

LeaderImpact Podcast Ep. 16 John Bakker - Reimagine Your Work

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 or on social media @leaderimpact. And if you're listening from outside of Canada check out our website at leaderimpact.com.

I'm your host Lisa Peters and our guest today is John Bakker. John has 25 years of experience in the auto industry as an engineer, manufacturer and leader. In 2009, John became an entrepreneur and founded Bakker Tailored Staffing, a niche recruiting and staffing firm that has earned a reputation for service, reliability, and professionalism. In 2020, after a conversation with a not-for-profit leader struggling with the impact of the pandemic, John launched Bakker Business Services, a division focusing on helping not-for-profits and small mid-size businesses thrive. As a leader, one of John's more significant accomplishments was the formation of a 100 person project team that successfully launched a high-visibility project with a total capital expenditure of more than \$600,000,000.

Outside the office, John spends his time working with several local, national, and international not-for-profit organizations. He has served as a mentor, advisor, and speaker, board director, and chair. He is known for his thoughtful, caring, and strategic advice. John is a professional engineer, a graduate of Queens University School Of Engineering, and holds an executive MBA University of Toronto, Rotman School Of Management.

Join us now for a conversation with John on how you can reimagine your work through redemptive entrepreneurship: A place of truth, grace, and connectedness in your personal, professional, and spiritual journey.

Thanks for joining us, John.

John Bakker

So glad to be here Lisa.

Lisa Peters

If anyone is watching us on YouTube and I mean if you're listening to us, you didn't get to see your profile picture. Okay, that was the best ever. You're scuba diving!

John Bakker

My wife took that when I came out of the water there in February when I was diving. And she had to show the kids that I actually did go. I dove back in if you would have it because I was out of it for a few years.

Lisa Peters

Well, I think it's the best headshot I've had to date and definitely, I hope you use it everywhere because it's a conversation starter. It's so good. Do you scuba dive a lot?

John Bakker

I've done 32 dives I think which is not a lot. I know people here that do 100 dives a year. But for me I'm a bit of a sissy, I only like the really nice, warm water in the Caribbean that's clear. It's too cold up here. So no, I tend to do it on vacations and I have to balance it with how much time I am going to be away with my wife versus diving on the coral reef. But I try to dive every year when we go down.

Lisa Peters

I guess she needs to take up Scuba diving.

John Bakker

Yeah, we've had that conversation. It didn't go well.

Lisa Peters

Oh all right then! So we've already started a little bit about yourself but tell us more. People loved to hear a little bit more about your personal life. The pivotal moments that have sort of shaped you, so take it away.

John Bakker

Oh man, there's so many things that I could share. But I think one of the things that just tells a little bit about me as a person, I actually was born into a Canadian family. It was a church-going family back in, I won't say how many years ago, but it was in the Hamilton area. So my life has been mostly in Ontario. I did actually live for 7 years in the United States and Michigan when my dad was going to school.

But yeah, I was really shaped by a lot of different things and I guess my story would be one of my personality is one. Where if you track with the Enneagram, it's probably one of the better ones that I love, I'm an Enneagram 8 which is really somebody likes to create stuff and do big things. And then I've got Enneagram 1 and 3, which are tied for second place. Enneagram 3 is a love to be engaged with people and love the respect and I need the feedback of people. And 1 is really about detail and so on. That's just a little bit about my personality.

I really was trained and worked as an engineer but my heart has always been entrepreneurship and also has been in business. So I didn't stay actually practice engineering for very long and quickly moved into management. And then got frustrated in the corporation with all the things that I couldn't do because of how corporations work.

I've been married to my wife Wendy for, we're going to have our 42nd anniversary actually in a month, and we've got 3 wonderful kids. They're all adults. We have two daughters and a son Rachel, Alicia, and Derek, and then we have 2 sons-in-law. And but those are great, but what's really great is our three grandkids we have Fenna, William, and Sophie. William and Sophie are the latest editions. They're both going to turn 4, they're twins, which is a really interesting thing. It just adds a ton of value in our lives.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, and you've really got to work hard to find time. To me because that's what's important is you get to an older age I got to spend time with my grandkids.

John Bakker

Yeah, one of the ways that we actually tried to work around that, I'm always looking for ways, and drives my family and my wife crazy sometimes, actually a lot of times, but it's we bought this property north of Kingston, I live in Kingston, my wife and I are downtown Kingston. And we have a property north of Kingston and we invited our oldest daughter and her husband to be owners in the property. So it's actually a home with a full basement apartment. So that's their cottage. Upstairs is ours and we've got a bunch of land. But that's really cool because he's got an excavating company too. He gets to do all kinds of great work for a pretty low cost. But we get to hang out with our grandkids on a regular basis and then have the rest of our family join us. So we've created a family compound just so that we can spend more time together.

