though, because I quickly went into management responsibilities and I could see that as a manager, right, your responsibility is also quite a bit about catalyzing people's best, right? Bringing it out individually and collectively. And so in various positions, more and more senior, I had my satisfaction that I was a catalyst for something great from people and from teams. And at some stage in my corporate career, I decided to become a coach. To really focus on that act, right, of helping people bring out their best individually, in one-on-one coaching and as a team, in team coaching. And I find beauty in that process. And I find that our job as a coach is blessed in so many ways. It's the most humble job on earth, perhaps, right? There's no credit given to it, and there should not be. All credit goes rightly to the clients. So And it's all so purely satisfying, right? So yeah. And then I was so satisfied that I thought why not give back to that beautiful community of coaching around the world, right, by serving with the global board on the International Coaching Federation? I've been there for the last three and a half years, and last year I was a chair. And it was so fulfilling to be able to serve our 38,000 members around the world and advanced in whatever way we could and we can the profession, in fact, right? And create new inroads for coaching with that intention of helping our coaching really become an integral part of our thriving society. I guess coaching was-- well, created like a million year ago, right? When you read Chinese philosophers, some of them had really a very coaching approach, right? But it was regenerated for our contemporary world a few decades ago and with intention to develop not only human potential but also human consciousness. And I think we would all agree our world today is in quite some disarray, and we've got some work to do in terms of unleashing further human potential and consciousness.

- S1: 05:28 This is fascinating, Jean Francois. First of all, I didn't know that you were a musician like I am. [laughter]
- S3: 05:36 [crosstalk] other room your general is a meter away, two, three feet away from you, right? [laughter]
- S1: 05:44 That's fantastic. I met Jean Francois many years ago. He was a mentor in a coaching training program that I took many years ago. And we lost contact for a while, and then all of a sudden I see Jean Francois, being on the global board of the ICF. Some of you listeners probably have seen him in the videos that he sends to the ICF. So it's fascinating to reconnect and now just to see that another connection here, Jean Francois. So thank you for that.
- S3: 06:22 Life is good. It comes with more and more connections, right, as we grow older, right?
- S1: 06:31 Yes.
- S2: 06:34 I heard something interesting, Jean Francois, when you were talking about being a leader as from your engineering career in an organization and also in coaching. And that similarity that I heard, underneath all that, was it appears to me that you see this as a privilege and an honor to lead and coach others. Can you talk a little bit about that?



- S3: 07:01 Yeah. Indeed, I feel strongly it's a privilege and it's an honor, right? Because we humbly create that space of authenticity and humility and vulnerability to give permission to people to also be authentic and humble and vulnerable. And that makes it possible for them to collaborate and bring up to their collective intelligence, in fact, right? And yeah, I feel honored, and perhaps you can feel the emotion in my voice right now. I feel honored each time a client or a team client bring out their best and in a very kind of naked manner of being who they are valuing their diversity. And to me, it's like a gift to the world, much beyond the room where that happens, in fact, right? Yeah, so it's definitely a privilege. And yeah, they trust in the process and also in the skills I try to bring to that space. Yeah, it's a big honor, yeah? And it really matters in our world, right, in disarray and so complex, ambiguous, volatile, and uncertain, that no leader alone is smart enough to figure out alone the best way forward. Only collective intelligence can find the best way forward, right? And so we've got a job to do as coaches, right, because we can help catalyze it when we work with teams.
- S2: 09:00 Yeah. I'm just curious did that thought-- I mean, it just comes through in your energy just that love for humanity you have. Where did that come from for you?
- S3: 09:18 Wow. Thanks, Amy for the question. Where did that come from? Yeah, I'm not sure, Amy. But I definitely see coaching at its core as an act of unconditional love. I think you know Peter Drucker, the management guru in the 20th century, was coming to see his clients and asking them that very simple question; what business are you in, which is a very, very difficult question at the same time, right? And to me, in coaching, if we have to answer the question, it could really be we are in the business of unconditional love, right? We love without condition, right? We have this absolutely deep belief that there's greatness in the people we serve. And if with that belief, we listen for it, it appears, in fact. Is that making sense? And perhaps that love for humanity is because I've been on the job, quite a dedicated kind of blue collar worker right, very focused on coaching doing hardly anything else, right? That's the way I've coached many hours, probably more than 12,000. And perhaps the love for humanity is just, yeah, the gift of those clients over so many hours, Amy. I'm not making much sense. It's [crosstalk]--
- S2: 10:55 Oh no, it's--
- S1: 10:56 [crosstalk] making complete sense.
- S2: 10:59 Yeah. Yeah. And I'm listening to you, and I'm like, "Here's this guy who travels all over the world, works within organizations, help shift cultures within larger organizations, works with high profile executives, and he's talking about unconditional love." I think that that is something that is where a lot of people get sidelined, right, in coaching as well as in leadership and working within organizations is it comes down to just pure humanity amongst ourselves and this love and honor we have with one another. But you seem to be a vessel of that. You bring this energy of that into the room. And I'm just curious. Do you speak of these things to groups or to your executive clients?



