

## LeaderImpact Podcast Ep. 12 Jonathan Friesen - Cross Cultural Heritage Creates Challenges and Opportunities

### Lisa Peters

Welcome to the LeaderImpact Podcast. We are a community of leaders with a network in over 350 cities around the world dedicated to optimizing our personal, professional, and spiritual lives to have impact. This show is where we have a chance to listen and engage with leaders who are living this out. We love talking with leaders. So if you have any questions comments or suggestions to make the show even better, please let us know. The best way to stay connected in Canada is through our newsletter at [LeaderImpact.ca](http://LeaderImpact.ca) or on social media at LeaderImpact. But if you're listening from outside of Canada check out our website at [LeaderImpact.com](http://LeaderImpact.com).

I'm your host Lisa Peters and our guest today is Jonathan Friesen. Jonathan Friesen was raised in a small Japanese coastal town during the rapid economic growth of the 1960s, attended boarding school in Tokyo in the 70s and university in Los Angeles in the 80s. After graduating, he settled in Vancouver and began a career in property development building high-rise communities in the Vancouver downtown core and resorts in the South Seas. The Friesen family eventually retired to the island of Grand Cayman and took part in a charitable housing organization. By 2002, Jonathan was ready to move back to British Columbia to reengage with the property development world.

Jonathan currently serves as the CEO of Mission Group Enterprises, which is one of the largest developers in the Okanagan where he sets corporate growth strategy, casts vision, and cultivates strategic partnerships. Friesen also serves on the board of several organizations in BC. With the broad perspective gained by global experience, he has learned that success comes not from fitting in but by being different.

Join us now for a conversation with Jonathan as he shares his story including how his cross-cultural heritage has created challenges and opportunities in business and his faith. Thank you for joining us Jonathan and taking the time to be with us.

### Jon Friesen

It's my pleasure.

### Lisa Peters

You know I got a glimpse of you at the global summit. I saw a little bit of you and I was just super excited that you agreed to come hang with us here today. So thank you and I know that you have a date with your granddaughter in an hour so we are just going to jump right into this. I know how important that is.

**Jon Friesen**

It is the most important agenda item of the whole week.

**Lisa Peters**

So my first question is always to our guest is tell us your personal story. I have to tell you a story because you know sometimes we gloss over the personal story and I was reminded in a LeaderImpact meeting and her name was Michellene from Africa. And I think that's the part I love about LeaderImpact is just these connections that we get and she reminded how important the personal story is to connect with those leaders. So I'm looking forward to you Jonathan telling us a little bit more about yourself.

**Jon Friesen**

Where would you like me to start? Okay, why don't I start with where I was born and you covered this a little bit in the bio. So my father is a German Mennonite from Saskatchewan as we were speaking a moment ago before this started, this recording started. And my mother is from Kyoto which is a very traditional imperial city in Japan. And so my mother was raised, well she was born right before World War II spooled up and my grandfather believed that their family of four girls, my mother being one of them, and his wife were in danger because they lived so close to Osaka which was a huge probably a military but mostly industrial production city. So they moved to Kanazawa where I actually was born to start a new life because he felt that you know it's so small and insignificant little fishing village at the time. That they would be much safer there than near the big cities in the Kasai area of Japan so they moved to Kanazawa but that also happened to be exactly where my father was called to become a missionary.

When World War II ended, General Macarthur asked for a thousand Christian missionaries. And so my father responded as one of those and he felt interestingly this this incredible pull. He felt a calling from God to go to Japan and minister to the Japanese. He was a Prairie boy who'd never seen the ocean and I'm willing to bet he'd never traveled outside of kind of the general, the Saskatchewan the farm belt area. He talks about the first time he jumped on a train to head to Vancouver so we can get on a boat. And watching his family drive away in their little Model A or whatever it was and how foreign of an experience that was for him and a challenge. Not only to get on a train and roll away from the little surroundings that he was familiar with. But then to jump on a boat, go over the Pacific, and end up in this country which most westerners of the day would have called strange or different.