Lisa Peters

That's pretty good. So I have to ask, how did you move from, I mean you were 25 years, in the auto industry as an engineer, how did you move to well how did you move to a completely new industry where staffing and training of staff like how did you get there?

John Bakker

Most people that knew me back early on my career, if they ever found out that I actually had like a staffing, people-based company, they'd go, No, not John. And because really, that's a really great question because it was about my old personal transformation and the things that happened to me and the things that I've had to experience.

But I guess it starts off with the fact that I had a lot of dysfunction in my family. And I know I'm going backwards a little bit. My mom died when I was 14. My dad died when I was 30. My dad

had lost his sister at 28. But my dad didn't manage my mom's passing very well at all. And so we have a lot of dysfunction in our family I know no one else has that. (Laughing) But we do.

But one of the things it really did for me though is that we moved around a lot as well. And one of the things that I found is that I was, I would say, I was relationally challenged early on and I was always focusing on that level one or the Enneagram 1 thing where I had to be right and precise and well, that's not quite right. Obviously, that doesn't do a great thing for your relationships but one of the things that I found is that if I worked really hard, and I know I could, I could get success to be accepted. Acceptance was one of the things I struggled with. And so one of the things that I really learned is that I could gain acceptance through success. So that actually became probably my core driver. And it was really kind of like my main compass, if you will, my main spiritual driver really. It would be like what Tim Keller calls counterfeit gods in his book with the same name.

So anyway yeah so I worked really hard and there was just a whole journey about how I actually got into high school or how I actually got into university. It was kind of interesting because university or engineering requires you to have pretty good marks in the area of math and science. I was really not having it when I left grade 12. Bad attitude. I had a D in math. And three years later I got accepted into all 3 universities but, there was a transformation there where I had, I was living on my own. My parents, my family had moved on to another city. So early on I was living on my own and I had to really apply myself and learn a ton of stuff in a short period of time and I found out I could do it.

But anyway, what really happened is that I had always wanted to do something more. I've always been a real purpose-driven person. I really struggled with the politics and the big corporation I worked for a very major automaker. I had a lot of very significant opportunities and jobs there that I'm very thankful for that I learned a ton from but it was never enough right? And so I went and got my MBA halfway through, but I did it in a nonstandard way. It wasn't the official corporate way and I went the executive way. And it was really just I wanted to move beyond what I had and I had that golden handcuffs right? It was just you're locked in you've got too many obligations. And really the biggest thing is, it's really I don't think I really had the courage to do...My wife was there for me, she was an incredible support all through the crazy stuff I did.

But what happened in 2008 was that was taken care of for me because at that point it was like we're told the plant's closing. And so I worked in an automotive assembly plant. I had a lot of responsibilities in the US and did a lot of work into the US as well with the role that I had. But I distinctly remember, we were like one of the top plants in North America, and we went from like top 1 or 2, to closed in a year went from 320,000 vehicles a year to zero. And that was just all caught up in that crazy time that happened in 2008, and 2009 that everybody else really struggled with too. But that actually started probably what was the deepest journey in my life. Where I had to...basically all the things that I had held dear were starting to get stripped away.

I had a great plan I had spreadsheets like you can't believe with respect to how things are going to work out financially. (They) Weren't quite working out the plan but boy, I had a lot of detail. And the thing is that I was doing it on my own, always doing it on my own and I realized that.

And one of the things that got going through that journey was I really had to learn what does it look like to move from focusing and prioritizing outcomes to focusing and prioritizing relationships. So that was a really deep valley. Like I said and not only did a struggle with the whole potential bankruptcy and all the pension stuff and all the things that were handcuffing me were just falling away. And then on top of it, Wendy actually contracted cancer and but thankfully she's been fully healed now for about a dozen years but that all happened all at the same time. And I did a lot of fighting and a lot of wrestling with God, if you will, through that process. But it was actually one of the best experiences in my life that I never hope to do again and looking backward.

But anyway the cool thing about it is in 2008, we heard about it, and then 10 days later I was on a plane to Zambia, only because my daughter had been there the year before, two years before and she says, on a mission trip, she was there for six weeks, and she said Dad you got to get out there. You've got to meet these people, It's so amazing. And that never left me. And so in midst of all the kind of their craziness, I put my hand up and I said hey I'll lead a team. Never been there. Never been to Zambia or Africa and just so happened ten days later I am in Zambia processing this latest news. And it was a phenomenal trip that actually started a whole new journey with this organization and continue to be involved with them. Was on the board and everything with them and still lead teams.

But the thing is I received this...Yeah, I call it a vision. And I don't know how people relate to this concept of vision. But it's just this deep-seated purpose that I was going to be able to integrate my personal, professional, and spiritual life in ways, in a business that I never could in a corporation. And by the way, I know that I should have copyrighted that because LeaderImpact now uses that. (Laughing) But I'm serious. That was actually what it was and I came back, just what's this going to look like?

