



**The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series**  
“Cultivating Employee Engagement Through Uplifting Growth”  
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Jeff Lockyer

**Intro:** Today’s podcast is brought to you by BCWI’s 360 leadership assessment.

**Male:** Welcome to the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*, where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

**Al Lopus:** Hello, and thanks for joining us on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*. Today, we’re going to look at uplifting growth, which is the fourth of the eight drivers that can take the health of your workplace culture to the next level. Uplifting growth is all about developing the performance of individuals, groups, and even your entire organization. And my guest today knows uplifting growth inside and out. His character, leadership, and convictions are going to give you some fresh, new insights on how to improve and strengthen your workplace culture.

And with that, I want to welcome one of our most popular podcast guests, Geoff Lockyer, the lead pastor of Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario. Jeff, I’m so glad you can join us. Welcome to our podcast today.

**Jeff Lockyer:** Al, thanks so much for having me again. You and I always have fun in these conversations, so I’m looking forward to it again. But yeah, I really appreciate you inviting me back for another chat.

**Al:** We do have fun doing these, Jeff, and I really appreciate your perspective on leadership in the workplace and particularly the way you bring in the spiritual dimension. So, thanks for that. Tell us about how we met and where this all started.

**Jeff:** I would say we met officially through this podcast, although I probably felt like I met you years before because we were five or so years into using the Best Christian Workplace survey instrument before you and I got connected in podcast conversations. So we developed a bit of a vicarious kindred

spirit from a distance over the years for the last couple of years, and then, last year you and I, you remember, got a chance to meet at a Church Culture Conference together and become thick as thieves since then as, really, we, like you said, share in not just the value of workplace culture but in the spiritual values behind it. I believe that very strongly, and I know that that's what God's called you to champion across North America and around the world. So I certainly appreciate you for that.

**Al:** Yeah. Well, thanks, Jeff. And before we dive in to uplifting growth, give us a quick overview of Southridge Community Church and why a healthy, flourishing culture continues to be so critical to carrying out your mission there.

**Jeff:** Southridge is located in the Niagara region of Ontario, Canada, so it's about an hour from Toronto and about 15 minutes from Niagara Falls, for people just to kind of orient the geography, and Southridge is what we call a multi-site missional church. So we have three locations right now, what, in the U.S. you often refer to as campuses, although they're not college-campus-level scale. We call them locations or sites. The uniqueness is at each of our sites is primarily organized around the missional difference that they intend to make in the community more than where the building's located or the times where that population of people gather for worship. And so these areas of focus of compassion justice are what we call anchor causes. And each of our Southridge locations is defined by its own unique anchor cause, an area of focus of compassion justice that tries to make that missional difference in the part of Niagara where it finds itself.

So, one of our anchor causes focuses on homelessness, and that's in our St. Catharines location, where we actually run out of our church building a 55-bed shelter, the largest homeless shelter in the Niagara region. It runs 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Similarly, another site focuses on at-risk kids and their families, and has all kinds of programming that runs out of that location, where, similarly, our other location focuses on an anchor cause that serves as migrant fruit-farm workers, and offers all kinds of social and medical and all kinds of different supports out of that location.

And so each of our church locations is really defined most primarily by these missional differences, which, to me, is why culture is so important, because when I look at our people across our congregation to be that focused on giving back so consistently and sharing Christ's light to others in such an ongoing way, you have to have a pretty full tank yourself. And so our workplace culture, and even beyond that, our ministry culture, our volunteerism culture, has to be such an energizing ingredient that it fills the hearts and propels our leaders to consistently be the difference makers in the part of the world where God's placed us. You can't be outputting that chronically without a consistent kind of fuel tank of input, and that's the role that a great workplace culture, ministry culture, plays for us.

**Al:** It comes from the inside out, doesn't it. I mean, it's got to be in your heart in order to do that. I love the anchor causes: a homeless shelter, at-risk kids, migrant fruit-farm workers. What a tremendous ministry. And, Jeff, everything you're going to share with us comes from real-life experience at Southridge, real challenges that you face, and these aren't easy groups of people to work with. You've got real situations. You've had real growth. And the reason I can say this is because you've served with us seven years in a row, and your culture has really become tremendously healthy—well, it's flourishing—so, Jeff, congratulations on that.