There's nothing common in the Japanese language to the English language. So the first thing he did was get engaged in language school, learn the Japanese language. Then he started his work as a church planter. One of the parishioners in one of those original churches was my mother. My mother, a classical musician, fell in love with J.S. Bach who as you know had a strong belief of his own. And he wrote an amazing piece, an Oratorio called St. Matthew's Passion. And the words of Matthew's passion are directly out of the book of Matthew. She read

those words, became a believer, and so they shared a passion. My father was also extremely musical, which is pretty typical as you may know of these German Mennonite types you can pick up any instrument and play it. So he was also very good at the violin although I don't think you had ever taken a real lesson.

So they started, I grew up hearing them play violin duets. And so they raised me in Kanazawa with my 2 siblings brother and a sister. And so I grew up as what many would call a third culture mindset. And this has been coined as kind of maybe it's a deficiency. But as a personality type it starts in many government kids that grow up overseas in the civil service or military kids, missionary kids that's same sort of thing, were all third both third culture kids probably. And it basically means that the culture you grow up in is not the culture you think you're from. You actually think that you're from somewhere else. In this case I thought well maybe I'm from Saskatchewan because my father is from there. I'm growing up speaking Japanese, going to Japanese school. All my friends are Japanese. I think there was one other non-Japanese family living in that city, and we hardly ever saw them because they were all the way on the other side. And so my entire surroundings TV, friends, school, everything was in Japanese.

My mother is Japanese but in my mind I'm thinking that maybe I'm Canadian because I speak English because my dad speaks English to me. And then you also realize eventually that you're not Japanese either. In my case I'm ethnically not completely Japanese, I'm half Japanese. And so you belong to this third place which is not where you thought you were from and certainly not where you are from. It's in the middle there, somewhere else. And it's an identity of non-identities. And so very early on I became aware of this. Later on I found words like third culture kid to name it. I realized that all of the other kids in my grade school in junior high and high school that I grew up with were probably also third culture kids.

And we also we share this common deficiency or advantage actually as we will discuss later on. And so when I when I finally ended up at Biola University in Southern California, I figured out how different American kids that grew up in America were to me and how I thought. But there's a couple different ways that one can react to this kind of difference. One is by shrinking back and realizing that maybe you don't fit in. And then you start to realize that not fitting in gives you a perspective because you're not stuck in this sort of a linear singular way of perceiving the world around you. And so it becomes an incredible advantage as long as you don't you know let it tear you down and make you think that you're less than because of it you're actually given a great advantage.

And so this the because I'm bilingual in Japanese I'm also bicultural. I'm third culture. I think that these things have given me insights that I would otherwise lack completely. And has had made me, I'm sure more sympathetic to issues such as diversity and equality, especially when it comes to ethnic issues. And the organization around me as we as we move forward I'm seeing that hiring diversely. And I think diversity is really a mindset. It could be gender,

hopefully, we get to discuss that later on. It could be ethnic. It could be linguistic. And it could be many, many other things. Maybe you've got something that others might call a handicap. Maybe you're from a little town that you might secretly be a little bit embarrassed about. Maybe you're from a huge city that is foreign to a place like Kelowna. And all of those differences demographic, psychographic, there's psychological, linguistic, ethnic, gender, those are all advantages for you if you know how to use them. So I know you asked me a little bit about myself. I've probably gone way too far. But that's a little bit about who I am and how I perceive the world around me.

### **Lisa Peters**

No. That is amazing. When we first started talking we spoke about Saskatchewan and of course I've got to ask do you know someone. And you weren't born here, but I mean the Mennonite. And I married a Mennonite so you know you asked me about some Peters and I asked you about some Friesens and it's a small world.

But thank you for sharing your story and a lot of insight to the benefits of being a third culture. I'm sure when you grew up there were some difficulties but then you started to see them as benefits. So thank you for sharing that.

I saw a picture of your dad, a family picture I think it might have been, the wedding picture and this was an interview I saw with you a while ago and you commented about I'm not sure if your dad was accepted. I mean he was in this wedding picture. He's sitting in the middle which what you had said is the prestige spot to sit. And the father-in-law was over in the corner. And I'm sure that caused some grief.

