

# BWF Amir Ghannad

**Amir Ghannad:** [00:00:00] I always say you nurture the whole person, and a much better employee will emerge. But your reason has to be genuine and authentic. People trusting that I wasn't trying to manipulate them or do something just to get the results. That I really cared about them. That made a difference.

**Tim Spiker:** When we care about those we lead first as people and second as workers, it has a profound impact on engagement and performance.

But in order for that to happen. The care has to be personal, deep, and genuine. I'm your host, Tim Spiker, and this is the Be Worth\* Following podcast. On this show, we talk with exceptional leaders, thinkers, and researchers about what actually drives effective leadership across the globe and over time. You just heard from Amir Ghannad, founder and president of the Ghannad Group.

Amir owns a wealth of business and multicultural experience. He spent 31 years in [00:01:00] manufacturing and supply chain, working within global companies such as Procter & Gamble and Campbell Soup. Additionally, he has lived in five different countries and has traveled to over 45 countries around the world. All in all, you could say he's been around the block a time or two.

Amir is the author of a book called The Transformative Leader. He runs the Transformative Leader blog and has been the host now for over 200 episodes of the transformative leader podcast. On this episode of be worth following. You'll hear how Amir takes a both and approach to having concern for people while pursuing commercial results.

You'll get to experience both his mind and his heart, and you'll hear how he very uniquely. Let the turnaround of one of America's most nostalgic beverages into a worst to first story in only 18 months. But before you hear all of that, you get to learn about the brave decision Amir's parents made [00:02:00] that put him on his own on the other side of the planet from them when he was just 16 years old.

**Amir Ghannad:** I grew up in Iran for the first 16 years of my life. And then after that, I was on my own basically in the States. And much of sort of who I am was shaped before I went to the States and that my mother, I would say, you know, I learned a lot from my mom and dad for sure. You know, my dad from a from standpoint of like work ethic and that sort of thing.

And my mom was the one who was constantly coaching and teaching and that sort of thing. And one example or one lesson that comes to my mind is just, the fact that if you take responsibility for something, you know, act as a responsible person and if you commit to something, then make it happen.

And so, she was definitely instrumental in [00:03:00] how, who I am today and how I lead. And then I would say that a combination of some of the really great leaders that I've worked with and some of the people in my organization who, were counting on me for leadership. And in some cases, they were teaching me a lot more than I was teaching them. And so that was really, really impactful for me.

**Tim Spiker:** Let's go back a little bit to 16 years old for a second, because, you know, there was a little phrase you slipped in there that sounds very unique and important, which was, I was on my own. Tell us a little bit about moving across the world, but also being on your own.

There aren't very many people you know, depending on the culture of the world you're talking about, but it's, it's not often that the 16 year old is immediately you know, on their own. So, share a little bit about that so we can understand the picture there.

**Amir Ghannad:** [00:04:00] Yeah, so it was 1978 in Iran. There was a lot of unrest just prior to the revolution and my parents wanted me to continue to get my education without any interruption. So, they made a choice and I was totally very open to it that I was going to go to the States and just basically visit every year or so until all this stuff blows over and then I was going to get back home.

And so, with that intention I basically left Iran and went to Boston where I was going to go to a high school. All I had in my pocket was the address to a high school in Boston, Massachusetts. And I'd had a few years of English, but literally zero conversational skills. I couldn't communicate at all.

Didn't have a lot of money, didn't know anybody. So, I get on the plane and I leave. And as it turned out, I didn't make it back to Iran for 13 years because there was a revolution and there [00:05:00] was war and there was mandatory military service and that sort of thing anyway. So, I didn't make it back for 13 years.

So, I found myself having grown up, honestly, as a kind of kid who was well loved and, you know, protected. I was the oldest grandchild in the family, and everybody was always there for me. I found myself being on my own, just

having to fend for myself and that sort of thing. But here again that sense of responsibility kind of kicked in.

Said, look, you know, you got to make it. You got, you got to make this happen somehow. And so I went through a lot of trials and tribulations, honestly, you know including three weeks after I got to Boston, the, the dorm that the high school had put us in no longer wanted us there, the high school students there, so I basically didn't have a place to live, had to find a few roommates and, you know, rent a place.

Don't ask me how I did that. And uh, you know, day 25, I got [00:06:00] beat up by this group of folks that, and it was a fairly severe kind of thing. So, lots of injuries and stuff like that. Then I had to, then I didn't have to, but I chose to kind of get a job as a dishwasher. So, I would. Paid the hospital bills because I didn't tell my parents for 13 years, what had happened.

I didn't want them to worry about me. So, basically, and these are the days when there is no FaceTime, there is no phone, you know, basically my only means of communication was writing a letter that would take two and a half weeks to get there and that sort of thing. And every two weeks I would take a roll of quarters, 10 bucks to a payphone and that would buy me three minutes.

It's with my parents to just basically let them know I'm still alive. Everything is okay. So that's just a little bit of the story.