**Jeff:** Well, thank you. I would give you the congratulations more than us because BCWI, without a sales pitch, it has been a profound gift to us. It's been a profound gift. I mean, seven years ago, you alluded to our first survey. You know that we were barely on the threshold of healthy—right on the border, really—with a number of departments near the threshold for toxic. So it wasn't like we were gifted with this kind of glorious utopia of a culture. We weren't.

But over the years, with, I would say some consistent deliberacy, to focus on two or three primary areas of improvement each year—we can talk about that more if you're interested—every year we've seen the score go up, where over the past three years, not only have we been far beyond that threshold for flourishing, but every one of our departments in the last three years, every one of our departments, has exceeded that threshold for thriving and flourishing, which, for me as an employer and as a senior leader, has been so encouraging because now I can know with kind of a statistical confidence that anyone who joins our staff in any role and in any department, when they drive onto the parking lot, they're going to show up to a statistically flourishing workplace environment. And from my perspective, you feel it. I know what borderline toxic feels like. I know what it feels like at retreats. I know what it feels like in meetings. I know what it feels like when you walk the hallways. Similarly, I know what healthy, I know what flourishing, feels like, and it's a very different feeling today all around our church, across our locations, than it was seven years ago, thanks to the instrument that you guys have made available for us. It's been profound gift.

**Al:** Thanks, Jeff. I'm looking forward to talking more about how you've used the instrument to actually improve the health of your culture. And clearly, as we've looked at the results, there are regular conversations going on between managers and their employees at Southridge. I mean, that comes out. That's one of the first things that we see. Tell us, how have you developed such a strong culture of feedback that really leads into this flourishing culture that you've developed?

**Jeff:** I guess first thing's first is to say that that wasn't always the case, and we've still got lots of area to improve in our performance management relationship with our staff and in the capacity to give and receive feedback. I would say, in the earlier days a speaker management consultant named Patrick Lencioni was quoted as saying, culture eats strategy for breakfast, and that kind of took us by surprise because at the time, all of our work rhythms were focused on strategy, figuring out what to do and how to do it, not focusing on the underlying culture that enabled our strategy to be lived out. And so we started to pay attention to culture way back in the day.

We realized that, hey, there are some behaviors that contribute to a culture around team development, organizing your team, setting up a team rhythm of certain kinds of meetings, having the right kinds of meetings, meetings where you can update, meetings where you can make strategic decisions, meetings where you can just kind of look forward and kind of blue-sky brainstorm, and just trying to incorporate those into our work rhythms from a team perspective, let alone from an individual performance management perspective, setting up and clarifying everyone's job description, looking at those job descriptions and prioritizing them every year into annualized work plans, or what Pat calls rally cries, focusing on what the most critical improvements are that you're going to make that year, and then breaking down those objectives into seasonal goals, what we often refer to as six by sixes, the six greatest priorities that you can focus on over the next six weeks. And all of those behaviors, all of those disciplines, we had to build into our ministry rhythm, both from the perspective of having those

meetings and from the perspective of having the planning meetings even to organize those meetings. All of that pre-work then kind of produces the rhythm, where you're having on the one hand the right meetings, and then in those meetings, you've got the underlying work plans, rally cries, and clarity to be able to have the feedback and the conversations about whether certain things are happening and whether certain progress is delivering or realizing or not. And it gives you that objective framework to have the very conversations that you couldn't before. Before that, feedback was either nonexistent or it was occasional, or worse, it was just arbitrary and subjective. "I think this. Well, I disagree. I think this." Now it's much more disciplined, regulated, regimented, and objective because we're having those meetings, and in those meetings, we're focused on the right kinds of conversations.

**Al:** Yeah. And what an effort you've made to get to that spot. Give us a favorite story of how the purpose and the importance of feedback really started to take root and improve in the health of your culture.

**Jeff:** Probably, my favorite story would be the way that it's applied to me and my supervisors. A lot of senior leaders struggle in the relationship that they have with their board of directors or their overseers to really get a sense of how they're feeling about the job that they're doing. I mean, a lot of, especially in church contexts, a lot of boards of directors are product of the ministry of a senior leader, and so it's almost intimidating or awkward for them to ever say anything constructive to a senior leader. And I know many, many governors, many board members, struggle to feel like they're adequately holding that senior leader to any sort of account.