### **Jon Friesen**

Yeah, yeah, so you know that was a very interesting photograph because it tells a lot. Now we look at it in the laugh because we know exactly what was going on. So my father-in-law should have been sitting on the floor not standing up at the back, in the middle of the picture. He was clearly the patriarch. Yet, there's this young foreigner from Canada that sort of gets the honorific spot in the middle, on the floor. *(Laughing)* And my poor grandfather, his wife and daughters pushed him out to the corner. And maybe they thought it was modern and cool. But I could tell by the look on his face he didn't think so.

### **Lisa Peters**

Modern and cool doesn't fit with tradition. Well, we're going to transition a bit over to professional insights. I think you have a great story and from what I understand, and the research I have done, is Mission Group is one of the largest developers in the Okanagan with a staff I think of over 100 and growing. I think that's what I heard yesterday, you can correct me there. So I'm excited to hear about your whole professional journey. I mean coming over from another country and you've moved back. I've heard a little bit about it but just tell us about your professional journey to CEO and any of those pivotal moments that moved you forward.

**Jon Friesen**

Sure. So stop me anytime you want to I might ramble again. So first of all, we don't have a hundred employees I think we're right now just cresting over ninety. We're doing some hiring right now again as the industry continues to expand and grow. And we work with actually thousands of other employees. We call them subcontractors but you know we have many communities under construction in the Kelowna area. And each of them hire a lot of tradespeople, although not directly. So we're also responsible, I'm thankful to say this, for a lot of employment, not just our own but other organizations' staff as well.

Your original question was how did I get started. So I started out after graduating as a chemical trader for a large Japanese trading company working in downtown Vancouver. So the office was on the twentieth floor of a significant office high-rise. And I thought I had arrived. This is my dream job. It also happens to be my first job. I felt very, very fortunate to be there.

They hired me because I was half-Japanese and I could converse in both languages which is very handy for an organization like that dealing with clients that were Canadian and bosses and the staff members and co-workers that many of them were Japanese. And to be able to a business trip to head office in Tokyo and be able to function perfectly well. So clearly being bilingual was an advantage there.

But very quickly I began to realize, which hopefully by now, I'm sure by now has been corrected in large Japanese organizations, that if so this type of organization in Japanese is called zaibatsu, a zaibatsu group or a zaibatsu organization. And they're hundreds of years old. The organization I worked for had over a three hundred year history. And they're well organized. But they're also extremely traditional and in some sense probably stuck in their ways. Hopefully not so much these days anymore that was thirty years ago that I worked for them.

But it became quite clear that I was unlikely to ever lead an organization like that. And I'm not saying that everybody should lead an organization. I think some people should not lead an organization. But I was made aware that as a mixed-blooded half Japanese individual, who did not join the company in Tokyo and did not go to one of several select Japanese universities that I would never reach that level, would never have the opportunity to reach that level of leadership in that organization. And I recalled the words of one of my professors and he said, excuse me just one second I'm going to have to cough who said if you don't at least have the opportunity to become president or CEO then it maybe is time to leave. So I took a bit of a risk at the time. We had a baby on the way and my wife and so it was a bit of a risk but I quit that job.

I resigned from that job and started my own mini trading company and also called myself a consultant, an import export trade consultant. So this is Jon Friesen in his late 20s thinking he was going to do this. And probably a little bit naive in retrospect. But I started out trying this and eventually I was able to find a consultancy, a consultant type job for a client with a construction and development company. So I got some insight into the business that I'm in right now through that activity.

So here's a business major from Biola University calling himself an import-export trade consultant and being sort of funnelled into an area that I knew nothing about. But after working with this organization and setting up certain partners, Japanese partners and a consortium of Japanese Partners we were working on. So I was the sort of the intermediary, I realized that through a series of events that this is a business that I can do myself personally. So after a number of years I took that step and formed a partnership with somebody who has a long tenure in the construction field and started working together in downtown Vancouver. And that went well for a number of years and but there were some key moments that I've said and hopefully those that are watching this haven't watched everything I've done for LeaderImpact. But there was a key moment when I was concentrating on growing the business, putting out fires, traveling to the various international locations that we were operating out of that I realized that the things that are truly important in life are falling away. That being family and children.

