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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 175: NICHOLAS JANNI – A NEW PARADIGM FOR LEADERSHIP

Female Speaker

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Ken White

Well, Nicholas, good afternoon. It's so great to have you with us. Welcome.

Nicholas Janni

Thank you, Ken. Very good to be here.

Ken White

Leader as healer so very interesting. A new paradigm for leadership. Does leadership need to be different post-pandemic and at this time in our lives?

Nicholas Janni

Well, Ken, I believe leadership fundamentally needs to be different for one basic reason, which in a way is the foundation of the book, because, you know, I work with senior leaders all over the world, one to one in teams, and there is one thing that I meet everywhere. And it is a simple fact that the thinking mind is far too dominant, that has become the predominant modality by which people process everything. Whereas Einstein asked one very crucial question, he said, is your mind your master or your servant? And in 99% of the leaders I meet, it's their master. And this is very problematic because the way I see it, it means we're navigating increasingly complex and challenging times with more than one hand tied behind our back because it's like we're using a limited part of the totality of who we are. And Leader as Healer means we have a very sophisticated thinking mind. We also have an emotional body. We have a physical body. We have an intuitive way of sensing. And we understand what it means to sit in a kind of deeper interior, spaciousness, or stillness through meditation and mindfulness. So Leader as Healer brings everything to the table. And I do believe that in these times, more than ever, we absolutely need that because thinking mind alone is not enough.

Ken White

And you've been, as you mentioned. Working with CEOs with senior leadership teams for years on this. How did they react to it?

Nicholas Janni

Once they comprehend what I just said to you, which is not very difficult to comprehend, they completely get it. They completely get it. Especially when we talk about doing and being, which I know you want to talk about, it becomes obvious to them. Absolutely obvious. And I think, to be honest, I think many leaders do know already exactly what I'm saying. But they don't know an alternative. Business schools do not teach an alternative. I believe, to be honest, that most senior leaders put in senior positions with a crazy lack of inner development. All the teaching is strategic, linear, left-brain thinking, which is very important, but it's not the whole picture by a long way. So yes, people really get it. Absolutely.

Ken White

As we embrace this, will we see different types of people becoming leaders?

Nicholas Janni

That's an interesting question. I don't think so necessarily. I'm very interested in working with young leaders. I mean, most of my work is with very senior leaders. What someone recently called the gray hairs. You and me more than me. But I believe that there is a real need to bring this kind of work to young leaders in the political domain and the organizational domain. The world is shaking as we know Ken, and we need the inner resources to navigate.

Ken White

In dealing with aspiring leaders and MBA students, and undergraduate business students. I can see them embracing this quickly. They think a little differently.

Nicholas Janni

That's true. I agree with you. Yes, absolutely.

Ken White

So in Leader as Healer in the book, you have a foundational principle and then five interdependent aspects. And I thought for our audience. They'd probably like us to walk through those. What is the foundational principle?

Nicholas Janni

The foundational principle is that, as cultures for 3000 years have said, we have two fundamental paths to us or modalities. They've been called in Chinese medicine Yang and Ying. In the Greek civilization, they spoke of mythos and logos. Yung brought in the archetype of masculine, the archetype of feminine. I kind of make it more pragmatic by speaking of doing and being. So if you imagine a triangle, the two bottom corners, one is doing, one is being, doing is left brain, analytical proactive what's the next task? Being is right brain, much more receptive, much more sensing, and much more intuitive. My thesis is that high-performing leaders need to be at the top of the triangle using both and not either-or. It's more like we need to learn, and I teach a lot of practices. How do we rest in a bowl of being out of which comes all our doing? That's when we're really in high performance. It's a bit like athletes how they speak of being in the zone. An athlete will say, I receive the ball or in American football, and I feel like I have a lot of time. I know where everyone is. That's there at the top of the triangle.

Ken White

And a great place to be. Athletes will tell you the ball appears ten times bigger than it really is.