And so, to kind of create some safety and some opportunity for that, we've developed a couple systems that our board uses in relation to my work plan. So at the beginning of every ministry year, I present my work plan to our board, which is basically the kind of overall goals and objectives of the church, because in a lot of ways, CEO or first-chair leader performance is synonymous with organizational performance, so I present this picture of here's how we're trying to move the church forward through myself and the departmental leaders that I work most closely with. At that point, they individually rank all of those ministry objectives according to their personal priorities, and then, we take their individual rankings and kind of integrate them into collective scores. And so at the beginning of every ministry year, I actually get a weighted average from our board about which goals and objectives they care about the most and which they care about the least, which is interesting to know. It may not track with what I care about the most or the least, and I may not necessarily agree with them, but at the very least, I can disagree with them to my peril because now I'm mathematically clear about what they care about more and what they care about less.

Fast forward now to the end of the year where they do my performance review. And, again, similarly, they all provide a scoring system. They all provide a grading out of five or out of 10 or whatever on all of the ministry objectives and the degree that they've been completed. But then, we don't just integrate their scores into average scores—so I get an average score from our entire board on each ministry objective—but then, that average score gets factored by the weighted objective of their priority to produce a cumulative over-all score. And so at the end of the day, my feedback from the board gets reduced down to one number. And, for sure, the whole process is far more of a conversation than just a number. But I'll tell you, Al, for all of these friends and congregants and people who maybe don't want to hurt my feelings, or respect and love me and care about me and want me to be encouraged, that

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number provides blinding clarity on how they feel about me and the progress of our church, and it provides a tremendous opportunity for us to have real, honest conversation about the good, the bad, and the ugly of where our organization is at and the leadership that I've provided to getting us there. And I find just that one process has moved subjective, arbitrary, feel-good, kind of fuzzy accountability into a very developed and, at least, honest conversation that we're having as a group of leaders. It's been fantastic.

**Al:** Wow, Jeff. That's really fantastic is right. What a great, good governance example of feedback in the relationship between a board and a senior leader. You know, having, as you say, to start off with having you present the overall work plan, having the board then rank the priorities and what they care about, and then at the end of the year, being evaluated on each ministry objective, and then, as we'd say in the business, you ended up with a weighted rating.

**Jeff:** And what's interesting about that, Al, is there was part of me in the first couple of years that felt so much value in this that I wanted to employ it in the people that I oversee. But I felt a little awkward kind of imposing it from the top down, where together with the board, we kind of designed this ourselves. So I shared it with our senior staff, and I said, "Hey, just so you know, this is how I get evaluated by the board." And their eagerness to employ that with me for themselves kind of took me by surprise. But when I talked with them about it, I realized they're as hungry to know, with as much blinding clarity as I want, how I'm feeling about them as I am to know how the board is feeling about me. And they want to know, what things are they doing that I most care about? And at the end of the work cycle when we're doing evaluations, how happy with them am I really? How pleased with their performance am I really—can we quantify that in some kind of more objective way. It's really been powerful.

**Al:** Yeah. What a great story, Jeff. You've used the term *blinding clarity*, and, boy, don't we all really hunger for that as we think about our own performance. And again, it's hard to have those kinds of conversations if it's not really happening at the top with the board and the senior leader. Well, that's a great example.

You know, as we know and as we move on, giving and receiving constructive feedback, just like you've been talking about, has a lot to do with the uplifting growth of people, helping, actually, people develop and grow. What's one practical suggestion that you'd like to give leaders about how to get the most out of feedback and thus improve their own workplace culture?

**Jeff:** I think if I was going to say one thing to this, Al, I would want leaders who supervise people to appreciate how distinct and how difficult yet how important what I would call the ministry of management actually is. Management is more than just keeping your subordinates on track. Management is all about bringing out the best of the people entrusted to you, both the best out of them as human beings and the best out of them as workers, as deliverers of results. And I didn't appreciate, and still to a large degree, don't appreciate how significant that is.