**Tim Spiker:** That is amazing. I feel like we could probably just take, you know, your, your first number of years in the United States. That sounds like a book to me alone. Just to, [00:07:00] just to work through that and then think about the many other things that you've become and accomplished in your career. From such a challenging beginning and now, you know, as a parent, I'm thinking about how could I put my kid on an airplane? I mean, granted, you're talking about a difficult circumstance at the time in your home country. But still, I just I can feel a pit in my stomach right now. Imagining taking, you know, my, my oldest is 14 and putting them on an airplane to go to a completely foreign country. Wow.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah. And, you know, I basically there for me, there are a couple of messages that I would like to communicate if I could. And that is, you know, as that kid, I want to remind everybody that basically, while we can look back and my experiences, and I only gave you the tip of the iceberg. There were a lot of challenges and people look at me and they're like, wow, how the heck did you handle that? But I want to say that you basically do what you have to do

when you find yourself in that situation, you essentially continue [00:08:00] to do what you have to do, and you grow as a result.

So, in a way, all of those bad things that happened turned out to be a good thing for me. But, you know, I'm the same way as a parent. That's the other thing I wanted to say is that, you know, I just cannot even imagine doing that. And so that I always say my, the greatest heroes of my story are my parents.

Because they had the courage to make whatever sacrifices they needed to make. And, you know, monetarily, they supported me for, for a while as much, as long as they could and that sort of thing. But most importantly, just from an emotional perspective, it must have been extremely hard for them, but yet they did it so I would have a better life.

**Tim Spiker:** That is truly amazing. Well, that better life. Let's talk about how, as you move forward, you moved into career, you ended up spending a fair amount of time in one of the most well-known brands, consumer brands in the world. Talk us through [00:09:00] a little bit of your time there because you're a leadership advisor and author today, but you haven't always done that.

You've been doing other things to gain that background in order to be able to help and support leaders. And you gained a lot of that experience while working for one of the most famous consumer brands in the world.

**Amir Ghannad:** I spent about 18 and a half years with Procter and Gamble and ended up working in three different regions started in manufacturing and basically stayed in manufacturing and supply chain type roles.

And honestly, Tim, I have to tell you, you know, I have a master's degree in mechanical engineering, but very early on in my career. I discovered that that was not really my passion. So even though I stayed in that career with Procter and Gamble, I was always paying attention to a sort of, how can I energize people?

How can I create a space for people to show up as the most powerful version of themselves? And, and even before I [00:10:00] read a single leadership book, I recognized that I was there to serve the people who were supposed to be working for me. If you will, quote unquote. And so, Procter & Gamble gave me an opportunity in, again, three different regions of the world, various roles I was a maintenance manager, I was in kind of a pseudo HR role, I was in operations several times, various levels of the organization.

And that sort of thing, but I gained a tremendous amount of experience at which really wasn't obvious at the time, like what it was doing for me, because it was a lot of like wax on wax off, if you will. And a lot of like going through experiences, which at the moment seemed fairly ordinary, but in the end, we know when I look back at all the experiences that I had being, you know, entrusted with some responsibilities to make things happen and all the training and development that I received and all the [00:11:00] coaching that I received from some of the greatest leaders that I had, all of that really culminated in getting me ready for, you know, what I'm doing now.

**Tim Spiker:** I have to sneak in here, there's a number, if you were you know, for those that grew up in America that are listening to the podcast, many of us think fondly back to sunny D and Amir has a direct connection to sunny delight. Talk a little bit about your role because I just, this is just for fun because, you know, we, we all remember the commercials.

I'm not going to ask you how much sugar is in it. Cause I don't want to know. I don't even want to know, but talk a little bit about your time. You're not allowed to anyway, so that's good. But talk a little bit about the, you know, managing. That's a pretty, that's, that was a pretty iconic brand here in the U S for some time.

**Amir Ghannad:** You know, and how that worked out is that I sort of stumbled into that opportunity. I was working in Germany at the time [00:12:00] my wife and I and the kids had been to Thailand for five years and had been the back to the States. And then we were in Germany for about three years on an international assignment and we decided to come back.

And I basically gave my notice without having a job and Sunny D happened to be a kind of part of the organization that was being divested and they offered me a job as a regional plant manager. And so, I took that job and I went in to that role and it actually turned out to be one of the most challenging roles that I'd had up to that point. I had been in my professional career for 19 years, but I found myself in a situation where we were the worst plant in the entire company. The results were horrendous, and morale was even worse, if you will. And everything that I was trying really wasn't working you know, being a cheerleader and supporting people and training and all of that.

So, I had to really turn another part of myself on that was really needed [00:13:00] in that situation you know, setting clear direction and being very clear and very firm and really making sure that the right people on the bus and the right seat and so on and so forth. And anyway, so we actually managed to

turn that plan around from being the worst to the best within a year and a half, and it was like the most amazing experience of my career, not just because we delivered the results, but we managed to really transform ourselves and our lives at work and outside of work. So that team is something is a team that I have a great. Connection to even today.

