



Episode 19: Rethinking Leadership—Doing Well By Doing Good

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What is leadership? How is it developed? How is it defined? We've assembled an expert panel of business professors and leaders to discuss modern leadership styles and philosophies, how different generations of workers view leadership, and what this means for the workforce of the future. Our guests are Professors Richard Bilodeau and Emily Newell of the [University of Southern Maine](https://www.usm.maine.edu/)'s School of Business; and Becky McKinnell of [iBec Creative](https://www.ibeccreative.com/).

[Professor Richard Bilodeau](https://www.usm.maine.edu/faculty/richard-bilodeau/) teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in entrepreneurship, creative strategies, design thinking, business sustainability, and marketing at the [University of Southern Maine](https://www.usm.maine.edu/). In addition to his teaching, Professor Bilodeau oversees USM's [Center for Entrepreneurship](https://www.usm.maine.edu/center-for-entrepreneurship/), and serves on the advisor groups for the Honors Program, Food Studies Program, MEIF Entrepreneurship Training Program and [Ci2 Lab](https://www.usm.maine.edu/ci2lab/). He also has an active consulting practice, working with a wide range of businesses, from small retail and coffee shops in Maine to industry leaders like The Weather Channel, ESPN, Nielsen, and Deloitte.

[Professor Emily Newell](https://www.usm.maine.edu/faculty/emily-newell/) is an Assistant Professor of Sport Management at the [University of Southern Maine](https://www.usm.maine.edu/) and a former intercollegiate athletics professional. Her research centers around the intersection of intercollegiate sport and higher education, with a focus on international students, minority students, first generation students, and academically at-risk students. Prior to joining USM, Emily was a faculty member at Georgia Southern University.

[Becky McKinnell](#), founded her award-winning digital agency [iBec Creative](#) the day after graduating from the University of Southern Maine in 2006. Becky has since been recognized as one of Businessweek's Top 25 Entrepreneurs 25 and Under, was named U.S. Small Business Administration Young Entrepreneur of the Year, and received the Stevie Women in Business Award, among numerous industry recognitions for her company's work. In addition to iBec, Becky is a founding partner of [ikno intranet](#), a social intranet software designed for companies between 50 and 500 employees that need an easy and intuitive way to communicate online. And most recently, Becky launched a necklace and handbag line inspired by salt air, [Wildwood Oyster Co.](#)

This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

The Greater Good: Episode 19

Carrie: Welcome to the Greater Good: a podcast devoted to exploring complex and emerging issues in law, business and policy. I'm your host Carrie Wilshusen, Associate Dean for Admissions at the University of Maine School of Law.

Carrie:

What makes a great leader? It may be very different from what we've thought and learned over the years and today we're going to explore the concept of authentic leadership and doing well by doing good and learn how this model might be good for business. Our guests today will share this innovative leadership model on March 12th at the Hussey Leadership Institute at the University of Southern Maine. We are joined today by three guests. We have Richard Bilodeau who is a professor at the University of Southern Maine and teaches entrepreneurship, business sustainability and marketing. We have a returning guest, Professor Emily Newell who teaches sport management at the University of Southern Maine and Becky McKinnell, who is a graduate of USM and a successful entrepreneur. She is the founder of iBec Creative, an award winning digital agency based here in Maine. Among her many accomplishments, Becky has been recognized as one of Businessweek's top 25 Entrepreneurs, 25 and Under and was named US Small Business Administration, Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Welcome to all of you. So Richard, let's start with with you. Can you talk about our traditional idea of what makes a great leader?

Richard:

Sure. I mean, I think a lot of people when they hear a leader, they often think manager or the person who's the boss. And one of the things that we're seeing in leadership is there

are many different models and techniques emerging for how we can inspire and motivate people to sort of take charge and to help do all the good work that an organization needs to do. And I think one of the things that is evolving in the field is our thinking about the role as leader, as a servant to the organizations. So how do I as the leader go about determining the best way, not only to motivate people and to help the organization succeed, but how do I really become the person who is the catalyst for doing that work? By offering my service to the organization, to the people that the organization employees and to the community as a whole. And this model, no surprise, we call servant leadership. And it really is about figuring out all of the ways in which we can get good at helping the organization succeed by offering our own time and our own service. And one of the things I really like about the model, it fits very nicely with our thinking about corporate social responsibility in all the ways in which organizations can do things that are good for business, but also do things that are good for society at the same time. And how we balance those priorities to become more effective.