So often, we're trying to get things done, we're trying to move things forward, and the obligation to manage people is actually difficult. I talk to a lot of people who supervise people, and they love having teams. They love casting vision and building teams and gathering people to solve problems. They love

working with other people. But the moment something kind of goes off side or the moment someone's disengaged or distracted or the moment someone requires management, they struggle. And the joke is—I say this often around here—people love management until someone requires management. And I remind them. I say, “The only thing worse than someone who requires management is when management’s people require my management.” And we kind of had a laugh about that. But it's true that most of us haven't embraced the significance of just the ministry of management to begin with. And then once we have and realize that as important as it is to just kind of move things along with the people that we work with, there's the bringing out the best of them. Then, we've got to realize just how important our feedback is in that process.

And I would say, if I was to add a bonus piece of experience or advice, it is so critical in those environments, Al, to be as true to yourself as possible, meaning do not hide your truest feelings from your people. I think it was Jack Welch, you know, some real leadership guru, said that the greatest gift you can give people is the truth. And I find, even in my context, I'm pretty good at giving the first 97 or 98 percent of what I'm feeling, but it is the potency of that last two or three percent that makes 97 or 98 percent of the difference in impact in helping a person be all that God intends them to be. And I would say, don't hold back on being true to yourself with the people that you work with as you embrace that ministry of management to a greater degree.

**Al:** Yeah. And I love the way you describe the way you'd need to bring out the best of those entrusted to you. And that reminds me of the First Peter phrase where he exhorts leaders, particularly uses the word elders, to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to them and, yes, to bring out the best of each of those as Christ did with the flock. That is being true to yourself; there's no question. Fantastic.

The frontline management corps that you've got at Southridge is really very strong. Supervisors and managers are competent—again, this is what your staff are saying—and they care deeply about their people, those that report to them. What are some of the ways that you've developed your frontline management to be so effective where they truly care about the people that they serve and they're competent in being able to manage them and teach them what they need to do in their job.

**Jeff:** I feel like I need to grow a lot as a leader in this way, meaning providing managerial training, because the one thing that I say to our managers when they first become managers is that your management conversation really has two objectives: how are you doing, and what are you doing? How are you doing and what are you doing? And I would say, it's just that simplicity, Al, that's where the both and of caring about these people and trying to get the best out of them as employees as workers, that's where that starts is just actually organizing your conversation into those two halves and not pole vaulting right into the second half and saying, “So, good to see you. What are you working on? What kind of results are you delivering? What are you doing?” There's a preliminary, How are you doing as a human being, as a parent, as a spouse, whatever, that's integral to our managerial conversations.

On the “what are you doing side,” I think that that's where I would allude to that comment I made earlier of being true to yourself. I mean, we've had conversations, even in the last six months, with managers who, they might struggle with someone's number of hours that they're working. They feel like they might be cutting corners on their hours. But when you look at the notes and the text that they provide that employee, they're filled with winky faces and LOLs, and they're kind of making sure that

they're still liked by that person. And you wonder, like, have you ever let this staff member know that you're not comfortable with the hours that they're logging?

Another example was someone had a staffer who had basically four work objectives to work on, and they felt like at this point in their work progress that they'd probably achieved half of one of the four. So they were kind of batting 0.5 out of four. A couple of days later, I talked to this staff member, and they said, "Oh yeah. My supervisor's really happy with me." And you're kind of in those moments, Al, where you think what is the disconnect between what I'm hearing and what the employee is hearing from this same person? There's a level of accuracy and, frankly, just a level of raw honesty that we're missing. And I would say, if you care about bringing out the best in your staff, number one, you'll start by caring about them as people and ask how they're doing, not just what they're doing, but then when you get into what they're doing, you will be as honest as possible with them to gift them with that full authentic truth that you're feeling.

**Al:** Yeah. That takes courage, doesn't it, Jeff?

**Jeff:** It's what I talk about with the ministry of management. It is not for the faint of heart, I believe.

**Al:** I trust you're enjoying our podcast today. We'll be right back after an important word for leaders.

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**Al:** And now, back to today's special guest.

What do you think, Jeff, could have happened to the health of your workplace culture had you not brought out the kinds of the approaches that we've just talked about? What if you didn't have the courage to really encourage this kind of honest communication? What would have happened?

