



This Is Your Life Podcast

Season 4, Episode 9

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Michael Hyatt

Stu McLaren: Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to help you win at work and succeed at life. My name is Stu McLaren, and as you can probably guess, I am not Michele Cushatt, who is the regular host of this podcast. She is at home recovering from her battle with cancer. The good news is she is kicking cancer's butt, and we are so grateful for that. She's going to be back here in the studio before we know it. In the meantime, we are in the studio, Michael. It's good to be here, buddy.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Stu! It's good to see you.

Stu: I have to tell you I do love being in this studio.

Michael: I know! You're doing great!

Stu: Well, you know, it took me a little while to get used to the fact that our producers are not in the studio but we hear their voices. It's totally like being...

Michael: It's like the voice of God.

Stu: Yeah. It's totally the voice of God. Right before we got started, I said, "I need to go get a drink of water." All of a sudden I heard, "I will get that for you."

Michael: Don't get too used to it.

Stu: I know. It's amazing. Okay.

Michael: This doesn't happen at home for me.

Stu: Well, I'm excited for today's episode.

Michael: Me too.

Stu: We're going to be talking about *the four temptations that every leader faces*. Before we dig into this one (this is going to be a juicy one), I want to read something you wrote on your blog.

Michael: Okay.

Stu: You wrote, "For more than 30 years, I have worked in the publishing field with leaders, authors, and other creatives. During this time, I have witnessed the corrosive effects of fame. I have seen leaders get prideful, greedy, and demanding. Sadly, it has increasingly become the norm in a world that values charisma above character. Very few have been able to handle the temptations that come with increased influence." What is it about leadership that seems to bring out the worst in us? I want to start with that if you can speak to that first.

Michael: Well, I think that oftentimes, leaders have more freedom, more discretion, more ability to kind of become who they really are.

Stu: So this isn't just about fame. This is about people in leadership positions as well.

Michael: Yeah, I think there's just a danger in leadership positions. When you get power, it amplifies who you are. If you're a good person, that can amplify the good you can do, and if you're a bad person, it can also amplify that. Now fame is kind of an additional layer, though, that can distort reality for us. It can make us think we're more important than we are or that our significance is more significant than it is.

Stu: Have you ever seen this happen in your life? Have you ever seen leadership do this in your life?

Michael: Yeah. I think I've faced all the temptations we're going to talk about, and I think that because I served under a lot of leaders before I kind of had the top spot (I didn't become the CEO until I was 50 years old)... I had had 25 years of experience in working for other people and seeing the good, the bad, and the ugly. It was helpful to me to not get power so early. I think it's very difficult for people who ascend to a top leadership spot at an early age, but these temptations affect everybody at every age.

The more successful you become as a leader, the easier it is for you to acquire people who tell you what you want to hear. They have a dog in the hunt, as we say here in the South. They have an agenda of their own. It becomes more difficult to get objective feedback and hear the truth. You can kind of enter into that reality distortion field and succumb to these temptations if you're not careful.

Stu: So this is for leaders in all positions, whether you have your own company or you're in a big organization. What we're talking about here today is that in learning how to build platforms, you're going to face four temptations you need to prepare for in advance. Let's talk about that, starting with the first temptation.

Michael: The first temptation is *the temptation of priorities*. This is the temptation that basically the more we rise in our leadership, the busier we get, the more demands that are placed on our time, and the easier it is to get our priorities inverted and start making the most important things the least important.

Stu: Because the more successful you become, the more opportunities that come your way as well.

Michael: Right. That's right.

Stu: Yep, and everybody wants a piece of you.

Michael: Yep. It's easy, if you're not careful, to convince yourself it's temporary. You can be like, "This is just a season." I remember having this conversation with Gail early in my career as I began to ascend through the corporate ranks and say to her, "Honey, look. I know I'm not giving the family the priority I should, but this is just for a season. Once we get through this, it's going to be okay."

The problem is the temporary has a way of becoming permanent. This becomes a permanent lifestyle thing because the truth is you're always beginning a project. You're always in the middle of a launch. You're always starting a new business or onboarding new people. There's something that would give you an excuse or reason to invert your priorities. But the most surprising thing I've found is that leaders often put themselves last.

Stu: In terms of what?

Michael: Here's what I mean. I can't tell you how many (especially among top leaders) aren't giving the proper attention to their health, their own intellectual growth, their own self-care, their own emotional growth. What happens is they end up going through burnout. I think there's a really important, appropriate level of self-care that leaders have to practice if they're going to be spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally available to the people they're leading.

