

EPIISODE 13: PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

## 3 VITAL QUESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS

DAVID EMERALD WOMELDORFF

CREATOR-IN-CHIEF, *THE POWER OF TED* + *3 VITAL QUESTIONS*

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*“All leadership really starts with self-leadership and the way that we lead our own lives has everything to do with the quality of leadership that we bring to our organizations, frankly our families, our communities, our school system, etc.”*

**David Emerald Womeldorff**

[INTRO]

**[0:00:25.9] LM:** Welcome to [Rise Leaders Radio](#). This podcast focuses on exemplary leadership, the type of leadership that brings about positive, meaningful change and places that matter. We explore how these leaders make things happen and the lessons they learned along the way. I'm your host, LeeAnn Mallory.

My guest today is [David Emerald Womeldorff](#). David is the author of the super-sticky and wildly popular book, *The Power of TED* and his newest book, *3 Vital Questions*. The concepts we talk about are foundational in my work with leaders and teams and go hand-in-glove with the previous conversation I had with [Bob Anderson](#) about [The Leadership Circle Profile](#) and reactive and creative leadership styles.

A lot has changed in our world since this was recorded in February and some of the references to workshops may not be relevant now. I encourage you to check out the website, [3vitalquestions.com](http://3vitalquestions.com) for information on all courses offered by David's company.

Now to the interview.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:01:44.1] LM:** I spent this morning working with a group of leaders who work in the public school system in North Texas. We were focused on the very topics we're going to discuss today, which are how the simple act of directing our attention and being more mindful about how we choose to engage with people and situations makes significant positive changes to the outcomes we get.

I do a lot of work with leaders in the public and private sector, for and non-profit domains and no content that I introduce is stickier and more impactful than the topic that my guest, David Emerald Womeldorff has popularized.

David's got the magic touch when it comes to making complex topics easy to understand and practice. I am amped up from spending the morning with these leaders and could keep going on, but people are tuning in to hear from you, so welcome and thank you for being here.

**[0:02:51.4] DEW:** Oh, my pleasure, LeeAnn. I'm just excited to hear how pumped up you are.

**[0:02:56.0] LM:** Yeah. It's always a high-energy topic. People just really grab right onto it. It's very, very relatable. Your first book was *The Power of TED\** (\**The Empowerment Dynamic*). We're going to spend time today on your most recent book, *3 Vital Questions*, which has much the same content, but it's applied in a different setting.

**[0:03:18.6] DEW:** Correct.

**[0:03:19.2] LM:** I think we would do a huge injustice not to cover the idea of the Drama Triangle and the roles that get played and The Empowerment Dynamic, because it's just so core. I want to make sure we get that in butThe *3 Vital Questions* is what's up. I'm going to toss the ball over to you and just ask you to go.

**[0:03:40.3] DEW:** Sure. Happy to. What I'd say is that we will definitely cover and get into whatever appropriate depth on the Drama Triangle and The Empowerment Dynamic. You're right, *The Power of TED* is a book that was published in 2005. I feel very blessed to say that it continues to sell well. It's

still an active book. *The Power of TED* was really written as a fable on self-leadership, and is in that sense, more of a personal development book, although many organizations and frankly, I know the way that you learned about the work was through the leadership and organizational leadership context.

It got adopted by a number of organizations. It's a book on self-leadership, because my wife, Donna Zajonc and I, and Donna is my business partner, we really hold as a foundational principle that all leadership really starts with self-leadership and that the way that we lead our own lives has everything to do with the quality of leadership that we bring to our organizations, frankly our families, our communities, our school systems, etc.

**[0:04:52.2] LM:** Here, here.

**[0:04:53.5] DEW:** Yeah. Whereas, the *3 Vital Questions* and by the way, the subtitle of that book is *Transforming Workplace Drama*, really brings the same frameworks into a different context that is really positioned for how to apply the ways of thinking, the ways of relating in relationships and ways of taking action, but to really bring it into an organizational leadership context. Let me quickly add that when I talk about leadership, that leadership is not necessarily a place on an organization chart. This is just as relevant to me to a senior leader, who is also a senior manager as it is to someone who's leading the way that they interact with clients and customers, or students that really hold that we all have a leadership role to play in whatever our responsibilities are.

