



## **Name: Tom Peters: “If Today Was Your Last Day”**

### **Season 4: Episode #11**

Speaker 1:

Welcome to Stayin' Alive in Technology, a series of conversations with Silicon Valley veterans touching on war stories from the past and practical advice for today. And now here's your host, Melinda Byerley, founding partner of Fiddlehead, a digital marketing consultancy.

Melinda Byerley:

Hello again, and welcome to another episode of Stayin' Alive in Tech. And yes, even though this is technically the conclusion of season four, it's been a while since we last did an episode. And that's fine because sometimes life happens, and you have to tend to it. I was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer this past June after a routine mammogram, and have just finished the most active phase of treatment. I'm going to be ok, but yes, getting well has been the sole focus of my energy.

You might have noticed that the title of this podcast is a song by Nickelback called “If Today Was Your Last Day. “ I've certainly had a lot of time to think about my life the last few months, as anyone who has faced a life-threatening illness or injury has. One of the things that frightened me the most when I was diagnosed was what would happen to my company, Fiddlehead, when I wasn't able to focus on it as much. I was so lucky to have an amazing business coach, Craig Barnes , who had been guiding me up to this point, and he told me that he was a survivor of head and neck cancer. It was then that coaching became a real friendship. Craig would text me often to check in on me and even sent me a magnet that he had on his fridge too, that said, “We can do hard things. “

Melinda:

Last week, I got the shocking news that Craig had passed away unexpectedly, leaving behind a loving family and bereft community that misses him profoundly. One of the reasons I decided to engage Craig, was because we shared the same values; which included living life with integrity and treating everyone, including our employees, with dignity and respect. Craig and I agreed that the profit motive could be balanced with humanity.

As we welcome Tom Peters back for a third time to challenge us all yet again to be better humans in the messy work of managing people and companies, I know Craig would have appreciated Tom's message. And that's why this song will finally close out this season.



This being Tom's third appearance on our podcast, I almost feel like a proper introduction is no longer needed, but I'll give him one anyway — the cliff notes, so to speak. And just as a side note, we encourage you to check out Tom's previous appearances on our show, including season two, episode six, and season three, episode 15, which we recorded about one month into the pandemic.

Melinda:

So, in case you are unaware, Tom Peters has done a lot of things. His long career has included stops at everywhere from McKinsey & Company to the Pentagon, and he's also managed to write a few books along the way — quite a few of them, actually, starting with *In Search of Excellence* in 1982, a book that changed the way the world does business and is often lauded as the best business book ever. Forty years later, he's still at the forefront of the management guru and thought leadership industry he practically invented. And he's still putting out books, which is partly what we will talk about today.

His newest book, Tom Peters' Compact Guide to Excellence, was made in collaboration with iconic designer Nancye Green. The book is essentially a collection of quotes that urges you to recognize what truly matters at work. It also argues that business leaders must start putting people first and start helping them prepare for a rocky future as we take on things like a debilitating pandemic, extreme wealth inequality, and destabilizing technological revolutions still in their infancy. Ultimately, as is the theme with nearly all of Tom's works, it argues that treating one another humanely is the best path forward. This is, in Tom's words, "extreme humanism" — which also happens to be half the title of another great book he's written.

Melinda:

And so, with that said, today, we'll cover everything from why, as Tom puts it, "managing by text" is something he still doesn't understand, who his book is intended for, and one particular quote from a beloved football coach he forgot to include. And, as talks with Tom often go, we examine the blurry intersection between doing right and doing well. I hope you enjoy our conversation.

Melinda:

Welcome to the podcast again, Tom.

Tom Peters:

Thank you very much. It is a delight to be asked back, as usual, in this world. So thank you.

Melinda:

Tell me about the book in terms of who you decided to write it for specifically. I'm a marketer, so I always want to know who the target audience is and why you decided to write it right now.



Tom:

Wow! Have you got two hours?

Melinda:

Hey!

