

Rachel: Hello. Today's show is with Lee Cockerell. He is the former Executive Vice President of Operations for Walt Disney World. He actually still works with Walt Disney World. As the Senior Operating Executive for ten years, he has led teams of 40,000 employees. He was responsible for the operations of 20 resort hotels, 4 theme parks, 2 water parks, a shopping and entertainment village, and the ESPN Sports and Recreation Complex, plus all the ancillary operations, which just supported the number one vacation destination in the world.

One of his major and lasting legacies was the creation of [Disney Great Leader Strategies](#), which is used to train and develop 7000 leaders at Walt Disney World. In 1990, he opened the Disneyland Paris Project. His [bio](#) says that he is the "perhaps hardest working person on the planet, and he is always just seconds away from delivering another profound notable quotable that everyone will write down immediately."

In this talk today with Lee, we covered a lot of ground. First I asked him just about... he said if he is the hardest working person on the planet I was curious about, does he feel like you can still live a rich life that feels like it's well lived if you're working often?

I got his perspective on that, some different things he does around time management, around starting a business. I asked him some questions about what to do if you're starting a business, if you're on a budget or not; different things. He shared some Disney principles around how they hire people and how they're able to create such magic.

Then we got a little bit personal and he told me about a time when he was depressed. He shared what was able to get him through that. We covered all kinds of different things. Lee has a ton of phenomenal information and I thought it was a cool interview. So enjoy.

All right. Thank you so much for being here, Lee.

Lee: Hi there, Rachel. Good to be here.

Rachel: Awesome. The intention behind "A Better Life" is to show people that if they have a choice, they can choose a better life. In that spirit, can you take a minute with us to just brag and share some of the things that you're most proud of in your life?

Lee: I got pretty lucky. I grew up on a little farm in Oklahoma and I probably was the most likely not to succeed. My mother was married five times and I was adopted twice. I got the name Cockerell when I was 16, and then I went to college and didn't do well, so I went in the army. Then I ended up running Disney World. That's a pretty good life. People would say, "How'd you do that?" I'd say, "Well, a couple of things." Certainly, my wife and I have been married 46 years. My son is very successful. He's the vice president of Disney Hollywood Studios. I have three grand kids who like me better than their parents. One of them is 19, he's at the University of Miami; a 16-year-old girl who's looking at NYU and Emory and other schools; another boy, 13. Everybody lives in Orlando, so I'm proud of that.

I think what I'm most proud of is the success I had in my career without a college degree. I'm trying to share that with people; don't underestimate what you can do in your life. That's really what it's turned out for me. I think too many people give up too early. It's a lot of fun to think about, there's a lot you can do if you just wake up every morning and go out there.

Rachel: I love it. Your bio says that you're the hardest working person on the planet, and you were just saying how if you go after it... What drives you?

Lee: Insecurity. Two things: insecurity and I'm compulsive. I tell my wife that compulsiveness is just a higher level of responsibility. She doesn't think that's funny. I was very insecure when I was a young person and kind of grew up introverted. I finally worked my way out of it. I went and got a speech coach and learned how to speak. If you had told me 40 years ago that I'd be giving keynote speeches for a living, I would have told you you've got to be the craziest person in the world because I took speech in college and dropped out the night before I had to give a speech.

Yeah, I think you just work it and you understand that sometimes it may take a little longer. Somebody said, "Gosh, it could take two or three years to get better at something." I said, "Yeah, but two or three years is gonna go by anyway so you might as well get with it." You can either have an average life or you can have a great life. It takes more effort to have a great life.

Rachel: That's a great point. Do you still think you're working so hard because of insecurity?

Lee: I don't know what it is anymore. I've kind of lost track of what it is, but I enjoy what I do now. People say to me, "Lee, why do you do this?" I say, "Because people are flawed." They give a round of applause and sometimes standing ovations when I give a seminar or give a speech. When I play golf, nobody applauds. This is my golf game. I enjoy it, it's fun, and it helps people.

I always say to them if you can help people, why not? If I can give them some advice about how not to make the mistakes I made early in my career, and how to be a better leader and a better manager, and how to improve customer service, if I can do that, maybe I can leave a little bit of a legacy with some people who can look back and tell people that Lee Cockerell helped them way back when.

Rachel: I love it. I know you have been working really hard and you're going and you're doing these keynote speeches. You have so many people, these books and all these things. I'm wondering. Do you feel like you can have a rich life that feels really well lived, including just not work things, and still work really hard? Do you feel like your quality of life is also pretty great?

Lee: Listen, I wrote a book recently — it just came out three weeks ago — called "[Time Management Magic: How to Get More Done Every Day](#)," how to go from surviving to thriving. I think if you focus where you spend your time, if you pay attention to where you spend your time, and you clearly know the three or four most important things in your life, and you spend time on those every day and you let the other stuff fall away...

Don't be spending time trying to help Kim Kardashian with her life, or the real housewives of Beverly Hills. Really think about where you spend your time.

Listen, I spend my time in three areas. One is my health. I pay attention to that every single day. I pay attention to my family in a big way, number two. I say number two because my wife said, "Lee, take care of yourself or you can't take care of us. Stay healthy." Last, I take care of my finances so that I can help my grandchildren, I can help non-profits, I can help our relatives sometimes who need some help.

