



**This Is Your Life Podcast**  
Season 3, Episode 5  
Published: February 11, 2015

Michael Hyatt

**Michele Cushatt:** Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to give you the clarity, courage, and commitment you need to do what matters. My name is Michele Cushatt. I'm your cohost today, and I'm sitting in the studio with the one, the only, Michael Hyatt.

**Michael Hyatt:** Hello, Michele!

**Michele:** I just thought I'd spice it up today.

**Michael:** Yeah, that's a different tact. Great. I think we should go back to the other one, but that's okay.

**Michele:** Oh, come on. Let's have some fun. All right, so all it takes, honestly and truly, is one look at major news stories in business, diplomacy, entertainment, politics, or whatever to discover that most crises we face begin as crises of leadership. Right?

**Michael:** Totally. Everything goes back to leadership. I learned that from John Maxwell. He's 100 percent right. With every crisis, every problem, somewhere there's a failure of leadership.

**Michele:** The good news is that means we can help correct that if we can start to identify and learn what kind of contributes to bad leadership.

**Michael:** That's right. We may not be able to fix the whole world, but we can at least fix our worlds by becoming better leaders and taking responsibility.

**Michele:** True. So regardless of what type of leadership you're in (even if you're leading a group of one or two or if you're leading hundreds), your influence matters because it ends up multiplying.

**Michael:** Yes.

**Michele:** Right? So bad leadership multiplies and good leadership multiplies.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** It's absolutely essential that you and I become the best leaders we can be and know really what creates a lousy leader. If we can identify those characteristics, we can work to avoid that and then become the best leaders we can be.

**Michael:** Yeah, sometimes we learn better by bad examples. I remember my daughter telling me one time... She was complaining about her boss and what a lousy leader he was. She went into great detail about this. I finally said to her, "Honey, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but honestly, you're going to learn way more from a bad leader, from a lousy leader, than you're going to learn from a good one."

I said, "This is going to strengthen your resolve not to be that kind of leader, so soak up everything you can. Don't be too quick to get on to a good leader, because not many of them exist, but you can be one. But absorb the lessons you're getting from this lousy leader."

**Michele:** All right. Our goal today is to help everyone who's listening (including ourselves as we're participating in this conversation) to thrive in our leadership roles wherever we are. We can do that by avoiding the characteristics of a lousy leader.

**Michael:** Yes.

**Michele:** We have 10 of them.

**Michael:** That's a lot.

**Michele:** That is a lot.

**Michael:** Let's see if we get through them.

**Michele:** We're going to do this.

**Michael:** Okay.

**Michele:** Let's start with the first one. We'll dive right into the content, and then we will unpack some of these as we go. What's the very first characteristic of a lousy leader?

**Michael:** It's that *they don't have enough confidence to lead at their level*. Now this shows up in some unexpected ways. I worked for a man a couple of decades ago who just couldn't ever pull the trigger on making a decision. He didn't have the confidence to make the decisions he needed to make, so here's how it looked from my vantage point as one of his direct reports.

I would go to him and say, "Look, we need to make a decision on this." I won't reveal too much, because it would out the guy. I would say, "We need to make a decision on this. Can you give me your approval?" He'd say, "Well, I need some more information." So I'd go out. I would have to do a bunch of research. I would bring it back to him.

He'd look it over, kind of get into the paralysis of analysis, and then say, "Well, I need some more information." So I would go back out and go through another loop of trying to get the information he required. By the time I got him the information to make the decision, the opportunity had passed. It was no longer even an option.

**Michele:** How frustrating for you. You've spent that much time.

**Michael:** Oh, literally... Fortunately, I only had to report to this guy for about a year, but it about killed me. I literally almost quit that job. I just said, "I can't go through this. I can't get anything done, because he doesn't have the confidence to make a decision." I see this in leaders sometimes. It's like they're so afraid to make the wrong decision that they make no decision.

