Transription - Rico Nasol Part 3

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie and htis is Inside Exec. We are continuing our discussion with Rico Nasol about leadership and identifying leaders.

Moving on, we've identified this person who would like to be a leader. We're happy with the organization. We've gone through our three C's. We think we're ready for a leadership role. How would you suggest that we develop a leadership plan for ourselves?

Yeah, so for the individual that's the one who wants to? So I would do the same exercises. What is important? What's the mission and vision you have outside of the team? So at Creative Studio, we had a mission and vision. But for yourself, what do you want to accomplish through this? What is this all for?
And so part of the things that I would also talk to people about, maybe this is contrary to other people was, Netflix leadership or leadership in Netflix is hard.
It was a hard place to lead. And I would often say, if this isn't the place for you, that's okay. Like, let's talk through it and let's understand. And if I see work is good for you, let's keep doing that. But if leadership's really what you want, let's work on your personal vision, mission, and the things you want to improve on over the next 90 days, six months, then a year. And we would track those things.

One of the simplest exercises is simply the three personal and three professional goals. And I did this with everybody, leaders, I see. And it helped me understand what they wanted to accomplish professionally, but also helped me connect with them on a human level, personally. So sometimes it'd be, I want to get better at presenting as like a professional goal. And then another personal goal might be I want to cook more. So in our next one on ones, which is something we haven't talked about yet, I'd say, well, how are we doing with that presentation? I really want to elevate you so you can do this executive presentation. Let me know if you're ready. And then on the next beat, how's the cooking coming? Like, what did you make for dinner last week? Right? So we create this human connection, but I'm holding them accountable in their professional life, but also in their personal life.

One of the roles that we have here, and it's probably more for individuals
rather than those in a corporate environment, is what's called an accountability partner. So we have coaches, mentors and accountability partners. And Fulyana is an accountability partner for quite a number of other executives who don't want the formal mentoring structure. Can you see that that is a different role to being a mentor?

Yeah, absolutely. So I look at the teacher. There is mentor and there's coach.
Right? And I look at the accountability partner more in the role closer to coach, right? Because teacher is the textbook way, right? This is the more academic way. So perhaps this is going to come from leadership books, things like that.
Mentor is, I've been there and I've done that. And so I have a lot of these books in my practice too, where I've been there and done that. I've been executive for 20 years. So the questions I get are, how do I scale? How do I think about this? How do I do this? What mistakes did you make? Right? And then the coach is not necessarily saying, oh, this is how you should do it, but holding you accountable and asking you questions that help you discover things you already know. Right? What do you want to have happen? What makes it

a challenge for you? What happens if you don't do it? Right? So that's the coaching / accountability partner for me. And those are three distinct buckets. And I vacillate between mentor and coach/accountability partner in my practice.

Because sometimes people just need to know if it's a tactical thing and there's no discovery moment. I'll just tell them, you know, what my experience was like.

But I will never rob someone of a discovery moment, if they're going to learn something new about themselves, I won't give the answer. I'll ask the question

in that situation where you've allowed someone to discover for themselves and then they've discovered something.

Have you been surprised by what's come out of it?

Absolutely. And I've often learned from it. Earlier in my career. And maybe this is me being vulnerable w,hen I was early in my career, I didn't really understand mission, right? I was a young leader. Someone came in and was like, what's the larger vision? Like, what are we doing this all for? And I thought it was obvious, we're trying to grow a business and stuff like that because I was asking him about what he wanted to do. Like, what do you want to do? Like, well, how do you want to grow? How do you want to do this? He's like, well, what's the larger vision? And I didn't know the answer. And so, the more I talked with him, we both discovered this together. And I learned something new about myself. I was like, I need to do a better job at being clear and creating a vision for this team. So, I have a lot of those moments now, but that conversation sticks out to me a lot.

Because I think it really changed me as a leader and how I could be a better leader. And I was not expecting that to come from someone who reported to me.

As an aside to all of that, those of us who've had vast experience tend to have a way of remembering the pivotal moments. Do you keep a journal? Do you record or have you recorded this is the history of what's brought me to this point in time?