You've got to know what you're going to spend your time on and what you're not going to spend your time on. I don't think the average person thinks about this. I have a great life. My wife travels with me if she wants to. If she likes where I'm going, she goes. I went to Portugal, she went. I go to Chile, she goes.

If I'm going to, I won't say what city, she stays home. I don't want to offend anybody. Yeah, we have fun together. I think you can have both, but you've got to know what you want. It's kind of like going on vacation. If you don't know where you're going, you're not going to get there. If you don't know where you're going, you're not going to have the right plan. I don't wake up in the morning and hope the day works out. I wake up in the morning and I think about my health. I exercise twice a day. I have a strength trainer twice a week to get bone density so I don't fall and break a hip one day and end up in a wheelchair for 30 years. I spend time with my wife; we go to lunch a few times a week. She travels with me. I like having her with me.

When I was working like a dog at Marriott, I spent the weekends with my son. I didn't play golf. He doesn't even think I was ever gone, although I was gone five days a week. It's not how much time you spend doing things, it's how you spend it. Are you paying attention? As I said to my wife, "Are you watching TV or are you paying attention to what your wife's saying?" If you're paying attention, life works out pretty well. If you're not, you get into a little disruption.

I think you can have both. I think you can work hard at both. If you stay fit, you have more energy. You can do more. This is the problem. Most people, they let their health get out of... They get no energy. They eat too much. They're overweight. They drink too much and they can't sleep. The next thing you know, you don't do much. If you don't feel healthy and high energy, you're not going to do much. That's why I always tell people, "You've gotta focus on the important things. Everything else can just fall by the wayside."

Rachel: How did you decide what your three most important things were for you?

Lee: I really believe that the biggest regret you will have in your life is if you lose your health. My mother died of lung cancer from smoking. A lot of people in our family have not made it because of poor health habits. My wife and I talk about it. I get my physicals, I go see the doctors at the right intervals, I exercise every single day. I get strength training to take care of that bone density problem. Especially a woman should be thinking about that. I just think about that. If you're not healthy you can't do much else. My family is really vital. I grew up in a dysfunctional family. My mother was married five

times. I'm not going to let that happen to my family. We changed the course. We talked about that, and we make sure that we figure it out and work it out.

I've been married 46 years, 47 coming up in August. My son has been married 24. We've broken the chain. Sometimes you've got to decide to take it a different route. We think about it. That's the problem. Most people don't think about it. Is marriage easy? No, it's hard. Sometimes you've got to give in, you've got to let it go. Like that "Frozen" song, "Let it go, let it go." That's what I do. Now, when my wife says something I don't like, I just let it go.

And then finances. If you don't have money, you can't do the things you want to do. I can't be out there teaching and training and writing books. People say money doesn't make you happy, but it really does give you the ability to help other people. If you don't have money you can't give people money.

I just think about those three and I can't think of other things. I have a few friends but I think, at the end of the day, you've got to be careful who... it's probably not your Facebook friends. You don't spend too much time there. If you're going spend time with your real friends, then do that.

I think a lot. Every day I think about, "Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing? What am I not doing that I should be doing?" Let me tell you, if people would sit and quietly think about the responsibilities in their life, they'd have a better life.

Rachel: I'm curious, you mentioned friends. If somebody does want to get together, for example, how do you prioritize that?

Lee: My wife and I talk about it. One thing in time management is you've got to learn to say no, too. We could go out every night in Orlando and come home and get to bed at midnight. Go out and drink too much. We say no a lot. We tell people why. We'll go out early; we'll go out on a Saturday, but not on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday like you can do that every night. Our friends know that. On New Year's Eve we have our own time zone. We tell people to come at 6:00 and set their watches to 8:00. We tell them to leave at 10:00 and their watch will say midnight. We just have a lot of fun. We have friends who are in the same time zone as we are because you've just got to decide what to say yes to and what to say no to. Is it the best thing for your health, your family? Then you can get everything done.

A lot of people just run around, going out every night, and can't get up the next morning. The next thing you know, you're not exercising because you don't feel like it. You drank too many beers last night. All these things just collapse on you.

I think one thing is, every morning sit and quietly think about what you should be doing and where you're spending your time, getting you the goals that you're trying to reach in your life.

Rachel: Do you have a guiding belief or some kind of quote or phrase that inspires you every day?

Lee: Yeah. Don't underestimate what you can do. I think this is the biggest problem most people have today. They underestimate what they can achieve. We're living in America, by the way. You can do anything you want here. Here's a guy that didn't go to college and became the head of operations for Disney. I mean, come on. Where can you do that? Nowhere else in the world.

Don't underestimate what you can do. I tell everybody that. You can do it. If you can't do it, you can get help. People are willing to help you. You don't have to do everything. You can ask for help. People would be glad to step up. Don't underestimate what you can do because you don't have to have an average life. You can have a great life. Does it take a little more risk? Sure. You've got to push a little harder? Sure.

Let me tell you, until you've experienced great... I always tell people, do you want to have a great surgeon or a good surgeon when you get surgery? You want to have a great one. If you have children, do you want to have good kids or great kids? Do you want to feel good in the morning or do you want to feel great? That's how I think about it. Great is so much bigger than good, but it takes some risk.