**Michele:** They're paralyzed.

**Michael:** Yeah. By de facto, they make a decision, and it usually ends up being the wrong one.

**Michele:** All that does is foster tons of resentment.

**Michael:** That's right. It does. So as a leader, kind of the converse of that is that you have to have the confidence to make a decision. Yes, there's a risk in every decision. Yes, sometimes you're going to get it wrong, but you can't hold up your team and the progress of the organization by refusing to act or make a decision.

**Michele:** And at times, making the decision that you later regret and think, "Oh yeah. I could have done that differently," is better than inaction.

**Michael:** Totally. You can recover from that.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** I mean, there aren't very many decisions you and I make in our lives (obviously there are some big ones we could make)...

**Michele:** Yes, of course.

**Michael:** But most decisions we make aren't fatal. There may be a setback. There may be some expense involved, but usually we can recover from it. But it's far better than sitting on the sidelines and not acting. The lost-opportunity cost there can be huge.

**Michele:** True. All right, so what is the second characteristic of a lousy leader?

**Michael:** Well, *they're arrogant, assuming they always know what's best.*

**Michele:** That's almost like the opposite of what we just talked about.

**Michael:** Yeah, it is. I've seen this in a lot of leaders too. They confuse their opinion with the right answer. It's as if their opinion was the right answer, and there was no difference, and everybody else in the room was not as smart as they were or are.

**Michele:** That's somewhat narcissistic.

**Michael:** It is. Yeah. It's obviously limited exposure, because if they'd ever been exposed to really smart people, they'd realize they don't have all of the answers. But sometimes people who are in leadership positions don't recruit the best people they could recruit, because it's a threat to their own command, their own sense of control.

So it's easy for those people to think they're the smartest people in the room, but arrogance is one of the best ways to derail your career as a leader. If you think you know all of the answers, you don't have the right team, for starters.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** You're not going to have all of the information. Somewhere between not knowing enough and thinking you know it all is the right place for a leader. It's to know enough to make a decision and then move forward with humility.

**Michele:** Well, you have enough confidence in your abilities to make a decision, but you're still open to the input and ideas of others.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** That's great. All right, what is the third characteristic of a lousy leader?

**Michael:** The third characteristic, I would say, is that *they're disorganized*.

**Michele:** Hear, hear! I just love this one because I think organization is such a key part of any time you're leading anything. But I'm kind of compulsive that way.

**Michael:** You are.

**Michele:** So maybe that is another bad characteristic. I'm a little too obsessed.

**Michael:** Well, let me ask you this question. Have you ever worked for a disorganized leader (not counting me)?

**Michele:** Oh yes. Well, let's put it this way. I've volunteered for a very disorganized person in a volunteer or non-profit kind of situation.

**Michael:** That's even worse. At least if you're getting paid...

**Michele:** When you're donating your time for somebody who's very disorganized, you are always feeling like you're trying to make up for their lack. There's bad communication. You never know what to expect. Nobody is on the same page. You're volunteering your time after your day job to do this, and it creates a lot of tension and frustration. I mean, the truth is that when you have volunteers and you're that way, they're going to walk. They're not going to stay.

**Michael:** They are.

**Michele:** You're going to lose people quickly.

**Michael:** It's one thing if you're paying people to stay... I had a boss one time who was incredibly disorganized. I would give him reports, and then he would claim that he lost them and almost imply that he never got them, so I would have to find the email where I had sent the report in and give it to him again. I was basically his filing system because he couldn't keep track of anything. Worse than that, he couldn't even keep track of his own calendar.

I had a meeting with him every other week. About half of the time I would show up for that meeting, he would keep me waiting for 10-20 minutes while he finished up another commitment. He just couldn't manage anything to the clock. Then the other half of the time he would cancel the meeting after I'd made the trek and done the preparation to get to the meeting. He was just totally disorganized, which made me completely lose confidence in him as a leader.

**Michele:** Oh, yeah.

**Michael:** It made me question why the organization would put up with this. That's the kind of thing that creates a lot of cynicism in an organization too, because you realize you have this kind of incompetence at a level above you, and you go, "Why am I working for somebody like this?"