**Tim Spiker:** Let's go a little bit further into this. Cause I, I just, you know, I saw, I knew about the sunny D connection, and I thought it would be fun to harken back to it, but this is a kind of an amazing story.

You're from worst to best in 18 months. And I heard you say, look, I had to turn on a different part of myself. An additional part of myself, perhaps not instead of the other parts, but in addition [00:14:00] to that had to do with clear direction and accountability. So just walk us through that 18 months a little bit, cause I'm thinking in a large manufacturing environment, many of us would think, you can't have that big of a change in that short period of time. How did it come together for you and the team to make that kind of a shift in such a short period of time?

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah, so you know, just to sort of clarify my comment around what I had to turn on, you know, for those who are familiar with the DISC model, and I use DISC a lot in my practice I'm an S I, so I like to kind of create a steady situation and calm situation.

And I like to encourage people kind of more of the eye, but in that situation, we needed more of a D style to, to be kicked in. And so, I did that for a period of time. And I have to say, you know, once we began to deliver the results through the organization. I went back to my S I because it was good enough you know, that's the best version of [00:15:00] me, but I had to sort of make sure that, you know, I'm not kind of, you know, he was good with the hammer sees everything as a nail. And I fell into that for a while.

But you know, we were really blessed with a tremendous amount of talent. But unfortunately, the people in the organization had kind of been conditioned to do what they were told. And so, it took some time to earn their trust and, you know, so that they would believe me when I said, look, I want you to go make this happen and I'm going to support you.

This is not like I'm trying to set them up for, for failure and that sort of thing. So, what took a while was establishing that trust and kind of undoing some of the things that had been done so we could establish a foundation of trust. There

was a tremendous amount of coaching and training that was going on at all levels of the organization.

And I really couldn't afford at the time I didn't have a whole lot of support to go out and get external you know, resources and that sort of thing. So, it was just me. [00:16:00] In some cases, my wife got involved as well. You know, we would go into the plant and. They provide training on personal finance about how to eat healthy and, you know, take care of yourself.

So, she was the only consultant I could afford because she was free and she and I essentially set out to make a difference in people's lives. And when we did that, you know, somebody told me years later, they said, look, you know, when you were doing all of those things, I was you know, doing marriage counseling, like literally with my employees.

I mean, I, I have no training in that at all. I was faking it totally, but it was working, you know, people, people's marriages will be restored. And somebody told me, they said, years later, they said, you know, when you were doing all of that. stuff, we were thinking, what the heck is this guy up to? What does he have up his sleeve?

And at some point, they said, well, maybe he actually cares. And I found that when people really know that you care about them, they tend to forgive you for your mistakes and make [00:17:00] up for your weaknesses. And that's exactly what, what happened. You know, I don't claim to be the sharpest tool in the shed as far as plant managers are concerned, but I was really blessed to have a very supportive team.

**Tim Spiker:** This is, this is extraordinary. We're talking about Procter and Gamble. We're talking about Sunny Delight. We're talking about well-known consumer brands in the manufacturing space. And you are talking about personal finance, nutrition, and marriages in terms of a way that you are investing in the people that you're leading and how that impacted the whole of your relationship with them and the whole of their engagement.

In the enterprise, in the business enterprise, what a unique approach to coming at the whole person and not just, you know, the full-time equivalent that shows up to work. That's, that's, did you feel like you were taking a risk walking into those spaces or were you like, hey, this just, this just has to happen?

What was your [00:18:00] mentality?

**Amir Ghannad:** Well, I mean, I have to say that in that particular situation, we just had no choice but basically do whatever we could to make things happen. Yes, we were trying to improve our processes and things like that. But one of the things that I noticed was that people were working in silos.

They were not collaborating and that sort of thing. And they, they had personal issues. I saw how many you know, people's cars were being repossessed. And I saw how many people were in the hospital, in and out of hospital. I knew how many people were going through a tough time at work. So, it's just like instinctively, I felt that, you know, what, uh, I need to help these People while we are trying to fix the processes in the workplace but it turned out that there was a direct correlation so I wasn't really doing that work just so we can improve the results it was just something that I'm [00:19:00] here for a purpose. And honestly, there was a time when things were really, really tough. And I was very close to just saying, you know what, the heck with this. I, nobody appreciates me. The people in the plant don't trust me simply because, you know, they had some sort of toxic experiences. Then my bosses feel like I'm the problem because I'm just a new kid that came out, came into this part of the business from outside.

And so I didn't really feel appreciated, but there was a particular day where I decided I, it became real clear to me, I remember it exactly. I was going to one of our morning meetings, it was eight o'clock in the morning, I was walking out of my office to go to the morning meeting, and I don't know, this may seem really kind of woo woo or whatever, but I just, you know, felt as, you know, heard this audible voice, like, hey, you know, you, you keep saying you're going to go out there and do some other things and whatever you're here for a reason.