**[0:05:48.7] LM:** Love that. Like you said before, this is also content that's very relevant in our day-to-day relationships with the people we love, with our neighbors, with our communities. It's applicable everywhere and in fact, got its start in the psychotherapeutic domain.

**[0:06:10.8] DEW:** Right. Right. The Drama Triangle is not original to me, although I've renamed it the Dreaded Drama Triangle, because of the toxic nature of the relationship roles and dynamics. It really comes from **Dr. Stephen Karpman**, who in the 1960s was an early student of **Transactional Analysis**. For a lot of us when we learned about it and we'll talk about the roles in a few minutes, really was a blinding flash of the obvious for a lot of us in the sense that once we learn about it, we go, "Oh, do I know that well, boy does that give language to a lot of life experiences." You're right, the core of this has some much deeper roots that and I'm standing- and this work of standing on the shoulders of many other people.

**[0:06:58.5] LM:** Where seems to be the best place to get started here? Do you want to start with the Drama Triangle, or is there something even before that that you would get started with?

**[0:07:10.0] DEW:** I think what would make the most sense is in our conversation, to frankly walk through the *3 Vital Questions*, because then we can talk about the frameworks that are contained in those questions. Again, what I would say is that what is in the *3 Vital Questions*, to use a little bit of jargon, transcends and includes what's in *The Power of TED*. Virtually, everything that's in TED is in the *3 Vital Questions*, but it's in a different context.

Without going deeply into the context, I think it is important to say that the first part of the book really gets into the cost of drama in organizations and how much time and energy can get sucked away from focusing on stakeholders and clients and customers and team members; that time and energy gets trapped into non-productive behaviors. Then also within the greater context is the challenge of change and the basic thesis, if you will, is that many, many change efforts in organizations fail to produce their intended results, because we don't – this is my thesis, because we don't step back and think about how we think, which is the first vital question, think about how we relate, which is the second vital question and to think about what kinds of actions that we're taking. That's the organizational context.

The first vital question is actually, *Where are you putting your focus?* The subtext to that is, *are you focusing on problems, or you're focusing on outcomes?* What informs that question is an organizing framework that I call FISBE. FISBE is an acronym that stands for Focus, Inner State and BEhavior. The idea is that what we focus on engages some emotional response. That inner state that then drives our behavior. Then that first vital question gets into two basic or primary orientations that we all have experience with as human beings. One of which is really our default orientation.

I feel I really need to mention - I know that last month, you talked with Bob Anderson from The Leadership Circle. This first vital question really comes out of my long-time association and working relationship with Bob, so I do want to do a little bit of that shout out, in that he calls it the *Reactive and Creative Orientation*. In this work, I just refer to it as a *Problem versus Outcome Orientation*.

**[0:09:51.2] LM:** Perfect. They're aligned with each other, but not exactly the same thing.

**[0:09:55.6] DEW:** Not exactly the same thing. I've put my own language to it with Bob's encouragement and endorsement, if you will. The Problem Orientation, the focus is on problems. Problems can come into our experience in a variety of ways. What that engages is the inner state of some form of anxiety; and the anxiety can range anywhere from 'this is a hassle and I wish it would go away', to out-and-out fear and terror.

There's some sort of an anxiety response, which then drives our behavior and our behavior is reactive behavior and takes one of four primary forms. It's either fight, flight, freeze or appease. We either aggress against the situation, fight. We flee. We try to get away from the situation. We may freeze and hope it goes away; or we may appease- to go along, to get along. That really is our default orientation as human beings is to be problem-focused and reactive. There are good reasons for that.

**[0:10:59.1] LM:** Yeah. I say we come factory loaded.

**[0:11:02.3] DEW:** Exactly.

**[0:11:03.7] LM:** We come into the world with this built-in. Like you said, there's a good reason why it's there. They're all survival mechanisms, coping mechanisms and we don't not want to have those. They still have their place. Our bodies and our emotions don't really know the difference between real physical danger and emotional distress.