Stu: And this is hard for leaders because, especially when people look to you, it's almost... I don't know whether it's our culture or what, but it's almost like a sign of weakness to be taking time to rejuvenate yourself.

Michael: Yeah.

Stu: But it's really coming from a position of strength, knowing your priorities are priorities for a reason. There's a reason they're called priorities, and you need to take time for those.

Michael: Yeah. I had a man who worked for me one time who would just not go home from work. I mean, he would stay at the office until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. He just wasn't taking care of himself. He was out of shape. He didn't have a great marriage. The worst part about that was he was leading by example. He didn't know it, but he was leading by example. I had to have a confrontation with him one time, and I said, "You're creating culture downstream from you because the people who are under you, watching you and looking to see what it means to be successful..."

I told him, "They look to you, and they say, 'Well, what it means to be successful is you have to put in 12-hour days. To be successful, you can't give attention to your own health or your own self-care. You have to just be all about the work.'" The truth is that if you do that for very long, you will burn out. This man had incredible stamina, and to this point he's still surviving, but I promise you it's an accident waiting to happen.

Stu: It's fascinating because I have friends who, when we graduated college, went into investment banking. That's an industry where...

Michael: They're notorious for this.

Stu: They're notorious for this. They're driving, driving, driving. But it has such a high turnover because of the very reasons you're talking about. People just burn out. They can't maintain that pace, because they just don't have their priorities straight.

Michael: They don't. I mean, just ask yourself this question. Are you more enjoyable to be around when you're rested or when you're really tired?

Stu: Yeah.

Michael: No. When I'm tired, I'm irritable. I'm short. I don't have patience. When I'm rested, I can be much more gracious and forgiving. So for the sake of your team as a leader, for the sake of your own long-term success so you don't burn out, for the sake of your family and what matters most... It's not just the work that matters most. You have to give an appropriate level of self-care to yourself. That means first and foremost that you need to be resting.

Stu: Can I ask you a question on this? What happens when you have opportunities that challenge those priorities, when you have something or somebody who comes your way (perhaps a boss or a business partner) and challenges those priorities? How do you stay strong in avoiding that temptation of taking on more?

Michael: Well, I think one of the things you have to do is have a conversation about it. You have to talk about the expectations, what the consequences are, and what's at stake, because a lot of times we're driven by an expectation that was never clearly articulated and the other person didn't intend. I was talking about this man who would work until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. He said, "Well, I would never expect my employees to do that."

I said, "Well, guess what? They thought they had to do that because all they had was your example, and the example is going to speak a lot louder than the words." So have the conversation about it with that business partner or with that spouse. Don't fall into the temptation of thinking it's only temporary, especially when it starts becoming permanent. When you start having the same conversation over and over again with your spouse and you're saying, "Honey, look. This is rough right now. I know..."

Stu: "It's just a period."

Michael: "But it's just a period. Once we get through this, when we get to May, it's going to be great," or, "When we get to August, it's going to be awesome." Andy Stanley has this incredible example of holding the rock. Have you heard this?

Stu: No.

Michael: What he says is that when you say you're going to give yourself to your work for a period of time, it's like giving this big rock to your spouse and saying, "Would you just hold this just for a little while? I'm going to be back in just a little bit. Just hold that now." So you go off, you're away, and you come back and hold it for a few minutes. Then you give it back. "Okay, well, I have to go do something else." So they get left holding the rock for a long period of time, sometimes to the breaking point.

Stu: It gets heavy.

Michael: It gets heavy. We don't realize what we're asking them to do. That's the temptation of priorities. I think getting crystal clear on your priorities as a leader and then living by those priorities is important. I mean, my priorities are crystal clear to me. In my life, God comes first. It won't be the same for everybody.

Secondly comes myself because if I don't take care of myself, it's just like riding in an airplane when the flight attendant says, "In the event of turbulence when we lose cabin pressure, there are going to be oxygen masks coming out of the ceiling. Put on your own first before you attempt to help anybody else." That's how I look at self-care. I'm going to pursue my own spiritual life, intellectual life, and emotional life so I can be available to serve other people. The third priority for me is Gail. The fourth priority is the kids. I mean, work comes down in sixth or seventh place.