- S3: 11:56 Yes and not all the time, right? Yes. Once they are in the groove I would say, right? But not necessarily at the beginning when they're not yet in that stage of maturity development that we accelerate with the working coaching, right. That have them open up to who they are and then accept who they are with the [inaudible] they like and the [inaudible] they don't like, and then grow mindfully, and then build healthy self-esteem. And eventually that inner strength of-- that have them to dare to be humble and vulnerable and authentic and then have a chance to be a leader, right. And when they are quite advanced on the paths then there is absolutely no reason why a conversation about self-love in the first place and love for others would be out of bounds. Because they've realized that with the work they do on themselves they've gotten to love that they-- the work they do on themselves and parts of them, and the emergence of new talents. The discovery of new strengths that they have, or potential, right? And then they have a higher level of consciousness [inaudible]. And there are important guys in business that have started to talk about that. And I would quote Eric Schmidt the former chairman and CEO of Google, and then Alphabet, the holding company of Google for the first two decades of Google in business, right? That gentleman Eric Schmidt had already said on TV perhaps 10, 12 years ago that the best advice he ever received was to get a coach.
- S3: 14:02 And then as he retired from his positions at Google and Alphabet the first kind of thing he did was to write a book that went on to become a bestseller. And the title was The Trillion Dollar Coach. And the book was dedicated to his coach Bill Campbell who coached kind of almost anybody who is somebody in the Silicon Valley, right? Not just at Google. At Facebook and [inaudible] as well, right? And the chapter number five of that book is entitled The Power of Love. So just like Celine Dion's song, right? And the message-- and that's the final chapter of the book-- the key message is Bill Campbell wrote Love in the Silicon Valley and that was much needed for all these alpha males who had big egos and actually deep insecurities. And were hiding them behind a facade of domineering people, right? And that love that Bill Campbell with his humble style made-- brought into the equation, really enabled people to become more mature. Nurture healthy self-esteem and therefore let go of some of their toxic behaviors. And then there was a possibility for productive collaboration, and then more agility. So that kind of love that Bill Campbell brought as a coach to the Silicon Valley was good for business.
- S1: 15:52 What you're saying is that love was the solution, was the antidote or what triggered development and then growth and human potential right there in these companies. It's interesting because business and love all-- at least up front, right? They do not match or we don't see them being put together. And I so appreciate your approach that perhaps in the beginning that language of love will not resonate directly with your client or with that particular executive. But you hold the space underneath and you hold that value throughout the conversation to the point that brings the clients to perhaps even accept the language.
- S3: 16:46 Yeah. Yeah, at their own pace, right. And that comes when it's valuable. [For them?] it's a process. Hell, yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Hey, everybody is a human being. You can be the CEO of a multibillion, multinational company, right. To just a human being,



right. And you've got the same fears and anxieties and unmet needs as your neighbor. Yeah, so [laughter].

- S1: 17:22 The other word that I would love to throw here because of your global experience, because of being born in one country, living in another country, traveling all around the world, all the experiences that you have. And in the face of what we are dealing with worldwide today. The word is diversity and the idea of diversity. What do you have to say about this word and human potential in your experience? [We encourage you?].
- S3: 18:00 Yeah. Well, if I take a business standpoint I said earlier on what the collective intelligence is the key to success in the [VUCA?] world, right. And so collective intelligence is heightened by the diversity of the team members, right. Because they think differently, bring different ideas, and therefore collective intelligence is nourished from various sources in fact [inaudible]. And there was so many excellent studies published over the last decade and a half focused on gender diversity, right, that showed that boards, executive boards, right, who have diversity outperform for example all white male boards in fact, right. Or all whatever similar individuals boards in fact, right. We've got the research, we've got the numbers. Diversity is definitely good for business in fact, right. And then I think also then from a personal standpoint, right, diversity is such an inspiration. We so lucky that our species, right, of Homo sapiens, right, is so varied, right. And there's really a big delight I think in life is to get lost very far from home and meet people who don't necessarily speak in a way that you understand. But then you still can establish contact and learn so much from them, right. So we all enrich each other in our personal standpoint on the personal side, right. So, yeah. And obviously at this time as we speak in June 2020, right. The case for diversity must be made even more powerfully, I guess.
- S2: 20:04 I think [inaudible]. It's human nature though. And I found this working with leaders in organizations. We want to surround ourselves with people like us, right? It's just easier. We can control it more, we don't get surprised, right. We don't have to manage things we're unfamiliar with. How do we break through that?
- S3: 20:28 Well, one way to break through that is when we hit the wall together, right. Because we all thought that singular or that single idea was a good idea, right? And then we could [inaudible], right. And then another way, right, is that one person is [Team E?] and the team becomes brave enough to tell the other team members that we should be braver and challenge ourselves to bring different people on board and really stretch our relational intelligence to the point that we make this new inclusion of different people a success, right. We challenge ourselves to be good enough to bring out their best after we've included them and then revise how we also bring out our best when there is more diversity in the team. So we do it in a way that is well-received and most productive, yeah. So it's like opening up to the idea that we can do better than just be comfortably seated together as buddies all of the same type. Right? And again, research has shown that diversity is good for business. Right? So yeah.