**[0:11:25.9] DEW:** Absolutely. The real key here is to become aware of that orientation in our lives. You're absolutely right. I mean, to me the real quick example is in our modern era, that thank goodness for a lot of us, especially in our culture for most of us, we are no longer in physical - most of the time - in physical survival mode. We have our basic needs met.

How many likes we get on Facebook to the brain can be just as real as wondering what that rustling in the grass is that our ancestor went through as they were going through the forest. You're absolutely right that we come pre-wired with that. We fully hold that that orientation as a default orientation has reached its limit of effectiveness for us, frankly as a species. I know it's a big statement, but that we really, we're at a point in time in our history and evolution that we really need to upgrade our operating system and we refer to these orientations as operating systems.

If I can shift the Outcome Orientation, represents that upgrade in the operating system. And in the Outcome Orientation, *our focus is on what it is that we want to create*. It's focused on outcomes. What's the outcome that we want? If we care about it, our inner state, our emotional response is some level of passion, which could be anywhere from just, I care about this, to a real fire in the belly. That inner state then gives us the energy to engage in creative action and taking what I call baby steps that get us closer to and/or clearer about the outcome.

This first vital question is all about understanding that problem-focused, anxiety-based, reactive operating system or orientation and how we *do* have the capacity and in fact, I contend that all of us have had some life experience where even though we didn't have the language, we were operating out of an outcome, passion-powered, creative operating system and accomplishing things that we really care about.

**[0:13:42.5] LM:** I agree. I think that we can all think of a time when we were really excited about bringing something into being. It can even be cooking your favorite meal.

**[0:13:53.6] DEW:** You got it. Yeah.

**[0:13:54.7] LM:** It can be that small. Of course, we want it to be bigger than that, but we have all sorts of examples. The other thing that I want to say, David, is that, so this morning when I was with this group of leaders, I just asked the question - to me, it was a really benign question, but I asked them, what do you love about February? Then what do you not love about February? Well, February is a big month in a school calendar, because they're starting to look at next year.

On one hand, it's really busy. On the other hand, they're starting to think about what changes that they want to implement for the next year, who would their new staff be, all of that, but it's just a matter of asking the question differently. The only thing that changed was the question I asked and the mood in the room completely changed with each question.

**[0:14:55.2] DEW:** Sure, because the first question of what don't you like about February, or I can't remember if this is the first, what don't you like is a problem orientation.

**[0:15:03.2] LM:** Yes. Yes.

**[0:15:05.0] DEW:** Whereas, what do you like is Outcome Oriented, even though it may not have been a particular outcome, but it's what they like. I mean, that's really one of the distinctions between these two operating systems is the Problem Orientation's focused on what we don't want and what we don't like, which is why we call them problems. Whereas, the Outcome Orientation is focused on what we do want, what we care about.

**[0:15:28.7] LM:** What was interesting too in that room was, "Oh, I didn't realize I was excited about that." It's the same month, but it's just framed a different way. It was just a change in focus changed the mood. Yeah.

**[0:15:45.1] DEW:** Then one other comment and then I want to move to the second vital question to connect it to the first, but what you just shared, what strikes me is that it reinforces this notion that in fact, the Problem Orientation is our default orientation. When we are on autopilot, it is what is often driving what we pay attention to, what's going on in our experience. For them to say, "Oh, I didn't really notice what I was focusing on." To be surprised that there are things that they love about or like about February brings to then conscious awareness that they can shift their focus to what it is that they really want and what it is that they care about.

By the way, one last thing on that first vital question, is that when we focus on outcomes and take the baby step, creative steps to go after that, we solve problems in service to those, so it's not that the Outcome Orientation is all goodness and light and problem-free, but that we can really tackle the problems that stand in the way of what it is that we really want and what it is that we really care about.

**[0:16:50.8] LM:** Right. I think that's a really important thing to bring up here too, that we're not saying that problems don't exist, because they do. We look at them differently and we treat them differently when we're focused on outcomes, 'this is an obstacle or something that I need to resolve on the way to the bigger thing that I care about'.