And I thought I was going to build an engineering company and so I actually started to work with a supplier that we had to unpack a major contract for and we schemed a way to sell it back, actually was into the GM Volt plant. That's at the time they were coming up with the electric vehicle. And we got really close to getting it and I didn't have a company yet and I had a \$2,000,000 bid on the table. But that anyways fell apart and I had gone and told everybody and the corporation did full disclosure of what of my plans were and then it's kind of like Okay, what do you do?

And so come time for the point to close and I had to make a decision but I also was privileged to be able to have an opportunity that I had. Somebody that I knew was trying to get me to go

to an opportunity in the Netherlands and also in Italy. My wife liked that one and then there was another one going to the US. And I was only one of a few that were actually offered opportunities like that. I turned them down and I stuck with this vision and started off with just living into this vision that I had. And I borrowed an office from a friend of mine in exchange for doing some consulting help at a general manager level for his business which was also going through a rough transition. And I started in an economic wasteland. And the amazing thing was we tried all kinds of things of what we're going to do, mostly engineering things, but the more I kept hearing it's like no I don't have any engineering projects for you but can you find me a mail wright for two weeks? And in my heart I go are you kidding? Yeah right? We're an engineering company and my mouth said absolutely we can do that for you. And it was a series of those experiences that led us to have a staffing company. And within I would say six or seven months both of those other opportunities had turned to ash for different reasons because the executives had moved on and I would have been exposed and this one actually led to a major contract that we just had renewed for, actually the fourth time. We'll now have this thing for up to 15 years it was been a major contract for us and it's to provide staffing services into the automotive industry. And it's been amazing. So you talk about trust, it was huge. But the thing about trust that I've had to learn, it's not about doubt. It's about I'm going this way with all the doubts that I have in my head but I'm putting a foot in front of the next one, in front of the next one. And it's been an amazing experience. So how did I do staffing? We figured it out. I used to do staffing at the corporation where I'd say I need some people and they'd send me resumes. We pick some, interview some, and hire some. But now we have to figure this whole thing out. And we did that by talking to people and asking people and collaborating with people.

Lisa Peters

I think the amazing thing is it, and John this it doesn't happen on your time.

John Bakker

Oh no.

Lisa Peters

It's on someone else's time and it will happen if it's meant to happen. It will come. And so well congratulations on Bakker Tailored Staffing and then you went into Bakker Business Services. but I want to talk to you about Covid-19. uring time you began working on a new enterprise and I want you to tell us more about it.

John Bakker

Yeah, that was kind of interesting. We had gone through a couple of major shocks. So in 2018, we heard we were losing our largest client by the end of the year. We figured that was going to be about a 50% reduction and in the, sorry was in...we heard about in 2018. It actually showed up...it was in 2019 the end of 2019. And so we had a significant reduction in revenue. And then Covid happened. And it's like oh my goodness I guess I'm meant to go fishing or

something. But we've spent a lot of time in culture, and I was just so proud of our team just on how we pivoted and the things that we did because it was mind-boggling how our team responded.

But here's the thing is that I was really of a sense Okay, we need to diversify away from just what we're doing. And we are predominantly a contract staffing company which means that we actually are the employer of record. We hire professionals and source them into our clients for engineering and other types of contracts. But they provide services to the client, we're the employer record. Just a typical contract staffing firm. But one of the things that we do really well is we do admin and we do back office and we do payroll and the culture and our values are such that we see it as a broken promise if we don't pay people correctly. So we basically have zero payroll defects. And we've had payrolls in excess of \$500,000, actually pushing even higher than that now, every two weeks. So there's a lot of volume that we're doing.

And so we heard from a not-for-profit leader, he was a friend of mine that I had. We developed a relationship and shared Raptor tickets with. A young guy is in his thirties and he had a vibrant ministry growing it was really serving people, and communities with some amazing sports camps, particularly for those that just can't afford the standard stuff. And he was going the sky's falling in because of Covid. So we talked about that. And then there was another... There was a document that he shared with me from an organization called Praxis Labs in the United States. And it really talks about the fact that we were not just in for a winter snowstorm. We were not just in for a blizzard. We were actually in for a mini ice age. And they talked about that and they processed that and said what does that look like and how do we respond to that? And that was actually really formative for me and my thinking together with my friend Brian's dilemma. And so basically he said I have to cut costs. What if you take over all my back office and bookkeeping? You guys know how to do that really well. And he says oh by the way I know a ton of organizations that would have that. Hmm, interesting. So we did. And it started to grow.