Tom:

Well, I'm going to back into it in an odd way. About a year ago, I wrote a book that was called Excellence Now: Extreme Humanism. And via my friend Julie Anixter, I ended up being introduced to Nancye Green, who is, according to all the lists, one of the top 100 designers in the world, chairman of the Parsons Board of Trustees, et cetera. She designed the first book, and I thought it was lovely. And it's the first book I'd ever done out of 19 that I thought was lovely. So we were chatting about it, chatting about the content, and we said jointly, "What if we summarize this, and what if we did it in a way that we hope is appetizing if you will?" So I went and found, I don't know, 50 or a hundred of my favorite quotes. I've always used quotes, and I've used them and put them up on PowerPoint slides because my comment is, "I haven't run a damn business. Anita Roddick has. Richard Branson has. Don't listen to me. Listen to them." So I let the quotes carry it.

So we found a hundred that seemed to be a centerpiece of what I've been doing for the last 43 years since In Search of Excellence. And then Nancye put it into this, I hope, very attractive design. It is an undersized book significantly. It's got a bright red cover. It is insanely accessible. There are pages in this undersized book with just three words on them and so on. And we do have a quote by Jane Smith or Joe Smith. It is not, in this instance, followed by 900 words of Tom Peters rambling on about what it means. So it is exactly what it says. It is a compact guide.

Melinda:

It's tweetable. It was like reading tweet-sized information, snack-sized information.

Tom:

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, I've got a million ideas on how to use it, but I was sitting somewhere or other, and I just opened the book randomly to some quote, and I thought, "Here's how you should use it." I opened it randomly to some quote, and then you and I could sit down and talk for an hour, if not a lifetime, about that little two-sentence quote. So I think it's to be used more or less in that fashion, to trigger serious discussion. And I've been writing about design for 20 years now, and I didn't really fully know what it meant until Nancye did this. Nancye's work is the look, the feel, the taste, the touch, the smell of the whole enterprise. So I'm really blessed, and it was great fun. So what can I say?

Melinda:

I found myself thinking as I was... I've read Extreme Humanism, so I was flipping through this. Thank you. I was trying to think about who it was for because I found myself wearing several hats over my career as well. I've been a small business owner. I've been the head of marketing. I've been a Frontline individual contributor. And I was curious who, when you were writing Extreme Humanism and even picking out pieces for this, who you thought your reader was.



Tom:

Well, again, there are no easy questions.

Melinda:

That's a sign of intelligence, Tom.

Tom:

Yeah, that sounds good to me. I'm not sure I'd buy the rack.

Melinda:

Well, take it.

Tom:

But it sounds good.

Melinda:

Well, take it and run with it.

Tom:

I want to say something, which is... It's not directly involved, but it's kind of funny. So Peter Drucker was the god of management in my youth, and Bob Waterman and I come along with In Search of Excellence. And for a whole bunch of reasons, it just goes off the charts. And Drucker was kind of bent out of shape, and he was quoted. In some magazine, he said, "Well, adults aren't reading this. Fathers are buying it for their teenage children." And I responded, and I said, "The good Lord must have blessed me because I cannot think of any higher praise." But it was really hilarious.

Melinda:

Or who do you hope will read this?

Tom:

I think almost anything. One thing that kind of interests me and has been a pet peeve or whatever of mine. I was trained initially as an engineer. So Tom Peters goes to work for the XYZ company, and he's an engineer, and he had good grades, et cetera. If Tom is worth a damn, he will have done pretty good work, and by year two, if not earlier, he'll be leading a little four-person project team. And at that point, in my opinion, his life flips 180 degrees. His entire business, if you will, is developing people, not sitting down with a slide rule and solving a problem.

So I'd love to think that a 24-year-old, fresh-caught engineer was reading it. I'd love to think that an MD was reading it, and I have no objection if somebody running a big company reads it. But the real answer to that too is I'm a lot less interested in the giant companies than I used to be. The national economy, the global economy is SMEs, the small and medium-size enterprises. And as far as I'm concerned, the whole Fortune 500 companies could dump into the Hudson River, and I wouldn't care.



Melinda:

All right, I'm going down that road. Tell me how you got there. How did you make that transition from big company to this point of view?