So now I'm at the stage where my 2 sons were toddlers. And I was coming back from a business trip overseas and my wife reminds me sometimes that you know in those years I was gone more than six months a year and you know in aggregate and not at one time. And so I was coming down from customs and my boys looked at me and they looked at the man behind me. And I realized that these boys didn't know who their dad was anymore simply because they were young and I'm not there for them. So that was an incredible shock. I talk about it a lot but my wife and I still reflect on it quite a bit and that this notion that when you allow yourself to believe the lie that you're doing it all for your family and your sacrifices are all for your family, you're actually robbing your family of the things they need most, which is time. They need you, your attention, your time, your involvement, your love. And if you're gone, you can't do that full stop.

### **Lisa Peters**

There's a lot of conversation just about leadership starts at home and if don't have it together at home it's going to fall apart and you clearly had that happen. I can't imagine coming down the escalator and your kids are like. Where's my dad? Yeah, that's tough.

### **Jon Friesen**

So that marked a change. It took two more years before we were able to wind everything up that I was doing. So I sold out that organization and we moved to Grand Cayman on the Cayman Islands. Where I concentrated on simply being a good father and a good husband. So

we would make lunch together for the kids. I take him to school. I pick them up after school. I play with them. We were lucky enough to live on a beach. And we did that spent a lot of afternoons fishing you know and trying to re...It wasn't too late. The kids were still little and so I was able to rebuild those kinds of relationships with my boys.

Even today, I think I can see the benefit there. We mentioned earlier on that every Friday afternoon is my play date with my 4-year-old granddaughter. And I want to be that kind of a grandfather as well. I want to be present. Make that a priority and don't ever say business is more important. Now there are sometimes when you just have to do something for work and that's perfectly fine, but it better be very important and it can't be consistently important from week to week.

### **Lisa Peters**

I think there are some people who are listening going, Yeah, but you know you're older now you can reflect on that and you can take time away. Some people are looking at it and they don't have the money and they have to work hard and they've got caught up in this money trap. And I don't know if you have any advice for no like you have to step back and sometimes you just get so wrapped up and you don't know how to get out.

### **Jon Friesen**

So my comment there would be stop telling yourself those lies. And sorry to sound so direct. But there is no money trap. You can concentrate on the things that are important. You can scale back the lifestyle that you think is important. You can sell everything and move somewhere. You can live in a maybe a cheaper house. But if you think that you're working hard and it's for your family and your family will benefit I think there might be some recalibration there that's necessary. I hate to say it but if you think it's all about the money you will very quickly get to the point where your relationships are ragged and you won't be able to earn your money either.

So when I see others start living an extremely unhappy family life, how do you think that affects their production when they're at work? How do their bosses see them? Are they really showing up at their best? And I'm willing to say no, it's not true. And in our organization, I'm constantly reminding people that your family and your time with your family is more important than your time at work. And don't ever make the work a priority. And I really mean that because I can see how much more effective my staff members are if they have a happy family life. And the opposite also happens to be true. So with a long view, even if it were all about trying to be the best employee you can, you should still try to make your family a priority.

### **Lisa Peters**

Yeah. It's so important. You talked a little bit about money and I remember being with a business coach. And she sort of threw it at me. She wasn't a Christian and she said, You

believe that money is the root of all evil. And she kept on this. I'm like no, no money's not the root. It's the love of money that is the root of all evil. It's this love and this obsession. Because I want people who are listening, money is not the problem. It's this drive and this thirst and this you will do it above anything. So I appreciate you just sharing that and going a little deeper and being forward. Like make the change. You can do it. Thank you.

**Jon Friesen**

Yeah, and the other thing is someday I think I've been thinking about writing a book and I'm not sure what I'll name it but it has something to do with make it about the thing that is not. And if you think it's about the money, if you think that Mission Group is here to earn as much money as possible I think we're mistaken. I think Mission Group here is to build into a community that benefits from our activity in a very broad way. Community capitalism could be a good or a bad word depending on how you look at it. But the way I mean it is, if our activities here are good, then the entire community benefits financially and in all kinds of other ways. And we are a for profit organization. But if we do it just for the money and being blind to the effect we have on the community, we are not going to be a positive benefit to the communities that we engage with. But we will also not make as much money.

