



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series

“How to Lead Like Jesus”

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Al Lopus: Hello. I’m Al Lopus, and thanks for joining us today. What is it like to lead an organization with the name “Lead Like Jesus”? I’m sure many of you ask the question, “Do they?” Well, I can answer that question. Yes, Lead Like Jesus is a certified Best Christian Workplace. But more seriously, as believers in the one Ken Blanchard says is the greatest leadership role model of all time, a bigger question comes to mind: “How could Lead Like Jesus serve to develop your personal leadership and build an operating framework for your staff culture?” Well, today we have the pleasure of talking with the president and CEO of Lead Like Jesus, Phyllis Hendry. Hi, Phyllis, and welcome to our podcast today.

Phyllis Hendry: Hi, Al. It’s so great to be with you today.

Al: Great! I’m really looking forward to our discussion. Phyllis, tell us a little bit about yourself and Lead Like Jesus.

Phyllis: Well, thank you, Al. You know, I am a pastor’s daughter, so having grown up in a pastor’s family, and a father who constantly reminded me as I would walk out the door, “Remember whose you are,” with that kind of background, that was a very good place to begin to want to lead like Jesus, to remember whose I am.

I have wonderful background in my family. Mostly, Al, I’ve been in business in my life. I was in banking for many years, in retail. I had ladies’ clothing stores. There’s been a multitude of entrepreneurial kinds of things I’ve done. In that whole time, I served in my church in ministries as youth minister and leadership teams.

What I have seen in my career is the importance of leadership, serving with business leaders and church leaders and military leaders in one great project I worked on. The leader really makes a difference. When I met Ken in December 2001 and he told me just a little bit about what he and Phil Hodges were trying to do, I thought, “I want to help. I want to do whatever I can to make sure people understand Jesus is the greatest leadership role model of all time.”

Al: Tell us about joining Lead Like Jesus. As you came on board, what were you trying to accomplish? What problems were you trying to solve, Phyllis?

Phyllis: Well, we believed then and we still do that the world is in desperate need of a different leadership role model. I don't think anybody listening to us would argue that the world is in crisis when it comes to leadership. What we wanted people to do was to realize that the same one who we have honored as Savior and Lord is also the greatest leadership role model of all time.

I think from our perspective, we have... I've been in church since before I was born. I never heard Jesus was a great leadership role model. We really wanted to take what Jesus did with the disciples (not what he *would've* done or *could've* done, but what he *did*), with kind of 12 ordinary guys, and how the world changed because of what Jesus did for them.

That was really our goal, Al. We wanted people to look at Jesus from the perspective and I would say through the leadership lens. Let's just look at what Jesus did and then take that into our own lives and apply that in our own families, in our own organizations and in our churches.

Al: Yeah, yeah. You've developed some great material. I love the Lead Like Jesus material you've been working on and developing since the early 2000s. In your training, the first thing that identifies a servant leader is the answer to the question, "Do you welcome and want feedback?" From your perspective, does the BCW employee engagement survey provide meaningful and actionable feedback to leaders?

Phyllis: You know, it does, Al. It's like a full-body scan. When you take the survey and you have all of your team looking at these wonderful questions, good questions, and you get to see... Actually, you get to see what the blind spots are. You may think you're doing well in some area, but maybe you're not.

It also affirms the things you're doing well. It affirms the things you're doing well, and it also shows you where things may not be going as well as you thought. Then you can do something about it. We recommend the BCWI survey to every organization we want to work with. We think this is a great way to say, "This is a good starting place. Let's find out where you are, and then we can figure out how to go from there."

Al: It's been a real joy working with you on that even as you surveyed your own team as I mentioned earlier. As we did that, three of your strengths are the dimensions we call "fantastic teams," "inspirational leadership," and "healthy communication." Those really came out very strong. It wouldn't surprise our audience to know your top scores were in the inspirational leadership area. On the leadership front, give us a breakthrough idea you've worked with to help develop (as you would refer to it) the heart of your team's leadership.

Phyllis: Well, first, Al, everybody on our team has gone through Lead Like Jesus training. It would be impossible to be a part of Lead Like Jesus and not have gone through our training. We believe, as you know, Al, that the heart is the essence of it all. If we don't get the heart right, then nothing else we do...no skill we develop, no thinking, no behavior...will change unless the heart has been changed.