**Michele:** The other thing it does... I've noticed this in another situation, which was actually a work situation where I was in a paid position. The leader above me was so disorganized that I would continue to come to meetings so prepared and trying so hard to get things done and cross things off the list, yet the leader's job never got done.

So eventually I stopped performing because it didn't matter what I did. It never got followed through on. It never got carried through. So at some point my own performance started to back off, because why kill yourself setting things up that never get finished, that never get carried forward?

**Michael:** Well, I had a similar situation with the same boss I was talking about before. Sometimes there were decisions that needed to be made that exceeded his approval level, so that meant he had to be able to gather his research that I would provide, go in, and make a case to his boss to get the approval I needed in order to move forward. He couldn't pull it off.

He could not get approval. If it exceeded his approval level, I pretty much just had to cross it off. I just knew he was never going to get the approval. He wasn't organized enough. He didn't have enough command of the facts. He wasn't persuasive or compelling, so it stopped there.

**Michele:** So what would you say to the leader who really does struggle with disorganization? How can they compensate for that or overcome it even if it's truly one of their chief struggles?

**Michael:** Well, first of all, I think it sometimes is just that it's not in somebody's genes or character or whatever. They're just not naturally organized, and that's okay, but I think that first of all to just recognize it...

**Michele:** In fact, some really, really creative people (not all, but some) or even highly intelligent people... It's like they can't even manage all of the ideas they have, so they come across as very disorganized.

**Michael:** That's right. So I think owning that for starters is key. Maybe they need to be in a completely different role and they don't need to be in a role of leadership or management, but assuming they are in that role... At the very least, get a highly organized administrative assistant or executive assistant who can keep track of your calendar, who can keep track of your commitments so things don't fall through the cracks.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** Ultimately this will erode people's confidence in you, and it'll affect your ability to lead and influence other people.

**Michele:** It's so interesting. I get to work with a lot of artists and people who travel and are on the stage. A lot of them can be disorganized. They're in this creative field. Almost all of them have a road manager who travels with them, because that's part of that role: to have somebody who kind of is managing all of those details so you can thrive doing what you're really good at.

**Michael:** Yep. Absolutely.

**Michele:** Love it. These are characteristics of lousy leaders, so our goal today is to avoid these or try to overcome or compensate for them. First, they don't have enough confidence to lead at their level. Second, they're arrogant, assuming they always know what's best. Third, they're disorganized. What's the fourth one?

**Michael:** *Their words and actions erode trust even with their supporters.* It may be that they simply don't have judgment, so they'll say things or do things that make people question what they're about. This is why I think that as leaders we have to be conscious of the fact that our words carry weight, that our actions carry weight.

People read into them, and when we do things that are kind of in that grey area, it can really erode trust. I think we have to be so above board as leaders, so committed to integrity that we never do anything that could be questioned or in the grey area that causes that trust to erode.

**Michele:** This is kind of (but not really) off topic, but that whole integrity thing isn't just about trying to say what's right, but you really have to live that first to control what comes out of your mouth. You have to live integrity in order to be a person who actually speaks that way too.

**Michael:** You do, and I told you the experience I had before that was the exact opposite of this. I had a boss at one point who had made a commitment to give me a raise after 90 days.

**Michele:** Yes!

**Michael:** It was a brand-new job. If I was able to really do the work right (it was a new position for me), then he would give me this raise. But the company had a hiring freeze and a salary freeze in place when it came time for my evaluation. Rather than just dismissing that and saying, "Look, my hands are tied. Blame it on the corporation," he reached into his own pocket, made up the difference, and gave me the raise out of his own pocket.

I didn't really have a choice. He said, "You have to take this." That's the exact opposite of this. By his words and actions, he built trust so that still to this day, I'm profoundly impacted by that, and I've really ordered much of my own business life and my own understanding of integrity around that role model.

**Michele:** I tend to think of trust as being something that doesn't stay static. You are either eroding it or building it with every decision and conversation you have.