**Lisa Peters**

Yeah I think that's a great point I think people need to find their purpose in life. It has to be bigger than working and a job title and I think that you have to know. And you commented like you build beautiful spaces for families. I've heard you comment that before. And that's so important to understand this is my purpose in life. It's not to make a million. Drive the best car or whatever the material things I'm referring to.

You talk about pivotal moments but any failures and successes I mean we don't learn from our successes. We learn from our failures. Anything to share there?

**Jon Friesen**

So true. Yeah, so there was that one kind of anecdotal story I shared about coming down the walkway from Vancouver International airport that was a clear failure. And that's the one I really like to point to and once again it was all about putting the emphasis on the work, the time you spend at work and the money that you make or don't make at work. And so that can lead to a cascading set of failures with marriage, parenthood, career choice, all those kinds of things. So I would simply point out that was a big one, a very large one. I'm sure there have been many, many others and some I'm so embarrassed I can't say it in a place like this. But that's a very significant one.

Smaller failures though I would be reflecting early on that some people often ask, How did you get here and what are the things that that that you wish you would have done? Or in other words failures. When I was early on in my career, I did often think that I probably have it's a set of it's is definitely as hubris but this level of arrogance that says I have all the answers, if not I

can figure them out on my own and I'm going to forge forward with this business, my way. I think that very quickly life and business lessons will knock those corners off. And now if I were to do it all over again I hope I would say I need to rely on my coaches and mentors. I need to know that learning is lifelong. And if I don't learn these lessons and if I don't engage these individuals as my superiors, and my mentors, and my coaches, I won't achieve the level of business acumen that I otherwise could. And so early on I often thought I've got it all and I don't need any help. Now I realize today that I need more help than ever. I'm constantly looking for people who can be my mentors. And that seems a little counterintuitive but I think that's kind of a mistake slash lesson that we can all learn early on. Never too late though.

### **Lisa Peters**

No, it is never too late to ever stop learning. I think of, this whole what's going on in the world right now. And there's a great resignation. I was just online today and I watched a CEO retire from somewhere. I don't know his story but we're moving into a different place right now and as the world begins to open up. I had another conversation and just I've I stepped back and go I don't know if I'm ready to get out there and continue on.

I love listening to your story. We're going to transition a bit because I know I have some great questions coming up for you, but in our podcast we always talk about the spiritual journey and I want you to talk about this. You were born in Japan. So were you born into a spiritual family? Your dad was a missionary or called to be a missionary. So just tell us a little bit about your spiritual journey.

### **Jon Friesen**

Yeah, well you know it's pretty obvious that I was going to church from before I was born. But that doesn't teach anyone anything right? You have to know it for yourself personally. So I suppose I was a little bit independent and rebellious in my earlier years. I remember sitting in chapel at the Christian boarding school that I went to in Tokyo. And in those days they used to love embarrassing people into Christianity so they would say if you've given your heart to Jesus raise your hands. And you'd almost feel embarrassed if you didn't. I know the purpose was to make you raise your hand so that you wouldn't feel somehow isolated. But I was always proud not to be one of those bad kids in the back with all the other bad kids slouching down and not raising their hands just because they didn't want to you know sell out to the man or whatever it was. And so you know I was that kid.

But there was clearly a pivotal moment I guess if you actually realize that all of this gobbledy goop that had been feeding in your whole life might actually be true and you feel it from the inside out and everything about you just tells you this better not be ignored. It came later on in high school. I was probably 16 or 17 and I was working at a Bible camp not because I necessarily bought into the rhetoric but it was a job and I kind of enjoyed the surroundings.

But there was just a moment there watching all these Japanese counselors praying and early in the morning and thinking to myself. You know this spirit is in this room. The reality of what we call the Holy Spirit was so visceral and somehow at that moment I thought you know there's no point in just being obstinate. There's a true meaning here and it's time that I just accept it. It's not really so much me coming up with a narrative that I can accept. It's accepting the reality around you that God is real that I need to pay attention to this if I expect to be part of the universe as it's actually been put together by the Creator.