Stu: Wow. Okay, great. When we are looking to build platforms, we're going to face these temptations, but here's how we prepare in advance. The first temptation is the temptation of priorities. What's the second temptation we're going to face?

Michael: I think the second temptation is *the temptation of entitlement*. You know, we think, "Gosh, I finally got promoted," or, "My business has gotten to a certain place," or, "I'm in the ministry at a certain level." We think, "Therefore, I'm entitled to certain things." I've never seen anything positive that comes out of an attitude of entitlement. By entitlement I mean the attitude that says, "I deserve this. I deserve this pay. I deserve this kind of office. I deserve to drive this kind of car. I deserve this kind of house, this kind of spouse..."

Whatever it is, no. The exact opposite of that is gratitude. To walk around in constant wonder that you've been given the gifts you've been given is the antidote to entitlement. It's to feel that sense of gratitude for what you've been given. I'll never forget that years ago... I must have been 28 years old.

Stu: So it was just a couple of years ago.

Michael: Just a couple of years ago. Last year, I think. I'm 59 now, so this will put it in perspective. I was 28 at the time, and I was working for a publishing company in Waco, Texas. It was word publishing. One of our biggest authors was Billy Graham. I was asked to go visit him in Anchorage, Alaska, where he had this big crusade, this conference.

I remember meeting him the first time, and I had never met him before. I was this 28-year-old kid. I was in the green room. He was all by himself. It seemed like this big, cavernous green room. He was a long way away. I walked across. He was just sitting down, just getting ready to preach. He stood up, walked toward me, and introduced himself.

Stu: That must have been a great moment for you.

Michael: It was a great moment, and I just thought to myself, "Only somebody of incredible humility who's that famous would introduce himself like I didn't know him."

Stu: Right. I had a similar experience with Richard Branson, actually.

Michael: Really?

Stu: Yeah. I was a volunteer at a big conference company in Toronto, and they held these big events with big-name speakers. Richard Branson was one of them. Similarly, he was backstage. I was in charge of all of the volunteers at this particular event. I had a team of 70-100 volunteers help me run this event. We had maybe 7,000 people in the audience. I was backstage.

I was talking to one of the event producers, and it was a similar experience where Richard was there, and he was just chilling out before he was to go up on stage. He's actually a very humble guy. He actually gets very nervous about going on stage. He doesn't like doing speaking engagements where he's by himself on stage. He always has somebody interview him.

It was a great experience just to see him back there. There was this business mogul who I have so much respect for, and yeah. He looked at me, I looked at him, and he kind of gestured for me to go over. I introduced myself. I think he could tell I wanted to say hi. But it was a great moment. I'll never forget it. I got my picture with him and everything. It wasn't like a formal thing. We just quickly took a picture.

Michael: It's awesome to meet great leaders like that.

Stu: Oh, it's great.

Michael: I remember one of the other things Dr. Graham did was express his gratitude. Again, that's the opposite of entitlement. He said to me, "Thank you for traveling all this way." He was a little bit amazed. He said, "Thank you for traveling all this way from Texas [where I lived at the time] to Alaska just to be with me. I'm really, really grateful."

Stu: What an impression that probably made on you.

Michael: It did.

Stu: Still to this day.

Michael: Yeah, and I have seen the opposite, sadly. I've seen people who have excused all kinds of bad behavior because they were entitled. It's that sense that the world owed this to them, whether it was that they wanted the best table at the restaurant, a specific thing comped (given to them for free), or a certain level of service. They were just entitled because they were

famous. They were leaders of some renown, and they expected to be treated like that. That's not good.

Stu: No, it's not good, and it creates an environment where people don't want to serve you, because it frustrates them. It's not a great characteristic to have by any means.

Michael: You see this in politics a lot.

Stu: Today we're talking about the four temptations we need to prepare for in advance as leaders. We've talked about the first two. First is the temptation of priorities. Second is the temptation of entitlement. We still have two more temptations for you coming up here in just a few minutes. We'll be right back.

*If you're like most members of my audience, you're committed to winning at work and succeeding in life, but the truth is you struggle with finding enough time to do it all. That's exactly why I wrote my new e-book, *Shave 10 Hours Off Your Workweek: 4 Proven Strategies for Creating More Margin for the Things That Matter Most*. You can't buy *Shave 10 Hours Off Your Workweek*, but you can get it for free by subscribing to my free e-mail newsletter.*

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Stu: Good news! We are not done yet. We are back, and we are talking about the four temptations of prominent leaders, and so far we've discussed two of them: the temptation of priorities and the temptation of entitlement. What's the third temptation, Michael?