Yeah. So, unfortunately, I just started journaling maybe in the last three, four years. So, a lot of the stuff that happened to me earlier in my career is just recollection. I'm hoping I remember those things the way they happened. That's the best they can work because I didn't document them. But I will say I have a lot of friends from all those times past. So, there is a bit of reminiscing and storytelling that happens. So, even if my recollection is not perfect, I have some corroborators.

You've got the fall back. You've got the backup. It's interesting to hear because I know that we all go back to our own experiences. And we talk about an experience in terms of sharing information with people as we have done this podcast. That was the reason we set it up because we both felt that we'd lived so much in the varied corporate worlds, that it was time for us to share that experience. But as we've talked over the years, we've found that our recollections sometimes are different, one to another from the same situation. But in saying that, the learning that we got from those situations at the time and when we recall it, has been different as well. And that's been interesting for us too because obviously in the immediacy of when the situations were happening, we were learning something that we needed to learn at that point. But being able to come back now and look at it in hindsight and look at it in terms of how we can share that with others, that's been a different experience, I guess.

Yeah, absolutely.

The next question I have, which I never like asking, but I'm going to ask you anyway, is what do you see as the place or the role for peer support networks for leaders? And I will preface it by saying that we've had a couple of guests who are mental health practitioners who were talking about senior executives, CEOs, who felt very isolated and very alone and didn't think that there was opportunity for a peer support network for themselves.

Yeah, no, I 100% support that because that is a true thing that people have.
Unfortunately, right, corporations are still hierarchical and the higher you get, the less of those people are around. Right. And like I mentioned earlier, I had a title, so everybody thought, oh, Rico must have it all together because he's an executive at Netflix. It's so far from the truth. And I wouldn't have been able to get as far as I could without my peers. And so I think there's two versions of this.
There's one, the external, right? So CEOs getting together with CEOs of other companies, but I think even within a business. So for me, I don't know if you've read Five Dysfunctions Of A Team by Patrick Lincione, but there is this concept of the first team. So I had seven executives that were my peer group and conventional wisdom would say, oh, my first team is the people that were in the first team, so the creative studio, because I want to make sure my managers and their teams are all successful.

But this concept is more that your peer group is the most important group.
And I found that is to be absolute truth because of a couple things. One, we were all going through the same things together. So if we were, if the company was going through stuff, then we were all having to navigate the same water.
So I had immediately a peer group that I could go to for advice or to vent or to whatever. The second thing is whenever we're planning or whenever we're budgeting or resourcing, if we're all aligned on what our priorities are as a peer group, that means we're not beg, borrowing and stealing from each other. If we have one engineering team to service all of us, we could get all of our priorities done together and say, okay, these are the three most important things to the group. As opposed to, I'm going to get my number one, Kathy is going to get her number two, Denny is going to get his number five, right? So it created this really strong peer group that one, we got more done, we shared resources and we now were models for all of our direct reports.

In the conventional way, if my direct reports are my silos, are my most important.
Now I'm telling my managers and my teams, hey, go work with operations. But I'm not working with operations, but you go do it.

Yeah, you do as I say, not as I do.

Exactly. So I 100% ascribed byo this like peer network internally and externally.

That's fascinating because we've not had anyone talk about that in terms of internally. So that's a really good point for our business listeners to take on board because so many of them are in those situations where they do have essentially a team that is at the same level as them. It sort of comes to the next question, which was about isolation at work. How do I break through that barrier of isolation and where did they go?