So that's a very key moment that I think about all the time. But interestingly whenever I'm in contact with other believers it keeps reminding me over and over again that this reality that we call faith is not just a tradition. People often say ask me the question, and maybe I'm putting this in your mouth a little bit Lisa, but if you ask me the question, How do you put together your faith and business? How does your faith work together?

**Lisa Peters**

That was the next question! Yeah.

32:47.88

**Jon Friesen**

What was it? Okay, perfect. I'm looking at your piece of paper. If somebody asked me that question I'd say how can you put together your faith and your work? You are who you are. You can only respond according to your experience. And if my experience is centered in the faith of that as a believer in the saving power of Jesus, then that better affect everything I do. It wouldn't matter if I go to Starbucks and order a coffee or if I come to work or if I'm speaking to my wife or my granddaughter I better be the same guy all the time. And so it's not a question of integrating anything it's just living out what I know to be true wherever I go. So I don't try to join the evil world of business with the good world of Christianity. I think that I'm a believer. I can only see the world the way I see it. And I have to live and respond that way to the best of my abilities and that's all there is to integration and just simply living what I am just like any other CEO would.

**Lisa Peters**

So what are some of those values you hold as a Christian that you take into your business?

**Jon Friesen**

Well, you know, interestingly enough people all always seem to quite often assume that Christian principles would be contrary to good business outcomes. Where Christian principles yield opposite builds of business outcomes. But if you simply stated what are the main things that should define every believer? It's simple things like do what you say you're going to do. Live up to your commitments. Tell the truth. Be honest. It's okay to be transparent. We are fallen individuals. If you pretend like you're not those around you will simply conclude that either you are self-deluded or you are profoundly dishonest because they already know you're

flawed right? And so why not and admit it when you make a mistake and say you're really sorry and mean it. Treat others with respect in truth. And wouldn't you rather do business with somebody that simply tells you the truth? Admits it when they made a mistake but they fix it. And everything they say you know is genuine and honest. And those are the kind of ways... That's how I expect to be treated and that is certainly how I hope I treat everyone around me. And I hope that's the culture that our organization holds true all the time. As far as I can see we seem to do a pretty good job almost all the time.

**Lisa Peters**

Well leadership starts up here.

**Jon Friesen**

That's right.

**Lisa Peters**

I don't think you need to tell anyone you're a Christian or have across in the background. It's exactly what you said, it's how you treat people. It's you're going to you do what you say you're going to do. Even if the lights are out or there's no one there, you still act with good character. You don't have to tell me I can see it.

So I want to ask you, I was watching an interview, I don't know how long ago it was, but you had an incident and I sort of prepped you that I was going to ask you about this because I wanted to make sure. But you had an accident on your site in July 2021, so not that long ago, where a crane fell and killed 5 people and I'm incredibly sorry for your loss. My question comes from an interview I heard you do about that. In your interview at the end you spoke of how reflecting back you see how God had prepared your team six months in advance of this accident. You had gone through the exercise of preparing a risk assessment. You had you know you had updated your insurance providers. You had hired some key people. You had a solid culture. And I loved hearing that because I feel like God had set you up. If this was going to happen to anyone, this incident, it happened to you, your team was prepared and it shouldn't happen to anyone but it happened to you. So if anyone wants to hear that interview I'm sure they can find it. But my question for you was, how did you take care of your team after this accident?

**Jon Friesen**

Yeah, so in some way we're still taking care of our team and those most affected around us. Incidents like this don't go away in a few months. So this is this happened on July 12th of last summer (2021). And how did we take care of our team? The first thing we did was, the people who were most affected were our men and women down on our construction sites that were right there. Those individuals who perished were not our employees. They were employees of a subcontractor in charge of dismantling the crane.

And so when it all happened there was a very difficult period of time, especially for those people on our own construction sites. Those members of our own teams that knew these individuals and had been working with them for months. And so we immediately brought in professional counselors for those individuals to meet with as groups and individually. There are still a few of us who are engaging with professional counselors. They've got what anybody would call PTSD and so we dealt with them with compassion. We also knew that there was going to be financial ramifications to an accident like this. And let them know that nobody's variable pay, in other words bonuses, that are a result of profitability or hitting budgets and so on will be affected as a result of this. That building closings and the financial results of the closings will be as though the accident had never happened because it's not their fault. And to be penalized financially for that would be completely incorrect and in my opinion unethical although probably legal.