My wife and I moved 11 times to make sure we had an excellent life. I got fired once and we moved. I got passed over for a promotion once and we moved. I quit once because I had a boss that was a total jerk and we moved. We moved 11 times. We had a great time because we're not going to sit around and have somebody work us over or beat us up or not treat us properly. Is it risky? Sure. I tell people, be careful where you get stuck. You can get stuck in the wrong place and the next time you turn around, 30 years have gone by and you're not happy. You've really got to manage your life. You've got to keep it under control.

Rachel: Absolutely. When you say you've moved because you want an excellent life, did you have a picture of what an excellent life would look like for you? Do you have goals that you're trying to achieve and then you're making your decisions based on that? How do you know what's excellent?

Lee: For me, I knew that I had to keep learning. I was listening to tapes and reading books. I'm one of these people where I asked a million questions when I went to work every day. I never left work not getting an answer to my questions, so I kept learning. The next thing I knew, they started promoting me. I kept learning, kept learning, kept learning. That was a goal of mine. I was reading a lot. I was listening to tapes on leadership and management and customer service. If I didn't know what was in some kind of food — and I was in the food business — I went and talked to the chef and I answered it.

Today we don't really have any reason. With Google, we can know anything we want to know. That continual learning I was always focused on. I wanted the promotions. I wanted to go up to the next level because I knew I could do more. I could lead and I could manage.

Usually, in the hotel business, you had to move to get a promotion. When you're with Marriott, you're living in Philadelphia but the promotion is in Chicago, and then the next promotion is in New York City. Then the next one is in Los Angeles, and then it's Paris.

I happened to be in a business where you had to move if you wanted to get promoted. My wife is a saint. Let me tell you. Her father was an admiral in the Navy. They moved 12 times. She's moved 12 with him and 11 with me. We've been in this house for 22 years, so you can imagine what it was like in the early days, but we had fun. We liked everywhere we lived. You spend most of your time at work or home anyway, so it doesn't really matter. I would tell you the highlight of my day every day is getting home at night; coming home, even when you're on vacation. It always feels better to come home than it does to go on vacation. I don't know why, but home is really special, especially if it's stable.

Rachel: Definitely. I saw you do a bunch of speaking, obviously. One of your bullet points for one of your talks is how you can share about the most important question to ask yourself every morning before you start your day. Can you tell us what that is?

Lee: When I think about that every day, I think about, how should I be spending my day? I've already told people. I would tell you that if you asked the average person, they cannot tell you the three most important things they're going to focus on every day. They can't tell you. They cannot say those three things, and they should be able to say them. I don't care if they have to write them down.

I just ask myself every day if I'm focused on the right things and I'm doing the right things. I think one of the best pieces of advice I got from my wife was, "Lee, be careful what you say and do today. Everyone's watching and judging you." I think all of us could take that lesson. With social media, and everybody's got a camera and everybody's got a recording device. Be careful what you say and do today. Everyone's watching and judging you. Role modeling is one of the most important things you can do in teaching other people, whether it's your children or whether it's people at work. There is a lot of bad role modeling today, a lot of bad leadership, a lot of bad behavior. You've got to make sure you don't get caught up in that.

I don't know if you've followed the story of the kids over at the University of Oklahoma last week, making inappropriate comments about African Americans. I mean those guys' lives are ruined. They'll never get over it. You can't get a DUI these days. It'll be on your record and on the Internet for the rest of your life. You've got to be careful.

I tell people, "You can Google me. You will find nothing negative," because I'm very careful to make sure nothing negative... I don't do it so it doesn't end up on there because your reputation can be gone in ten seconds.

Rachel: Yeah. I saw one of your podcasts and you said that we're always putting on a show, huh?

Lee: Yeah. At Disney I learned that more. I didn't know that so much when I worked at Hilton and Marriott, but when I came here, really, that's the whole premise of Disney. We're putting on a show. Everybody's got a role in the show, whether you're a

dishwasher, whether you're cleaning bathrooms, whether you're an executive, whether you're Mickey Mouse. Whatever you're doing, you have a role in the show. Everybody needs to know their role in the show. They need to know what they can say and can't say. They need to rehearse. They need to be professional. I say to people at Disney, "You don't have to be happy to work at Disney. You've got to act happy for eight hours."

It's like when you go to Broadway. I guarantee that the leading lady, when she goes up on that stage, she's professional. She does it every night. Even though she had an argument with her boyfriend, she puts on a show because that's what professionals do. I think in any business — I don't care what business: Vegas casinos, restaurants, rental cars, gas stations, a hospital — make sure you know that you're putting on a show. When you think about the big red curtain opening every morning, make sure you know what you're doing and you know your role in the show and that you actually perform it professionally every single day. That's what professionals do.

I think if businesses start thinking that way, they would get better because they do a lot of unprofessional stuff. You go to a restaurant and the people are over there texting each other. They're not paying attention to you. Nobody says good morning. Nobody says goodbye. Nobody says thank you. It's unbelievable. You're putting on a show. If you want to be the best in the world, you've got to put on the best show in the world. It's a good concept and a good model for thinking about how to run a business. Make sure all your employees know that they are actors in a business and we're putting on a show. We want a hit show that runs for 30 years.