Carrie:

But in that model, aren't you losing control of your business and aren't you losing the power associated with a leadership position?

Richard:

Well, it may feel like you're losing control, but if you actually empower your employees to do the work that you need them to do, you end up in situations where the overall organization becomes a lot more effective. So through these models of empowerment and motivation and inspiration, one of the things that we see more and more is people become invested in the company in which they work. And as a result of that investment, people tend to experience more overall work satisfaction. And when employees are more satisfied, our customers end up being more satisfied. And we know that customer satisfaction is a very important driver of business sustainability and profitability over the long haul. So it's interesting that it might feel like you're losing the day to day control, but overall you create a culture where everyone is much more accountable as a result of everyone feeling more invested in the work that they do.

Carrie:

So you're creating stronger momentum for your organization?

Richard:

You definitely are. And you know, it's fascinating to me when you go out and you start to survey people about what they do and do not like about leadership. Most people when they

go to work, like to feel like they have some autonomy in their job. And so that old model of micromanagement or managing by walking around and making sure everyone is in the right seat doing the right thing and monitoring all their actions at work, we're finding more and more of that model doesn't really work. People feel like they're overly watched, that the organization doesn't trust them and when your employees think that they're not trusted, then they also don't really develop a sense of loyalty to the company.

Carrie:

Don't invest as much into the company, their personal skillset?

Richard:

Exactly. They don't invest. And so to me I think it creates this interesting opportunity to really leverage the best of the people that you've chosen to employ.

Carrie:

Emily, we spoke in Season 1 about your work in the sport management department at the University of Southern Maine and the teaching you do. How do you see this form of leadership as valuable to the students with whom you work?

Emily:

Yeah, I think it's absolutely important. We see this model employed a lot in sport and it's really important, you know, to not have the old model of kind of the the dictator athletic director or leader of an organization. And there's a lot more you know, power being spread throughout the organization. So we really want to model that in our classes. Particularly with the event and facility management class that we teach every spring. The students actually put on an event in that class solely kind of on their own. We always joke we're the bumpers if we're bowling and we make sure that they don't go into the gutter, but they might, you know, hit the bumpers a little bit on their way down the lane. And we think that's really important because if I'm going into the classroom and giving students, this is the project you're doing, this is the event that we're going to plan and here's exactly how to do it, they're really not developing any leadership skills throughout the process because we're telling them exactly how to do it and not letting them develop that authentic self and that sense of leadership.

Carrie:

Let's pause there. I want to define authentic self. So tell me about that.

Emily:

Yeah. So I think authentic self is something that we're all kind of striving to look for in that idea of the type of leadership, not modeling something that you think is what's going to be best or that you're supposed to be doing and following the book, but really finding what fits your personality because that's going to then translate into what we talked about that, that sense where employees feel...

Carrie:

Empowered?

Emily:

Yeah, empowered. And that trustworthiness, right? Because they understand that you're putting forth your true self the way that you like to lead. And so there's a little bit of trust that's built up there that I think is different than when you feel someone is being inauthentic. Richard, did you have anything to add on authentic leadership and authentic self?

Richard:

Well, I mean for me it really is about being true to your own self and letting that sort of inculcate the organization in terms of how it operates culturally. Like I own a business. I've never been a nine to five person. So I've been a person who's always said, okay, here's the work we need to do. Here are the hours of the day. Everyone find a schedule that fits their needs and in the overlap it's when we'll get together and it just creates this real different environment than if I said everyone must be here at nine and everyone must stay 'til five. And one of the things that I find is my employees are a lot more productive. Like I get a lot more value out of employing people when I allow them to really be themselves.

Carrie:

Becky, I want to turn to you because you are a successful entrepreneur, graduate of USM. Can you talk about how you got started and what you've been doing?