And so we started off with back office and payroll services. And basically, we're saying, Hey we want to come alongside. We want to partner with you as long as you're a real fit for us from a value and a mission standpoint. And it's like you just go focus on your mission. We want to take care of all the stuff that you have to do but don't want to do but you really got to do. And that's where the idea started and it's just got huge traction. And as we've been building this we've been talking with our clients. We intentionally go out there and assess where they're at. And they're going, Well yeah, but can you do grant writing? And can you do strategy? And can you do IT? It's really all the essentials that they are under pressure to do and do well, but it's not why they signed up for it. Most people don't sign up to do that in a not-for-profit. They're pumped about the mission. So yeah, so we want to come from behind, underneath and we're invisible. And it's been a real privilege to be able to do that. But yeah, it's taken off beyond our expectations.

Lisa Peters

Amazing. So, this Praxis that you talked about, when I looked up the website, it takes it to redemptive entrepreneurship. So I want to talk a little bit about that because I hadn't heard of this. So it starts off with this redemptive frame. So start there because from what I kind of got, my notes it overlays three ways to work with three dimensions of work.

John Bakker

It's been so cool that I ran into them and now I'm actually part of a redemptive entrepreneurship community for the last while here in Canada, which I'm really, really benefiting from. But 1 of the things that I found out is that it actually gave me language and a framework for thinking that I've wanted for the last thirteen years. And really what one of the things they talk about is they said there's really, and they said there's really three different types of ways to work. Ways to work are, you can say it as there are three different types of organizations but an organization is really just a way to organize people to do stuff.

So basically just three ways. One of them is as exploitive organizations. In other words, it's about zero-sum. It's like I win you lose. And it's about I'm going to do whatever I have to do to achieve my goals. The second one is what they call ethical, the ethical organization. It's about doing good and it's about leaning into things that are happening and to do good and to be good is really kind of what it is and you respect people as opposed to exploit them. But you still, you're still really focused on your own agenda. The third form is what you call the redemptive form. And the redemptive form is about being intentional about stepping into places of injustice or orienting your strategies around, Where is there injustice or brokenness or where is there something that's just unfair? Or yeah, those are a number of the things that you say that actually now start to animate your thinking but it comes from a leadership intent that's not so much about I when you lose or I win, you win. It's more about I sacrifice and you benefit and it comes from something where you really are focused on the other, recognizing that that's the place actually where abundance really happens as opposed to scarcity which is so common. But they talk about the three different dimensions. There's really it's about strategy and which is the what you do. It's operations which is how you do it which is really your culture and how you deal with people. And then there's the leadership intent which is really the why and Simon Sinek talks about this all the time. And he calls it the what, the how, and the why in his stuff that he talks about *Start with Why* it's the same thing.

Lisa Peters

I feel, and it's because we continue to use this word intentional. And I find that everyone is working so hard to have intentional leadership. It has to be. You have to be intentional. And so I'd never heard the word redemptive entrepreneurship. That word is new to me.

John Bakker

Well, it's a very old word and it's about redeeming something. It's about restoring and there are so many beautiful metaphors that we can look at but what does it look like to redeem

something and bring no health or vibrancy or beauty or fairness or...So many things are broken and we can rail against it. But it's like, All right, what can we do to make the world just a little more beautiful after we've been there. And that's part of redeeming it.

So one of the things that I found it when I started a staffing business that I had no idea about I've quickly realized it's like I don't like this business because it's so exploitive and everybody's being hustled and it's like everybody's got your hand in your pocket. But as I understood it, I understood why and I understood the incredible pressure on the people that worked in it and most of those people were on commissions only and they were really under a lot of pressure so they had to do that. So one of the things that we said for our vision for our company was that we just want to leave the world or we actually want to make an impact so that we've improved the reputation of the staffing industry just a little bit through the experience that they've had with us.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, it's a...I think people if anyone's listening, I think we want to know how can we become a redemptive entrepreneur or how can we put this in our business or really looking to you for...And I think you're struggling as much every day as maybe that to make that change. Would that sound right?

John Bakker

Oh, it is. Oh, it is. In fact, one of the things that we're struggling with is when you make those kinds of choices, and this is where the how gets really important I think, how the culture that you have is so vital it needs to be like your touchstone. And it's something that I've been focused on for many years. And the how is about how do you show up? What are the core values? And those are not aspirational values where I think this is what I am or what I want to be. This is, what do other people say about me right when I'm not there. What's my reputation? And I think you have to really think about what are the core values and what are the things you want to be known for and then everything has to be aligned with that. But what's beautiful though, and also very challenging, is that when you're hiring staff or when you're trying to connect with a client you think about all the problems you have. Often it's because there's a values misfit or misalignment. So if you are really wanting to prioritize relationships first, and we sign up for a client that's everything about the buck. Everything is about money. There's going to be some problems. And why do that?