Rachel: That's a really great point. You're now working with this [Thrive15](#) company. I know that they're all about teaching people to start and grow businesses in a really practical way. For you, since you touched on business, let's just go that route. For you, what do you feel are the best steps to start a business that's going to be great?

Lee: You know what? I had to do it myself. I worked for corporations my whole life and the next thing I knew I retired. I had to start thinking about, okay, how do I start my consulting business? How do I get these books? How do I publish them? How do I promote them? I had to do the same thing. I started thinking about it. I made a list of the things I needed. The first thing I needed was a website, and so I found me an expert. He designed it for me, and then I wrote the content.

The next thing I needed to know, I needed a tax account. I needed an investment person. I needed to make sure that I had all the systems in place where I could do the contracts. I needed a contract. Got that set up on my computer, and then I got an invoice set up. I just went through the steps.

This is what this [Thrive15.com](#) does. It tells you how to do things that you need to do. Having a good idea is not enough if you can't execute it. How do you set up an LLC or how do you incorporate? How do you get a bank loan? How do you write a business plan? How do you hire somebody effectively? How do you fire somebody without getting in legal trouble? How do you do public relations? How do you get your name on the Internet?

There are a thousand things you've got to think about and that's what this [Thrive15](#) does. It's a series of 15-minute videos. You watch them and every five minutes it stops and gives you a test to see if you've learned what you were supposed to learn in the first five minutes. You get tested 3 times during the 15 minutes and you learn something. Then you get points, you compete with other people around the world. We've got 33 countries involved in this now. It's just an incredible thing. Even if your listeners want to use it, they can go on there and use the promotion code "magic" and they can use it free for 30 days. They can go in there and watch all the videos they want for 30 days. If they like it, they can join it. If they don't, they don't have to.

It's the way education is coming. It's going to be online. Ten years from now, every kid in America will be able to go to college because it's going to be free. It's going to be online. It may not be as good as going to a campus, but it'll be available. Young people have no problem learning on their phone; a little six-inch screen, or on an iPad. It's going to be easy.

Older people have a problem with this. I saw my grand kids' house. Nobody watches the big 48-inch TV anymore but the dog. After dinner, five of them go different directions — one with an iPad, two with their phones, one with their laptop. Everybody goes to a different place. One is watching a movie, one is texting. This is life. People say, "Oh man, this is terrible." Let me tell you. It doesn't matter. This is what's happened. This is the way it is. Kids go do their thing, and they're going to easily learn. They're going to take more and more courses online.

Adults — you, me — there's no reason we shouldn't take these courses, too. If I can learn more, I can do more. If I can do more, they'll pay me more. That's why I'm always looking for a new story, a new idea; so I get more people to hire me to give keynote speeches. That's what this is really targeted at. If you're a young person, go use it.

Rachel: Yeah. I love that idea. I didn't know too much about it, but I think that's so fun to be quizzed every couple minutes, every five minutes; very cool. I also want to touch back on, you said when you were starting doing your consulting, you needed a tax expert. You got a tax expert. You needed an accountant. You got that. For people who might not have a lot of money, do you have any suggestions for them on how they can do this in a way that's still forming a great business?

Lee: Yeah. I think a lot of young people out there can do a lot of this themselves. I'm too old. I can't do a website. Most of them either have a friend who can do it or you can find a teenager who'll put one up for you. It's easy to put one up yourself now, self-guided on the Internet. You can do your own. If you can't afford a tax accountant, maybe you don't need one. Maybe you can get your father [or mother] to help you. Maybe get a friend to help you. You can do it yourself and take courses. On [YouTube](#) you can learn how to do it.

I do most of it. I do the contract myself. I just went on the web and I looked under "Contracts" and I found one I liked and I just changed it a little bit and I made it my contract. That's what I use now for every customer. I just went and did a Word



document and did an invoice. I just made it up. That's my invoice. I didn't pay for any of that stuff.

My [website](#), I've got a guy that runs it for \$500 a year. I write the content, I put the videos on there. He takes care of all that for \$500 a year. That's pretty cheap. A lot of people out there can do it themselves. I tell you, when I don't know how to do something I just call my grand kids and they come over and show me. They really know how to do everything. They can edit, they can put on videos. These days with technology and those kinds of things, a lot of it you could do yourself. You don't need help or you can find a friend who will help you or somebody in your family. There are a lot of ways to get help without spending too much money.

Rachel: Good point. People want to start a business; they can do these things for free or very inexpensively, or have other people do it. Is there like a litmus test or questions that people should be asking themselves to know that their business idea is viable and something that people would want?

Lee: Well, at Disney we interview two million guests a year, but I think before you go out don't fall in love with your idea until you check it out with people to see if anybody really wants it. Sometimes we fall in love with our own ideas and we're the only one that loves them. I think you need a lot of research. I think you can go online and do a lot of research today. You could find out who else is doing something similar because probably you're not doing something brand new that nobody has ever done in the whole world. Make sure you really understand the cost implications so that you don't get into the business and then not have enough funding to be able to do it. Maybe make sure that you can get the right investors.

It's like this [Thrive15](#). We had to really work on this to get people to invest, to get the money up. It takes a whole team of people to write all these courses and get them online. There are 50 or 60 people and we have to support their salary during the start-up of this thing. We made sure we had the financing in place first, and we had the loans, and we had the money.