We focus on the heart, and the biggest challenge of leaders who want to lead like Jesus is, "I have to deal with my own heart, keep my own heart in that right place." I guess the biggest breakthrough idea I could give every leader is to do a heart check every day.

One of the wonderful opportunities we have at Lead Like Jesus is, because we have a common language of leadership, that language helps us say, “How is your heart today? Is there pride or fear in this heart? Do I bring pride or fear into this meeting? Or am I causing others in my team to be prideful or fearful by what I am saying?” I think the greatest breakthrough idea for any leader every morning is to check my own heart before I can lead others.

Al: Yeah, I love that part of the training. We can't lead from the inside out if the inside (if our heart) isn't in good shape for sure. You know, one of the other strengths is healthy communication. Now much of your team is virtual, which is the way our team is and the way more and more ministries are becoming. They don't all work together in the same location. So what are some of the practices you use to create such a high sense of involvement and innovation even though your team isn't all sitting together in the same place?

Phyllis: Well, I really do believe it makes it more challenging when you're not in the same place. You really do have to be intentional about communication. We do have a weekly phone call of all of our team, and people sign in from everywhere so we can have an update. We complete an update form. We ask several questions on the form that people complete every week so we can just stay in touch with each other.

“Is there anything you need help on? What would you like others to know? What do we need to pray about?” All of those are just a few questions everybody answers that are emailed out to everybody before our call, so people kind of know what's on the hearts and minds of each other.

I think the other part of that, Al, is the willingness to communicate at any point. Since all of my team are not in the same place, I can't just have an open door policy. I have an open text, open phone, open email policy that people can email at any time, and I will do my best... They know I will get back within at least 24 hours even if I'm traveling, because they're important. What they need is important. Even if it's a small question or a big question, I would respond.

The other part of that is feeling like every person on the team can communicate with other people. We often will send out an email where everybody will give input. Then on our call, we'll gather the input and see how we come out. It really is about being intentional in your communication, being willing at all times to be open for questions. As you said, we believe feedback is the breakfast of champions, so we listen for feedback, and we try to make sure everybody has the opportunity to give it.

Al: Yeah, that's one of my favorite quotes: “Feedback is the breakfast of champions.” I credit Ken with that. I'm not sure he created that, but he certainly has coined it from my perspective.

Phyllis: He certainly has said it.

Al: Yeah, that's exactly right. Yep. Yep! Now we have a mutual client named Joni and Friends that we both work closely with, and their president Doug Mazza has made your training mandatory for all their employees and credits Lead Like Jesus as a key reason that they are a Best Christian Workplace. Share with our audience a bit of their story from your perspective.

Phyllis: Well, I love Joni and Friends so much because as you said, we have become core to their operating system and all they do. Just a short story about that. In 2004, I was speaking to one of our designers. His name is Jesse Palmer. I said, “Jesse, Lead Like Jesus doesn’t have to be on the door of an organization. I just want Lead Like Jesus to be the Intel chip. We want to be the core operating system of organizations around the world.”

I met Doug several years ago, and I was sitting beside him at the table. He turned to me, and he said, “You’re our core operating system.” I almost fell out of my chair, because that was a dream come true to me that an organization like Joni and Friends would give out our book and then say, “Your training is coming up” to everyone who joins their staff. Whether they’re going to be on the loading dock or whether they’re an executive VP, they are going to go through Lead Like Jesus.

They have done an incredible job taking it deep into the core of who they are. Lead Like Jesus has become a DNA for them. They use this in their hiring policies. They use this in their conflict resolution. Everyone on their team has gone through it. We are so proud to be associated with Joni and Friends and how they have taken Lead Like Jesus deep into their core operating system, which, as Doug would say, impacts their culture and everything they do.

Al: Yeah, you know, that’s exactly right. He has expressed that to me several times. Take a minute, Phyllis, and describe the training Joni and Friends gives to all of their employees or maybe just a summary of the experience people have going through your training.