And the thing is that if you really spend time aligning your relationships in a way where your values and your mission, where there is good alignment, it actually makes for some really fulfilling work. And you start to build this reputation within this pool. Because the thing about culture that I really learned is this is like a magnet. And a magnet needs to do two things. We often think about it attracting but it also needs to repel. You need to be really clear about who you are.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, I think the hard part though, John is, I mean if you if you're not making the money and you get a contract, and it's not, you should be repelling but it's money and that's really because people have got to pay the bills and so do we, I feel like sometimes we sacrifice.

John Bakker

I had a conversation with a young woman in her late 30s just last night, who is a real professional in health care and but she's a real entrepreneur. And the life's getting sucked out of her through the bureaucracy and the rules and especially because of what's happened with the Covid. Just layer upon layer upon layer of policies and procedures that are just sucking the life out of her and she loves to work with developmentally challenged kids and autistic kids. But she's so constrained. And so it's like how do I get out? How do I do this?

And so a big part of it was spent, some time really talking and thinking about what's really important to you. Where do you want to be in 10 years? If you could dream, where would you want to be in 10 years from now? And then what would that look like in 3 years. And then a year. And so you have this kind of this laddering up of your goals. You say, Okay, what's really important for me to get to step one? And then you start to think about, yeah money's important, but here's the thing is that there's a lot of different people around us, and are we trying to do this ourselves?

I did that for many, many years like I said I had spreadsheets galore. But the point is, that if I spent some time talking to people, I'm really pumped about this. What do you think about it? Ask people. Spend time interviewing them and in the field. And it's amazing. I told this young woman, and I said that she wants to do something in this space with respect to helping out families, especially people that are in the lower economic range, find resources for their kids. So it's like spend some time just establishing a social media presence. Spend some time talking to them asking them questions, build relationships. Get to be known as somebody who cares and she can do that in her spare time.

But then it's like you're going to get to a point where you say, All right, how do I now transition? You got to think about what you're learning. What's your living wage? What do you need to do to put bread on the table? Well, there are some things that you can do but you do it often and with your family around you. And sometimes you have to have others contribute but it's building this transition plan and then also having the accountability systems around you to help you stay on it because it's hard to do alone.

But the biggest thing is courage. And that was something I lacked for many years and I remember a friend telling me this when I was considering my options the traditional safe ones were starting my business. He said if you don't believe that you can do this, no one else will because they'll see it in your eyes. And it really is about inviting a team of people around you to help you and ask questions. You're not the smartest person in the room and I'm not either.

Lisa Peters

In a conversation prior to this podcast you talked and I wrote down, It's in our DNA to serve. And I think of this woman that you talked with yesterday and, people that are listening, you have an opportunity. You could go serve in the industry you want as a breakthrough. I mean we need to surround ourselves with people but go into something and serve the people and help.

John Bakker

It's amazing how you break down barriers with kindness. My granddaughter loves to say kindness is a superpower and she's absolutely right. I have another fellow that worked with me in marketing and growth marketing and he always would say curiosity is a superpower. And he's so right because curiosity, you can't be truly curious if you're not humble. If you're humble, you're teachable and then you're going to be able to ask questions in a way where you're actually listening, which is something that we often don't do very well. We're quick to talk and even yell at each other. How well do we listen and show kindness? And it's amazing the walls that break down and it's amazing how people will be attracted to you as a person.

Lisa Peters

You have a very smart granddaughter. (Laughing)

John Bakker

(Laughing) Yeah, she actually is!

Lisa Peters

Earlier you talked about the compass, and we've talked about the moral compass, and this morning, and I'm not even kidding about how things happen, I'm doing a quick study on Proverbs. I marked it here and Proverbs 2 verses 9 and 10 and I'm gonna have to put on my glasses to read this, yeah and it says...aging with glasses. Yes.

John Bakker

You shouldn't need that in your 20s!

Lisa Peters

Thank you! And anyway Proverbs 2 verses 9 and 10 Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will fill you with joy. And that was my study this morning. And I'm like that is just amazing that I'm talking with and so I listened to it on an app and they went into a study and they talked about your compass. I'm like that is funny, I'm having a conversation with John today. That's how things happen in my life.

John Bakker

It happens to me all the time these coincidences

Lisa Peters

It's not coincidental.

John Bakker

It doesn't matter what they are they all keep happening which is cool. But that's one of the things that I really appreciate about being with LeaderImpact, is when they came out with that, and I know I heard it first in a different way. But it truly is when you look at your personal, professional, and your spiritual dimensions of your life like we live in a very secular country where we say oh this spiritual stuff should be put it in a closet. Keep yourself, whatever. But I've traveled in the Middle East and I've traveled to Africa and I've traveled to South America been in Asia but it's amazing it's in so many places, especially in the Middle East. It's like the spiritual dimension of your life is so fundamental.