You need to do that here right now. [00:20:00] And on this day, I decided that no matter how tough it was going to be, that I was there to serve a purpose. And the purpose was bigger than just delivering the results to the company, which was my responsibility. But the purpose was much, much bigger than that. And, and so we went to work, and we just continued to hammer that at that and, you know and, and make it happen.

**Tim Spiker:** You know, I think there's a really important lesson in what you're sharing and, and, and you said it, but I want to reiterate it, which is I wasn't serving to help people in the whole of their lives in order to simply get this business result that I was after. The health and well-being of the people in the community there that we're doing the work it does have an impact on the outcome but if the only reason that I'm investing in is others so I can get an



outcome out of them then they're going to feel that and they're ultimately going to not come to the conclusion that they did with you is that you actually cared.

They're going to [00:21:00] come to the conclusion that somebody is a very crafty manipulator or trying to help. In other words, you, you, you have to do it for the right reasons. And the right reason in this case is not just to get a financial outcome. And yet it does impact the financial outcome as you articulate it.

**Amir Ghannad:** Absolutely. I mean, I think there is, you know, I always say, you know, you nurture the whole person and a, and a much better employee will emerge. Okay. But if your reason has to be genuine and authentic, I mean, I remember one of our warehouse employees telling me about the troubles that his grandson was going through and that sort of thing.

And I said, look, you know why don't you bring him in one day? And I had a coaching conversation with this grandson. Okay. And, and if you kind of kind of do a, a why, why, and try to figure out part of the this sort of nurturing you want to do and how much of it is connected to the results, you would probably not be doing that, but it was [00:22:00] small things like that that added up to people trusting that I wasn't trying to manipulate them or do something just to get the results that I really cared about them that made a difference.

**Tim Spiker:** Yeah, and then ultimately. There is a different sense of collaboration, a different sense of connection between people when, when that becomes more of the, of the culture of the atmosphere where you're working.

**Amir Ghannad:** And I want to be clear, like, it wasn't all me. It's like when, when we started doing that, it was just like people started role modeling or that kind of behavior for their teams. They started doing things for each other. So, we created a culture in which you don't just calculate what's in it for you, but you do what's right for other people. And, and, and yes, there was a tremendous amount of collaboration. That ensued and it wasn't just that kind of nurturing.

Honestly, there was a lot of tough conversations, too. There were these three guys, my lean [00:23:00] guy, my maintenance guy and my operations guy didn't get along and it wasn't obvious to the naked eye, honestly, but I have this sort of off the charts empathy and I can get into people's world. I could read like what the heck was going on.

So, I coached these guys for months and finally, I mean, I had to go and put them in a room and I said, look, bring your lunch because we're not getting out

of here until we get to the bottom of this. And lo and behold, we got to the bottom of what was going on between these guys. And, and believe it or not, it, it went all the way back to an event that had happened in 30 seconds, 12 years prior to that.

Oh, my goodness. One of them said, you know, when, when I started with the company, I came in this room and you were sitting there talking to so and so, I said, good morning, you looked at me, you didn't say anything, you look back at the other guy, and right then and there, I knew you were threatened by me.

And, you know, we uncovered this and we, there were so many of [00:24:00] these kind of hidden sort of skeletons, if you will, that we had to dig up and deal with in order to create that collaboration.

**Tim Spiker:** It's so, it astounds me. It shouldn't at this point, but every time I hear stories like these, I think about. Like, I like business strategy, business strategy is fun.

However, the greatest business in the strategy cannot overcome broken relationships. It can, it never works. And when people aren't speaking to one another or aren't being, you know, forthcoming with one another, aren't collaborating well, the, the best strategy in the world doesn't get executed. And, and it's, you know, we need both, obviously.

We need both healthy relationships and great strategy. But I think about how many times do we go to pull on the strategy lever when we should instead be investing just as you described. And hey, let's get to the bottom of why three important leaders in this business are not getting along and bring [00:25:00] your lunch because we're, we're going to, we're going to figure it out.

I just, I love that you were willing to go there. Instead of just trying to make another turn on the spreadsheet.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah. You know, I think it's important to address the bottleneck in our case, the bottleneck was not absence of you know skills or talent. The bottleneck was that one plus one was 0.5 instead of one plus one being three.

You know, we were taking away from each other's greatness as opposed to adding. And, and honestly, you know, most of the businesses that I work with today are not lacking, you know, technical expertise, functional expertise. What

they're lacking is leadership is, you know, and I don't mean just leadership from the top.

I'm talking about at every level of the organization, leadership, enough leadership to say, you know what it is incumbent upon me to work collaboratively and work through conflict in a healthy way and things like that. And so that [00:26:00] is sort of my sweet spot, if you will. When I work with my, with organizations is to say, look, let's strengthen that.

And you'll be amazed what it does for you because you know, you get people to work together, produce excellent results.