Michael: It's *the temptation of resentment*. You know, it's inevitable as you go through life (particularly as a leader) that people are going to offend you. It's really easy, if you're not careful, to become resentful of that. We've seen all kinds of people... Richard Nixon had his notorious hit list of enemies, and other political leaders and business leaders have done the same thing. It really models the wrong thing to the people you're trying to lead. It ultimately undermines your own leadership.

There's no good fruit that comes from that kind of behavior, and it eats up your soul. Instead of using what energy you've been given to positively affect change in the world, you spend this time resenting somebody else. I've heard resentment or anger described. With people who are that way, the saying is that it's like they're drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It becomes a part of the culture if we're not careful.

Stu: Do you have any examples of resentment or what it would look like?

Michael: Yeah. I've seen it where it manifests itself as really unhealthy competition.

Stu: Oh, okay.

Michael: A leader just wants to win at any price and is willing to color outside of the lines, not play by the rules, and do things that are unethical or sometimes illegal. It can come out of a place of resentment. That's where it begins. I think resentment in our own souls is like a leak in our gas tanks. It's just an energy drain to us because we're spending this energy being offended at somebody else rather than channeling that in a positive direction.

I think what that means for leaders is that when you get offended (you'll inevitably get offended; you'll be slighted, and somebody won't give you the respect you think you deserve, won't honor your office like you think they should), you can get resentful of that. I think what you have to do is kind of what we were talking about before with entitlement. It's just to always stay in a place of gratitude.

Stu: Yep.

Michael: I remember that my friend Luci Swindoll said one of the ways she deals with this is to treat everything like a compliment. Even when people are offensive to her or say something nasty to her or she gets an email criticism (she's a public figure)... She said, "I just treat it like a compliment."

Stu: Well, the more successful you become, the higher the probability is that you are going to face criticism. You're going to have people who disagree with what you are doing or saying, and it's important to be aware of that beforehand so you have strategies to deal with it when it does happen.

Michael: Yeah. If you think of maybe political leaders who have been in this situation...

Stu: You've faced it too, right?

Michael: Yeah.

Stu: When you do something on your blog, make some blog post or podcast episode somebody may not agree with, you get criticism for it.

Michael: I do, and one of the least attractive things is when I react in kind. If I get snippy with that person or try to put them down in some way, it's not attractive to my followers. It's not a good example to my team. It totally violates my whole premise of servant leadership. I think there's a lot at stake in this, in how we treat other people. It's in those moments when we're offended that our real values come out.

Stu: It's interesting... I saw a great article several months back about the singer-songwriter P!nk. She was at an awards ceremony, and afterward people criticized her for her weight.

Michael: Good grief.

Stu: When you see the pictures of what she wore... She's not overweight or anything for that matter, but there were people who were very, very critical of her on Twitter. She responded to them, and the way she responded was amazing. She talked about how her husband commented that there's just more of her to love. She showed a picture of herself with her son and related how he said she looked beautiful in what she was wearing. It really put into context what's really meaningful in that moment. In a very elegant way, it just shut down that criticism because it put it in perspective.

Michael: Yeah. That's really good.

Stu: Yeah. It was beautiful.

Michael: As you were telling that story, I just remembered another thing I learned from Luci. She says that when people criticize her, rather than sending a lot of energy and defending herself, hating them, or whatever, she just writes back and says, "You might be right." Because they might be right, but that just kind of dials down the emotion of it. "You know what? You might be right. I'll think about that."

Stu: Yeah, it's awesome. That's a great response. Okay, we're talking about the four temptations of prominent leaders. First is the temptation of priorities. Second is the temptation of entitlement. Third is the temptation of resentment. What's the fourth temptation?

Michael: It's *the temptation of popularity*. As you begin to get successful, if you're not careful, that kind of has the seeds of its own destruction. You start believing your own press. You start thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. I think that to just stay grounded... I have to tell you that one of the things I love about living in Nashville is the fact that we have a lot of

stars who live here. We have a lot of movie stars who have moved here from the West Coast. We have a lot of music stars.