There were other people doing this kind of work. There are others out there that do it on different subjects: one on photography, one on how to write websites. There are others out there. There's a history here that this would probably work, but you never know. The worst case you can get in is not have funding. If you get a good idea and you start down the road and you can't finish it, you're never going to get it launched, and then you're not going to get customers.

I'd say, really ask people that you trust, "Do you think this will work? How does it work?" If you're not good at finance, get some good accountant or finance person to go through your numbers and make sure you're not kidding yourself because this is the biggest problem. When you have a great idea, sometimes you can be too optimistic and then it doesn't work. I would say a lot of them don't work. A lot of ideas people have don't work. A lot of them don't work because they don't have the funding. They have to stop even though they had a good idea.

Take your time, get the performance done right. Make sure you know where you're going. Get a lot of advice from a lot of people, and then if you feel still good about it, go do it. See if it works.

Rachel: For people who are feeling optimistic... It seems like there's a trend lately where people just want to quit their jobs and take these leaps of faith. How do you feel about that?

Lee: I think that's true. There is because a lot of young people today don't want to work for big companies. They want to do their thing. It's a trend. There's no question about it. Young people today are different from my generation. They're not as worried about security. They go take those gambles. I would have been terrified to do this when I was their age back then because it wasn't done.

I think technology has opened up this opportunity for a lot of smart people to dream up new business and provide new services. If you're tough enough to take the trip, then I say yeah, go do it. I would say, the younger you are... You ought to do it when you're young because when you've got two kids and a mortgage and a college ahead of you, it's harder to take that leap. Take the leap early. Make it work. If it doesn't work, then you can always work on something else because as you get older you'll be less risk averse. I guarantee you, when you've got that mortgage payment and kids and college payments and stuff... If you've got a good idea, go get it done. Go do it.

Rachel: Absolutely. For people who are listening who might have two kids and a mortgage, how would you recommend that they start getting this business off the ground?

Lee: I'd say they'd better have a good father-in-law [or mother-in-law] who has a lot of money because it's hard, but if it's a great idea, maybe go get funding. Maybe get a bank loan. Maybe get a private equity to invest in it. Let me tell you, the older you are with the more financial responsibilities, the harder it is for you to step out of a job and a corporate life where you have health care with benefits and all of that stuff. You've got to be a really tough person to take that leap, but hopefully you've got somebody that's going to support you. If you've got that, go do it.

Rachel: Yeah. Maybe just don't even take the leap of faith, huh? Just take a couple hours per week or whatever it is, put it into your business without giving up your cushion.

Lee: That is probably the best way to do it. Have a little soft landing place. Yeah. Maybe you've got to just work harder over the next five years because you can launch the business while you keep working. That's another case.

I think people that have a great idea sometimes they are doing their job and several hours a week when they get home at night they're working on it. Absolutely. Keep your income coming in, especially if you have responsibilities and a family.

Rachel: Yeah. People have their business, they get it started. You've worked at some amazing companies that were so good at just growth. Do you have any tips on the best

ways to grow someone's business? I know there are a lot, so I guess just some of the ones that come to your mind right away.

Lee: Well, I started with Marriott when they had 32 hotels. Now they have 4000. I will guarantee that the way Marriott grew their business was quality wins out. Marriott always focused on quality. Cleanliness, friendliness, quick check-in, excellent food, you know? I think that's the key. If you're going to grow something, people have got to love it and they've got to want it. There was one example of how you do it. Even in my little business, I started out with one customer. He gave me 12 speeches and 12 seminars for a year. Since then I've done 500.

It kind of takes on a life of its own. I wrote a book and had the speeches take off more. Then everybody wants a seminar. Then I wrote the second book. Then I got even more business. Then all of a sudden we got into 14 languages. Now I'm hearing people from Russia and Japan and China and Portugal because the books are in all those languages.

When you start growing and you have a reputation for excellence and reliability and credibility, and you keep your promises, and you've got a message that people want to hear, with social media today the word will get out. If you're great, the word will get out. You've got to learn how to promote yourself on social media sites. Tell people about your business and what you can do for them. Get them to call you.

Even I did a lot of free ones. I did it for churches, non-profits, just to get experience, to get practice, and then I could put them on my list of clients. Finally, people started paying. It got bigger and bigger and bigger and then when I got the third book, I got a lot of credibility, but it took a long time. It took time to write those books and get them out there, and get 14 languages to buy the book; publishers in all these different countries. Actually, all three books were just published in Russia recently. It's pretty exciting, but you've got to grow your business. It takes patience. You can't just expect overnight success.

Rachel: Yeah. That's a great point. If you want to have quality and you want to have that excellence, how does pricing come in? I know you said for you, you did free in the beginning. Did you then gradually raise your prices as well?

Lee: You know what? My wife gave me the best advice. She said, "Lee, don't under-price yourself. You know a lot, you've got a great resume, you've worked for three great companies. Don't under-price yourself." I put a price out there for a speech and I thought, "Nobody will ever hire me." I didn't get one person pushing back. I will tell you, I charged probably \$10,000 more for a speech than I thought I should.

Rachel: Wow.

Lee: Today, for my keynote speeches I charge \$16,000 in the US. I charge \$25,000 in Europe, \$35,000 in Asia. I don't have any problems because price is what you pay, value is what you get.