When I was a new leader, my mental health wasn't great. And that feeling of being alone was hard. So what I recommend for folks is there's so many resources now. And I don't know the list is here, but I was lucky enough to be at places that offered resources, whether it was coaching, therapy, mental health.
We even at Zappo's had our own internal coach. His name was David Vick.
And yeah, he was there for anybody who needed to talk about anything. And so I would go off and go to him and say like, I don't know. I'm afraid to ask. And this is when I was a young leader because I was afraid of not knowing. Right. So this was my first exposure to what imposter syndrome was. I didn't have a name for it. But I was afraid of not knowing. I was afraid that in these executive rooms, if they asked about content and creative, if I didn't know the answer that meant I wasn't smart enough. So I isolated myself because I didn't want to ask these questions amongst my peers. The first thing I had to do is swallow. It's, you almost swallow your pride, but it's really asking the questions like who benefits from that. Right. And looking at what do I have to gain from isolation? What do I have to gain from asking for help? Or finding a peer group? And if just asking that simple question, there's no denying, what do I have to gain from isolation?
Nothing really. It's just everything stays the same. What do I have to gain from support and a peer group? Knowledge that I never had access to. Someone I can confide in, a place to vent, right? Other than maybe my partner who won't know what I'm talking about or tired of hearing the venting.

But it's a safe place, isn't it? So it's in that sense, what they're looking for is not just somewhere to vent, but the safe place to do it, the safe environment to do it.

Yeah, absolutely.

That's the challenge for them is to believe that there is, you know, as much as we talk about Imposter Syndrome, I think the next big topic of discussion needs to be safe places because I don't think that we're very good at identifying what they are or where they are.

Yeah, exactly. Like 100%, psychological safety and just feeling safe, psychologically and emotionally. 100% right. If you don't feel that, then it doesn't matter what, and I don't think you're going to get the value that you want if you don't feel safe.

Rico, that's my list of questions. I've done very well. I've stayed pretty much on topic. I would now like to offer you the opportunity to talk about what you're doing, what your program is, and what the one on one stuff is and maybe where you see yourself. We ask a question, that if we were having this discussion in 12 months time, what would you like to look back on and say that you are very happy that you have done in that ensuing 12 months?

Yeah, so my overall mission is to improve cultures, one company at a time.
Right. And so the reason why I put together this program is to help set the foundation for leaders because often, I know this happened to me earlier in my career, I got promoted because I was good at the job, but nobody trained me.
Nobody taught me how to, they taught me about labor laws and they taught me about discrimination and like that kind of thing. But nobody ever taught me how to be a leader.Right.
And unfortunately, nobody goes out and says I want to be a toxic leader, but unfortunately

that's what happens because leaders don't get trained. And then when they promote and hire, they don't know how to train those leaders.

So I created this program to help fill that gap, fill that need because this is what I was doing at Zappos and Netflix. This is how I trained my directors, my senior managers and my teams because I wanted them to be better lead, better than than I found it. Right. The job of a leader is to make everyone around you better. So whatever that means. And this is my goal, is to do that to help fill those gaps. And I do it within companies. So I'll go to businesses and help facilitate this program. And I also take individuals and in group coaching to go through this program.

Now, the one on one, oftentimes people have a lot of fears. So we go through it in the confidence phase, but some people have a lot of fears, whether it's fear of failure and imposter syndrome, fear of money, like a lot of things that they they don't know who they are. So I offer one on one coaching to get through some of those bigger obstacles first. Because the program will give you a high level if you don't have a lot of those major fears but sometimes folks will deal with me because they just have so many blockers that they need to work through. And that's what the one on one coaching is for. So that is my practice.
And that is what I focus on.

And in 12 months time, I would just want to scale that. You know, I have a decent sized clientele now, but I want to scale that. I want to continue to spread this.
Train as many people who didn't get the training, right? Even if it's foundational, give people access. And also people who can see me and maybe inspired.
I work with a lot of minorities because they don't see themselves in their executive team now. They see, you know, very predominantly white male in their leadership teams. And they rarely see a minority that's like a VP or an executive. So even working to do that, like, I didn't even think that was possible.
Yes, it's possible. And there's not a lot of people out that look like me that have done or doing the things that I'm doing. And so that's why I do it. And that's what I'm hoping to gain and help other people with.

Do you find that these people are drawn to you because they think that you've got an answer for them?