Tom:

Well, part of it... And I like to think this is true of 99.9% of what's in my books. I use exclamation marks and red exclamation marks and so on, but I did stick around after my MBA to get a Ph.D. in organizational behavior at Stanford. And I don't open my mouth unless there is hard-nosed research that supports it. I had this great mentor. His name was Karl Weick. And whenever I write anything, I say to myself, "Would Karl smile at this, or would he say I was full of baloney?" So add that to the fact that there is a ton of research, and six or seven or eight pages in this book is related to it, that says big companies don't perform well, and over time they get worse. There is a quote from an economist by the name of Paul Ormerod, and I won't get it exactly right, but he basically says... I will get it almost exactly right. "I am often asked by would-be entrepreneurs how do they get a small company. And I always give them the same answer: Buy a big company and just wait."

My old McKinsey pals, the now discredited McKinsey, Richard Foster, and someone else did a study some years ago of 50 years' worth of data for the 1,000 biggest companies, publicly traded companies in America. Not one of a thousand outperformed the market over the 50-year period. And the second half of the story, which is really way more important, is there are so many fun companies to look at out there who are doing absolutely magnificent things and doing weird things that you would say, "You can't make a buck off that."

And I think we covered it in *Extreme Humanism*, the last book, and I think I may have even mentioned it in this book. There's a company in Seymour, Connecticut, by the name of Basement Systems, Inc. And what they do is turn your damp, moldy basement into a sparkling rec room or an extra bedroom or what have you. And out of basement reclamation, they have built a \$100 million company. Larry Janesky, who owns and started the company, wrote a book called *Dry Basement Science*. And I was slightly annoyed that *Dry Basement Science* outsold one of my recent books. But what can I say? But I love the Basement Systems, Inc. of the world. They're just these sparkling people. There's a friend of mine by the name of Bo Burlingham, who was a co-founder of *Inc.* magazine, wrote a book. A wonderful title, wonderful content, and it's called *Small Giants*. And it is 20 superstar stories that are... Basement Systems, Inc. wasn't in it, but they are all, if you will, cousins and brothers and sisters of Basement Systems, Inc.

Melinda:

We're going to come back to this because I'm fascinated, like you are. When I read in this, I was reminded again, because I think you mentioned Basement Systems, Inc. in the *Compact Guide*. And so I went out and read that again and was... We're going to come back to that.

Tom:

And buy the book *Dry Basement Science*, for God's sakes. And if you have a basement, dry it out.

Melinda:

That's right. I bet you they did boffo business during the pandemic too.



Tom:

Oh my God, yes. I don't know the answer to your question, but you're absolutely-

Melinda:

You can only assume. You can only assume.

Tom:

That's a good hypothesis. Yeah.

Melinda:

So I found myself... And it could be whenever you read something, you're reading it through your own lens, as you know, what you're going through in your own life, what you're experiencing in your own life, and where I'm at as a small business owner. And I found myself reading through, certainly, the emphasis on strategy. And strategy is hallucination without good execution, and a lot of the stuff we learn in business school is about that. So you rightfully, I think, start the first set of quotes off in the book thinking about execution, relentless execution. And then I found myself... Then the focus of the book shifts to people. And lately, I've been thinking about this and tweeting about it, about the apparent, in my mind, conflict between execution and people. So here's the question. If execution is everything, what happens when people... I'm going to use an inflammatory phrase here. What happens when people stand in the way?

Tom:

Well, remember, quote-unquote "people" are the 99% of employees who are not in the executive suite. That's number one.

Melinda:

Well stated.

Tom:

Number two, one of my favorite quotes came from the commanding officer of ground forces at D-Day, and it's General Omar Bradley. And he said, "Amateurs talk about strategy. Professionals talk about logistics." Now, the reason I use that example here is the people who make sure that the flat-bottomed boat comes into the right place with the right amount of ammunition at the right time, those are the people we're talking about. They are the 98%.

So I mean, to me, yes, execution is everything. Any idiot can write a strategy. I mean, that's why we wrote the damn book, In Search of Excellence. McKinsey had a new managing director, and he called me in because I had just gotten this fresh-caught Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Stanford. And he called me in, and he said, "Tom, we design the most beautiful, fantastic, brilliant strategies known to humankind for our clients, and then the clients don't execute. What the hell is going on?" And the answer is, I think you and I both agree, 98% the development of the people who can execute that strategy and modify that strategy in the face of the real world.