**[0:17:11.3] DEW:** Exactly. Spot on. Spot on.

**[0:17:13.9] LM:** All right. Vital Question Two.

**[0:17:16.1] DEW:** Vital Question Two is, *How are you relating?* There are a couple of sub-points here. It's how are you relating to others, how are you relating to your experience and how are you relating to

yourself? Are you relating in ways that produce, or perpetuate drama? Or are you relating in ways that empowers others and yourself to be more resourceful, resilient and innovative?

I really want to connect that question and those sub questions to the first vital question in that if our operating system, if our orientation is problem-focused, fear-based and reactive in nature, that creates the environment and the conditions for the Dreaded Drama Triangle, or DDT, which I'll explain in more detail in just a moment. I also want to say that if we can consciously choose to operate as much as possible out of that Outcome Orientation, where we're focused on what we care about, that our inner state is more passion-based and we're taking creative action, that creates the conditions for a different set of relationship roles and dynamics that we call TED or The Empowerment Dynamic.

Let's talk about the DDT first, which again is rooted in that Problem Orientation and which by the way, really is a Victim Orientation, because we feel victimized by the problems that are coming at us. The relationship roles and dynamics and again, this builds on Dr. Karpman's work and the Drama Triangle, the central role is the role of Victim. We all find ourselves in that role from time to time. Anytime we're complaining, anytime we feel hopeless, powerless, etc., we are in that role.

I want to say one other thing about the Victim role though to make an important distinction to me. There is a very important distinction between victimization and victimhood. Victimization is again, something that we all as human beings experience. To me, I play with it on this proverbial scale of 1 to 10 and one might be, I'm in the slow grocery line in the store again and I've got to go pick up my kids. Whereas, 10 is - you just have to turn on the news to see a lot of 10-level victimization happening. That's different than victimhood.

Victimhood to me is a way of being, it's an identity. This work really stands as a Challenger, or a challenge to victimhood while acknowledging that victimization goes with the terrain of being human beings. Again, we all find ourselves in that Victim role from time to time. Well, in order to be a Victim, one must have a Persecutor, which is the second role. The Persecutor certainly could be a person, but it also could be a condition, like a health condition, it could be a situation, like a natural disaster, a tornado, something like that.

The dynamic between the Persecutor and the Victim is that to the Victim, the Persecutor becomes the dominating reality that they're focused on. When it's interpersonal dynamics, which is really what we primarily focus on, it's that Persecutors, whether they're conscious of it or not, actually fear their own



victimization, so they adopt a strategy again, consciously or unconsciously, that it's better to dominate than to be dominated.

**[0:20:39.3] LM:** I think of the bully.

**[0:20:41.6] DEW:** Yes.

**[0:20:42.9] LM:** That's basically the imprint, or the dynamics of a bully.

**[0:20:48.0] DEW:** Correct. Great example. To complete the triangle, so once the dynamic between the Victim and Persecutor comes into play, then the third role is the role of Rescuer. The Rescuer can come into this relationship dynamic, in a sense, in one of three ways; either the Victim goes looking for a Rescuer, or someone imposes themselves as a Rescuer, very often with benevolent intentions. They're trying to be of help, but they intervene into the situation and sometimes there's hope for Rescuers, like hoping for there to be a cop up ahead that is going to pull over the jerky driver who just cut us off.

**[0:21:27.4] LM:** Right.

**[0:21:29.7] DEW:** What the Rescuer doesn't realize and this is really important. I say this as a recovering Rescuer myself, is that the Rescuer actually unintentionally, very often reinforces the victimization that the Victim is feeling. Again, the three roles are Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer.

**[0:21:48.7] LM:** All right. Those are all part of the Drama Triangle.

**[0:21:51.0] DEW:** Yeah, the DDT. If we really seek to consciously upgrade our operating system to that outcome, or what we also call a Creator Orientation, then The Empowerment Dynamic, or TED as we lovingly refer to it, serves as an antidote to the toxicity of the DDT. There are three roles that correlate to the three roles in the Drama Triangle. If Victim is the key, or the central role in the DDT, the central role in The Empowerment Dynamic is the role of being a Creator. The opposite of Victim, or the antidote to Victim is Creator. There are two major components to our stepping into and developing our capability as creators.