- S2: 22:07 It's interesting times we live in in that we're seeing-- and I'd love your take on this. We're, right now, in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic, and it seems to be kind of dividing us, at least here in the United States, and bringing us together globally, it seems, much more so than anything else that's ever happened in modern history, in my opinion, aside from world wars and things like that. One of the things, here in the US, we pride ourselves on our American innovation. Right? But now we look around the world, and we see, "Wow, look at how South Korea and Singapore and all these other countries are handling this virus, this pandemic. It's brilliant," and making us recognize, I think, as a country that doesn't recognize other countries too often, that we have a lot to learn from one another globally and giving us a new perspective here. So how do you see this bring it-- do you see this bringing us together as well?
- S3: 23:20 Absolutely. Yeah. I'm seeing maybe a kind of a lot of selfless generosity extended between people, in fact, across the world, in fact, people from one country using a bit of the saving to send masks to another country, in fact, regardless of the size and the economic development level of the other country. So I'm setting that. And I'm thinking, in fact, that over the last two centuries, right, liberalism and states have really governed the economies. And before that, economies were run on a more kind of communal or even family or tribes kind of level, in fact, and that would have been the pattern for millennia. Right? And I'm wondering if there could be a connection that when perhaps states do not perform sufficiently well and perhaps also the economy does not show signs of really supporting the people, then there is this kind of fallback to what had been a safe haven for millennia, which is closer human relationship. I'm not sure I'm making sense, right, but this is my hunch also. Right? It's like in these difficult conditions, perhaps the solution is getting closer again with our neighbors, reconnecting with our loved ones, our families, right, rekindling relationships on a personal level, and depending less of higher authorities or bodies of concepts. Make sense?
- S1: 25:20 Yeah. What I hear is like going back to the bottom line, going back to the fundamentals of connection. Right?
- S3: 25:30 Yeah. You say that much more critically than me. Thanks for that. Yes. Yes. [laughter]
- S2: 25:35 It's what we do as coaches. [laughter] Yeah.
- S1: 25:44 Yeah, go ahead, Fanny.
- S2: 25:46 Well, I was just going to say connection is something that I don't think we talk enough about, and it's certainly comes through in your work. [inaudible] seems like even before this pandemic and some of the economic challenges we're facing in the world today because of it, you seem to kind of look at chaos, the [inaudible] world, right, as an opportunity to leverage. Aa you talk a little bit? Because your last book, Game Changers at the Circus, was I just thought brilliant. And it's done in metaphor as a fable which I always love. But it seems that you kind of had your finger on the pulse of this even before all of this. Can you say a little bit about what you saw coming and then how it now has kind of mushroomed with this pandemic?