Becky:

I started, iBec Creative right out of college when I was 22 years old. So at the time I didn't really know anything about what it meant to be a leader or what it meant to be a manager and I just kind of went with my gut and I think that really served me well in the beginning. Like when I was setting up my initial office space, I really wanted to make sure that I had an environment that felt like a fun place to work. Like it didn't feel like an office. It felt more like a comfortable home. And you know, just letting my employees be who they are, whether it was with how they dressed or you know, bringing their full selves to work, like

rather than having their work mode and then their personal mode, really encouraging my team to be themselves and have that authentic relationship with each other and extend that to our client.

Carrie:

And how do you see that impacting the work? First of all, what does iBec Creative do?

Becky:

Sure. So iBec creative is an eCommerce agency. So we help retailers and manufacturers grow their businesses online by doing their websites, the coding part of their websites as well as the branding, which is the look and feel and then the digital marketing to help them with social media and advertising to grow their businesses.

Carrie:

And how do you see your leadership style impacting the quality of business for iBec Creative?

Becky:

I think, you know, one of the things that I love to hear about when a new, either it's a new employee or a new client comes into the office and they say like, wow, I just feel so creative in here. And like everyone here is so kind. And I feel like I've worked personally really hard at that. Like I feel like kindness and creativity is really personal to me. And to be able to get that feedback from people that are choosing to work at iBec or choosing to work with iBec is, is really rewarding for me.

Carrie:

Great. So I want to spend some time talking about how the work, how this idea works with the workforce of today. I think about, you know, sometimes you get some of us older folks going, Oh, these young kids, they just, they want work life balance and all these sorts of things. And we all complain about that. It sounds like this model might work really well with the workforce that we're faced with. Richard, you want to start on that?

Richard:

Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things that's really interesting about the younger millennials and gen-Z is their need for trust in the relationships in their life. And some of that has been driven by social media. I mean, certainly if we look at the way in which people buy products nowadays, they go out to the social sphere to see what people think about it. And they're really interested in the people in their lives who they view as having important opinions.

And we sometimes call these people opinion leaders. So they might be that power blogger that always gives you...

Carrie:

The influencers?

Richard:

Yes, an honest review about something. Or they may be someone who always likes comments and shares and social media. They may be people that leave ratings and reviews that resonate with us because they seem to be really truthful and really honest. And so I think it's interesting that the importance of building relationships, although it has evolved in much of relationship building is done in cyberspace. Still the fundamentals of building that relationship are really important. And I think when you start to look at the way in which people use technology for example, you know, one of the things that's fascinating to me in my classes, my students often want to collaborate on a common document that we'll put in a tool like Google Docs where everyone can participate equally. And this is a different model than I start a word document. Then I send it to Becky and she tracks her changes and then she sends it to Emily and she tracks her changes. It's a lot more of a collaborative tool where everyone can participate at the same time. Certainly we get to keep track of who made the changes if you want to see. But often people just contribute to the document and make a pretty fantastic document. And I think when we start to look at the way in which people are collaborating more and wanting to communicate more and be part of the same sort of team, you really do get that sense of that teamwork through the ways in which people are communicating.

Carrie:

Again, it's empowering your employee base or your team. You don't, Becky, you don't even refer to them as, as employees, you refer to them as your team.

Becky:

Yes, definitely. It's teamwork makes the dream work. I couldn't be what it is today without my team and you know, my employees doing the work and you know, it took me a couple of years to really understand what servant leadership means and really sink my teeth into focusing on my team that has made number one priority is to help them grow and help them be successful. Even if that means that I'm taking a worse job. Like, you know, the jobs that no one else wants to do with a company, like being a leader is about supporting your

team with the harder, more difficult or the projects that no one else wants to do. So that they can be really great at the easier projects that they can excel at.

Carrie:

And does that impact, I'm thinking employee turnover and/or team member turnover and things like that?

Becky:

Yeah, I mean it's all about creating a happy and enjoyable place to work where you are, you know, excited to come to work every day and I get that, you know, sometimes you need to grow on and move to another position at another company or change careers. So I don't look at turnover as such a personal thing. And I, you know, control what I can control at iBec and right now it's controlling the environment that they show up to work in every day and making sure that it's as supportive as possible.

Carrie:

And also this idea of employees and remote access to work. Does that work in this model? I mean, you talk about this wonderful kind of incubator, flat room idea of having input regardless of their status in the organization. Is that what I'm hearing? That you're, you're pulling ideas from, from all levels within the organization because you've created a team?