One is to create outcomes. Again, connected to the first vital question. The second that is equally important to land is that we as Creators, we really own our capacity to choose our response to whatever is going on in our lives. Even when what's going on could easily be reacted to as a Persecutor, so that we are at choice as to how we respond to our life circumstances.

What comes to mind is that, we want to take a moment and do the other two roles, but then I can share an example from my own life of making this shift from the DDT to TED. The antidote to the role of Persecutor, whether it's a person, condition, or circumstance, or situation, is to see that as a Challenger. What Challengers do in our lives is they call forth learning and growth.

Being able to look at that situation and say, "Okay, what's here for me to learn? What capabilities do I need to really cultivate to be able to move forward for what I really want, even in the face of the Challengers?" Then the third role, which is the antidote so the role of Rescuer is a helping role, but it's a helping role that leaves the power, if you will, responsibility with the person being supported. That is the role of Coach.

I don't mean necessarily professional coach, although there are certainly a lot of wonderful folks who are professional coaches. Any of us can be in the role of Coach and support to others, because as a Coach, what we do is we ask questions. We help people clarify their outcomes, what is it that they want? and/or we help them clarify the current realities that they're facing and what they are dealing with. Very importantly, help them clarify and make their own choices around what baby steps are they going to take to move toward what they want and/or choose a response to the life circumstances. The three roles of The Empowerment Dynamic are Creator, Challenger and Coach.

**[0:24:48.0] LM:** When I hear you describing it this way in terms of the *3 Vital Questions*, there's a connection that I'm making, or a connection that's louder and clearer this time than it ever has been. It's the relationship to the Outcome Orientation and resilience. There's a huge, really strong connection there for me that I don't think I've, I don't know, for some reason, it's just hitting me more directly today.

**[0:25:23.2] DEW:** I love hearing that. It's reason why in setting up the second vital question question that we say, *are you producing or perpetuating drama, or are you empowering others and yourself to be more resourceful, resilient, innovative?* It very much is related to the mindset, or orientation that we are moving through life with.

**[0:25:46.1] LM:** I think it's when you talked about the second aspect of the Creator and it's our capability, or power to choose our response to any situation. That is where resilience really comes in, because we do have a choice on whether we're going to be waylaid or knocked out by something, or whether we're going to use that thing, even as a Challenger.

**[0:26:14.0] DEW:** You bet. Let me share an example that is it's historical and yet, quite personal for me. That is at one point in my career when I was internal to a large financial services organization and as working in executive education, executive development, I had been recruited to this organization by two of the best bosses I've ever worked for. About a year into being in that organization, which was very developmentally oriented - they move people around for their professional development - the managers that I reported to that I really loved and resonated with got replaced with my worst boss ever.

**[0:26:56.1] LM:** Okay. Bummer.

**[0:27:00.0] DEW:** Yeah. No kidding. Well, I talk about Problem Orientation and being in the DDT and just so I can tell the story, I need to just say that this boss happened to be female, but my previous boss was female, so this is not at all gender related, but I know I will refer to her as I share this. What's ironic here is that I was already using – I didn't have the Drama Triangle in my leadership work at that point, but I had, because of my relationship with Bob Anderson, the Reactive and Creative Orientations.

I have to admit, I was deeply entrenched in the Problem Orientations as it related to reporting to this person, because she was a 180-degree different philosophy than what had drawn me to the organization. Yet, part of what's important here is I loved what I was doing. I loved my role in the organization, but I saw her as a problem. I never went to a doctor to get diagnosed, but I'm pretty sure I was developing ulcers. It was that bad, that intense of a situation. Clearly, I felt victimized, because, 'what happened to these wonderful people I used to work for?' She was a Persecutor and I don't want to overly dis her, but there were a lot of ways in which she was persecuting to a lot of people around her, not just me.

Then as it relates to Rescuer, for a long time, I was hoping that someone would finally see what was going on and somehow, I guess, was hoping for a Rescuer, that someone would step in. I went

through months and months and months of living in that reality. Then literally one day, in what I call my quiet time in the morning, all of a sudden, I got that duh moment. I wish I could say it was an epiphany but was more of a duh. It was like, I really got that I was seeing her as a problem that was causing a lot of anxiety and I was reacting to her.