- S3: 26:51 Yeah. Well, thanks very much. I'm glad you enjoyed the book and thanks for the credit to giving me in some foresight here which really is too generous. Right. I didn't see anything coming really of this crisis at all. Amy, at all, yes, nothing. But what I could see as you also write what was that increasing complexity and ever faster pace in changes and then the need to equip people in organizations with the ability to bring out their best collectively and then I guess now, we have kind of worse or worse in a way than [inaudible]. We have chaos, right. And it's critical that the crisis does not enter our minds. It's not because there is a crisis outside that there has to be a crisis inside I think. And so our job as coaches is really to help people pause, let go of their fears, their anxiety, their unmet needs or all the other millions of thoughts that flashed through their minds when they are panic, right, and then stop to reflect about the situation. Establish clarity in chaos, and then start them or put together a way forward, decides some action they're going to take, and then take massive action, in fact, right. And so, everybody needs a coach, right, because seven billion over people are afraid are in chaos. And everyone needs to bring their best thinking because livelihoods are at stake, jobs are at stake, companies may not survive, right. And there is way worse than that, in fact, right. There is also risks of famines and I mean, there are risks to life. So so my dream, of course, would be that everybody has a coach and we can't do that, right. But we can't make that happen. But at the same time, we have to keep face that every time we coach someone then that person somehow becomes a bit of a coach also, right. A then the ripple effects of our humble work with one person actually can impact positively the life of many others. And I wish we had done a lot more. And I wish we'll do more and more, right. But there are some reasons to hope, right. The International Coaching Federation has a foundation that has touched the lives of over 17 million people already right? And those are people who cannot afford it, right? With thousands and thousands and thousands of our fellow members in the association who've generously offered their time, in fact. And to your point, this chaos is an opportunity, I guess. So to me, it is a wake-up call. I hope we can make it ring loud enough for companies to know that they need to use more coaches and more coaching, right? Because that will really spread behaviors in managers and others that are more collaborative more agile. That will also bring better quality of energy, more hopes that together we can win, and that together we can overcome the chaos. Sorry for being long-winded, again.
- S2: 31:05 No.
- S3: 31:05 [crosstalk].
- S3: 31:05 Oh, my God.
- S1: 31:06 This is wonderful, just as well. I just want to ask you, you mentioned specifically about the International Coaching Federation and your work in the International Coaching Federation. So we'd love for you to talk a little bit more about that and perhaps touch a little bit on how do you see the importance and the opportunity that this organization-- of the impact of this organization around the world.
- S3: 31:37 Yeah. Thanks for the invitation. So I've been on the global board for the last three and a half years, right? And we've worked for most of that time on enabling the



association, right, that's all of its members around the world, to contribute more to the profession and the members, in fact, right? And last year, we announced that we were creating six families under the International Coaching Federation umbrella. So one is dedicated to serving our members, right? Another one is dedicated to helping coaching in school do the best job they can and stay [inaudible] [tops?]. And another one is to help strengthen the credentials of the profession, right, which is a very important contribution of this association to the world. And then, there are two more families that are brand new. One is called coaching in organizations, in fact, and it has a dedicated board of directors. And it's going to create more inroads in the world of business and in non-profit organization. [inaudible] coaching, it's a [French?] term. So we hope that this is a game changer for the pace of progress of coaching in organizations. And then, the other family organization that is brand new is thought leadership. And that's so that coaches, as a profession, have a voice at the international level, right? Imagine Davos, the World Economic Forum summit every year, right, inviting a coach to talk to those world leaders, right? Presidents and other business tycoons, right? That's never happened, right, so far, and we think that should happen, right? We want that coaching, is a force for good, obviously, at a higher level than for now. After all, our mission is again, right, embed coaching as an integral part of a thriving society. And the original mission is, awaken human potential and consciousness, right? And so that thought leadership institute will work very hard and I'm sure very smart to enhance the influence of coaching on the way the world goes. And then the sixth [family?] is our pre-existing [inaudible] condition which I mentioned has touched more than 16 - one six - million lives through pro bono coaches already over the last few years, in fact. So yeah, there is this fantastic momentum. We are celebrating the 25th anniversary this year of ICF with this kind of enhanced DNA to carry out its mission with agility and with great impact for the benefit of not just the members, which come first of course, but for the profession in general and for the whole world. And we couldn't be more excited and very hopeful that this is going to work out very well.

S1: 34:52

And we are very thankful for the work that you do for the the International Coaching Federation and the impact that you have having this organization. Thank you so much for all the work that you do for us, for each one of us coaches. We're very grateful for that. Jean-Francois, if all of this experience that you have, of all the years and all the more than 12,000 coaching hours that you have logged throughout the years, if you had to say one thing, one bottom line, one value, one insight, what would that be?

S3: 35:37

0-Yeah, the value I cherish most amongst all the most would be humility. And particularly as a coach and as a leader. Actually, it's very effective. It's very effective for coaching, it's very effective in business because then it creates, it gives the permission to others to be humble as well and then then we have no [mobile chip?]. We have people's truths come to the conversation and from that we can easily dig into it and find the goal. Right now the challenge is to have this value of humility that is genuine. One has to nurture a lot of healthy self-confidence because humility is risky and it can only be genuine if you are strong enough inside to take the risk of being humble. Which is a lot of the work we do in coaching, by the way, with leaders. We help them nurture healthy self-esteem and then one day they can start to take



the risk to be humble and giving permission to their people also to be humble and then everybody will do far greater work and create much more value for the organization. And it's the same with a coach. My advice to new coaches is always come out as who you are in all humility when you go to your first chemistry session. Because while people are going buy these, you, anyway the type of energy you bring and they will buy it if they trust you. And I don't know if we have time but I had a very strong lesson from one of my first clients in terms of the value of coming out as authentic and humble. We have time for it?