**Tim Spiker:** So, you're at Procter and Gamble, but at some point. You make a transition. You decide that you're going to make the leap go and do work in the leadership development space. You wrote a book. Talk to us a little bit about making that decision to make that transition to be somebody who's full time focuses on leadership development with people in organizations.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah, pretty much by the time I was nearing the end of my work at Sunny D, I was very, very clear the whole time I had been doing for like 28 years or so, I'd been even though I was in a manufacturing and supply chain career and that sort of thing, I was always doing it from an [00:27:00] angle of, Empowering people, creating great space and that sort of thing, and I was always writing these notes and things like that.

So right around that time I was, I wanted to always do something on my own. But one of my friends from the old Procter and Gamble, kind of one of the, the roles that I had in the past, one of my colleagues called me from Campbell Soup and they wanted to offer me a job at Campbell's which I turned down because it was like a plant manager job.

And I said, look, I want to do this kind of thing. So then once they found that I wanted to do that work, they made me an offer. I couldn't refuse. So, I went and actually did that work that I wanted to do for Campbell Soup for four years across multiple plants. So, in, in a, in a way I was a consultant. Who was getting a paycheck.

And so, I got to really practice this idea of getting into people's world and connecting with them, seeing what's missing, bringing whatever need they needed to supplement [00:28:00] their work. And so right around 2015 this is where we began to sort of make the transition. My daughter had had it with me talking about this book that I was going to publish one day.

And so, and she sort of, she you know, told me that we're going to go ahead and publish this book. And if you got some other stuff, we'll put it in the next book. So, she took over the project, gave me some writing assignments and in all of this, you know, designed the cover, got her brother involved in doing the editing and all of this.

And we basically published The Transformative Leader in 2015. And by that time, I had been also speaking on vacation days and things like that, speaking around the world about some of the victories we had had, you know, at Sunny D and other things. And so the book actually has sold now in over 30 countries.

And, and shortly after that, a few months after that, my daughter started talking to me about [00:29:00] leaving my corporate career and starting a business together. And so, in 2016 she and I started the Ghannad group. And then later on, my son joined and my wife joined as well. So, for the last. seven years or so.

**Tim Spiker:** Now, is your wife still working for free or does she get a pay? Do we get her paid now? Right.

**Amir Ghannad:** She actually gets a paycheck. Yeah. A big one.

**Tim Spiker:** That's great. That's great.

**Amir Ghannad:** Exactly. So, so, you know, we started out with some public speaking, but then that led to doing some workshops and a bit of consulting, some coaching.

And, and so we offer a variety of services, but they're all. Aimed at guiding leaders in the process of creating extraordinary cultures that deliver breakthrough results and unprecedented fulfillment. So, we're a guide where we're not coming in to say, everybody step aside. We have a standard process.

We kind of go in and connect with people to see what's working [00:30:00] and what we can bring to help, help them accelerate their progress.

**Tim Spiker:** Well, I'm glad that you brought up the transformative leader, your book, because I wanted to talk to you about it. And there's one thing in particular I want to spend a little time on because you, you make a statement in the book that is one of the most favorite things that I have, I've ever heard you say in quote fingers there as I'm, as I'm reading the book, but between you and I getting to visit personally, and then with regard to the book and other podcasts you've been on, you talk about the fact that there's you've never had a

commitment that you've broken, and you mean that statement a little bit differently than people might think at first when you hear it. But I'd love for you to unpack that idea a little bit because I think it's really true and profound and important idea for us to think about.

So, talk to us a little bit about this idea of never breaking commitments.

**Amir Ghannad:** Sure. So let me just put it this way. When I'm in my events, [00:31:00] I ask the audience often, how many of them meet a hundred percent of their commitments and literally no hands go up. And so, then I raise my hand and I say, you know what?

I meet a hundred percent of my commitments. And, and, and people look at me a little funny, like, oh, this guy is like really arrogant. He thinks he's perfect. That sort of thing. But then I tell them the story. I say, you know what? I have an exercise program that I'm a hundred percent committed to. And if the weather is nice and I get enough sleep and I feel like it in the morning, I'm on it, you know, I'm doing it.

And then they're kind of looking at me a bit puzzled and I said, well, you know, but you don't, what you don't get is even on those days when I snooze the clock seven times and don't exercise, I'm still meeting 100 percent of my commitments. And so, they're a little bit puzzled, right? And I say, you know what?

Because the kind of commitment I'm talking about is what you are truly committed to. And in my case, I'm 100 percent committed to being lazy, right? And so. [00:32:00] Even though I say to other people that I'm a hundred percent committed to my exercise program, that's not a hundred percent commitment. That's a partial commitment.

That's a conditional commitment. And I will do it if this happens, that happens, but there are things in life that we are a hundred percent committed to. And we all, not just me. But every person in the audience, every one of us meets a hundred percent of those commitments that we truly are committed to, not the ones that we keep telling other people we're committed to, because some of those we are committed to, but some of them, we just say it.

And if the conditions are right, we'll deliver. If not, we'll provide an excuse, right? And so that's the notion of a hundred percent commitment. Commitments come in three different forms, Tim. For me. There's a hundred percent

commitment. This is like, you know, you have a newborn, you don't set conditions, say, okay, tonight we only getting up three times.