Let me tell you, pricing is an art. You've got to think, what are you delivering? Check the competition. What are other people... What's your experience? Why should somebody pay you that much? If you've got something and you're good at it, you're great at it, people will pay the price.

But if you don't deliver — and let me tell you, I deliver. When I get finished speaking, I'll have people in tears. Let me tell you, I bring people to the table because I've learned what the message is, I tell the truth, I tell people how to be better. People are willing to pay for that.

My wife was great at that. She said, "Lee, don't under-price yourself." A lot of us probably in business, when you start out as a consultant, it's easy to under-price yourself, and then it's hard to raise it. You started out too low. Just check the competition. See what everybody's doing. You just keep tweaking it, playing with it. Then you hear other people like Hillary Clinton, she charges \$250,000 for an hour of speech. There you are. It's an art.

Rachel: Absolutely. She's a writer, too. She's hooked up.

Lee: Exactly. I mean, look at her. Here's a lady that was living in Arkansas not that long ago and nobody knew who she was. Look at that.

Rachel: Crazy inspiring.

Lee: It happened pretty quickly.

Rachel: It did. It really did.

Lee: She's a very confident woman, and a lawyer and smart. She keeps learning.

Rachel: Um-hum.

Lee: Makes her mistakes like all of us, but she picks herself up and goes right back in head first.

Rachel: Yeah. I really liked that email thing where she said she would share all her emails. That was pretty cool.

You've also been putting yourself out there more on social media. Do you have any kind of strategy around that?

Lee: Yeah, I use social media for only my business. I don't put out there, "Lee Cockerell's having a coffee at Starbucks with Mary." I don't put on there, "I'm brushing my teeth right now. I've gotta go to bed." It's all about my business.

Some of it is humorous. Some of it is about my family and how it ties to my business. I try to do creative, humorous little pieces about why time management... Lessons, I give lessons. If you look at my Facebook page or LinkedIn or Twitter, if you go to my Twitter account there are 600 posts on Twitter. They're all posts about how to be a better leader, a better manager, and improve customer service or patient care in a hospital.

There's nothing in there about this nonsense stuff about, "I'm going to the grocery store to get some coffee." No. It's a resource for people, so if they go to my [Twitter](#) account, it's a free resource there, including my podcast called "[Creating Disney Magic](#)." It's free and you can go there. That's what I use it for.

I don't want people to go there and say, "Wow this is a bunch of junk on this site." I want them to go there and say, "Wow, here are 600 posts about how for me to be better. I'm gonna listen to this one today, and then I'm gonna listen to that one, and then I'm gonna read that one." Be careful not to abuse social media, where people hate to see your name come up.

Rachel: Do you think that most of your bookings come from social media? Where do you think most of them come from?

Lee: About 20% Disney gives me. Wherever, be it in Orlando or they sent me to Turkey this year, to Mexico. They've sent me to give speeches to clients that want a business speaker. I would say probably 40% or 50% comes from my website. Somebody goes to the website where I have all my seminars and keynote speeches listed, and then I would say probably 30% or 40% comes from referrals. Somebody was sitting in a room where I spoke before and they said, "Wow, I'm gonna call this guy and get him to come speak at my convention next year."

A lot of referrals, a lot of Disney, and then a lot of website and social media. Somebody sees it or their father tells them he was in the speech and you ought to check this guy out. And from my books. In the back of each one of my books it talks about, "You can hire me to give speeches, seminars, workshops." I kind of have it everywhere, everywhere I can put it. People learn about you from different places. Disney's great and it's great to have a Disney connection because that's why people hire me. If it was just Lee Cockerell they'd probably not ever hire me. They like Disney and I can tell them how to implement it in their business.

The first sentence in my book "[Creating Magic](#)" says, "It's not magic that makes Disney World work, it's the way we work that makes it magic. You can do it in your business, too."

Rachel: I know it's not magic. How can they create the illusion of magic?

Lee: I can tell you the three things we focus on at Disney which anybody can do. We are fanatical about who we hire. We are very careful about who we hire, who we bring in to the company. We check them out 12 ways. We're experts at interviewing. We know what to listen for. We try to hire people who know how to overcome obstacles because you have them every day when you deal with a customer and it's raining or it's hot.

Rachel: You still there? I'm going to hang up and call you right back. I think we got disconnected or something.

[Silence from 00:39:09 to 00:39:40]

Rachel: Everything was fine and then all of a sudden I couldn't hear you anymore.

Lee: I don't know. It just dropped off, but anyway, where were we?

Rachel: The last thing you were saying that I heard was about doing the interviewing. You're really good at asking the right questions.

Lee: Yeah. Disney's success model for magic is, get fanatical about hiring the right people. Hire people who know how to overcome obstacles, people who have a positive, can-do attitude and passion. Don't worry about the skills so much. You can train that. That's what we do. We are fanatical. We're so clear with people before we hire them about our expectations. A lot of people get up and say, "I don't want to work here. It sounds like the Army," but we have a Disney way of doing things. We're fanatical about hiring the right people.

Second, we are fanatical about training. We train people, test them, and then enforce the training. Let me tell you, just in our Disney Vacation Club, just to be a person who takes the appointments for people to see the hotel rooms, it's six weeks' training, just to take an appointment. We train, test, and enforce the training, and last, we create a culture where everybody wakes up in the morning happy to come to work because we treat people very respectfully. We're very inclusive. Everybody has a chance to get ahead at Disney. It's a place where everybody matters and they know they matter.

