

Speaker 1 You found my podcast!

Speaker 1 00:00:05 Danielle Royston and this is telco in 20.

Speaker 1 00:00:18 I am super pumped about our first episode. Why am I doing this? Um, I think it's because I'm like the Elon Musk of telco, Mr. Tesla, Mr. Space X, he said an incredibly exciting vision for his mission to Mars. It's now 20, 20, every five years. He inches closer towards his goal. I'm a little bit like him. I believe in the next 20 years, telco is going to radically change and everything we know about the software that runs the telco industry is going to move to the public cloud. Okay. I think I just compared myself to Elon Musk, which is a little bit crazy, cause he's amazing, but I am that bolt. If you follow me on Twitter, you can get some laughs with some of my crazy tweets. But what I'm talking about is really changing the way telco companies work today and changing a company is super hard.

Speaker 1 00:01:04 I know this because I've been a turnaround CEO for the last 11 years. My most recent company was a little diamond in the rough, the telco software company named Optiva, no one ever talked about the public cloud, not a sole public cloud has changed every other industry. And so I was very curious, why hasn't it come to telco? And literally everyone would shush me. They were like, don't say that to customers. You can't talk about the public cloud to our customers. And I'm like, um, you're insane. What are you guys saying? And thankfully, completely ignored them and called my pals over at Google said, Hey, well, one of you travel to my biggest customer. That's located in Asia that has 200 million subscribers and let's go talk to them about the public cloud and a public called database called Google cloud spanner. So, I launched my hail Mary, which was awesome that I did because it totally worked. And I was like, hold on a second. What if we took our company, pivoted our software for the public cloud and became the leaders in our space. Once I knew one of the largest telcos would go to the public cloud, I knew everyone would go to the public cloud. I love hard problems. And it was probably one of the hardest problems I've ever tackled as a turnaround CEO. I knew I succeeded because I had courage and a vision, but it starts by taking the first step.

Speaker 1 00:02:30 So this podcast is a little bit different than the others. We usually talk all things telco and public cloud, but today we're going to talk about transformational leadership because that's what the telco industry needs. Now I'm talking about the kind of bold and visionary leadership that launched companies and entire industries into new orbits. My guest today is an old friend, Jim abled. He is a senior human resources professional and a leadership guru. I Jim, when I worked at a super innovative software company called trilogy here in Austin, Texas, he knows more about transformative leadership and accountability than just about anyone. I know the kick it off, right? I've known Jim for close to 20 years. I guess it'll be 20 years, you know, in September. And I wanted to spend a little bit time, Jim just recalling our first impressions of each other. So, I'll go first. So, when Jim came to trilogy, um, he was going to be hired as our SVP of HR, which I felt was a completely useless title and we did not need Jim at all. And I saw him as you know, someone coming from an old and boring company to ruin our fun.

Speaker 1 00:03:47 Jim, what did you think about me?

Speaker 2 00:03:52 Well, um, I thought you were very young. I'm 20 something. Um, and I knew I was interviewing for a very different kind of company. You were interviewing me for trilogy accompany, which the business press had recently dubbed Insanity, Inc. And if trilogy or Insanity, ink, I found you to be insanity and Carnot were so extreme and so outrageous. I can't find the words. So, I'll use yours, everything, we're changing everything. But by the way, the company that I joined at Josie, I thought was filled with the smartest people in the world that ever met, who knew nothing,

Speaker 1 00:04:38 But it's like the most dangerous kind of smart where

Speaker 2 00:04:43 Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's super innovative because you're on constrained.

Speaker 1 00:04:47 Well, I think there are smart people who know they don't, they don't know something. And then there's smart people who don't know what they don't know. And we were definitely the latter. Right. It was just an, it was a lot of unbridled energy and zero focus. So, so Jim, what do you think is good leadership and why do you think it is?

Speaker 2 00:05:12 I would say leadership is important because you want to win. Yeah. Are there any great sustainably great companies in the history of the world that were built by bad leaders? Are there any academics or experts who are doing research that ties bad leadership to better bottom line performance? And are any employees waking up in the morning thinking I can't wait to go to work because my leader is so bad. I love working for that guy. Leadership matters. It just does. There's no substitute for effective leadership. It's the sin <inaudible> of any enduring high-performing company.

Speaker 1 00:06:02 Totally agree. Leadership absolutely matters. I like to think that I matter, and it matters if I'm, if I'm good and it matters if I'm, you know, great. And that's obviously what I'm shooting for. So, can you talk to me about what you think the differences between the leader and a transformative leader?

Speaker 2 00:06:22 Well, one thing that all leaders do, whether they're good leaders or great leaders, is they make the plan. They decide what the organization is going to do, and good leaders make winning plants. And the difference between a good leader and a great leader is the quality of those plants. Um, the great leaders make way bigger plants. They make way better plants. They make plans that change everything, Jim. And when those plans are so good people call those visions. Yeah.