Richard:

I think you are. I mean, I think one of the things you're trying to do is foster an environment where everyone feels like they have a voice at the table. And you know, one of the things that's interesting is the way in which we communicate at work is changing. You know, one of the businesses I own, everyone works remotely. And so we very rarely get together in the same space physically. Although we are intentional about doing that at least once a quarter because we do think it's important to try to maintain those connections. We also do still encourage employees to get together on their own for lunch and coffee and we support some of that. But with tools like Zoom, it allows us to feel like we're all in the same room. And the other thing that I think is really interesting as we move into more of a virtual office environment, often just getting out of the office sort of rearranges people's perception of the pecking order. So when we're all sitting in the same size box on the screen and it all looks like we have equal weight and authority, people often feel more comfortable sharing their opinions. Now obviously you want to create a culture that's respectful and at the end of the day you want to make sure that employees do understand if someone has to make a tough decision or a tough call, that may be the person who has the word manager in their

title. But when you're doing things like ideating or brainstorming or trying to plan a new strategy, when you get everyone to participate, you get a lot more ideas and usually this yields a better outcome. So you know, one of the things that I think is often challenging in the old model of management, you know, people will give their idea and then the manager will say, I like this idea. And then you just drill down on that idea. Well often we end up missing something that could be a better opportunity because we haven't been open enough to allow there to be enough dialogue or conversation to explore those choices. You know, out of design thinking, one of the things I love is we have moved away from, let's brainstorm to find one really great idea to this process of really valuing initially the quantity of ideas over the quality of ideas.

Carrie:

And I would imagine that having different folks on your team having input into that idea, some of them would have closer touch with the end user and therefore more effective ideas for your organization. And so that becomes good for business. Right? Emily, you bring this into your teaching. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Emily:

Yeah, I mean, going back to what I talked about with the project and kind of with giving students the opportunity to take those leadership roles I actually kind of do it in and out of the classroom. And when Richard mentioned, you know, the idea of remotely, I think we're building a workforce that's also going to be more used to that. We are really pushing kind of, not just here at USM but across the US a lot of online education and access for people online in really innovative ways. Not that, you know, read this chapter, take this quiz, respond to this thing, but I have them working collaboratively online as well as in the classroom. And it forces them into using different types of technology like Google Docs, like Zoom to develop project teams and develop projects and really work collaboratively that way and develop kind of leadership skills in terms of who's going to lead the project and coordinate schedules and make sure things are getting done. So outside of the classroom in the traditional sense online, we're doing that. And then just in person, really focusing on letting them practice, developing those skills. I always tell students that the thing that I see in the 6+ semesters that I've taught in event class that they struggle with the most most is leading their peers and really learning how to develop that leadership style with people that are their age. And Becky, I don't know if you experienced that being a young entrepreneur but it was something that it's hard for them to look and be like, I'm either the same age or

younger and now I have to lead. And I think that's important because you're not always going to be thrown into this traditional workforce model where you have, you know, old man or lady that's been there for 20, 30 years leading the organization and that's the boss and it works its way down.

Carrie:

Training their hand-picked successor?

Emily:

Yeah. So it's definitely a different model that I think is important for them to learn before they leave and go out into the workforce.

Carrie:

Becky, talk about that. So how did you learn that, you said your instinct, your gut?

Becky:

Yeah, I mean I think that, you know, getting back to kindness, it's really, I try to just not think about any age or gender or any diversity differences and treat everybody as equals and really listen and support them and help them grow. And I think when you do that in a genuine way, you'll, you'll gain trust quickly. And I think that you as an employer, you really want an engaged workforce and to be engaged you need to feel respected and heard and empowered. And that's all part of being a servant leader.

Carrie:

And do you find that that's impacting your bottom line as a business owner in a positive way?

Becky:

Yeah.

Carrie:

And you're sticking with this style of management because it feels right to you, but is it also good for business?

Becky:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I can't imagine doing it any other way. And I think, you know, sharing more with the team about what makes a profitable business is, is hugely helpful. And having a profitable company and educating them on, you know, all the impacts for the bottom line and having them be a collaborator and how we can be a more profitable company and continue to invest in growth.