**Michael:** Constantly. Yeah. That's right.

**Michele:** All right, so words and actions erode trust even with their supporters. What's next?

**Michael:** I would say the fifth one is that *they over-promise and under-deliver*.

**Michele:** This is so... I mean, people do this so easily without thinking.

**Michael:** Politicians especially.

**Michele:** Yes, yes. It's dangerous, because it all goes back to trust again.

**Michael:** It's dangerous, and it's a fine line. Usually when you're selling the future, so to speak, when you're describing what's to come, there's an element of faith. There's no certainty in it. You're trying to describe what you think you can deliver, but you can't be so far out there that you get people to buy into something you couldn't possibly deliver. This takes judgment.

A smart leader may fail on this one or two times, but then they learn. Now there's a fine line here too because I don't want to be the kind of leader (I think this is another element of lousy leadership) who way under-promises. In the corporate world, we used to call this (and people probably still call it this) *sandbagging*. You're preparing against a flood.

You're trying to protect yourself in the situation rather than be honest about it. So I think you have to stretch, get a little outside of your comfort zone, but not over-promise. You have to then do everything to make your actions conform to your words. This is the essence of integrity: making our actions conform to our words. That builds trust.

**Michele:** All right. So they over-promise and under-deliver, which is so dangerous. We want to make sure we keep our word.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** It's all about integrity. Let's go ahead and move on to the sixth one.

**Michael:** Okay.

**Michele:** What is the sixth one?

**Michael:** The sixth one is that *they don't articulate a clear vision*. This is one of the most important ones. In fact, I would argue that it's the most important function of leadership. More than anything else, they have to paint a picture of a better future. They have to know clearly where they're headed.

**Michele:** Multiple times.

**Michael:** Multiple times, again and again and again. If a leader doesn't know where he's going, doesn't have a clear destination in mind, how can he possibly bring anybody with him? Because whatever else leadership is, it's the ability to enroll other people in a journey going somewhere. If you don't know where the *somewhere* is, you're just lost in the woods.

It's very rare, frankly, that leaders have vision. They might have some vision about the immediate future, but to have some vision about where this is all going and connect the dots so that people's little actions are connected to the bigger picture is rare. I worked for a man one time who had zero vision ability. Basically, his only vision was to make money and make more of it.

**Michele:** That's not usually a compelling enough vision.

**Michael:** No. It was really compelling to him because he wanted to be rich, but it wasn't compelling to anybody else, because we weren't really that interested in making him rich.

**Michele:** You weren't interested in his making money, so why would you get...?



**Michael:** I could kind of get interested in my making money, but I really (I think this is true for most people) was doing it for more than the money.

**Michele:** There has to be something a little bit greater than that.

**Michael:** Yeah. There's nothing wrong with money.

**Michele:** No.

**Michael:** I love to make as much as I can.

**Michele:** But we usually want a little bit more of an added value to it.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** Like, "Make money and change the world." Then that's a good combination.

**Michael:** Then it's a good thing, like Stu McLaren talks about. But in this case, what he did was realize he wasn't casting vision (because he was told that by a consultant). So his solution to that, rather than getting a real vision for himself and doing the hard work of trying to understand where he wanted to take this organization, was to call a committee together.

I got appointed to the committee. He said, "I want you guys to come up with a vision." So by committee, we tried to cobble together this vision. I mean, it was better than nothing, but it was basically a vision born of compromise, because that's what happens when a bunch of peers are working together. The environment was political for other reasons that were related to this guy's leadership.

It was very political, and it was just kind of a watered-down pro forma kind of vision that could have belonged to any corporation. Basically, "Do a better job serving our customers and creating excellent products." It was a bunch of stuff that makes people's eyes glaze over and makes them yawn.

**Michele:** I think I'm yawning right now.

**Michael:** I know! It just wasn't compelling.

**Michele:** So what would you suggest as a better solution? What should he have done?

**Michael:** What he should have done... I think this is how you get vision as a leader. You have to carve out time in your schedule for reflection, and you have to think about the future. Most leaders do not spend adequate time thinking, but to really think about where it is going...