Nicholas Janni

Exactly and artists know that scientists know that you speak to. I spoke to brain surgeons who describe exactly that state. And not only do we do our best work, it feels great. It's like a win-win. That's doing and being really in harmony together.

Ken White

Interesting. So that's the foundational principle. Then you have the five interdependent aspects. Number one embracing emotions. What do you mean?

Nicholas Janni

Yes. Well, it's a big one, Ken, because I think we live in a culture where we've got various strange from our emotions. We've created this belief that there are positive and negative emotions, which I utterly disagree with. If we're sad, we need to feel sad. And if we don't, the real danger is we become numb. There's a lot of grief around after COVID. One of the CEOs I work with, very senior CEO, created an extraordinary little grief ritual. When people came back to the office after 18 months out, she gave everyone. It was beautiful what she did. And the thing with emotion is it doesn't need big trauma. It needs acknowledging. Imagine a CEO is leading an important strategic meeting. There's a lot of tension in the air. An emotionally mature leader as healer will pause the meeting and just say, just a moment. There's a lot of anxiety here. I'm feeling it. I'm not sleeping well. I'm sure you're all feeling it. Let's just acknowledge that.

Ken White

Yeah.

Nicholas Janni

And you know, what happens in that moment is literally and metaphorically a sigh of relief. But the important thing, Ken, is that after that, we think much better.

Ken White

Yeah, right.

Nicholas Janni

The critical thinking we prize so highly does not work well when whole parts of us are suppressed.

Ken White

Right.

Nicholas Janni

So this is a really big part of the work. Teams that can sit together and just acknowledge what they're feeling. And my clients report incredible results from this. I put examples in the book senior board meeting, and someone just says, just a moment, how are we all feeling? Two or three minutes sharing whole meeting changes. Whole meeting changes. It's a human being.

Ken White

It makes sense.

Nicholas Janni

Of course. It makes sense. And yet how challenging it is.

Ken White

Right.

Nicholas Janni

This is often the toughest part of the work.

Ken White

Oh, I can see that. Most leaders feel being vulnerable is a weakness. Right.

Nicholas Janni

It's a weakness. Plus, we naturally, I mean, it's a big topic too big for now. But as we develop, we naturally have to close off certain feelings because they were too much to deal with. So this is why I say leader as healer needs to do that in the work. They need to work with a mentor or therapist and get more comfortable with their emotions, or they will not make other people feel comfortable with their emotions.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Nicholas Janni in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. If your organization is interested in retaining your best people, consider enrolling them in one of our MBA programs for working professionals. William & Mary's online MBA, part-time MBA, and executive MBA programs are designed for the professional who works full time. So both the employee and the organization benefit. Show your employees you care by investing in their growth. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary at wm.edu. Now back to our conversation on Leader as Healer, a new paradigm for 21st-century leadership, with Nicholas Janni.

Ken White

The second interdependent aspect is the power of embodiment. Can you tell us about that?

Nicholas Janni

Yeah. When we were children, we were completely embodied. Everything was a physical experience. We closed that down, and we have forgotten the power of the body to feel the world, to receive information. We have completely forgotten that. If you look at any pre-industrial culture, Indigenous tribes, their relationship with the natural world is unbelievable. They feel exactly what's happening. We're hardwired for that, Ken. So by shutting off the body, we lose our groundedness, we lose a whole part of our presence, how we come over to people, and we lose this enormous resource of sensing and getting information. When I work with a client, one to one, I'm feeling their interior with enormous precision. How am I doing it? Not through my thinking. My body is feeling. And we don't have to build that. We just have to uncover it. It's our natural state.

Ken White

And be aware.

Nicholas Janni

Yeah, exactly.

Ken White

Interesting. Third, living a life of purpose.