And so everybody surrounding this whole incident we did the best we can and still continue to show as much compassion. Some individuals are traumatized to the level that they simply couldn't come to work for a long period of time so we give them that time. And when things like this go on the number one thing is how do you take care of your team and show compassion. Show love to the individuals that are affected by this and frankly even those of us who are in this office and never went to the site after that happened were deeply affected.

It's a hugely dark period for our organization. But depending on how we're able to respond to this sort of thing publicly as well as internally defines who you are and it's what we often call brand. So we've recently been discussing this brand question and brand assessment. And we believe that our brand even after something so disastrous today is stronger than it was before the accident. And so I hate to say it because no one would ever want to take an opportunity of gaining from something this disastrous, but there are always things to learn and ways to get better when the tough things happen in life. And I know our conversation is a little bit about differentiators. Differentiators are so often born of calamity or trauma or things that sort of take you outside of the box. Baggage if you want to call it that. And so are extremely disadvantageous incidents like this they can make us stronger and better based on the strength that God can give us and how we respond to it as humans, as people who love other humans, people who care deeply about how others or how others are doing in the face of this kind of calamity. And so it's what it's really whatever it takes.

### **Lisa Peters**

Thank you for sharing and my question though comes back to you and I think leaders take care of their teams and they take care of everyone and sometimes being a leader is very lonely. So my question is who takes care of Jonathan Friesen?

### **Jon Friesen**

Who takes care of Jonathan Friesen? While I think that there's a couple answers to that. First of all and I try to be less guarded than a lot of folks think the CEO should be. So one of the

practices that we have with our lead team, so myself and all my direct reports mostly vice president level people in our organization, we do a daily huddle like every single morning. At a quarter to nine we meet. It's called a standup. You're not allowed to sit down because it's going to be short. End everybody goes in out in a room and just speaks of whatever there is top of mind is at that moment. And it could be a business item or a personal item. And one thing I always try to show in there is a level of transparency right? So you know there's of course you know limits as a leader to be exactly how transparent you can be. But if you got something that's bugging or bothering you or something that's getting you down, well then it's okay to talk about that there. And if I can do it then so can everybody else. So my leadership style is all about honesty and transparency. But you can't have one without the other and without both of those things trust could never be built in an organization. And that's one thing.

I also belong to a very solid peer group of CEOs out of Vancouver. And it's called High Impact Labs. But this group of CEOs, we operate with this thing we describe as the cone of silence. I don't know if you remember, Get Smart. Might be before your days. An old TV series. I remember back when we come came to Canada now and then. But the cone of silence simply means whatever gets said in there doesn't get repeated. And so you've got CEOs of significant organizations in British Columbia, most of them are global. Can say you know I'm feeling really burnt out and I don't know how I'm going to continue. That's okay to say that and you get the support of other leaders, corporate leaders who can share common experiences to help bolster those individuals who are suffering. So I think it's very important for all of us to have a mentor/peer group.

But if you are transparent, those around you those who report to you, those who you report to, your board of directors, your chairman they can all be such great resources. But I will say the number one support I have is my wife. There's a safeness and a sanctuary there where I can express anxieties without being judged. There's no corrective measures that get spelt out there. So we usually we all have our own...We know what the corrective measures should be or they are. But just to be able to express them out loud in those 3 different settings with my peer group at work, with my peer group which is outside of work, and with my own family I feel extremely well supported.

### **Lisa Peters**

Which is a great transition to LeaderImpact question. How have you been involved in LeaderImpact groups or LeaderImpact?

### **Jon Friesen**

Right now I'm not involved in a LeaderImpact group. That might not be quite what you were looking for. But we finished right before Christmas a group that we were holding in our office. Was a very good experience but it was a book study. The book ended and I'm kind of waiting for the next book study to start up again because I really enjoy those. They were mostly

members of our own team our own Mission Group team but several individuals, 3 or 4 were from the exterior as well. So you know those are very, very good experiences.