**Jeff:** Worse results than I think we realize. Worse results than I think we realize. Knowing that we're not perfect at it now—we've got lots of room to grow in this now—you see what starts as fuzziness and results in lack of feedback and ultimately lack of accountability isn't just a lack of performance or a lack of delivering results. That's not the end byproduct here. The end byproduct is way worse because at some point this employee finds out either by other employees or maybe from their supervisor one day, they find out that they really weren't delivering. And then you've got way bigger problems because now you've got an erosion of trust, which then, at that erosion of trust fractures team unity and relational glue and now the team doesn't work as well and the employee-supervisor relationship isn't as strong, and now things start to go off the rails, where if that trust switch gets turned off, now all

kinds of bad things compound that are way worse than just a nominal employee kind of going about their business nominally and never really achieving all that God meant them, as sad a conclusion as that would be. You go off the rails, and that's where you can have departmental splits or people becoming disengaged or leaving your organization, and then you've got retention rates. Then you've got overall kind of corporate-trust or division-disunity issues, and then one thing leads to another, and you've got a huge blow up, and you start to reverse engineer where that came from. And sometimes if you can pay attention to it and you're honest with yourself, sometimes that comes from just some raw honesty that you failed to have the courage to provide when you needed to.

**Al:** Yeah. And that is a sequence. Fuzziness, I love the way you described that. Leaders—I'm one of them—I'm kind of comfortable with some levels of ambiguity, which is kind of like fuzziness, but when it comes to talking about performance, if you are fuzzy, if there is some ambiguity there, that does lead to an erosion of trust. I mean, that is a direct connection. I appreciate you drawing that connection and how an erosion of trust on a personal level, really, then, is hard to recover from, and that, then, when it happens, broadly in an organization you see organizational trust decline, and then you see performance clearly decline. That's—

**Jeff:** That's everything. That's toxic culture. That's backstabbing and betrayal. That's people bailing out. Now, you've got a whole fire that you've got put out, and a lot of cases it's not necessary.

**Al:** Yeah. So let's move to clarity instead of fuzziness so that that downward cycle doesn't happen. I really love, again, the feedback from your staff. Another strength that your employees experience is meaningful recognition for doing a good job. The recognition is a part of uplifting growth. When it comes to uplifting growth, leaders are always looking to improve how they recognize their people. I continually get those kinds of questions. What are some of the ways that you're doing this recognition thing so well at Southridge Community Church? I mean, I'm giving you some recognition here, Jeff.

**Jeff:** This is awkward for me to even respond to because we know around here that our culture is one that is never satisfied. We have a real *citius, altius, fortius* approach, and so our debriefs of things often default to what could be improved as opposed to what praise we should dole out. So to be clear, this is not a strength of ours. I would say, though, that Henry Cloud once, I heard him say, where discipline is low, apply external structure. So build in structures or behaviors to compensate for your lack of natural capacity at something. And so we've tried to do a little bit of that.

We have in our monthly all-staff meeting a discipline where we've got an item of our agenda called sharing ministry wins. People go and brag on about each other, and, hey, I saw God doing this amazing thing in you. And it's really become a special time of appreciation and recognition of one another.

We have at our all-staff annual retreat an entire three-hour session that is just debriefing the year. We call it a "raise the glass" session, where we just are celebrating how incredible God has worked this year, and it's, again, an opportunity to lift up one another and show people ways that we saw God work in one another. Our staff Christmas party, we actually have a little awards presentation called The Ridgies, which have these little academy-awards trophies, that one of our staff hosts this event and provides a whole bunch of staff at these awards. And they're mostly comical, but underneath all that



humor is some truth that we're not only trying to make fun of one another but really trying to in kind of a backhanded way honor some of the faithfulness and some of what's special about one another. I mean, those are a few the very surface things that by discipline had to build into work rhythm.

As well, we do have a very clearly outlined compensation grid, and it allows for people not only to be advanced based on their faithfulness in a ministry of responsibility to a position of greater responsibility, but it also rewards and encourages people to move along their current job description into a greater degree of kind of ministry excellence or a degree of ministry maturity, where they may not be taking more responsibility in a different role, but they're seeing God blossom their existing role, and they're being compensated and rewarded for that.

And I just want to make a comment about that because I don't want to suggest that in ministry money is that much of a motivator. For most of our people, it's not. They're not doing what they do for the money. But fairness is a unifier more than money is a motivator, and recognition inspires people in every way. And by putting a few more dollars or advancing a person on a pay grid, you're saying that as a supervisor and as a collection of supervisors who discern all that, you're recognizing something that in our employees they really appreciate.