So you set me up with the way you stated the question. The people I want... Well, I could go on forever and ever. The most important hour in my adult life came early in the In Search of Excellence research when my co-author, the late, alas, Bob Waterman and I, who worked for McKinsey in San Francisco, went down the peninsula 30 miles to a middle-size-plus, fast-growing company called Hewlett Packard. We met with the president, John Young, and that was interesting in and of itself. We worked in the Bank of America Tower in San Francisco on the 50th floor looking over Alcatraz and various other things.

Melinda:

With suits. Wearing suits too, I'm sure.

Tom:

Oh yeah, wearing... Well, the way I put it, wearing suits and drinking their tea off of china that came directly from Buckingham Palace.

Melinda:

Wow!

Tom:

So Waterman and I go down to Palo Alto, and we go up to the front desk and said, "We're here for a meeting with John Young, the president." Now, if it had been in a B of A, what would've happened? 10 minutes later, the executive assistant to the executive assistant's executive assistant would've come out and so on. We say, "We've got a meeting with John Young." Two minutes later, John Young pops out a side door and says, "Hey, guys, glad to see you're here." Takes us beyond the door to the engineering spaces where his office is. Remember, he's a president of a billion-dollar company, and there's John Young's office. It is an 8' by 8' cubicle with those half-walled, whatever they are, plexiglass walls. And we were already at the "Holy shit" level.

And then halfway through the presentation, which is the point of this discussion, my comments, he introduces us to the HP way and to MBWA, managing by wandering around. And it was a life-changer. And it was a life-changer because what it said to me is leading is an intimate act. Leading is being fully engaged with the person driving that landing boat in or the 23-year-old engineer who's working on a little corner of a new project or what have you. It's all about the people. I have, well, so many things that we could talk about, like Neutron Jack and why Jack Welch is now accused of destroying capitalism and why it's probably true. But that's another interview.

Melinda:

Hey, you're talking to the daughter of an autoworker, who grew up on the stories of Chainsaw Al. So I'll put a link to that in the comments.

Tom:

Yes. I'm going to get your... You triggered one. I did a PBS show years ago. It doesn't matter when. But the featured person was Pat Carrigan, and Pat was the first woman to run a GM parts factory. So we go in, the cameraman and I and my director and so on, and we walk in and walk around a little bit. And I



don't know whose idea it was, but one of us knocked on the door of the guy who ran the UAW in the factory. As you know better than I, when you've got a giant factory, the UAW has its own... Not meaning bureaucracy in a bad way, but it's got its own parallel organization.

So we walk in and talk to the UAW director and said something about what we were doing. He said, "Let me bring this to a conclusion at the start." He said, "Pat Carrigan arrives. And it couldn't have been two minutes after she arrived that I hear a knock on my door, and there is Pat Carrigan, and she introduces herself." He said, "I have been in this plant, in this leadership position for 15 years, and not one plant manager has ever walked into my office. I am always called into the palace quarters." I mean, I was almost in tears when that happened. But with your dad, the autoworker's background, you can identify with that far more than me.

Melinda:

Yeah. Management crossing the line to labor is rare, was rare certainly in those days.

Tom:

Well, and one wonderful thing, by the way, which I thought was cool. When Pat retired, the state of Michigan did one of those things that you do when you honor people and passed some little thing honoring Pat's excellence that she had achieved there, which I thought that was the greatest thing in the world.

Melinda:

I'm living in the bubble of Silicon Valley and working. We support big tech companies or fast-growing unicorns. I certainly see a change over the last few years, an emphasis on people, Elon Musk notwithstanding. We won't go down that rabbit hole. I know we would agree. But a focus on what... Especially during the pandemic, I saw a lot more... maybe again frequency, recency bias... but saw a lot more focus on the health of our employees and how they feel. And what I found myself, as a business owner, is sometimes you get stuck. In fact, it happens frequently, where the messy reality of people's lives is in conflict with the for-profit motive.

I tell people, I feel like I'm as well-intentioned as anybody in terms of trying to build a company that cares for its people. And almost daily, there is a war between what's good for the business and what's good for the people. And it shouldn't seem binary. I know I'm not supposed to think about it in a binary form, but it often seems like it's hard to reconcile. And that's what I was struck with as I was going through the book, was execution, execution, and what happens when the execution is in conflict with what's going on in someone's life, right?