Just those three things: hire the right people, give them the greatest training in the world, and then create a culture where they're excited to wake up and come to work in the morning because they know they have opportunity. Let me tell you, you do those three things and you will get extremely higher results.

A lot of people are not doing that. They're not being careful about who they hire. When they hire the wrong person they don't fire them. They don't train very well. People are not trained, and then they don't test them to make sure the training took place, and then they don't enforce the training.

At Disney, there's one way to do it and that's the Disney way. We train people how to do that. That's why when you come there, you can walk away and say, "Wow, wasn't that a great experience?" Well, that can be done in any company.

Rachel: What are the types of things you're asking people when you're interviewing them?

Lee: If it was customer service, we might have five or six questions with obstacles in them. The question might be, "Tell me about a specific time you had to deal with an irate customer?" What you want to do is listen to how they handled it and what was the outcome. Let me tell you, if you interview five people for a customer service job and after you ask them five or six questions like that with an obstacle in it, if you listen to how they overcome the obstacles, it'll become very clear to you which one has the can-do, get-it-done attitude.

People can only talk about what they do. A person who is not good at that lets it go, drops the ball, who never gets back to the customer, they can't talk about it. Let me tell you, everybody has obstacles every day just like you do. Everybody has them. If you

live in LA it's the traffic. If you live in Chicago it's the snow. Sometimes, can-do people, they get there anyway. They leave earlier. They make it happen. They don't have any excuses. This is why people have got to learn more.

Even in my book "[The Customer Rules](#)" rule number nine is all about how to ask the right questions. There's a little book out there they can read on this. They ought to look at rule number nine in "The Customer Rules." There's a whole chapter on how to interview better and how to select better and how to deal with people who don't perform. Let me tell you, at the end of the day, your people are your brand. At the end of the day, that's it. Your people are your brand. Everything is a commodity today. If you get the right people answering the phones, the right people greeting your customers, the right people serving your customers, and they're well trained, you will have an incredible business. I guarantee you.

You go to businesses now, including Las Vegas where people don't have a clue what they're doing and they've got an attitude problem and they don't do what they're supposed to do, that's the manager's fault. That's not their fault.

Rachel: I'm curious now. I recently did a podcast with Ryan Jenkins who works with a bunch of millennials. He mentioned about how young people today are more prone to taking risks. How do you see the future of Disney? I guess millennials by 2025 are going to be, I don't remember exactly what the stat is, but the overwhelming majority of the workforce. Do you feel like that's going to impact Disney at all?

Lee: I think the thing with Disney is we've got a lot of people working for us now. You hear people all the time say, "Oh what about these young people? They don't work like we did." I say, "Let me tell you what. That's all we got. We've got this generation and we've got the next generation." A lot of people in my generation were poor performers. We need to quit thinking about when people were born. We need to make sure that when we work with people we treat them as individuals. Understand their aspirations, what they're trying to achieve. Help them get where they want to go. Get them the training they need.

There are a lot of great young people today. I'm not worried about the future at all. I'm just making sure we hire the right millennials, not the wrong millennials. It's like the right baby boomers, not the wrong baby boomers, and not the right X and the Z and whatever all these designations are.

I don't really care when you were born. I care about how you perform and I'm going to take care of you and I'm going to make you successful so you're going to want to stay with me. I don't want to go somewhere else because I'm going to make sure you are able to achieve your aspirations, too. When I care about you, you're going to care about me. That's how you have to think about leadership, like your kids. If you take care of your kids well, they don't run away from home.

Rachel: Yeah. Speaking of leadership, I'm glad you brought that up. I was curious because I remember reading how you mentioned that at one point you were a manager

and I guess a disgruntled employee hit you over the head with a beer bottle. Since then you just had to learn about basically becoming a better leader, becoming more likable.

Would you say caring about other people, is that one of your biggest tenets of that?

Lee: Sure, but that wasn't my problem. My problem was that I was an insecure young man who had a position. I abused my position. I intimidated people. I thought that I knew everything when I was young. I walk up to a waiter and I intimidate him and I approach him the wrong way and I say the wrong thing so he hits me in the head with a bottle. Okay. I get six stitches over my eye and eight in the back of my head. Later on, I speak to another guy and I say inappropriate things to him. I was really pretty demeaning. He comes out of the chair and hits me again over the head with a clipboard. Now I got 24 stitches in my head. My wife says, "Lee, do you think people hit you because of the way you talk to them?"

I got over that. I haven't been hit since 1973, by the way. I learned that you've got to be more respectful, that you've got to quit thinking about yourself all the time. You've got to be sensitive. You've got to have some finesse. How you speak to people matters, and how you pay attention to people matters. I'm an expert at that now. I was not that way. I was a young, immature manager that didn't know what I was doing, introverted. I kind of took the power place, you know? I've got the position; you've got to do what I say. Well that doesn't work very long. I got over it and I learned that you've got to lead people.

I didn't trust people back then. I didn't trust anybody. I only trusted myself because I had grown up in a family where I didn't trust anybody. I had to work my way out of that because if you're defensive and you don't trust people, people don't want to work with you.