**Al:** Wow. Those are great examples. I love the monthly all-staff where you talk about ministry wins. And I just exhort leaders at their annual retreats. Take three hours to talk about how the ministry has been successful, to "raise the glass," as you say. I love the name Ridgies. For Southridge, The Ridgies award every Christmas. That's—

**Jeff:** I have one of those trophies on my desk right now. They're a badge of honor around here.

**Al:** Yeah. Well, that's fantastic. And fairness around compensation is a unifier, and for people that are doing just great work to be rewarded in that way reminds me of the parable "Well done, good and faithful servant," a way of recognizing.

In your mind, Jeff, what can leaders not afford to miss when it comes to extending thanks, appreciation, and affirmation to their teammates, people on their teams, even entire departments, that deserve meaningful recognition?

**Jeff:** It's interesting that you talk about Luke 19 because I think about that, and for me, "Well done, good and faithful servant," that you imagine Jesus providing at the end of your life, for me that's almost provided an excuse to not do enough encouragement and recognition. I sort of mistakenly take from that parable that you work hard and you put your nose to the grindstone and you be faithful and you run that lifelong marathon, and it's only at the end that Jesus is going to give us the "Well done, good and faithful servant," and it's that recognition that we work for. And I don't think that humans are wired for one-for-all-time, end of life encouragement and recognition. I think we need more than that.

Using that marathon example, I don't know if you've ever heard the science of what they call a max VO2 test. So when they get an athlete on a treadmill and they find out their blood-oxygen carrying capacity, and so they measure that by getting them on the treadmill and having them exert at their

highest capacity. So basically, they get on the treadmill with an oxygen mask, and they run as hard as they can. Scientifically, a max VO2 test can only be statistically accurate if you have three or four people around that treadmill shouting encouragement the whole way, because emotionally and psychologically, human performance by definition can't achieve certain capacities in certain levels without the necessary ongoing encouragement around it.

So, all that to say, I feel like for me and for every other leader who's listening to this podcast, nobody does it enough, and we can't assume that just because the parable of the talents in Luke 19 has Jesus at the end of our lives saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant," that the vision of Jesus one day encouraging us and rewarding us at the end is enough for a lifetime of faithfulness. It's not enough.

**Al:** Yeah. Research, as you say, shows when people around us encouraging us, we all do better. Wow, that's a great story and example.

Jeff, each person on your staff knows they have someone who encourages his or her development. You know, again, we see that in the survey report. Each staff member also realizes that he or she has opportunities to learn and grow throughout the year. That's one of the questions we ask. Give us a few practical, effective ways that Southridge has encouraged and championed professional, personal, and even spiritual development of its people.

**Jeff:** I would say for us, probably the most helpful tool has been the document we've developed for our annual performance review because it clarifies—again, we're talking about the word *clarity*—it clarifies personally for every staff these dynamics in black and white. So basically, our performance review is divided into two halves: a look back at last year and a look forward at next year. And on the look back at last year, we've got a place for people to put their work accomplishments and to compare their work plans with the results achieved and all those kinds of work-related things. But we also, in the look back, we've got a category on our personal development. How we grew in our character, how we grew in our competence, how we grew in our experience of the organizational culture, how we grew in our chemistry with other teammates, and all of these three or four Cs, being a team member, we evaluate those. And as an employee and as a supervisor, we feed back on those, on our personal development, and it makes our personal development as foreground as your professional kind of work results.

On the flip side, in the look-forward part, we don't just set our work goals and hear all the organizational objectives that we're trying to achieve. We also have as a part of that, what is your personal-development plan that's going to help you achieve that? What conference do you need to attend? What personal reflection days do you need to build into your schedule? What retreats do you need to be a part of? What mentor are you working most closely with, who's helping to sharpen the iron of your expertise? Those kinds of things. And we build the personal-development plan into the look forward so that in individualized black and white, on at least an annual basis, what can become a part of the performance-management conversation with every supervisor is both the character development on the one side and the personal development on the other side.