It was like, 'No, I need to accept the reality that she is who she is and how she is', then shift my focus in what it is that I really want. Again, just to reiterate that I really loved what I was doing. What I wanted was to be able to do the kind of services, the leadership training, the organization development, processes and interventions and to really focus on what it is that I wanted. As I shifted that focus, one of the things that I can now overlay, and again, I didn't have this at the time, is that I had stepped into really that Creative Orientation and seeing myself as a Creator and seeing her as a Challenger, because I can tell you that although I would not want to do this experience for anything in the world, looking back I would not trade it, because as a Challenger, I learned so much from this relationship about how I wanted to be, and what it is I really wanted to be about, when and if I found myself in a formal leadership role, which I did.

I'll give you a little bit of the rest of the story. I ended up, after many twists and turns, with her job, but that was not my intention. It was just, 'what is here for me to learn and to get clearer about? What am I wanting my focus to be?' I wouldn't be doing this for work had I not had that experience. I turned to some trusted individuals: in one in Executive Development, one who was the head of HR, frankly in Texas, can you think of it? I asked them to coach me. I sought out a coaching role.

Again, I didn't have TED at the time. As I look back, I really shifted my orientation, which allowed me to have a totally different set of relationship roles and dynamics. It fundamentally shifted the trajectory of my professional life and ended up, even though there were no guarantees, ended up with a frankly, a better outcome than I could have even imagined.

**[0:30:54.9] LM:** It sounds like a bit of a crucible at that time and you really got formed and forged and sharpened during that time, which led to an up-level, or as Bob was saying on the previous podcast, a booting up of your own capabilities, because of how you responded to the situation with the worst boss ever.

**[0:31:23.1] DEW:** Yeah, that's right. I can take this story now into the third vital question.

**[0:31:27.4] LM:** Excellent. Good. Perfect.

**[0:31:29.9] DEW:** Which is, *What actions are you taking?* Are you merely reacting to the problems of the moment, or are you taking creative and generative action, including the solving of problems in service to outcomes? In this situation in my career, I somewhat consciously, because *dynamic tension* is what informs - what we call dynamic tension informs the Third Vital Question.

It's really an iteration of **Robert Fritz's structural creative tension**, that has three basic steps. I want to describe that and I'll connect it to the story. The three primary pieces of a dynamic tension, which is about creating outcomes - by the way, before I do that, let me just say that if, (I want to connect up all three questions), so if our orientation is problem-focused and we're engaged in relationship roles and dynamics that are DDT-based, then the actions that we take are merely going to be reactive. We're just going to react to what's going on around us. In that DDT, the reality is that reaction begets reaction begets reaction, whereas –

**[0:32:40.2] LM:** Really short term focus.

**[0:32:42.7] DEW:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. If we shift our focus to that Outcome/Creator Orientation, cultivate, empowered relationships, then the action that we take is focused on, *how do we create?* and go after the outcomes that we want to create. That takes us to the *dynamic tension*. The three basic steps of dynamic tension is first and foremost, the *focus on the outcome* and to be as clear as we can on the outcome, that the outcome can sometimes be clear and concrete, other times it may be more vague and directional. For me in that time in my life, the outcome was in-between. It was not clear and concrete, but I knew I loved leadership training, I knew I loved working with teams and organizations.

Then the second step is to step back and tell the truth about, *what's my current reality in relation to the outcome?* That engages a tension between what we want and what we're currently experiencing. Looking at current reality, part of what we've added to assessing current reality is to look at what's going on currently that supports or is aligned with the outcome that we want to create.

There were a lot of things going on in my experience that supported that outcome. Not to pat myself on the back, but the evaluations we got from the leadership programs that I ran and helped facilitate - the feedback we received from the organization development interventions - a lot of supportive things.

Then the second aspect of current reality is, *what's inhibiting our ability to create what we want?* which we've already somewhat alluded to, is that that's where problems exist. *What are the problems that we want to overcome because they stand in the way of what we really want?* There were a lot of inhibiting factors in the personality of this person and some of the dynamics that resulted in the large organization as a result of that.