But anyway, one of the things that I've really found is that as I've matured in life, I realized that my spiritual compass is so important to guide me in the choices that I made with respect to my time, my talent, my finances in the professional and the personal spheres. And we often think well we don't really have a compass and yeah, that's stuff's not for us. But I can tell you everybody has a compass. If you want to find out look at their checkbook and look at their calendar. Those are the ways. How you spend your money and how you spend your time will tell you what your compass is. It will certainly give you some clues.

And the thing is that for me, my compass was I needed to be successful so that I could be accepted. And it was working. But what I also realized was that relationally there was a lot of stuff that was like relational collateral damage. I got what I wanted but there was relational collateral damage. And one of the things that I came to see in retrospect is that because of that link between acceptance and success I flipped it around. And I also started, I didn't accept you unless you were successful and it was an implied thing and it was particularly a problem in some key relationships including with my son. And my son is brilliant but he's still working out his own way just like I had to. And I realized that for too long I was trying to make him successful to truly accept him.

And so that's been a big part of my own journey as I really come to see what's the compass I want to be following? And for me, I went through some very tough times through my 30s and 40s, and it was really in my 49th year that I came to terms with the fact that Jesus is going to be my compass. There's a lot of things I don't know but there are so many things I appreciate about him and how he shows me how to live. What does it look like to be fully human in relationships with people?

And so I've really been on a journey as an apprentice of Jesus. And I really use that as my guide. And it's really cool when I start to find other people to help me process that but it's tough. And that's where sacrifice is. Like there's no other person that ever walked that could, that physically walked on the earth other than Jesus that could demonstrate what sacrifice looks like. So and he says you got to follow me. So as I start to lean into this thing called sacrifice I've had to realize that there's some stuff I need to deal with and I need to unpack. But anyway, that's the journey that I'm on but it now colors all my decisions.

And we're actually going through a process to actually establish three core guiding principles for our new enterprise and we're actually needing to spin it off into a not-for-profit. We're taking what's in the for-profit, we're spinning it off as a not-for-profit here over the next few months, which is interesting. So from a sacrifice standpoint, I'm actually giving away all future profit. I see the value and one of the key things is we want to be Jesus-centered, relationships first, and client-focused. Those are three guiding principles. And what does it look like to do that?

So now, it's like how do we make, how do we make staffing decisions? How do we align with clients? How do we align with other partners? And we're processing that. And we basically have a set of values that boils down to. But a lot of it is, we don't...we're not driven by fear because I've had so many examples of this is that you're driven by faith in what you believe to be true. For me, it's my compass. And I have not been disappointed. But I can tell you many things happen at the eleventh hour so that's part of faith. But it's also that I've learned that I've got to put myself second, as opposed to first, which I did for so many years. And it's amazing how that's transformed my relationships my business, my personal life, and my marriage and I'm on a journey for sure. But that's the thing about actually working it out. You've got to do the tough stuff and you got to do it in the community. You have to have people that you give the approval to say you gotta hold me accountable, including my team.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, that's a great point. Yes. So before we get off the whole sort of professional and redemptive entrepreneurship, I want to mention, I found...there's a book I believe it's on Praxis *The Redemptive Business: A Playbook for Leaders* and it's free online. So if anyone is looking.

John Bakker

Oh yeah, that's a great one and there's also one for redemptive for not-for-profits. So Praxis Labs and the redemptive framework. There is quite a bit of material. There's stuff on Amazon that you can get, but it's just it's amazing and it's something this world needs. There are way too many exploitative companies and ethical is great. But what we need is people stepping into brokenness. One of the things that we're trying to do is we're trying to open up staffing. There's a huge demand for labor. Everybody's struggling. There's also a huge labor source in places around the world where they don't have the same kind of opportunities that we do. So

we're trying to connect the dots. Why? There's an injustice there. There's an unfairness there. There's a need there.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, good. I'm going to transition a bit, you talked a little bit earlier about how you created the integration of personal, professional, and spiritual. You started that.

John Bakker

No no, I heard it. I didn't start it.

Lisa Peters

Well yeah, so I want to ask you a little bit about LeaderImpact because I mean that's why we're here and how did you get involved with LeaderImpact? Are you still involved?