Phyllis: Well, our training is called an *Encounter*. We called it an Encounter because we believe often it is the first time people encounter Jesus as the greatest leadership role model of all time. We especially want people to encounter Jesus. We teach in a framework that I think is really important. As I’ve already said, we always begin with the heart. The heart is why we do what we do. It’s our intention and motivation.

It’s really important that we go deep into the heart to understand, “What are the barriers that keep us from leading like Jesus? What are the things that cause us to edge God out? How do we exalt God only?” The heart is a primary place we begin.

Then in our training, we know we can’t keep our heart in its right place. We talk about habits, and we separated our habits. We have two sets. The first one is *being* habits. Those habits are founded, foundationally built, out of accepting and inviting God’s unconditional love. Then we talk about those habits that allow us to be with the Father. Remember where our model is Jesus. Jesus spent time with the Father. So if he did, then we certainly should. That gets us to this place where our heart can be transformed by him.

Then once we have this heart in place and we have this relationship that is ongoing, then we go to the head, which is what leaders think. What do leaders think who want to lead like Jesus? In that section, we talk about mission. We talk about values. We talk about all of the kinds of things: our perspective on leadership, our perspective on people, and our perspective on work.

Often in Lead Like Jesus, we train people who are in faith-based non-profits or faith-led businesses, and sometimes they feel like they're in this mix of secular and sacred. We believe that as Lead Like Jesus leaders, there is no secular and sacred. We walk in the door. The Spirit of God walks in with us because he is in us. This is an incredible opportunity to help people see, "How do I think as a Lead Like Jesus leader no matter where I lead?"

Then we believe the heart has been transformed, the head has been informed, and now when that all happened, we believe our behavior will be different. This is what leaders do. When we think about what leaders do, we believe with all of our heart (as you do) that when we say we are followers of Jesus, we will do differently. We know people will not *do* differently unless they *become* different.

That's why we start with the heart, but what we see in leaders who have been transformed in this way, they do differently in the work they do. They treat people differently. They have policies that are set up to honor people. They make sure people understand they are doing life-giving work. They're communicating. They're authentic. All of those things.

Then lastly, our last habit is we have a section on *doing* habits that we believe Jesus practiced certainly and we think Lead Like Jesus leaders would do. Those habits are forgiveness and grace and encouragement and building community. It's in that framework that we teach our workshop. That's the big overview of Lead Like Jesus. It helps people look deeply into how they lead and really personally the language of leadership they actually overflow to their team.

AI: Yeah. Great summary. I can see how that forms a great operating system for any Christian organization to implement, because it gives that language as you described, as well as a framework for leadership.

Well, Phyllis, thanks for being with us today. I certainly have enjoyed what we've learned. I think we would all agree that we have much more to learn from Jesus than just the fact that he is Lord and Savior. He is the greatest leadership role model of all time.

We also know leadership really does make a difference in any organization. The process you have really can help leaders with their hearts, their head, their hands, their habits, those core aspects of your training. We've seen (as you know as well in your work) that makes a big difference in the culture of Christian organizations. Phyllis, just give us one final thought you'd like to leave with ministry leaders today.

Phyllis: You know, I would go back to where we began. That is, all ministry leaders... You know, we have to earn the right to be heard. We have to live lives where we earn the right to be heard. If we want our organizations to be organizations that honor the Lord, then we certainly want to lead like him. That comes back to that one thing we talked about in the beginning. That is, guard our own heart that we might be the people God would call us to be first.

AI: Amen! Thanks, Phyllis for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories today. Thank you for extending your ministry to leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've shared with us today. To our listeners, if you enjoyed today's episode, you can find the transcripts on blog.bcwinstitute.org. We'd love to hear your feedback about our interview today, so please take a minute to leave a comment on our blog post or reach out on social media @bcwinstitute.

Also, do us a favor before you go. Would you please click over to iTunes to rate this program? It makes a big difference for getting this material into the hands of the right people. We would be so grateful. Well, my friends, remember your leadership is a gift. As we talked about today, leadership makes a difference. It lets us lead, reflecting the greatest role model of all time when it comes to leadership. Let's work together to be sure Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world. We'll see you the next time on *The Flourishing Culture Podcast*.