Like, "In a perfect world, if I could just wave a magic wand, where would this organization be in five years that it currently isn't?" When I became a divisional leader at Thomas Nelson in the year 2000, I inherited the division that was dead last on every possible metric out of 14 divisions.

**Michele:** That would be fun. That was a nice inheritance, wasn't it?

**Michael:** Well, it was actually very good because I couldn't screw it up. It could only go one direction.

**Michele:** I love that positive attitude. Very nice. It was only going up from there.

**Michael:** At first it was kind of like, "Ugh. I got handed this thing that's kind of broken." But then I realized, "No, this is a huge opportunity." The first thing I did was go off on a retreat and start jotting down a series of bullets about what I wanted to see over the course of the next couple of years. The CEO had asked me how long it was going to take to turn this division around, and I did what a lot of managers do and just pulled a number out of the air.

I said, "Three years!" I had all of the confidence like I knew what I was talking about, but I really didn't have a clue. But I went off, and I said, "Okay, what could this look like in three years?" I was very concrete. I wrote it down as if it were present tense, as if I were experiencing it, as if it were a present reality. Then I went back...

This is the other common thing that leaders will do if they get a vision. They don't go back and seek the counsel of their colleagues or the people who report to them. They just come in like Moses from the mountain. They have the vision and say, "This is what we're going to do. Are you with me or against me?" If you're not with him or her, you get left off of the team.

So what I did was go back with this vision that I saw as a rough draft. I said to the team, "Look. Here's what I see could happen, and I just want to know what you see. I want this to be something we collectively own, so this is just a starting place. I know it's tough to do this in a committee. What else do you see?"

By the time we were done with that process, everybody owned the vision, and it didn't take us three years. It took us 18 months. We went from the fourteenth division to the first one in 18 months, but it started by getting crystal clear on the destination, what it would look like when we finally accomplished the vision.

**Michele:** I love that. So that last one was to lay down and articulate a clear vision. All right, we have four more characteristics of a lousy leader, but we are going to take a short break right now, so stick with us. We'll be right back.

**Michael:** As a busy and successful blogger, podcaster, author, speaker, and consultant, I'm constantly asked about the tools I use to get it all done. Now for the first time, I'm going to pull back the curtain and let you peek inside my toolbox to see the software and hardware I use for everything from blogging and podcasting to productivity, social media, and speaking, plus so much more. You can't buy Inside My Toolbox, but you can get it for free by subscribing to my free email newsletter.

When you subscribe, you'll receive my newest content right in your inbox. You'll never have to worry about missing an important post or update again. To get your free copy of the Inside My Toolbox ebook, visit [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com) and enter your name and email address into the form on the page. Don't waste any more time or money using the wrong tools. Sign up today at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com).

**Michele:** All right. So far we've walked through six characteristics of a lousy leader. I'm just going to recap these really quickly. They don't have enough confidence to lead at their level. They're arrogant, assuming they always know what's best. They're disorganized. Their words and actions erode trust even with their supporters. They over-promise and under-deliver. They don't articulate a clear vision, which you said very clearly is so important.

**Michael:** So critical. Job number one.

**Michele:** It's perhaps the most important thing on this whole list right here. Okay, so move on. What's the seventh one?

**Michael:** *They don't enroll others in their initiatives.* They depend on coercion or force, or they think they can do it all themselves.

**Michele:** Oh, I've seen a lot of that last one. They're the ones who are just like, "Well, I'm just going to do it myself. I'm going to do it myself."

**Michael:** Yeah. Sometimes you get this attitude from these kinds of leaders like, "Well, my people are idiots," or, "They just don't get it," or, "They're lazy." No, you just haven't enrolled them in your vision. I was just at a board meeting where there was one of the leaders in the organization who was blaming the people who reported to him for why he wasn't delivering on the performance he had promised to the board.