We engage the tension between the outcome and telling the truth about current reality.

Then if we're telling the truth about current reality, the third piece of dynamic tension is to then determine and to take baby steps that move from our current reality toward our envisioned outcome. Baby steps to me are things that as an individual, or team, we can choose to do that tend to be short-term and in organizational terms, LeeAnn, it could be things as simple as, 'I need to have a conversation', or 'we need to go gather this information'. It's just whenever the next little step is, that's going to help us move toward and/or get clearer about the outcome.

**[0:35:26.6] LM:** Fantastic. It seems those can also be practices, like daily your weekly practices, or habits that you can undertake in order to - if one of the things that you need to do is build some capacity somewhere that you don't have in a certain area, or you can undertake some practices.

There's something else that I wanted to say about current reality. Do you include in current reality, your mood, or mindset, or the narrative that you currently have about the current reality *in* the current reality?

**[0:36:03.2] DEW:** Yeah, absolutely. This may be overly simplistic, but one of the things that we really emphasize is the identification and naming of feelings. Why that's so important, especially in organizational context, is that I think there is implicitly, and in some environments actually explicitly, the assumption that yeah, this is just business, this is just work. There's no place for feelings, of being really identified and dealt with.

I'll make it a real short version of the story. When I first saw the impact, what happens when we don't allow feelings to be acknowledged, and the story is actually back in this financial services institution, when I still had the great bosses. The situation was that we were having a meeting around what budget we had to work with. We had submitted our budgets, run them up the proverbial flagpole. Of

course, what gets allocated is less than what you asked for. This was the meeting where we needed to talk about how we were going to shift our plans to stay within the budget.

As we got into the meeting, my boss's boss, my boss who was great and my boss's boss who was also great, his name was Jeff. Jeff said, "Okay, folks. This is what we have to deal with, what changes are we going to make?" The mood in the room was like trying to start a car in Minneapolis in January. There was just no energy.

Finally, somebody said, they actually said, "Jeff, can I just say something?" He said, "sure", and then this person said, "I'm really angry." Jeff, to his credit, instead of saying, 'well, get over it,' or 'tough, this is what we've got to deal with', Jeff's response was just, "Ah, got it. You're angry. How's everybody else feeling?" Now most managers would never ask that question, because they were afraid to be opening Pandora's Box.

**[0:37:57.9] LM:** Right. They'll say that: 'I don't want to open Pandora's Box, so I don't ask those kinds of questions'.

**[0:38:03.2] DEW:** I swear to you, three minutes of clock time, this is what happened. Somebody else said, "Well, I'm feeling really frustrated." Jeff said, "Ah, you're feeling frustrated. Got it. What else?" "Well, I'm really disappointed." "Ah, you're disappointed. Got it. What else?" What he was doing was allowing the feelings of that current reality to be named. He didn't add to him, he didn't put any gas on the fire, so to speak.

After about three minutes of clock time, somebody said, "Well, okay. We're feeling frustrated, angry, disappointed. This is the hand we've been dealt. What are we going to do?" We got creative. I share that to say that in assessing current reality, it's important to attend to the feelings, both in terms of inhibitors, that story really illustrates inhibitors, but also the supports. I can be both excited and scared, right? It's like, I'm excited about this opportunity and I'm scared, because I currently don't really know how this is going to happen. To really pay attention to that inner state is absolutely critical.

**[0:39:10.5] LM:** Good. I'm glad we talked about that. That's a great story. What I loved about what Jeff did as well is he didn't try to fix anybody's feelings. He just said, "Yep, that's what it is. That's part

of our current reality. Anything else?" But did not try to smooth it over or make anybody feel differently. That's just it was what it was.

**[0:39:33.0] DEW:** Exactly. Those are the three vital questions: *Where are you putting your focus? How are you relating?* and *What actions are you taking?* For those who maybe have read TED, the FISBE and orientations and the DDT and TED and dynamic tension are in that book, but it's more focused on how one leads their own lives. Whereas in *3 Vital Questions*, a little bit different sequencing, a little bit different context, but how to apply that to organizational realities like the story I just told.