Richard:

Richard, you wanna speak to that, how it, how it, this model is, is maybe better for business than the traditional model top-down.

Richard:

Yeah, I mean I think interestingly we are seeing more and more in the marketplace that customers really need to be satisfied if they're going to continue to buy things from you. And you know, this is not a new concept that happy employees yield happy customers. This has been going on since the early to mid 80s but I think one of the things that's becoming more transparent today is that consumers expect more from organizations. This whole concept of the triple bottom line where you can be financially successful while also doing things that are good for society and the environment. Most consumers derive a lot of psychic income from buying products and services from organizations that they know are doing things that are good for the planet and good for the people on the planet. And that intangible often becomes one of the key motivators to repeat purchase decision. And so one of the things that's interesting is if you can really get your organization into a place where it understands how it balances these priorities and it really is out there practicing what it preaches and that becomes visible to customers, then you're going to find that you've often created a situation where your customers want to return. You know? So one of the things that is a fascinating concept and sustainability is this notion of radical transparency. And this is when we tell the good, the bad and the ugly of the business both internally and externally. That can only happen externally if we get really good at it internally. And one of the things that I think is great is often when we create this very open culture and we learn about the bad or the ugly sooner, we can address it more quickly. And when our employees see us taking that action, then that also is a driver of their satisfaction to continue to be employed and trust. And then they feel more comfortable in those things go external because they know when people see us taking those actions, then our customers are likely to be happy because they know that we are really serious about what we do as a business, but that we care about things beyond just profitability. So we've got to find a way to convey that. And one of the easiest ways is to just get it infused throughout our corporate culture.

Carrie:

We've established that this form of leadership is very powerful for businesses, both with employee satisfaction and also with the bottom line in businesses. But we call this podcast

The Greater Good. So could each of you talk a little bit about how you see your work impacting the greater good of your community? Richard?

Richard:

Yeah, I mean one of the things when I think about leadership and the way I teach it, the very first thing I teach is the principle of enlightened self interest that a business can do well by doing good. And you know, I think there's so much solid research out there now looking at the long-term profitability of organizations that use their powers for good as opposed to evil. And one of the things we see is those that generally are doing good in the long run end up being more profitable than their peers in the marketplace who might not be doing as good in the world. But I think when we actually start to look to individuals and organizations that really are being thoughtful about how they do good in the world and the role that their business plays as part of the community that it exists in, that we see more and more that those organizations can be successful.

Carrie:

And Emily, you have chosen to incorporate this in your teaching. So obviously you think this is important. Do you see this form of leadership as serving The Greater Good of our communities?

Emily:

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's important for people to go out, like Richard said, into the world with the mindset of leading in a way that can help promote, you know, good within our communities, both small and broad. And so I think by teaching students in this way and giving them kind of the ownership, starting to build that trust, it builds someone that's going to go out into the world and then maybe reflect that back in what they do. And that's what I think is really important is just building that trust in the classrooms and then they can help develop their leadership style. And I always see people swing the other way as well. There's always a class or someone in a class that, you know, takes more of a take charge my way or the highway, you know, kind of way of leadership. But I think when students start to see that the most effective classes that we've had, the most successful events that we've had have been those where, you know, you have one or two people who take I guess more of a soft leadership role where they're guiding the class, but also listening to everyone getting input from everyone else, it makes everything else more successful. So I think that, you know, not only is it successful in the classroom then translating to the

business world, but it's helping us become better citizens than when we leave knowing that, you know, we don't always have to be in control of everything around us.

Carrie:

It's interesting to hear you talk about it, how this model of thinking so positively impacts the learning environment in the classroom. It's just, it sounds transformative.

Emily:

Yeah, I definitely think so. Most of what I teach, I don't lecture at all in any of my classes. We put kind of that information online and in the classroom are really focused on experiential part and letting students lead and kind of direct what they're doing in their learning. And I think in doing that, you know, I'm kind of trying to model that type of leadership and that I'm showing trust for the students. Instead of just giving them this is exactly what you need to do and fill it in. And so it allows them to then develop more than just trying to follow and kind of fill in the bubbles.