I didn't ask this question, because I didn't feel it was appropriate in this larger context of the board meeting, but I wanted to ask him the question that had been asked of me before in a similar situation. I would say to him, "What is it about your leadership that has led to this lack of performance? What is it about your inability to enroll the people under you? What is it about your inability to paint a compelling vision of the future?" Because if the first job is vision, the second job as a leader is enrollment.

You have to create alignment in your team, and the only way you do that is by knowing where you're going and then convincing people that they want to go there too, or helping them see that it's in their best interest or it is compelling in some way. It really comes down (I hate to use this term) to salesmanship. You have to be able to sell the vision, and a lot of leaders don't have that ability.

**Michele:** Well, it takes time, and I think they just want to plow ahead with it rather than taking the time to really create that alignment and getting them enrolled in the process.

**Michael:** They do. Let me tell you something. Demagoguery or being a dictator is very efficient.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** But it's not very efficient when you don't have the threat of death hanging over people's heads.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** So it may work in some country where they're not that sophisticated, where it's like a third world country or something. But it doesn't work in the real world where people are (I think of everybody this way) volunteers, even people you're paying. You may get their physical presence, but you don't get their heart.

You don't get them committed to the vision unless you enroll them in that. Coercion is not an option either. We see this a lot in the political sphere, where people just try to muscle something through and just bludgeon the minority.

**Michele:** Oh, there's so much fallout.

**Michael:** Oh, so much fallout. The best leaders don't do that.

**Michele:** All right. That seventh characteristic of a lousy leader is that they don't enroll others in their initiatives. What is the eighth?

**Michael:** *They're not transparent.*

**Michele:** So they're kind of shut off, removed.

**Michael:** They're shut off. They don't reveal anything. They're like the Wizard of Oz. They're behind a curtain. They don't tell you what they're thinking. They don't share any emotion. I worked for one corporation where they didn't share any of the performance metrics with any of the executive team, because the leader was paranoid in that situation.

He thought that if people had more information than he had, he would be at a disadvantage. He didn't trust anybody, and he wasn't transparent. He didn't reveal anything about himself. The problem is that if you don't reveal anything about yourself, you don't take advantage of the most important thing you can use as a leader, which is your heart.

**Michele:** Mm-hmm.

**Michael:** People who follow you don't expect you to be perfect, but when you're transparent and share your life, it enrolls them in the process.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** So transparency is hugely important. Of course, now we have a political environment in our country where people are so afraid of getting sued or the media taking things and twisting them and polarizing their constituents against them that they're very reticent to share the very things that would really help move everything forward. So everybody is kind of pretending, posing.

**Michele:** At the same time, I think our culture is less tolerant of a lack of transparency than ever before. I mean, I think of my kids, the millennial generation, some of these younger people. They're all about transparency.

**Michael:** They are.

**Michele:** If you aren't transparent, they will shut you off so quickly. That just shows them you can't be trusted. "I'm done with you," and they will walk away.

**Michael:** Well, I've learned the hard way by being transparent in my family, by being transparent in the organizations I work in and companies I've run, that that's one of the greatest leadership tools you have, because it builds trust.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** When you're transparent with the numbers of just financial performance, for example, whether they're good or bad, people learn to trust you. They learn that you're going to tell them the truth. You're not going to try to gloss over or spin the truth.

**Michele:** All right. Let's move on to the ninth one. What's the ninth characteristic of a lousy leader?

**Michael:** *They're blind to what's happening in their own organizations.*

**Michele:** Oh, I've seen this, let me just say.

**Michael:** Okay, so let me ask you for an example. Can you think of an example?

**Michele:** Okay, let me see if I can think of one. I don't know if this was true blindness or a willing blindness, like he was intentionally trying to stay blind, but I had an immediate manager in a job one time, and then there was another manager above him who was so inappropriate in how he handled situations. I mean, we're talking about situations where HR should have been involved. It was so, so inappropriate.

Yet the immediate manager, the one who should have been advocating for his staff, his team, and whatever, just was blind to all of these interactions that were going on. He would never do anything about it. He just pretended it wasn't happening. He just turned away every time. We got so frustrated.