Not necessarily because a lot of my marketing starts with questions, right? A lot of my coaching starts with questions. What could, what would you do if you couldn't fail? Right. If money were no object, what would you be doing? So I don't have those answers for you, for me, for like, I don't have those answers.
But each person does, they just need to know how to let it out. Right. And a lot of times the societal norms prevent them from that. So there was somebody that was telling me, you know, I think I want to be a VP. Like, I think I'm supposed to do these things. And my question was, who expects that from you? Right. And she's like, I don't know if it's me or society expects me to. Right. And what do you think it will look like when you get there?And what does it mean to you that you're not sure if it's society or you? And if you weren't doing that, what would you be doing?

I love that if money was no object, what would you be doing? Because that's the time where

people actually are prepared to verbalize their inner most wishes without having the layers of control that they put on at themselves.

Yeah, absolutely. And I have a lot of free resources too that I give to folks to help them with these things. Because for me, knowledge is free. Like, I'll give all my knowledge to everybody because I don't think knowledge should be hoarded.
I think knowledge should be shared and given away. But if now you're having trouble implementing, that's where I'm here to help. Knowledge is one thing, but putting it into action is another.

And the 90-day program along the same lines?

Yeah, it's the same line. So it just goes deeper into the three C's.

I've got one last area I just want to bounce off you. What do you define as a leader?

So I mentioned it earlier. It's someone who makes everyone around them better.
Because leadership is not about you or me. Leadership is about the people around us.

Looking at the background that you sent us and thinking about leadership and how we can align that to something that people might understand, maybe it would be better, rather than talk about leadership in the corporate world and you have to be these things, but for many of us or many of our listeners, they are parents as well. And I wondered whether it would be easier for them to think of the shifts that they made as a parental leader during that period of time, right from the baby through to a toddler who then becomes a little bit more independent, so you had to change the way you were leading that team to get things done, to school where they started to have outside influences and other thinking that they're exposed to, to teenagers where they now start to try and find their own value and their own persona. How do you have to change your leadership? And I think at that point, it's where many of us as parents struggle as leaders because we don't know our place as a leader in terms of that environment. Can we see that there is a similarity between that change in our leadership thinking to what we would find in the workplace?

Yeah, that's a really good question. And my kids are still young. So my wife and I were married for a while first, because we traveled in and that stuff. And then we had kids. And my daughter is, she's turning nine and my son is turning six.
So they're still young, but it's a good question because I was talking to a friend of mine about this same exact thing. Leadership in parenting, corporate leadership should be a little bit more like parenting. And in this way in particular, when you're a parent, you don't necessarily go out and take credit for what your kids do. But why is it that some leaders, when their teams do well, they take credit for that? And I think that's where we need to learn from parenting. And an example is, you know, if your kids, like my kids, we've taught them, you know, say thank you, please, have really good manners. And when someone says, oh, you know, Jayland's my daughter, you have such great manners. I don't go in and say, yeah, I taught her that. We teach them, you know, like we don't take the credit for that, but we're helping develop them and shape them. And I don't think we would ever as parents take credit for like the human beings that our kids turn out to be. I think we're an influence, but you know, we don't, shouldn't, take credit for that. And I think that's where in leadership, people think, oh,

this team is mine. I own this team. So this success of this team is my success. And I think that's the thing we need to go of.

And it also comes back to how we identify ourselves. So work, we identify with the job title or with what we do. And for a long time, when we're parents, we identify with I'm so and so's mother or I'm so and so's father, you know, when we were out socially. So again, it's about that keeping your, your persona and your identity separate to the leadership role that you're in at that particular time.

Well, I think we have come to a logical end to our discussion. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us at this time?

No, just that if anyone wants to reach out to me, I'm on LinkedIn and Instagram.
And yeah, riconasol.com. I would put that question out to anybody that if money were no object, or if you want to make this even the best year ever, what is stopping us from doing that? What is stopping you from doing that? And what's one thing you can do today to make it happen?

That would be the perfect place to end this podcast. Rico, thank you for your time and your expertise sharing that with us today. I'm Kim Baillie and this is InsideExec. And we will put all of the links on the website and on the individual pages to all of the information that Rico has sent us.

Thank you.