No, if he gets up, you know, five [00:33:00] times, if she gets up 15 times, it is what it is, you do what you have to do. And then there is zero commitment. These are things that you're very honest about. And you say, look, I'm not committed to that. But then in, in the middle here, there's something called the 50/50 commitment.

These are commitments that we pretend to be a hundred percent committed to, but we have all kinds of conditions. You know, I am a hundred percent committed to this project team. If all of these other people do everything that they said they would do, if my boss gives me all the resources that I want, and if they say yes to everything that I ask for.

No, that's not a hundred percent commitment because that's not reality. So, this is why I would say, you know, not just me, but we all meet a hundred percent of our true commitments.

**Tim Spiker:** Yeah. It's a fascinating idea to be able to say, what if I ignored everything that I said and just looked at what I did? And if we want to define what I'm committed to, we'll, we'll look at that in terms of [00:34:00] action and take responsibility for it in that way.

And then hopefully come around and ask ourselves some hard questions about, well, what could I be a hundred percent committed to that? I'm actually only 50/50. If, if I were going to flip a switch and say, I'm going to approach this differently now, and you're reminding me, as you unpack that story, it's making me think of Jocko will extreme ownership in a sense to say, okay, you know what? Even if I don't get all the resources that I want, all the capex that I want, what, even if I don't get all these conditions, I am going to do everything I can to make this happen. In the, you know, in the business example of what Jocko talks about.

So, I think it's such a, it's a profound mentality, because ultimately it, it takes away all the excuses. This is, I can't blame anything on anybody else. I can't say I can't say that it's somebody else's fault. I'm saying that I'm going to try to figure this out no matter what. And it seems very powerful to me in, in that way.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah, \and the power of it, I want to just [00:35:00] underscore the fact that this is not for somebody else. It, it helps you be the most powerful version of yourself because honestly, you know, I'm not saying I don't

have 50/50 commitments in my life. I have plenty of them, but you know what they do to us is that, you know, when we pretend to be 100 percent committed, but then we give ourselves and other people excuses that are external to ourselves, then we take on this victim identity.

You know, we continue to enforce the, hey, you know what? I'm still 100 percent committed, but if it wasn't for these knuckleheads, if it was for this, if it wasn't for that, you know, and, and over time we begin to feel like a victim to our circumstances when in fact, we could make choices, you know, at any given point in time, we could say, no, I'm no longer committed and I'm willing to accept the consequences or I continue to be committed and I'm going to take on a different strategy.

Yeah, but this 50/50 thing [00:36:00] gives makes a victim out of us.

**Tim Spiker:** So good and so important for us all to think about well, your work takes you all over the world and what that gives us today as we're visiting is a chance to see the broader world through your eyes, you're knee to knee eyeball to eyeball with leaders on a regular basis.

What are some of the things that you are seeing out there in the marketplace with a variety of different industries and cultures and organizations? What kinds of things are you seeing around leadership and culture development that really have your attention and passion these days?

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah. So, what, what I've really kind of concluded out of, you know, all the clients that we serve and the different interactions that I have is that the problems that we solve fall into three categories, Tim, and, and they make a huge difference.

And I always tell people that it's not rocket science, you know, don't be. Go in [00:37:00] and looking for the latest research on this and that and the other. Yes, there's value in research, but it just really comes down to three things. When our clients bring us in, we address these three problems for them. And I'm telling you profits sore, morale sores, and all of that.

The number one problem is that people in leadership roles. have simply not had sufficient development as leaders. They are functional experts. They're technical experts who have continued to get promoted. And at some point, they realized that part of their job is now to lead an organization, not just to get the job done.

And so, one of the things that we do is basically we work with leaders at various levels of the organization to help them develop those leadership skills, not just pick up tools and skills, but recognize who they need to be and how they need to show up and how they need to put those tools to work. So that's number one leaders versus sort [00:38:00] of functional experts, we help functional experts become leaders.

The second problem that we run into often is that people are not collaborating and they're working in silos and therefore there's no synergy. And you know whether it's across functions. Or between individuals within a function and what I found often is that, you know, when I ask a question, I said, so is the direction clear people's first answer is, oh, yeah, yeah, we have a vision, we have a mission, this and that. But then when we dig a little bit deeper, we find out that. They are truly not focused on a unifying vision.

So, one of the things that we do to address this is, you know, among other things around developing leadership skills and collaboration skills between people is to get real clear what the direction is, what's in it for everybody, how it unifies people and how we need to communicate it in such a way [00:39:00] that truly unites people.

So that's number two, collaboration versus silos. Number three is that while people on the front lines are looking for their leaders to provide leadership and they're disappointed when they don't see it and so on and so forth, the other way is true as well. People at the top are saying, you know, these people on the front lines are not taking initiative.