Tom:

Well-

Melinda:

And when you're in a small company in particular. In a big company, you have lots of people. If someone has cancer or someone has a death in the family, there are people who can cover. And in a small





business, there aren't. And it seems like this is... I'd just be curious to hear what you think about, what you know about that intersection between doing right and doing well.

Tom:

Well, I wouldn't give you a glib answer.

Melinda:

That's why you're here. I wouldn't want you here if you were going to do that.

Tom:

Well, one thing I can say is that I ran the Tom Peters Company for 20 years at 555 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto. So I know of what you speak, even though the Palo Alto of the last 15 or 20 years has been a bit unrecognizable to me. There are several things I would say. There's a wonderful book called The Three Rules that I quoted, and it was done by Deloitte and Touche. They looked at 25,000 companies and came up with 27 superstars. And out of that came the three rules. And the three rules were revenue before cost. I've forgotten the second one, but it was the same thing basically. Top line before the bottom line. And rule number three was there are no other rules.

So one of my deep-seated biases, and this doesn't solve the problem because I think you're doubtless one of the good people in this regard, is it's a hell of a lot easier if you are making a fabulous product or service that has devoted customers and has high margins, and cost-cutting is not what we do around here. It is revenue building. It is customer relationship building. It is innovation building. So going back to roots, I would say that's from day number one. Cost-cutting is a loser strategy, even though you can undoubtedly hire more people than you need and get fat.

The second thing... Well, I think this is an indirect answer to your question. I have a speakers' bureau, the Washington Speakers Bureau, which arguably is the best there is. And the CEO is a woman by the name of Christine Farrell, who I've known forever. So I came down from the greater Boston area or... It wasn't San Francisco. It was later than that. From the greater Boston area to visit them in Washington. It was after the '06, '08 crash. And I was talking to one of the folks, and I said something about Christine, and they said, "Oh my God, let me tell you about Christine."

If you're in the speakers' bureau business when a recession hits, you're toast. No more big conferences, et cetera. She said, "I walked into Christine's office one day, and there was one of our lower-level employees giving her the biggest hug in the world. And she said, 'Christine, Christine, it's okay. I'm going to be okay.'" Christine had laid this person off, but done it with such passion and such care that the laid-off person was hugging her boss. And A, I believe in that story because I know the people involved, but B, I believe in that kind of a people-oriented environment. And if there is a point where people have to be let go...

There's a little auto-parts company near me, and when a recession hit or when the pandemic hit, they were in a difficult time, and they did small stuff. Like, the person who was the accountant spent hour after hour after hour helping the 10 employees apply for the unemployment benefits and apply for extra healthcare benefits and so on. So I think you can have that kind of a people-oriented place, and I think it even helps you more in the bad times than the good times.



Melinda:

Let me ask you a question just to... I hadn't planned to ask this question, but it made me think of it. In that environment, speak now to that engineer or that frontline worker. What is their responsibility in that environment? So you and I agree, management is there to support, right? We are there to enable the people that work for us. That is our job. What is the responsibility that the workers have?

Tom:

To do fabulous work, but only because we've made it so that they think they're doing fabulous work. I don't want to quite use that language. I mean that's fine, responsibility, but... God, I hate sports analogies and particularly football analogies, so we'll forget that.

Melinda:

I watch football. You're not going to exclude me by using a football analogy.

Tom:

No, no, I know I'm not, but...

Melinda:

But good job trying. I mean it's good that you're aware of it.

Tom:

We don't want to get on that one because I was a great San Francisco 49ers fan, and one of my neighbors was Bill Walsh. And let's not go down that road.

Melinda:

Oh, stop. I'm a Packers fan. This is not going to go anywhere.