We've even got a question that says, hey, looking beyond your current role, are there things that you're seeing in the future that you would like to consider? We've got a question that says, when you consider your season of life, are there things that you would like your supervisor to be aware of? So are you

entering a fuller or a freer season of life? Are you heading into a maternity leave, or would you like to be going back to school? And just those kinds of questions, looking forward on a personal-development side and looking back on the character-development side, it keeps those kinds of issues front and center for us.

**Al:** People love to hear stories of real people and real experiences. I bet you could pick one staff person that Southridge whose own development has been truly inspiring. Who would that person be, and why would you pick them out?

**Jeff:** Again, there's probably lots of examples that I could point to, especially because our staff culture is so inherently promoted from within. So many of our people were church members and serving in a ministry and then entrusted to leadership of a ministry, and then that ministry either blossomed, or a staff-need emerged and so that person went from a volunteer role to a staff-capacity role, and then from a staff-capacity role their faithfulness and their development resulted in another role. One thing led to another. There are lots of those examples.

One that comes to mind is a guy that we're very closely with named Jeff Martens. He's about 10 years younger than me, so we refer to him as Junior. I would be Jeff, Senior, and he's Jeff, Junior. And Junior, he grew up in the church. His parents were founders in the church, was actually born into our community, so he's been a lifer. And went to school, got a business degree, and was working at a local bank in corporate lending. And right around the time we went multi-site, we needed someone with administrative capacity to run the site-launch logistics. And so we convinced this guy to give up his corporate job and plug into ministry life and to be our site-development director. And so Jeff Martens came on our staff to be our multi-site-development director to launch these sites.

Well, he showed such promise and such humility and potential and whatever as a site-development director that we then promoted him to our senior leadership team as an operations director. So he oversaw all of the logistics and the infrastructural supports of all of our ministries, administration, finance, H.R., I.T., communications facility management, all those kinds of things. And he did that faithfully for a period of time, until, again, in the course of our conversations, what are you seeing in your future, how are you developing as a person? He started to feel like he was made for more what we called kingdom offense than his operational infrastructural support role was allowing. And so then, we made a transition from him as the OPs director to overseeing our weekend services. And again, it was kind of a lateral move professionally, but it was, again, a promotion of his faithfulness personally, because now he was more on the frontlines of impacting people. He wasn't just serving in a ministry that affected the other ministries. Now he was directly affecting people. And in that regard, he started to design services and flex greater creativity and work with artists and whatnot. And that's a role that he's in today.

But even real time today, in the unfinished story, there is an open conversation with him about what his next move might be and how he might be growing into a more pastoral function or maybe a site pastor kind of role or maybe a mentor to next gen. It's always been an on-going conversation with someone like this. And I cite him as an example, not just because I work closely with him but because he literally has gone from a baby born in our community to a senior-leader parent of it, and the conversation of his development continues even today.

**Al:** That's a great example. You know, there's so much more that we could talk about when it comes to uplifting growth at Southridge, but as you continue to give thanks for your culture, what's one unfinished initiative or desire that you continue to have for your people? What's the dream that's still under construction, even as long as you've been working on this? I know you've got a picture of what the next step might be.

**Jeff:** Well, like I said before, our culture has kind of a *citius, altius, fortius* approach to it, so we're never satisfied. There's always something that we're trying to work on. And that approach, I would say, has been a benefit when it's come to improving our workplace culture. You and I have talked before about this bottle-neck approach that we take to improving our culture, where it's nothing more complicated than we conduct a survey, we get the results, and we look at the two or three worst things in the results and try to focus on those, where the biggest bottleneck's to us having a flourishing culture. And by focusing on those for a year, the next year you roll out the survey and what do you find? You find that those things have improved, but guess what. There are two or three now new worse things. And so those are the two or three now new worse things that we're going to approach and focus on this year. And every year you're approaching and focusing on the two or three worst things because you're concentrating on what the new bottleneck to your flourishing culture is.

Well, we've just finished our seventh year of surveying, and there are now some new bottlenecks, interestingly, around some of these dynamics of the ministry of management. And so I would imagine in the future, us paying a lot more attention to the uniqueness of the ministry of management, investing a lot more in our managers and in managerial training, holding to a greater account and maybe even developing some systems to support and provide accountability around that honesty that we talked about, and getting the other two or three final percent of what people are really feeling on the table so that you can gift your people with the full honest truth, as well as what we talked about in increased efforts and systems to thank and appreciate and celebrate and reward and recognize staff. All of these things, both on the truth and the encouragement side of the ministry of management, I would say that's right now a huge focus for us as we continue to find new bottlenecks that maybe five or six years ago weren't bottlenecks but are now the new greatest areas of improvement that we're facing.