Nicholas Janni

Yeah, I think it's a big topic now in organizations, as I'm sure everyone will know, more and more organizations. I'm working next week, actually, with a big European law firm who, by the way, bought a program called Leader as Healer, which is pretty interesting. And their CEO just published a report a month ago saying, I've realized we need to pay a lot more attention to our purpose. It's what gives life meaning, Ken. William said living without purpose is one of the most grievous wounds to our soul. And purpose is not to make more money. Nothing wrong with making money. Purpose is much deeper than that. Purpose is always about contribution. And we know from all the psychological research on happiness we get much more satisfaction from giving than we do from taking.

Ken White

Sure.

Nicholas Janni

And I believe many organizations are now waking up to the fact that they need their primary purpose is what are we contributing? And more and more organizations are finding they make just as much, if not more, money when they have that kind of purpose. We're at a very transitional time at the moment.

Ken White

And you work with business school students, too. You see how important that is to them as they're seeking that employer after graduation. Really critical now.

Nicholas Janni

Well, we know that from data. We know that millennials will accept lower pay while working for an organization whose values they believe in. Absolutely. It's clearest.

Ken White

Number four the practice of mindfulness and meditation.

Nicholas Janni

Big one. I mean, listen, meditation mindfulness is now used in hospitals, prisons, violent schools with incredible results. A colleague of mine, pre-COVID, was in China. The CEO took her into the atrium. One sign said conference from the other sign said meditation room. This is coming more and more in. Why? Because the very act of paying attention, which is the core of mindfulness, activates our right brain. It activates our feeling of our

body. So we immediately enlarge our bandwidth when we practice mindfulness. So our perception immediately gets much wider as opposed to what I said at the beginning, this kind of narrow view of reality. So I teach a way of practicing mindfulness throughout the day. And it doesn't take any time. It's very important. There are certain ways we need to be practicing whatever we're doing, whatever meeting we're in before a Zoom call. I mean, I've been working with people who are spending 10 hours a day on Zoom. Don't just sit there absent. Practice for a moment before a call. Take a moment to breathe, to pay attention to your body. You will show up differently, and you will listen differently.

Ken White

And the fifth interdependent aspect is the call.

Nicholas Janni

Yes. So this is a kind of more advanced in a way because I do believe the very simple story. I used to work in the theater. If an actor used to come to me, let's say, with the Shakespeare text and say, oh, Nicholas, I don't know what to do with this. I would always say something like, look, that's not the right question. The only interesting thing is, what will it do with you? Now everyone knows artists, scientists, leaders, sportspeople, whatever the best ideas come to us, we say it in English. The idea came to me, but that has a very deep implication. So I'm actually working on a whole project with Bob Anderson of the Leadership Circle. And the basic thing we're teaching leaders to do is to learn a completely different level of receptivity. What is it that is trying to come through? Not what do I want to do? What is being asked of us here? It's listening to a much higher level of intelligence, which always comes when we're in the right receptivity.

Ken White

Seems to come when we're calm, correct?

Nicholas Janni

Exactly. For instance, yes. When we're calm when we feel more spacious inside, and we're listening very deeply when we're walking. People get their best ideas in the shower.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Nicholas Janni

People get their best ideas when working out. It's not a coincidence because our energy is flowing, our energy is flowing, and then suddenly, ideas pop in. That's the call. And that's, by the way, I believe, the basis of innovation as well. We don't do innovations. It does us.

Ken White

Yeah. Interesting. So I can see a leadership team, even a group of managers, saying, wow, my plate is full. And now you want me to think differently. What do you say to them in that instance?

Nicholas Janni

The more you embrace this work, the more you will find. First of all, you get much less depleted. Secondly, you get much higher level of connection between everybody, and ultimately you're going to reach a much higher level of performance that will be much more satisfying as well. The argument we don't have time is nonsense.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Nicholas Janni, and that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. If you'd like to purchase *Leader as Healer, a New Paradigm for 21st Century Leadership*, it's available now in the UK and will be available in the United States on June 26. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business, home of the MBA program offered in four formats, the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. If you're looking for a truly transformational experience, check out the William & Mary MBA program at wm.edu. Thanks to our guest Nicholas Janni and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Wishing you a safe, happy, and productive week ahead.

Female Speaker

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