But I've been amazed at how grounded these people are here, and I think that's one of the reasons they like living here as opposed to other places. This is a place where they can be real. I'm sure there are exceptions, and maybe I'm a little naïve, but I run into these people from time to time. I'll never forget the time I was at a local restaurant with my family and it was one of the girls' birthdays. I was attempting to take a picture of the whole family, and I got this tap on my shoulder. I didn't realize it until I turned around, obviously, but it was Wynonna Judd. She said, "Can I take that picture for you?"

Stu: Wow. Amazing.

Michael: I said, "Really?" She said, "Yeah, I'd love to do that." So she took a couple of snaps, gave me back my camera, and walked off.

Stu: That's awesome! Wow.

Michael: I just thought, "There's a person who's not..." I don't know her well enough to know all that's involved in her life, but to me that just demonstrated somebody who has not been corrupted by popularity. She has a good sense of who she is. I've had other encounters with other people here as well. But I think that as a leader you have to be very careful because a lot of nice things get said about you in the blogosphere or the press, perhaps, as you're more successful. People are always trying to ingratiate themselves to you, so you have to be wary of that. I think just to keep a level head about it is important.

Stu: Well, I want to take a moment and give you credit because that's one of the characteristics I love most about you. There are few people I have ever met who are so aligned in their public personas and their private personas.

Michael: Thank you.

Stu: Yeah. I do want to give you credit because you have built this enormous platform online, and there are a lot of people whose head that does start to go to, and it is that temptation of popularity. I just want to give you credit because it's a great example of teaching what you talk about through example.

Michael: Thank you. To stay there, I think you have to surround yourself with people who are real, people of integrity, people who aren't afraid to speak the truth to you.

Stu: It's a good thing you have some of your daughters with you, because they certainly keep it real.

Michael: Oh, they keep it real. They cut me no slack, and they'll tell me if I have...

Stu: They'll tell you when the nose hair is hanging out, and they'll say, "Dad..."

Michael: I mean, really, right? You've seen it happen. They tell me when I have spinach on my teeth. I love having that around me, but I don't think I'd get very far if I let this go to my head.

Stu: True. Well, great. We have been talking about the four temptations leaders are going to face. First is the temptation of priorities. Second is the temptation of entitlement. Third is the temptation of resentment. Fourth is the temptation of popularity.

Stu: As we wrap up this episode, what are some elements of a healthy perspective on leadership?

Michael: Yeah. I actually wrote down three things here. I think, first of all, a tip is to see leadership is a privilege. It's not something you're entitled to, and it's not something you earn, necessarily. It really is a privilege, and it has been given to you for a reason, not for yourself but on behalf of others. My second tip is that it's best held with an open hand. It's very unattractive to me when leaders are so unwilling to give up their leadership and they just hold on to it with both hands. I've seen that in the corporate world as well.

Stu: What do you mean when you talk about leaders holding on? Are they holding on to certain responsibilities or...?

Michael: Yeah. Or people won't find or appoint a successor. This happens a lot to founding entrepreneurs who just stay past the time they should leave and become an impediment to the growth of the organization because they're not willing to hand off some of the responsibilities or even delegate.

Stu: Gotcha.

Michael: So it's important to hold it with an open hand. It never works without people who can tell you no, so you have to have people in your life to whom you've given the right to say no to you, to be able to challenge you on things. We've talked about this before. Create an environment that's safe for dissent, but shockingly, you're not always going to be right. You do need to have your thinking challenged. You do need to have people who are willing to get in there, push and shove, and come up with the best thinking for the sake of collaboration.

Stu: Well, if you've enjoyed today's episode, I want to recommend that you go over to Michael's blog at michaelhyatt.com. There you'll find the show notes and the full transcript. If you want to watch this episode rather than listen to it, you can also find the full video of us on the blog at michaelhyatt.com. Last, can you please go over to iTunes?

Here's why. If you can rate the podcast, we'll attract more people like you. That's what we want. It just helps us get the show in front of more people when you rate it. It will take 30 seconds. Go over and rate the podcast. We'd be grateful for it. Michael, as we wrap up this episode, do you have any final thoughts?

Michael: You know, you don't have to succumb to these temptations. That's the good news. I think the best defense is simply awareness. Being aware of these four temptations, arming yourself against them, and being alert to them so you don't succumb to them is the best defense. Your leadership is a gift, and it can be a great blessing to the people you're trying to lead if you can avoid these temptations.

Stu: Well, thank you, Michael, and thank you, everyone who joined us today.

Until next time, remember: Your life, your one and only life, is a gift. Now go make it count.