**[0:40:04.2] LM:** That is my experience in reading both books, is that this second book is even better for an organizational context, because it's giving organizational examples. Both of the books are told through a parable, which is part of your superpower - being able to take these concepts and then put them in a story that's much more engaging than just talking about concepts. The second book happens in an organization with the custodian.

**[0:40:38.6] DEW:** That's right. That's right. The wise sage is actually a custodian. Not a janitor, a custodian, which there is a really important subtle difference there.

**[0:40:47.6] LM:** I've actually never heard you go through the models and the concepts through the lens of the *3 Vital Questions* in this way. This was a first time for me. I really enjoyed hearing how it unfolded. My mind was going, "How is this connection going to be made?" It's fantastic. Another great thing about this is that I had some insights that I didn't have before, having it told this way. By the way -

**[0:41:24.3] DEW:** That's awesome.

**[0:41:25.2] LM:** - I was telling someone that I've read *The Power of TED* several times, it's the same book, it's just that I'm a different person every time I read it. Now the whole darn book is marked up.

David, is there anything that you want to direct our attention to - anything coming up, anything new that's going up on your website? I will definitely put some links in my show notes and everything but talk to me about what's going on.



**[0:41:55.4] DEW:** Sure. I appreciate the question and as you know, there's actually now two websites; one is [thepowerofted.com](http://thepowerofted.com) and the other is [3vitalquestions.com](http://3vitalquestions.com). We just this week announced, or actually scheduled, we haven't actually announced that we will be offering a two-day what we call deeper dive for people who might want to go deeper experientially into the *3 Vital Questions* that's going to be in Dallas, at the [Stagen](#) facility on July 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>.

**[0:42:29.8] LM:** Fantastic.

**[0:42:31.3] DEW:** Yeah. Another thing for people who are in either internally or externally who might want to train *3 Vital Questions*, we have a trainer certification. If people would go to [3vitalquestions.com](http://3vitalquestions.com) when the certifications are announced, we'll have at least two more this year. I know one will be in sometime in November on the East Coast and we'll have one mid-year somewhere. That will be on the website.

Then either website, quite frankly when you go to it, there is a pop-up that happens if people would like to receive our weekly, what we call essay or newsletter, called *TED Works*. That's really co-written, it's primarily written by Donna (I get editorial privileges). It goes out on a weekly basis, it's easy to sign up for. Those are some avenues.

The thing about the *Cis* that it's a great way to keep the principles in front of you. It's short. It's typically no more than 600 words. Very often, we're sharing our own life experiences. Just because we teach this stuff, doesn't mean we have it nailed. Yeah, so we bring our own experience many times into those essays as we're continuing to live into that Creator orientation and to developing our capacity as Creators, Challengers and Coaches.

**[0:43:58.5] LM:** Like I said, I will have all of this in the show notes. There will be various social postings on things. David, thank you so much for taking time out of your Friday afternoon. I know we're both at the end of long weeks, but it's just always such a joy. I feel uplifted after our conversation here and excited about new ways to talk about this with the folks that I work with.

**[0:44:29.1] DEW:** Well, LeeAnn, it's always a pleasure to hang out with you. I've really enjoyed our conversation and I look forward to more to come.

**[0:44:35.7] LM:** All right. Well, I'm sure I'll see you in July and hopefully before then.

**[0:44:39.7] DEW:** All righty. Great.

**[0:44:40.9] LM:** All right. Take care.

**[0:44:41.9] DEW:** You too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:44:49.2] LM:** If you like what you heard today and the direction this podcast is pointed, subscribe to Rise Leaders Radio on iTunes, leave us a comment and a five-star rating. You can also check out the Rise Leaders website at [www.rise-leaders.com](http://www.rise-leaders.com) to find the resources I pull front in my coaching and consulting work and that I find central to transformative leadership.

If you're committed to leading with the clear vision and from core values and taking your team to the next level, then get in touch. You can reach me LeeAnn Mallory from my website. I'd be honored to hear from you. I appreciate you tuning in today and especially for being the type of person interested in learning more about how you can elevate your part of the world.

Take good care.

[END]