I'm also involved in another men's group which is different from a LeaderImpact group. I know this is a LeaderImpact video and if those of you watching would like to be involved in a LeaderImpact group I would highly encourage it. It's a great way to learn about faith. And integration of faith and daily life including business. But I would say any group that is faith-based will have huge benefits.

**Lisa Peters**

I agree. Nice work. So we're almost at the end but I have 2 more questions to which I ask all my guests. And I look forward to your answer on this one. So LeaderImpact is dedicated to making a lasting or to leaders having a lasting impact. And as you continue to move through your own journey how have you considered or have you considered what you want your faith legacy to be when you leave this world?

**Jon Friesen**

Yeah that's a good one. So I changed my answer 2 or 3 times since you first opposed it a while back. Well I think it simplifies down to just one basic thing. That I would like when I'm gone to know that my children and my granddaughter have a meaningful relationship with God.

**Lisa Peters**

I love that answer because last week I interviewed a Mennonite couple that was just honoured with the Paul Harris fellow at a Rotary. They said exactly the same thing as you and they're very strong Mennonites. They said exactly and I had a feeling that's what you were going to say. Like I can't wait so it's a great answer.

**Jon Friesen**

What's yours?

**Lisa Peters**

When I heard that from Otto and Florence, anything I'm involved in and again this may change because you're putting me on spot, anything when I am involved in something I hope it continues. And I hope I'm raising my children that they go on to do great things. And it was funny because my father-in-law was there when I was interviewing Otto and Florence and my father-in-law his grandkids are amazing children. And they participated in a silent auction for a Rotary fundraiser and I think 8 of his grandchildren all purchased items to support Rotary which supports Canadian mental health and the ripple effect program. We grew up in Rotary. And so we're continuing that. So I kind of expect that that answer from you is so perfect. So my final question for you is what brings you the greatest joy?

**Jon Friesen**

What brings me the greatest joy? When I walk into my place of work or at home, if I feel a sense of cohesion and unity then that makes me so happy. So it's not about a thing. It's not even about a vacation or an experience. It's just that sense of cohesion and unity when you know that everybody is pulling in the same direction. They're all bought in and there's no detractors. And there's something about walking into a room like that or an organization like that and it's not always that way. I'm not trying to pretend like that's my life. But when this happens and frankly, right now is a time like that for our organization but it's not always like that. And it's like that right now at home. So I'm a happy camper right now because I have a sense of overwhelming unity that I will say is really a result of the divine is really what we're talking about.

**Lisa Peters**

Oh my cheeks hurt from smiling. That's a great answer. Yeah I could I could feel it when you walk in that joy that you get. So thank you. Well I want to thank you. This ends our podcast this ends our time with you Jon. And we hope everyone listening has enjoyed it. But thank you for taking the time I know you're a busy guy. We had some problems getting together. So I'm so glad that it finally worked. So thank you. Now if anyone wants to engage with you would you like him to go to [missiongroup.ca](http://missiongroup.ca) or you know how would you like people to contact you if that works.

**Jon Friesen**

Yeah so you know I'm happy to engage anybody who would like to my email address at work is [jfriesenATmissiongroup.ca](mailto:jfriesenATmissiongroup.ca). If you happen to forget that email address just go to our website. If you just do a Google search under Mission Group Kelowna or just Mission Group, it should come up and you can leave something in the general mailbox. It'll definitely get to me but [jfriesenATmissiongroup.ca](mailto:jfriesenATmissiongroup.ca). Please feel free to email. My pleasure.

**Lisa Peters**

You're the best. Thank you Jon for joining us today. Love it.

**Jon Friesen**

My pleasure.

**Lisa Peters**

Well this ends our podcast with Jon we hope you enjoyed our time together and thank you again for joining us. Now if you're part of LeaderImpact, you can always discuss or share this podcast with your group. And if you're not yet in a LeaderImpact group we would love to have you. So check out our groups available in Canada at [LeaderImpact.ca](http://LeaderImpact.ca) or if you're listening from anywhere else in the world check out [LeaderImpact.com](http://LeaderImpact.com) or get in touch with us by email [info@LeaderImpact.com](mailto:info@LeaderImpact.com) and we will connect you. And if you like this podcast please leave us

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