S2: 37:53

Yeah.

S1: 37:54

Absolutely

S3: 37:56

so that was in the early-- few months, the first few months of my second career as a coach, right, and I didn't want to spend much money because I was not making any as a new coach at the beginning, and so I had rented a super crappy office in Bangkok, right. You would not even want to step in, right, and so I didn't have a mentor at that time, which is-- well, which I wish I had one, right, because I would have made my life way easier at the start, but anyway, so I was sending tons of e-mails to propose my services and I had absolutely zero answer, except from my previous company who graciously gave me some people to a coach, and a couple of other people I knew also, like I mentioned earlier, right, who were gracious, yeah. And then one day, there was this one liner in response to an email. So it was an email from the CEO of a big multinational company in Bangkok. Big, like several thousand employees. A name everybody knows in the country, and his one liner e-mail response to me was, "Tomorrow, your office, 4 PM, and I almost had a heart attack. Luckily, I was too young for that, right.

[laughter]

S3: 39:25

[inaudible], it was the crappiest possible filthy, small, ugly looking office anyone ever had in Bangkok, right, but he was going to come there, and I thought, "I'm a dead guy walking," right. So, still I was walking, so I spent the day and the early morning next before his meeting, visit cleaning up everything, right. So he came without any comment, and then so we had a chat, and then he disappeared, telling me, "Okay, we'll contact you if we see an opportunity," and I said that-- I thought, "Yeah, sure, sure, sure. [laughter] Farewell." And then to my surprise, the next morning the assistant of one of the senior vice presidents called me to ask me if I could find time to coach her boss, right. And you bet, my agenda was, kind of, almost empty. I had all the time in the world. [laughter] So we had this session. It went well, then the CEO connected back and said, "Hey, you did well. So why don't you meet my other SVPs, right. Senior vice presidents, right, and see perhaps if you can do something together."

S3: 40:43

So that was my lucky break, in fact, after so many fruitless efforts, right. And so the point is five years later I had become friends with that CEO, and I asked him, "Why did you give me a chance when you visited, after you visited me in my super crappy office?" He said, "Oh wow. Yeah, yeah. yeah. You were mean to yourself. That office was really super crappy. I've never seen a crappier office in my whole life," right. "It



was refreshing in a way, but so dusty, yes. And so why I gave you a chance is because you were authentic and you were humble, and to me that was very refreshing because I spend all my life facing arrogant consultants who lavish me with their intelligence, right, and I don't trust them, but you in your crappy office, you were there, not faking it, and I thought, "Okay, I can trust the guy. Let's give him a chance, and that's just one chance, right. The messes it, then that's over. He does good with it, then maybe we'll give him another chance, right." So there was zero risk, right. And to the point of that value of authenticity and humility, right.

- S1: 42:05 Oh this is an incredible story, and what a value that you're giving us and our listeners here by sharing this story with us because we're very grateful for sharing your experience here. One final question here for you, Jean Francois, what's next for you?
- S3: 42:25 More of the same, Elias. I found my sweet spot. I love what I do. I will continue to serve our community as much as I can, and serve my clients, right, and contribute in any little way I can to helping coaching become more of an integral part of the fabric of society so that society thrives, right, and I have no other dream. [laughter] More of the same.
- S1: 42:58 This is wonderful. [laughter] Thank you. Thank you so much, Jean Francois. We will see you traveling and going in place this year. I will see your LinkedIn posts when you are going around the world. Hopefully, once all of this virus can subside. So we are very appreciative for your time, and your sharing your experience and your knowledge with us here.
- S3: 43:25 Thank you very-- yeah. Thank you very much. Amy, that was-- you guys coached me in a way, right. I heard myself say things that I had not said before, say say--
[laughter]
- S3: 43:37 [inaudible] you guys are wonderful. I had a great time, thanks, and I hope our listeners too. Yeah.
- S3: 43:41 Thanks so much [inaudible] and all the best to you, and much love.
- S2: 43:46 Thank you. Jean Francois. Thank you.
- S1: 43:48 Thank you so much.