What's wrong with them? They just want to come to the work and do their eight and hit the gate, right? Well, you know what? We need to recognize that every one of those people is a champion somewhere in their life. And so how can we create a condition at work in which they show up as their best self? So, the way we deal with that is, first of all, again, teaching and coaching the leaders, but also working with the people in the middle of the organization and on the front lines.

To help them understand they don't have to wait for their leaders to be enlightened, that they can [00:40:00] actually make an impact right where they are. And that makes a huge difference. So that people are not waiting for each other to actually initiate something. But just right where you are, you can make extraordinary things happen.

So those are three issues that, that I see over and over again.



**Tim Spiker:** You know, the, the latter one that you mentioned there just reminds me of the word engagement and the amount of research that exists globally, over 400 studies now. Meta study by Gallup pointing towards really just a global epidemic of disengagement, or at least the lack of full engagement.

And that's not new. That's not like, that's not a pandemic thing. That's not, you know, it's not related to that. There's always been this extraordinary opportunity for strategic advantage in the marketplace for leaders and companies who figure out how to create an environment where people want to engage because when they [00:41:00] engage, especially compared to their peers, they have a huge business place advantage because there's so much more coming to the table at that point. So those are, that's three fascinating buckets to think about and I so appreciate what you said at the beginning. It's not as if research is not important and helpful.

Probably we have this conversation a decade or two from now. It's, it's probably going to be the same three buckets in all likelihood.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, yes, research is important, and we need to really understand what, what the latest technology is and so on and so forth or what insights we can gain.

But bottom line is, it's like, okay, if you've been researching what, what is the best gym you can join for the last 6 months, you you're not even doing. A couple of push-ups and sit ups. I'm going to say, listen, it's good to continue to look for a really amazing gym, but do whatever you can right now with what you have.

And there's a lot that people can do by just [00:42:00] going back to the basics and treating people like human beings and creating an environment in which people want to bring their best.

**Tim Spiker:** You can just everybody pause just hear that let it soak in for a second you know Dr. Benjamin Hardy writes a lot about the power of environment and I hear that coming through and in what you're saying and you know he has he's a book called willpower doesn't work and you know there's the old story if I'm going to be healthy but I you know I fill my pantry with twinkies it's gonna be a tough going.

And so, this idea that we as leaders, are we creating the environments that are inviting people to engage? Are we creating spaces where people will want to engage? Or are we just trying to leverage FTEs for some unit of production?

And the fact of the matter is when we look in the mirror, none of us wants our leaders to purely treat us as an FTE that's creating a unit of production. We want them to [00:43:00] engage with us and see us as more than that. And so, we as leaders have that same responsibility to the people that we're influencing and how do we create those cultures that invite people to engage? So, it's, it's really a really good, important ideas for us to think about.

This fall, you've got some new stuff coming down the road to talk about the issue of saboteurs and producing results. And I'm going to quote you here with ease, which really got my attention when I saw it. So, talk a little bit about what's coming here in a number of months from the Ghannad Group.

**Amir Ghannad:** Yeah. Yeah. So, this really goes back to the initial stages of when we were doing the work at Sunny D. You know, I was doing all kinds of training and coaching and that sort of thing. And then later on, it turned into a training program that we were rolling out across the entire company. And then I've kind of built on this. And, and we have actually created a couple of [00:44:00] signature workshops that we do with organizations as a foundational work. So, the first one is discover the transformative leader within. You know, I believe that there are these seven hidden saboteurs of success and fulfillment that if we master, if we identify them and we develop the habits that we teach then we show up as the best version of ourselves.

And so that's kind of conquering the seven hidden saboteurs. The second course has to do with culture transformation. It says, okay, the first course is about personal transformation. The second course is about culture transformation. So, what we've done is we have turned both of these into e-courses. that can be taken individually on demand, or they could be facilitated by internal resources at companies that we would train to be facilitators.

So that's what we're excited [00:45:00] about is something that will help us continue to expand the Influence of this work that we've seen a lot of great benefit out of.

**Tim Spiker:** Yeah, it's, it's amazing because I think, you know, you and I are both old enough to remember a world where just getting something out to the internet and offering to people wasn't a possibility.

I mean, some of our listeners may be like, what world was that? Well, there was a world, there was one where you couldn't just post something and the opportunity now to take things that were previously really just private and executive suites for people who were coming with very large checks. The idea

that that some of that some of those ideas and some of that content can now be brought to a broader population at a lower price point because of the power of technology.

It's really amazing. It's not easy. I will say to convert those conversations into something online, but [00:46:00] what a wonderful work that you're taking on to get that so that more people can have access to the to the advice you're able to provide other leaders and organizations.

**Amir Ghannad:** Thank you so much. You know, I think it's important to learn about leadership. I think it's, it's important to continue to be a student of leadership, but it's really, really urgent if you will, to actually be a leader right where you are. You know, don't wait for that degree to be finished. Don't wait for that training class to be finished.