John Bakker

Yeah, I am. I got involved actually in 2009. It was right at the time when I was contemplating am I going to Europe? Am I going to the US? Am I starting my company? And then it was the executive director at the time John Havercroft he came or somebody said you need to go. So I ended up chasing contacts and I ended up in conversation with him and he tried to recruit me as an area leader. And I said sounds really cool, but no, but I'll join a group. And so I did. And what it was amazing, an amazing experience for me. So I was first part of a group in Pickering because that's where our business. That's where I was living. Our business is still anchored there but we deal nationally now. But remember going to the first group and then we had to start we had to get an office. we did that in Whitby which is a little bit further to the east. and we had to find an office that had a big welcoming boardroom in it specifically because of LeaderImpact, that was the intent. And so I did that. We opened it up in 2012. we started a group there and it's been amazing. But I had so much...I made so many friends and had such positive experiences and had so much great counsel and advice as I was starting my business that I knew nothing about. I always worked in a corporation. Yeah, I build big things but always with somebody else's money. Now, it's me, or it's our team. So it's been tremendously powerful. So yeah I was a group leader for many years. Was a city chair for a lot of years. Now actually being on the advisory board nationally and have been a number of global exchanges, were life-transforming for me. Have great friends now in Colombia. Have been there a couple of times. Yeah, and I'm still involved actually in a new venture that I'm working on.

Lisa Peters

Good. So I want to ask you just for those people listening thinking is it for me? Because I think there's because not everybody is a follower of Jesus. There are some seekers in our and I know there are in my own group. They're there because they think, I want more. I like what I'm hearing. I'm still nervous. And do you find that?

John Bakker

There's a...I think it depends on who is the Jesus that you were interested in. And this is one of the things that I always appreciate about Jesus is that he didn't say, he didn't call the religious leaders, it wasn't necessary, well some of them he did but didn't say go figure it all out and get all your ducks in a row and agree with me. No, you said just hang out with me. That's what follow me meant just hang out with me. And as you hang out with him you start to learn about him but we get to do this in community. So in our groups, it's like what does it look like to actually just be inclusive where everybody is welcome and there's a safe place and we truly want to be human with each other. We want to listen. But what does it look like to explore this compass and let's talk about our respective compasses? How is it working for you? How's it working for me? And then we start to share it.

So I look at it, I always loved it to be able to share here, These are the things that I'm learning from Jesus. This is the thing that I've learned from these experiences that I'm having but they're all about things that are life-enriching as a human. And ultimately if you lead with love people are going to step in.

Never forget the young man that I had the opportunity, I've had some really cool experiences, but this fellow, actually he had almost crashed and burned. He had been very successful. And gone very quickly, had success professionally but created problems personally. So we started to self-medicate and he ended up with substance abuse issues. Completely crashed and burned. Lost everything. Almost lost his life. Ended up in prison for selling drugs. And he's got this beautiful story is my birthstone is rock bottom and which is great. So anyway, one of our one of the women in our group is actually on a train. She saw him and she listened to his call seeing the book he was reading time after time they all sit in the same spot on the GO train. And starts up a conversation and said you should really check this group out. And she give him my number and it was really cool to bring him in. So he comes up with all these experiences. He just come from a higher power to the so concept of God but he met Jesus in our group and it was because of a welcome. It was a welcoming place for him and he experienced it in other people. We had atheists do the same thing. People that would self-ident identify as atheists. It's like come on in. And one particular fellow after six weeks he had a prayer request. It's like what?! And it was amazing because God answered that prayer request in an hour. Next week he had another one answered, in the day. All of a sudden his eyes opened up and he looked at his life totally different. And all we were doing is just trying to be real and welcoming and sharing our own experiences.

But it's like we went to another conference...We had an event breakfast and a speaker shared and there was a young professional or was a woman who was a lawyer and I said What did you think of it? She goes, Yeah, the topic was really interesting but what struck me? She says you guys are all full of peace. You got this peace about you. And it's like that's it. And people are drawn to us if we have been transformed. They're drawn to me if I've been transformed if I'm trying to be all together and everything else's like forget it. But I'm being real. We're all

being real around the table and trying to encourage each other and it's like people come like moss to a flame. If that's real yeah like the truth is the truth. It is the truth Jesus is love and it's like we're all as humans attracted to love. So am I loving it out.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, I had a podcast and it was that was so similar. And my guest was very attracted to someone just because she had such peace. And she goes I don't know like what are you doing? Like I want what you have. So I love hearing that story again and again and again. I think it's it.

John Bakker

In spite of the brokenness and the challenges that I have in my life and all warts and so on that I have.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, yeah, because it's because that brokenness is around us and it's no different.

John Bakker

And it's in me. But do you know what, it's about a process and it's about every year I'm just a little bit more of a, I become a little more of that full human being. And that's the thing I truly believe that Jesus came to show us what it means to be fully human in our relationships with God, self, others, and creation. What does that look like? And yeah, the longer I lean into that the more I benefit and hopefully can benefit others.

Lisa Peters

Now you mentioned when the woman was on the train and she saw the guy he was reading a book and whatever time after time or whatever the book was called my question for you though is, do you have a favorite leadership book?