First of all, he looked very weak because he wasn't willing to go to bat for his team. Then you sit there and actually even question his intelligence, like, "How could you not see this?"

**Michael:** Right.

**Michele:** "Surely you would do something if you saw this. Why are you not doing...?" So then you think he's not even sharp enough to pick up on what's going on. I mean, it just started to derail so many different things.

**Michael:** Well, if you're not questioning his intelligence, you start to question his integrity.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** "Well, he says one thing with his lips..."

**Michele:** Silence is agreement. It's that kind of idea. Silence is agreement.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** "He's not doing anything. He's not acknowledging it, so he must be in support. That means he's in alignment with the behavior that's happening."

**Michael:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, in one organization I was working in, we had this exact same situation where there was a divisional leader who was an incredible performer. He hit his numbers year after year after year. The big bosses were unwilling to deal with his unethical behavior. There was everything from allegations of sexual harassment to just out-and-out lying, fabricating stories. There were a lot of red flags, but because he was a big performer, the leadership was willfully ignorant.

**Michele:** So blind but doing it on purpose, choosing to stay blind.

**Michael:** Yeah. Choosing to stay blind because they didn't want to have to deal with what they would do to replace him for the sake of performance. I see that happen in a lot of organizations, maybe not that blatantly, but sometimes people are willingly ignorant. Sometimes it's because leaders are just kind of ensconced inside the C-suite, as they call it, the corporate suite. They just don't venture out where the real people live.

**Michele:** True. I've seen that too, where they just kind of stay in their office and do their thing. They never go and interact with their staff.

**Michael:** Yeah. It even happened to me when I was a CEO, because you're depending on filtered information, right? You want to trust the people who are reporting to you, but obviously (they don't do this because they're malicious or because they're unethical) they're going to give you their perspective. If you don't ever dig any deeper than that, you don't get any other perspective.

One of the first things I did when I became the president of Thomas Nelson was introduce this practice called Pizza with the Pres. What I did was, department by department, get the people who were working at many, many levels below me just to have lunch with me. We brought in pizza, and then we just chatted. I asked them a couple of questions.

One of the questions was, “What in this company do you not want to change, because you think it’s so valuable and you don’t want us to screw it up by taking it away or changing it?” I tried to build some trust just in that discussion. Then I said, “Okay, is there anything that you would immediately change if you could be the CEO for a day?” I got amazing information from people.

**Michele:** I would imagine that was some of the most valuable time you’ve ever spent.

**Michael:** I really respected what they shared with me, and I did not reveal it anywhere else. I took it as a problem to be solved, not somebody to be punished, whether they were ratting out somebody else or whatever.

**Michele:** You created a really safe environment for that conversation.

**Michael:** I did. Yeah.

**Michele:** The point being that it kept you from kind of operating blindly in your position.

**Michael:** That’s right.

**Michele:** You intentionally created scenarios that gave you opportunities to see what was really going on.

**Michael:** And as a leader, you have to do that. I think one of the great advantages of email, frankly... I saw this when email came in. I mean, gosh, it was back in the late 80s. When email came online, suddenly the hierarchy began to flatten because you didn’t have to pass a physical memo kind of up the ranks to the top.

I would encourage people to email me and have them email me all the time when I was the CEO of Thomas Nelson. I’d have people at the very lowest levels of the corporation send me a note or tell me about a situation that needed to be addressed. It takes time, and it takes building trust.

**Michele:** Yes. That actually somewhat goes back to the whole transparency thing.

**Michael:** It does.

**Michele:** Your accessibility kind of created this sense of transparency.

**Michael:** That’s right. You have to invite it. You can’t punish it when it happens. You have to actually demonstrate that you’re going to do something about it. I remember that in one of those Pizza with the

Pres meetings, I said, "What's the biggest problem you're facing?" She said, "I am out of file space." She happened to work in our legal department.

She said, "When I have to get a contract out, I literally have to pry the other files back so I can quickly grab the file I need and pull it out, because everything is so jammed in there. When I have to get a new file in there... I mean, there's no room." I'm thinking, "Really? I mean, how much could it cost to have to order a file cabinet?"