**Al:** As I think back in previous podcast, you talked about how culture is the most important thing a Christian leader should focus on. What has brought you to this conclusion, Jeff, that culture is the most important thing Christian leaders should focus on?

**Jeff:** You and I, Al, know that this is more than just a minute in a podcast. This is, at some level, our whole lives. I know it's your whole life by profession. It's become my whole life, really, by discovery because over the years what I've seen as we've paid attention to culture is that it requires certain things, right? Paying attention to culture isn't something you can just fake. It requires a level of clarity; a level of honesty; a level of vulnerability; a level of humility; and ultimately, a level or a willingness to change, so a level of repentance, a desire for growth, a dependence on God from the inside out, grow attitudes that lead to behaviors that lead to systems.

And this whole process, what I've discovered is this whole process, because it can't be faked, it requires a genuine work of the Spirit of God in you as a leader. And because it requires a genuine work of the Spirit of God in you as a leader, it, in a lot of ways, Al, it is the first-thing's-first step of the kingdom of

God bringing God's will on earth as it is in heaven to your context. So all of us as leaders want to see, whether it's in the marketplace or in ministry, we want to see God's kingdom expand, and we want to see the essence of His kingdom come, His will be done on earth in our context as it is in heaven. But that starts in an inside-out way with us, and it starts, I find, most palpably when we're paying attention to us and the changes God wants to make in us by availing ourselves to how we might want to improve us in culture. And so of all the things you could focus on as a leader—strategy, H.R. issues, goals, planning, vision, all the different things that team building, all the things that a leader could care about—focusing on culture makes you focus on the way that God wants His kingdom to come in you, and by starting with you in the inside-out way, I believe you're giving God the greatest chance for his kingdom to come and will to be done among you. And so my conviction for every kingdom leader to care about culture only comes out of the conviction that if every kingdom leader wants God's kingdom to come and will to be done through them, it has to start in them. And the way that it starts in them is by paying attention, first and foremost, to the culture around them.

**Al:** It starts by the Spirit of God working in us. There's no question about it. We can't fake it, no matter how hard we try. That's right.

You know, Jeff, I've really enjoyed what we've learned today and particularly the way you communicate and express these truths. Given all you've experienced in the ongoing transformation and the greater health of your culture, how about one final thought that you'd like to leave with leaders today?

**Jeff:** Only the encouragement of the journey and the appreciation that the journey actually is the point. The journey is the thing. You'll never arrive—you know how highly we score right now in our workplace culture survey. We still have some kind of glaring issues that we need to improve. We're never going to arrive. And yet, by paying attention to areas of improvement every year, God's been able to do a work in us, and as a result, been able to do a work through us that is really quite extraordinary and nothing but a miraculous work of His gracious spirit. And so to encourage other leaders to give it a try, to encourage other leaders to stay with it and to be faithful and paying attention to culture in that raw, honest way, appreciating that it's the journey of growth, the journey of sanctification, the journey of experiencing God's mercies in new ways, that is the opportunity that God has to work among us, starting within us in a first-thing's-first kind of a way.

**Al:** The journey is the thing.

Jeff Lockyer, lead pastor of Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and multiple stories today, and thank you for extending your ministry to leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've shared with us today.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Thanks so much, Al. I love chatting with you, and look forward to being able to do that again some time.

**Al:** I do, too.

And just to our listeners, I want to thank you for joining us on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast* and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a specific insight, a story, an action step—and Jeff has mentioned several today—that you've enjoyed in the past few minutes, please share it with others so they can benefit as well. And please, review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

This program is copyrighted by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. All rights reserved. Our writer is Mark Cutshall; our social media assistant is Solape Osoba; and this is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives greater impact and growth for your organization. I'll see you again soon on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*.

**Male:** For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit [blog.bcwinstitute.org](http://blog.bcwinstitute.org). Join us next week for another one-to-one interview with a respected Christian leader. The *Flourishing Culture Podcast* with Al Lopus is a presentation of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.