John Bakker

Oh man, I'm sorry I don't have a favorite leadership book I consume books that started way on in my journey and I never lost just this hunger and I actually have about 6 books on the go at once I'm reading 3 right now. So favorite, I would say I'm really pumped about a couple that I'm reading one spiritually and two culturally. The two cultural ones are it's called *Reinventing Organizations* by Frederick Laloux. And it's about how you make this transition from highly structured, corporate-type organizations that are soul sucking into not just team-based but ultimately what they call the teal movement which is really about self-managed teams where we treat each other like adults. And we actually are all invited to be part of it. So that's something that we're working on. But I love the book and I'm rereading it again.

Have another one I love I'm reading on the Netflix culture by Reed Hastings and Aaron Meyer *Rules No Rules (No Rules Rules: Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention)*. That's pretty

fascinating. I don't know if it's sustainable with the amount of money they pay their people but that's quite fascinating.

And the last one that I've got is really a spiritual one. It's some rereading again. It's called *Dismissing Jesus* and that's been something that was really powerful for me so I'm trying to read it again. So sorry it's not the best one. I haven't narrowed the best one!

Lisa Peters

No! Those are all good and it's funny because I think I'm exactly, lately, I have become this I've got three books on the go. And very different books. But I just read a bit of that every day so I get it. But last time we talked, you talked about and I ordered it and I got it. *Didn't See it Coming*.

John Bakker

Oh, that one. That was a good one.

Lisa Peters

Yes, so I just got it. So I'm going to start that one very soon. I'm excited about that.

John Bakker

And you know with that one, it is so important. Here's one of the other things that I've found and I've really been blessed to serve in many relations I have a lot of friends that are in the early 40s. It just seems weird. I'm quite a bit older, two or three years (Laughing), but do you know what I find? There are so many of them whose lives are broken because they've been following a false or compass that's not good for them. And their lives fall apart right around 40. And that book is bang on because it's about what happens in the 30s. Never saw it coming because you're so busy doing stuff and we're all still thinking good of each other and it takes about 10 years and all of a sudden that's it we've had enough. And if you want your eyes open read the book.

Lisa Peters

Yeah, good. Awesome. So that's *Didn't See it Coming: Overcoming the 7 Greatest Challenges that No One Expects and Everyone Experiences* Carrey Nieuwhof. Well, we're going to head into my final 2 questions with you. I ask all my guests and as I mean LeaderImpact is dedicated to having to leaders having a lasting impact. So as you continue to move through your own journey, all the ups and downs, have you considered what you want your faith legacy to be when you leave this world?

John Bakker

I spent some time around the time that I started the business reading the book *Finishing Well* and *Halftime* by Bob Buford. And he talks about what do you want your epitaph to be on your tombstone. What do you want it to say? And for years the thing that's been sticking with me is

he loved well. And if you knew me for many years, I did not love well and a lot of times I still don't. But that's really wanted to say is he loved well because I think it says so much. So I would say that's one of the things that I want to be known for is that he loved.

Lisa Peters

That's lovely and my final question is what brings you the greatest joy.

John Bakker

Yeah, I would say it's seeing my wife's eyes sparkle and a big smile on her face or my grandkids or my kids, the same thing, just seeing the joy on their faces. I would say long slow dinners at the lake on the deck or on the dock. Scuba diving on a coral reef. Early morning Kayak rides on a still lake. Those are all the things that give me joy. There's more but those that come to mind.

Lisa Peters

That's awesome. I think what I love about being part of these podcasts is my cheeks hurt like so much because I'm smiling. And I just love being here and hearing people's stories. And I think I know the story and then I don't know everyone's story. And I hope everyone else enjoys it as much as I do.

John Bakker

And that's a beautiful thing about being curious. There are so many wonderful stories out there. Just got to ask for them.

Lisa Peters

There are yeah I believe that everyone has a story.

John Bakker

They do.

Lisa Peters

So thank you John and that was a great conversation about your life. Your personal, professional, spiritual redemptive entrepreneurship and how you're doing it and still on a journey.

John Bakker

Very much.

Lisa Peters

Thank you. So that ends our podcast with John and we hope I hope everyone listening enjoyed our time but John if anyone wants to engage with you, how can they contact you?

John Bakker

They can come and contact me on LinkedIn John Bakker and it's b-a-k-k-e-r, I've got the Dutch spelling and it's a long story of why it's Baker. But John Bakker is the way to get me on LinkedIn.

Lisa Peters

Well, thank you again, John. Well 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. Check out groups available in Canada at leaderimpact.ca. Or if you're listening from anywhere else in the world, check out leaderimpact.com or get in touch with us by email at info@leaderimpact.com and we will connect you. And if you like this podcast please leave us a comment, give us a rating, or a review. This will help other global leaders find our podcast. Thank you for engaging with us and remember impact starts with you.