So we got out of that meeting, and then I contacted her supervisor. I said, "I want you to order this woman a new file cabinet. Trust me, you'll make her day. All of her problems will go away. She'll think you're a hero. Just do it."

**Michele:** She was like, "Yay!"

**Michael:** I never really told him the whole story. I definitely didn't rat her out. He did it, and she was over the moon. A little, simple thing like that...

**Michele:** So small, but if you don't make the time for those kinds of conversations, you never know.

**Michael:** No, and if you don't act on the information you get, you lose credibility also.

**Michele:** True. True.

**Michael:** It's like, "Well, we told the guy what we need, and it's still not happening."

**Michele:** So you don't want to be blind to what's happening in your organization. What's the final characteristic of a lousy leader?

**Michael:** *They don't hold their people accountable, especially themselves.*

**Michele:** Oh, that's big! This is huge.

**Michael:** They always have an excuse.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** There are these certain organizations (we've seen them before) where it's almost impossible to get fired, because there's no accountability.

**Michele:** You know what? Accountability is healthy.

**Michael:** It's hugely healthy.

**Michele:** We've had such a hard time accepting that, but accountability is so healthy in a family, in a church, in an organization... It's so critical. Two ways.



**Michael:** It begins by holding yourself accountable.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** So if you said you were to deliver something and you don't deliver it, you fess up. You own it. That's the only way to improve. That's the only way to grow as a leader. Hold yourself accountable, and then hold your people accountable. What that looks like is asking the hard questions. I think people appreciate that. It creates discipline in a team. People who aren't performers, who don't want to be held accountable, leave the organization (which is a really good thing).

**Michele:** That's true.

**Michael:** And you'll attract people who are willing to be held accountable, who are willing to do what it takes to deliver. If you want to build a performance-based culture, accountability is crucial.

**Michele:** All right. I have one final question for you. We only have a short time left, but I think this is important. Is it possible to have lousy-leader moments without being a lousy leader? I look at this list and I go, "All right. I can probably come up with instances when I've done almost every single one of these." So can I have lousy-leader moments without being a lousy leader?

**Michael:** Yes you can. I had a couple this week myself.

**Michele:** I'm so relieved.

**Michael:** I mean, seriously. When you become a lousy leader is when this becomes a pattern of behavior and this becomes the predominate way you relate to the people you're trying to lead. No leader is going to be perfect. The opposite of a lousy leader is not a perfect leader, but it's a leader who is informed by these, trying to do the exact opposite, working and growing and becoming a better leader.

**Michele:** You know, we gave you a lot of different characteristics of lousy leaders today, and for those achievers out there, you're going to want to go and try to be perfect at all of these. Let's not do that.

**Michael:** Yes, don't do that.

**Michele:** I'm just giving you permission to breathe, but start with one. If you see that you're disorganized, then start with trying to figure out a plan for more organization, hiring that excellent executive assistant to help you, or whatever it may be. Pick one or two. Start working on one of these. We're all in progress, but the goal is to move toward thriving in leadership rather than being a lousy leader.

**Michael:** Yes.

**Michele:** Well, if you've enjoyed today's conversation, you can get all of the show notes and a full transcript of the entire episode at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com). In addition, if you'd prefer to watch the video rather than listening to the audio, we have the whole thing recorded and (again) posted at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com).

I have a favor to ask. This is so important. If you could take just a few seconds to head over to iTunes, we'd love for you to rate the program. It's the best way to get this content into as many hands as possible. Do you have anything to add at this point?

**Michael:** Yeah, I do. I think I would add that you have to decide what kind of leader you're going to be, to be self-aware, self-conscious, and intentional about it. Do you want to be a lousy leader? Do you want to be a great leader? Then begin to shape the decisions you make, the stuff you consume, the way you relate to people. But the choice is really in your hands.

**Michele:** Excellent counsel. Thank you, Michael. Well, thank you for being with us today. We've so enjoyed having you here.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Do what matters.