Carrie:

And Becky, you've been doing this model of leadership since you started your business, how do you see it impacting The Greater Good?

Becky:

Well, I don't think any business operates in a bubble and it's really important to be connected to the community through actions from your business. Whether in our case I'm doing free work for nonprofits from time to time or you know, taking the team out to go pick up trash in Portland. You know, we just find ways to get out and connect with the community or have interns come to our office and job shadow to get young people inspired about working in tech. But I think too, it's about modeling some of the, like I think about myself as a business owner. I have the choice to do what I want or be where I want with my time. So I volunteer a lot for different boards and I realized at one point that I wasn't giving my team that same opportunity to volunteer. So we added a new policy to our handbook where every month employees can volunteer for two hours and will be paid by the company. And you know, just finding ways to make it part of your culture and giving your team permission to give back in their own way.

Carrie:

So your business is deeply integrated into the community in many ways. It's not just a for profit company, it's also a big part of the community and building community.

Becky:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I think, you know, our, our team really wants to have that purpose and you know, not just be at our computers all the time and really be interacting with the community.

Carrie:

Wonderful. So now, I'm very interested in this topic. How can I learn more about it? How can I shift my model of thinking around leadership? Richard?

Richard:

Well, the great news is at USM, every year we have a leadership Institute in the spring. It's called the Hussey Leadership Institute. And this year it's taking place on March 12, which is a Thursday. And this is the third annual event of this particular day. One of the things that's wonderful about this day, we use this overarching theme about how we can do good by doing well. The Institute is named after Timothy B Hussey, who was the President of Hussey Seating, a very well known Maine company for a number of decades. Tim unfortunately passed away a few years ago and his family and company wanted to remember him by organizing an event where we could get the community together and really focus on emerging leaders. So what were the things that we could be doing to help people who were just beginning the journey of being leaders within organizations while at the same time presenting topics that anyone who was leading could benefit from, regardless of how seasoned they were. And so this year's theme is really around the topic of authentic leadership. So how can you really be an authentic leader? You know, I think we have a wonderful keynote speaker, Carla Harris from Morgan Stanley is coming. She was the first African American woman to serve on the board of that organization. And she's just a wonderful and inspirational speaker. She talks nationwide. She has all sorts of popular videos and a podcast and I just got a couple of books and I just think that she's going to be really inspiring. And then also the people on this podcast will be leading us through some breakout sessions. Emily is going to do a session on letting leadership emerge and where we'll be using experiential learning exercises to see what types of leadership emerge and then there'll be a community based discussion around what we see. And then Becky's going to join us on a panel discussion on leading the workforce of tomorrow where we really talk about what do business owners and leaders need to know today about how we're going to lead the workforce of tomorrow, which in Maine could be potentially challenging. I'm going to give a workshop on the big five skills of leaders, which are creativity, empathy, experimentation, play and reflection. So I think what you'll see over the course of that day

is you have this wonderful opportunity to hear the keynote, but we also have six breakout sessions that sort of cover the full spectrum of what it means to be authentic in leadership.

Carrie:

This is a one day event. Can you talk about how we could register? If I wanted to go, who is the audience? Who do you, who are you hoping will come?

Richard:

So there is a link on the USM website. The easiest way to get there would just be to use the search tool and type in Hussey leadership, H U S S E Y leadership. That will be the most effective way to find the page with more information about the event and how to register the audience we expect to come from a wide variety of diverse background. In the past two years we've had folks from startup organizations all the way to very well established large corporations. We've had folks representing the nonprofit sector all the way to the for profit sector. And we have people coming from a variety of different stages in their leadership life cycle, shall we say. Some of the people in the room are young emerging leaders. Some of the people in the room are seasoned pros who've been at it for decades. The other thing that's great about this event is we have made opportunities for people to network and we will also have a number of USM students there who are studying business or studying leadership and organizational studies. So it's a good opportunity to come together with the folks who are already thinking about leadership so that you can start to build connections with folks that are just starting out on the journey and folks that are pretty well-seasoned.

Carrie:

Well thank you so much for being with us today. It's been an absolute pleasure to chat with you. Thank you.

Group:

Thank you.

Carrie:

Please join us next time as we explore innovative thinking in the world of medicine.

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