I was lucky to have a couple bosses that really helped me. I had a boss one time that said, "Lee, do you realize the whole world's not about Lee Cockerell?" I said, "Okay." "Quit being so defensive. The whole world's not about Lee. I'm not attacking you. We're just talking about a business problem. You don't have to go into all your defenses." He helped me get over that, and I thank God for him because nobody likes working with... You ever deal with somebody who's got 12 excuses and they want to make it your fault?

Rachel: Yes.

Lee: You know? Nobody likes that. I got over that. That's probably why I'm still married. I got over that. I still have it down in my stomach, but I control it. Insecurity is hard to get over.

Rachel: Yeah. Those were some really good tips. They're actually really, really helpful. Another question I love to ask people just because I want our listeners to know just like everybody else you're a real human being. You've got everyday struggles. We never stop evolving. For you, what's the thing right now that you're currently working through, and how are you getting through it?

Lee: I'll tell you something I went through that was the worst thing that ever happened to me in my life. My wife almost died in '08-'09. I had to take care of her for two years. She



was really sick, and I ended up with depression. I got hooked on Ativan, a narcotic. I got hooked on sleeping pills. I couldn't sleep. My life was miserable. I finally saw a psychiatrist and this guy helped me. My wife is fine today. We found a really great surgeon who fixed her. I nursed her back to health. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. I didn't care about anything for a year and a half. Depression is a bad, bad place.

I told my wife, I said, "You know, Priscilla, I used to love you. Now I'm madly in love with you. I thought you were gonna die." It changed me dramatically. I think I've moved to a new place about sensitivity for people because it came so close right in my face.

I tell you, I learned a lot about depression. That's a bad place. You do not want to go there, but the psychiatrist told me, he said, "Lee, I'm glad you came in." He said, "Most men don't come in." I learned a good lesson. There it is. If you need an expert, go get him. You can't solve it by yourself.

That was the hardest thing I ever went through. Now I pay attention every day, am I being there for people? Am I being positive? People are having enough problems already. They don't need me to make their life worse.

I wake up every morning working through, how can I help people more? I think that just going through that with my wife, it really hit me. You know what I used to think about depressed people? I used to say, "What's their problem? Why don't they get their act together?" I thought it was an attitude. Man, did I get a good lesson. I ended up with it myself.

Rachel: Wow.

Lee: It was tough. It was tough.

Rachel: Was it the psychiatrist that helped get you out of it? Were there other things that you had to do?

Lee: Yeah. My wife told me to go see a psychiatrist. I really needed the anti-depressants, the drugs. They can cure 80% of people with depression with drugs. A lot of men don't go in. Men think they can solve it, but they end up drinking too much or sleeping or not getting a divorce or whatever else they'd abuse. [Inaudible 00:50:31] just was great.

I remember that morning after he interviewed me. He said, "Lee, you're gonna be fine. I'm gonna put you on Cymbalta," and I took it. One day I woke up and I was back to normal. It was a chemical imbalance in my brain from all that stress I was under for two years trying to take care of my wife. I think about that, that's another lesson. If you can't do something, go get help. You don't have to solve it yourself. If you need a professional, you need an expert, go get him.

It was the best thing I ever did. I can spot a depressed person a mile away today, and I really try to help them, get them to go in and get some help, especially men. Especially soldiers that don't want to go in and see a psychiatrist because of this macho thing. You've got to make sure we understand that we can't solve everything ourselves.

Rachel: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for sharing that. I feel like that's very, very helpful for people. Just in general I think this has been great. We've covered a lot of ground and I love how passionate you are about everything, it seems.

Thank you so much for your time. I would love if you could just let people know where they can go to find out more about you.

Lee: Yeah. My website is [leecockerell.com](http://leecockerell.com). Everything you ever wanted to know about me and probably more than you want to know is on there, on that site. You can go to Thrive15.com if you want to watch me. I've got 42 videos on there and I can talk about all these things, including the depression story.

I think the stories are important. Learn how to tell stories. Storytelling is very powerful when you're teaching. More people need to learn how to tell stories. I think if you watch those videos you'll see storytelling is pretty impactful.

Those are two places. My books are on my website if you want them. They're on Amazon and Barnes & Noble and everywhere else. If you've got any readers that want to order bulk copies I give a big discount. They can email me. My [contact](#) list is on my site, too — my address, my email address, my phone number. If somebody out there is depressed and wants to know the name of my psychiatrist they can call me and I'll get them in touch.

I get a lot of calls from people after I do these that say, "Could you tell me the name of your wife's doctor? What was that surgeon's name? I think we need him." She had a failed bowel resection surgery. Every time I tell this story I get a thousand people with the same problem. They're looking for that great doctor. Not the good one. They're looking for the great doctor. The good doctor will kill you. The great one saves your life.

That's how I think about it. There's a lot of information on the website. I hope it's helpful to people.

Rachel: Spectacular. Well thank you so much, Lee, for your time.

Lee: Okay, Rachel. Stay out of the casinos.

Rachel: Consider it done. I'm not a gambler.

Lee: Okay. Thanks a lot. If you want to do this again, let me know one day.

Rachel: Wonderful. I'd love to. Thank you.

Lee: Okay. Thanks.

Rachel: Thank you. Bye.

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