Begin practicing some habits. And one of the ways that you can think about it is, you know, how would I want to be treated? And no, I, I'm a big fan of treating other people the way they want to be treated, not the way I want to be treated. You know, I get that it's important to listen, you know, for how people What kind of style of communication they prefer and that sort of thing and, and tailor [00:47:00] our communication to them.

But there are some fundamental things like, am I, you know, do I feel like I'm valued? Am I growing? Am I learning something? Am I trusted? Am I part of something big in my life, in this, in this particular company that actually contributes to other people and contributes to me? Those are basic needs that we all have.

So, we all sort of possess this internal compass that could point us in the direction of something we can do for others, because it's exactly the same kinds of things that we want. People want to be respected. People want information. People don't want to be kept in the dark. People want to be trusted.

People want to be given some responsibilities. And so, I'd say like right now. Begin to practice some of those things, right? While you're researching and learning and, and, you know doing all of that. So, do it now.

**Tim Spiker:** Could you not just feel the winsome [00:48:00] wisdom coming off of Amir Ghannad? I have had the opportunity to interact with Amir on a number of occasions now. And every time I step away from the dialogue, I feel like this is a person I want to be around. This is somebody who knows a lot, but

also shows up with such humility. It's just so inviting to want to be around. A leader of his caliber. And I'm so thankful that he joined us for the episode.

A couple of things to emphasize here as we wrap up, he talked about people being in leadership roles, but us not developing them to be leaders, this idea that look, a functional expert doesn't necessarily make a great leader. They might, but what are we doing to get them ready? What are we doing? And many organizations have this issue.

Many organizations don't think about leadership development until they start placing people in leadership [00:49:00] roles. And I know that sounds ridiculous, but how many of us have been in organizations where somebody gets promoted and then we begin the leadership development process? Why not be intentional before that person has other people in their charge?

It would be wise. It's not hard to see around that corner. We know that people are going to be promoted into leadership roles. Why don't we go ahead and begin that process before they get promoted? Just a simple common-sense idea.

Another thing that Amir mentioned is this idea of getting clear on the direction we're heading, but also keeping in mind and taking into account what's in it for the other person. Now, this is motivation one on one at a certain level, but again, it's something that we sometimes as leaders lose track of, yes, we need to communicate clearly where the department needs to go, the improvements that we need to make, but it's also very important for us as leaders to look at the individuals on our teams [00:50:00] and think through person by person, what's in it for them and speak to that, help them see what's in it for them if we move forward. And by the way, that has to be a real story, not a made-up story. That's, oh, this is actually good for you as the leader, but it's not that great for them. No, no, it's got to be genuine. This isn't a sales job of something fake.

This is a communication work to help people see really, really what's in it for them. And they might see that easily or not. But the point is we as leaders, it's not enough to just say, here's the direction that we're heading and why are we getting there? We need to keep in mind the individual motivation question at hand so that we are working with people around what's in it for them.

The final thing that I want to emphasize is essentially something you heard throughout the entire discussion. It is this wonderful combination of care and performance. You got the sense from Amir as he told his story [00:51:00] around Sunny Delight that we couldn't simply accept underperformance, and yet, did you hear?

You did hear. You couldn't have listened to that conversation and not hear somebody who cared for his people. He cared deeply and it was genuine, but it wasn't just the care. It was also the responsibility, his responsibility as a leader and calling other people into responsibility. It's that combination of the two.

And if you go all the way back to when he talked about his mother, teaching him about the idea of responsibility. And you see that even yet today coming through in his leadership. So, it is the combination and we have to hold on to both. We have to be looking forward for how we can get better and have those tough, difficult conversations that we need to around performance and how do we get better?

But when people genuinely know when they accurately and genuinely know that we [00:52:00] care about them, those conversations become healthier and more productive. I mean, think about your own life. If you've had a leader that held you to account, but did it in a way that was inviting you to a higher standard that was good for you, did it in a way that spoke to you and connected you and was being done by somebody that you knew beyond a shadow of a doubt cared for you.

Don't we listen to instruction differently from the people that care about us versus the people who we don't think care about us, we listen to those words very differently. It elicits very different emotions out of us. If we don't think that somebody cares about us as they're trying to drive us forward, oftentimes the emotion that comes forth from us is suspicion.

I wonder what they're up to. I wonder why they're doing this. I don't think this is really about me. What is it that they're trying to get? And yet, when we know for sure that somebody has a deep conviction about caring for us, not as a full time [00:53:00] equivalent on a spreadsheet, but as a real human being, when we know for sure that they care about us and they come to us with things that we need to work on, things that we can get better at, things where we can grow.

We almost always take that instruction and that encouragement to heart. And so throughout all of Amir's story, we get a chance to see this wonderful combination of care and performance, bringing people and organizations forward, but not doing it in such an antiseptic way, doing it in a very human way that caused people to be genuinely and deeply engaged. And so that leads me to the question I want to leave you with today.

And that is this, as you are driving your teams toward performance, do you genuinely and deeply care about them as [00:54:00] people, this is Tim Spiker

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