Tom:

Oh, yeah. Okay. Bingo. The damn quote that I forgot to put in my book, and I had it in an earlier book, came from that tough, hard-nosed SOB called Vince Lombardi, the coach of the Green Bay... the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers. I cannot do you the entire quote. I can't do it justice. But here is the first sentence, and all of our listeners should write this down or put it into their heart. "I do not need to like all my players, but I must love them." And then he talks about love is creating an organization where people support each other and so on and so forth. That quote made me tear up, because some people will not, who are listening to us, unlike you and me, won't really know about the Lombardi Packers. But they were the Green Bay Packers. They were the toughest sons of bitch in the world. Look where they came from, for God's sakes. And yet, that was Lombardi.

There's incredible responsibility, but my responsibility is that I love you and my five employees in the purchasing department or where have you, and my responsibility is not to let them down. It is to bust my ass. And when you're having a bad day, when you've got a kid who just tested positive or something like that, it's my responsibility to step up. I mean, people don't like it sometimes when you call business a



family. I have no problem with that whatsoever. I mean my overall logic is, unless you were born with a silver spoon, you are going to spend most of your adult waking hours at work. You can adore your family, but the bulk of your waking hours will be spent at work. Therefore, using direct logic, if you piss away your work life, you piss away your entire life.

Melinda:

That's right.

Tom:

So it is a lowercase F family. And sure, there's nepotism and all those things, and you can go down that road. And if we had more time, we could do that. But it is, per Mr. Lombardi, it is an intimate enterprise. And I saw it with the 49ers and Bill Walsh, and Walsh was 179 degrees away from Lombardi in some respects, but it was... I remember he wrote a book, and it was fabulous, and he even said I had contributed to it.

So Walsh comes to the 49ers, and he inherits a team with two wins and 14 losses. Walsh's first year with the 49ers is two wins and 14 losses. The next year is six and 10, and the next year he wins the Super Bowl. Walsh's explanation in his book, and this is a football team, he said, "I spent the first year building a culture of winning, and as a result, we only got two games on the positive side." But it was building a place where, indeed, per what you and I are talking about, the players supported each other. Well, that's the best answer I can give you.

Melinda:

Oh, man, please, we're not going to... Please tell me you're watching Ted Lasso.

Tom:

I don't.

Melinda:

Oh, you're going to... Come and find me after you've had a chance to watch Ted Lasso because it's very much-

Tom:

I will.

Melinda:

It is very much a leadership analogy that's a positive example of building a culture of-

Tom:

I promise I'll do it.

Melinda:



Plus, it's funny.

Tom:

I've been told to do it, and now that you have told me to do it, a person who I respect deeply-

Melinda:

Ah, thank you.

Tom:

... I will do it.

Melinda:

So let me use the football-to-football analogy since I had talked about Ted Lasso and talked about soccer. Also, my partner's Argentine, so as you can imagine, it was a very-

Tom:

Oh my God.

Melinda:

... big day on Sunday.

Tom:

Oh, an understatement. How lovely!

Melinda:

A very big day. For an American to... He's American too. But to watch... Soccer is not in our blood in the same way, and to watch that was pretty amazing. But I had the opportunity, this World Cup, to spend a lot of time observing Lionel Messi. And I came across an article, which I'll put in the show notes, about his walking-around strategy. He's famous for... And he's done this for years. He spends 85% of the time on the pitch walking.

Tom:

Oh, I love that.

Melinda:

He almost never scores a goal in the first two minutes because, according to his coach in Barcelona, he spends the first five to 10 minutes of every game walking around, taking in the situation and observing the patterns. He is literally running where the puck is, to mash it up with Wayne Gretzky, right?

Tom:

Yeah.



Melinda:

He is watching three, four moves ahead. And as I watch him on the pitch, he's evaluating which balls are clearly more likely to score and then deciding when to get involved. And I'm like, "This is totally management by walking around." That's all I can think about. Literally, he's physically walking around.

Tom:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Melinda:

Okay. So here we are in an environment where who the hell knows how many people are actually going to go back into the office, particularly again speaking in the Silicon Valley bubble, where a lot of us are remote full-time or hybrid. It's a mess. So in the past, you could walk around. You'd go for a cup of coffee or to the bathroom, and you could walk around. You could see... It's a natural part of your day. What I'm finding as a manager of people in the pandemic is that I have to be much more proactive about this. I have to make time for it. And that is time that is not spent on other things. And it got me thinking about the traditional ratios of managers to employees. We typically say you have a minimum of this. A manager's salary is allocated across a minimum of three, no more than seven people. And if you are actively making time to do this, it's astonishing how much time it takes, because you have to coordinate when are they in, when are you in. It can't be as informal as it used to be.