Speaker 1 00:07:05 Awesome. When I took over Optiva in 2017, it was literally on the verge of bankruptcy. Um, and I didn't really know what kind of company I was working with. I could be working with a company that didn't really have a great future or potential. And I've definitely, I've worked on 15 companies like that, where you just sort of like, you know, change the trajectory of the crashing plane and it PS it's super profitable and I've done it 15 times when I came into Optiva, I just didn't know what I had. And so, um, but I knew it was a really big

company. It was about \$150 million in revenue. It was 1600 people. And one of the first calls was to Jim able to be like, Hey, I'm going to, I'm going to do a lot of things at this business. We're going to change the culture. We're going to change the way they work. People are going to be scared. And so, you know, I, I called Jim and he gave me a lot of great advice,

Speaker 2 00:08:05 But I don't what the one other thing, um, and this I think is, is, um, is a good point. It's an easy point. Um, 30 years ago, uh, I worked for the Ronald Reagan of business communicators and he gave the best definition of a transformational leader. I ever heard. There wasn't even a term transformational leader back then, but I can still hear his words. He said little changes to little things are a waste of time. And we don't have time to waste. Yeah. Little changes to big things. They're dangerous because they create the illusion of change, big changes to little things. They're great, but you need a lot of them big changes to big things. That's what builds the business. It was so great. And transformational leaders make big changes to big things, which is why they're a big deal.

Speaker 1 00:09:03 And so many people don't have that courage to make those big changes to big things. So, when you're working with leaders who are going to change a culture and drive a lot of change within the company, what are your like two or three tips for what you need to do to be successful?

Speaker 2 00:09:22 Well, first you need to be a really transformational leader because you're talking about big changes, not, I mean, not everybody has to change everything, but what you're describing about is folks who really are going to do things differently. And if you really want to do things differently, there's two characteristics that you have to have the differentiate you from. All of the leaders, one is you've got to be brainy and number two, you've got to be bold and you need to have way better plans than other people, way bigger plans, because those are the plans that people call visions and they change things.

Speaker 1 00:10:02 Yeah. When I came in, I like to call the strategy that the company had was like, everyone was in a boat, but we only had one or at sea, we were just sort of driving in a circle. Right. You know, when you're a boat and you have like one and we just didn't have, we had, no, we had, we really didn't have direction. Right. We had some velocity, I guess, but we were telling everyone, yes. And so, you actually have to say, no, like that's what leaders do. They're like, this is what we're working on. And even more importantly, this is what we are not working on

Speaker 2 00:10:36 Super important point. Yeah. Super important point.

Speaker 1 00:10:39 That was one of the first things that I did at Optiva was, you know, set a course for the future. And it was a bull and, you know, sort of that bold vision and the initial feedback was you're wrong and it won't work.

Speaker 2 00:10:53 Oh, that's so funny. You bring that up. Cause that gets to the boldness part. So, a big leaders, they don't care if everybody thinks they're wrong. Now the, the, the

most famous executive of the 1990s was Jack Welch's GE I was always struck by how he didn't fear criticism or opposition. In fact, he seemed to love it. It was almost like he got an adrenaline rush from confrontation. He's the analogized changed leadership to military bombing mission is that if you're not being shot at, you're not over the target and that kind of combative to desire to prove everybody else wrong. I think that's endemic the transformational leaders because if they were just trying to do what everybody else was, there's no way they can be distinctive. They're just going to be me too. Instead of better,

Speaker 1 00:11:38 Everyone was telling me I was wrong. And I literally, I was like a child. I would cover my ears. And then, and then, then like, I'm not listening to you and I screw you guys. I'm going for it. And I'm really, really glad I, because, because in doing that, I got the confirmation from the customers that was on the right path. And there was a little bit like a snowball effect. Right. You know, I created an Appalachia. It was like one little snowflake of a night.

Speaker 2 00:12:05 Well, you know, you've, you've always been a, a big doer and complementing that with being a big thinker is the winning combination. Um, do you remember Steve case? He was the AOL guy. Totally. He's. He has one of my favorite business quotes. He said a compelling vision without the ability to execute is just a hallucination. And what really differentiates you is that ability to get things done. You've had that with you from the start. Totally coupling that with the big idea makes you somebody who matters.

Speaker 1 00:12:37 I'm a Mexican, not a Mexican I'd love to say that. All right, Jim. So, as we wrap up an exit for our listeners who want to learn more about being a great leader or a transformational leader, or even a Mexican, uh, do you have any cool recommendations that you would like to share with them from your experience?

Speaker 2 00:12:59 My favorite all time business book is execution by Larry Bossidy. He was the CEO of allied signal. And what he talks about is the sweat equity side of change. So, there's a million books on thought leadership and, uh, you know, big thinking. Um, but what he was great at was taking those big thoughts and making them a reality and all the secrets of how you do that are in that book. It's outstanding. It's a good reminder that the compelling vision, um, doesn't execute itself, it's just a hallucination.

Speaker 1 00:13:41 I think that's a great way to end. I think that's totally true. You are really a great friend and a mentor to me despite that rocking counter 20 years ago, stick around because we're ending each episode with a telco in 20 takeaway. I have 20 seconds to tell you something you need to know about. I'm sure we piqued your interest in the book execution. I'm such a big fan of how important it is to execute. Then I'm going to send a free copy of the first 10 telco exacts who follow me and request one via direct message on Twitter. My handle is telco dr. That's T E L C O D R. Even if you don't get a copy from me, you should totally read it. I'll be sure to put a link to the book on Amazon in the show notes, a huge thanks to Jim Abel.

Speaker 1 00:14:29 And thank you to all of our listeners. Don't forget to hit that subscribe button, share our podcast with your colleagues and let's connect on LinkedIn and on Twitter at telco dr. Also sign up for an email newsletter, a telco dr. Com that's T E L C O D r.com. We've included that link in our episode resources, and you can text me too nine two five telco dr. Later nerds. How about ASA? Love Easter baby you're later. Nerds is great. That should be your sign off on everything. Thank you. That's great feedback. Hasta pasta. Later, nerds.