So I got to thinking, when I wanted to talk to you, was who's doing this well in this remote environment? And I will add to this, I'm observing something, and again my perspective, in call it the kids today. Oh, man, I feel old. Kids today, they're more comfortable in text. They're much more comfortable in text than they are on the phone. They get much more anxious about, "Hey, let's pop in for a chat." They freak out. They're like, "What's going to happen? Am I about to be fired?" There's a lot of reassurance required to do management by walking around in this time, in this place, in this way. So that's my long-winded way of asking you how management by walking around, management by zooming around, as you called it in the book, how you're seeing people do it well and what advice you have.

Tom:

I will limit my advice. You should not talk about things where you don't know what the hell you're talking about.

Melinda:

Fair.

Tom:

Not unlike you, based on what you've just said... I do want to say some things I do feel. But managing by text is something that I don't really understand.

Melinda:

It's hard.



Tom:

Yeah, it is really hard. And I am infinitely older than you, but you were not born yesterday, and I'm not sure anybody can manage who's over the age of 30. I really do, at some level. It is a completely different form of communication, is the answer. Here's one thing I want to say, which is just not out of the loop. But relative to myself, when the pandemic came and I was no longer in rooms with people, I thought it was ballgame over. And what I have learned is that... This is not text. This is you and I talking over a Zoom, a videoed Zoom link. What I have learned is that you can transmit as much emotion and engage as emotionally in Zoom as you could in that so-called real world.

It was kind of funny. When I finish giving a speech in an auditorium, I just am worse than death warmed over. And my wife walked in after an hour Zoom lecture, interchange that I had had, and she said, "My God, you are as exhausted and drained after the hour in front of the little screen as you were when you were in a room with a thousand people." So I think the emotionality and the... Emotionality, there's a word that-

Melinda:

I like it.

Tom:

Emotionality.

Melinda:

You should copyright that.

Tom:

Yeah, absolutely. I think that can be maintained. There are some things that will probably be lost. It makes me think back a thousand years ago to when some of this stuff was... Way, way, way back when. There was a guy by the name of Dave Bing, who wrote a column in Fortune magazine. Okay. So Dave Bing wrote in one of his columns, and I laughed, but I really didn't. This was when... What was the, oh for God's sakes, television show? What was the ad guy's television show?

Melinda:

Mad Men.

Tom:

Mad Men, for Christ's sakes. Remember the Mad Men age? And what Bing said is he said, "You know what I think? I think the end of the three-martini lunch is going to be the end of innovation." And there's a dollop of truth to that. And I do completely think that... I was doing another TV show, and it was with a big architecture company. And they had moved into a new headquarters, and they had put kind of comfy seats outside all the restrooms because they figured two people coming out of the restroom would sit down and just chat a little bit.



A, I don't know how you capture that entirely. And B, I'm really being very straightforward, I don't know what the leadership secret is in a world of 98% texting. I really don't. I think it's there. I think it can be discovered. We've adapted to every other damn thing known to humankind. We've adapted to railroads. We've adapted to phones, and so on. And I'm sure there will be adaptation, but I am not going to talk in a way to you that could end up going out to a large number of people and say, "Let me tell you how it's done." Bullshit. I don't know.

Melinda:

That's an awesome thing. That's an awesome thing. And I think, by the way, as a side note, you probably have heard that California's legalizing research in the use of psychedelics, and maybe that will mean the birth of innovation again. Who knows?

Tom:

That could be it. That could be it. My dearly beloved California. I loved my time in the Valley. It was absolutely perfect. My timing was great. It was from 1970 to 2000. My problem today is sometimes I think there's too much money out there.

Melinda:

That's for another podcast. I know I have to let you go. It's always a delight to have you, and I hope you have a good holiday and a good new year, and we'll bring you back next year when the next book comes out.

Tom:

Well, very much the same back to you. Take care. Happy New Year, all those kinds of things.

Melinda:

Thanks, Tom.

Tom:

Take care. Thanks.

Speaker 1:

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