One Knight in Product - E99 - Eb Ikonne

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Eb Ikonne

Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. I'll be talking to thought leaders and practitioners in and around product management to help you build the right products and build them right. If that sounds like the sort of thing you want to know, why not head over to OneKnightInProduct.com where you can sign up to the mailing list, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on your favourite social media platform and guarantee you never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we talk about poor leadership and ask ourselves are we getting the leaders we deserve, or the ones we need? Or neither? We find out what leadership means why it's important for leaders to continuously adapt and improving what servant leadership means and why it's needed. We also talk about adapting leadership styles across working cultures and why it's never one size fits all. And we consider the universal truth... leadership is hard. You have to look after yourself if you want to look after others. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is Dr. Ebenezer Ikonne. Eb's a composer, singer, products and tech leader who started out as a software developer before moving into the world of product management across an array of tech firms and furiously taking notes and all the leadership practices he saw along the way. Eb loves reading and spends a lot of money on books. But now he's decided to put his money where his mouth is and betting on himself, turning these academic eyes to the tricky word of product leadership and trying to make us all better leaders with new book, Becoming a Leader in Product Development. He's also accomplished in front of the camera, giving us all advice in his dazzling collection of soccer kits on how to survive in the workplace via his YouTube channel Joy at Work, which I'm assuming means a little bit more than just a ping pong table and free coffee. Hi Eb, how are you tonight?

Eb Ikonne 01:48

I'm doing great. lovely to be here. Jason,

Jason Knight 01:50

Good to have you here. So let's get started. First things first, becoming a leader in product development, new book came out, I believe in September, how's the reception been so far?

E Eb Ikonne 02:01

Been pretty good, pretty good. I get LinkedIn messages, got a couple of reviews on Amazon. So you know, writing a book is interesting experience. And then you put it out for the world to to say and I know I've got friends who are really nice, who probably think, hey, maybe it's not that great. But you know, he's a good friend of ours. So we won't say anything negative. But I've gotten a lot of positive feedback. And it's a book that hopefully addresses a variety of topics. So while not everything might apply to somebody in a particular situation, you'll be able to find something that you can use.

Jason Knight 02:39

So those friends pretending to like it, they put up friends or just sort of just random people that you know,

E Eb Ikonne 02:44

All of the above, product and other walks of life.

Jason Knight 02:48

Yeah, I mean, I was gonna say, because it's obviously a really good and wide ranging book. But I imagine it's something that's fairly targeted at a certain audience, right? So not the sort of thing that your mom would read, for example.

E Eb Ikonne 02:59

Yeah, you know, I bring this up, because my mom actually bought two copies of the book, my mom's a professor. And she said, Hey, I'm gonna use some of this material in my class. I'm glad you asked this question. She's in the information, resources space. So while it's a book that's really focused on the product development context on you, and I very familiar with, there are a lot of leadership principles that transcend you know, contexts or domains. And I think she looked at it and they're like, hey, there are a couple of things my students will probably benefit from in this book, even though your examples are all product development examples, and we're gonna have to figure out how to maybe repurpose or come up with new examples. If the things you're talking about still make sense outside of your field?

Jason Knight 03:44

Yeah. Fair enough. I'll take that back then and say it's a book my mum wouldn't read. So it's

unsurprisingly, a book about becoming a leader in product development, which is a big topic, and you kind of touched on the fact that it's got quite a lot of sections that you can kind of dig in and dip in and out, depending on what you need. But before we dig into some of the themes on the book, how did you personally become a leader in product development?

E Eb Ikonne 04:10

Well, that's a great question. And I probably have a decent story for it a story I tell actually, in the book as well, because I try to be as honest about my journey as best I can, even though when you're telling your own story, you know how it is you lie to yourself, sir, you go, you highlight some areas and some areas you kind of put back in your memory, but I was kind of thrown into leadership, to be honest with you. Yeah, I've been in this profession for a minute. I consider myself still young. I have folks on social media that have been in this profession for 40 years. So I don't talk too much when I say I've been in it for about 24. But I come from a time where when you were kind of considered to be a solid, or a pretty good technical person. The next move for you was management. And that's what happened to me like okay, he's understands this. He gets his stuff done. So let's give him people to work with. Right. And I'm pretty sure you're familiar with that movie. It was a classic movie. Yeah. 80s in the 90s. So that's how I got thrust into a leadership role, which, for the record was a train wreck to start off with. But that's how it happened.

Jason Knight 05:20

Yeah, that definitely resonates with me that's very similar to my leadership journey as well, like my first toe in the water was definitely that kind of, yeah, this guy is a really good individual contributor, let's put him in charge a team of individual contributors that do exactly the same. And just, he can just lead them. That's nice, obviously, again, with the same inevitable results. But from the sounds of it, it sounds like you didn't necessarily get a lot of, say mentorship or coaching or support in that and that you basically just had to school of hard knocks it to some extent, yeah, who does? Well, yeah, I mean, I guess that's the question, right? Like, whether that's something that when you speak to people, and maybe when you spoken to people about this book, that that's a very common theme, or if that's just like, old people like you and me, that's that's happened to and it's all okay, now.

E Eb Ikonne 06:07

Oh, that's definitely it's not okay, now, it's still the same, it's quite common. You know, most leaders and at all levels, by the way, I offer are winging it every single day, in some ways, I, I like it, and I'm not I'm not a metaphor, guy. And I want to be careful with this now. But, you know, as a parent, I know that sometimes I'm winging it, I just tried to 100% just make stuff up as I go. And that happens with leadership. The unfortunate part of it, though, is we have enough resources out there, that people shouldn't have to wing it anymore. However, because our teams succeed in spite of us, which is, you know, success in spite of, it's something I talk a lot about, we get this false sense of effectiveness at our jobs, a lot of leaders think they're good, because their teams are covering, you know, where they're not effective. And so, as a result, we continue to wing it, our teams continue to succeed. And then we step away thinking, hey, we're pretty good. So people don't get the mentoring, they don't get the coaching, they don't get the support that they need. Or even if they get like training and things in the in the

workplace, you know, they take you out of your team and put you in a room with other leaders and then write on a chalkboard and then send you back into the, to your teams, nothing really changes, because there are a lot of other conditions that need to change available to support you, and those things don't change. So the book is really a resource, a reference guide for leaders who don't want to wing it as much, who don't want to have to figure out everything, and who want to be able to lead with some base of what leadership is, and a theoretical and practical sense of how they can go about leading teams and other groups of people.

Jason Knight 07:57

Yeah, I almost like to consider this as like a chain of mediocrity in the sense that like, I'm imagining, for example, that there are a number of people that got promoted away from being an individual contributor, like you, and I did. And they got basically left to work out on their own. But the person that they were maybe emulating, the person who promoted them, was probably also in that position, because they were probably promoted for being a good individual contributor, and they will have to work out on their own and next person in the line ahead of them exactly the same story. So you've just got this kind of infinite line into the future where basically just everyone's just learning relatively poor practices. And I think it's interesting what you say, these days, at least, there are so many resources out there, like your book, but obviously also other books out there, too. That should make this a little bit easier. But either people don't know about the books, or they don't meet them, or they don't think they apply. I don't know, it just seems like a really strange situation to still be in that position now.

Eb Ikonne 08:56

Yeah, I think that's a great point to bring up. And I wanted to just comment on your first observation around how you just have this in a chain of mediocrity that exists. And that's what happens. I, Emily, what I see. So when I see that what you've done, has in quote worked for you, right? It's working in quote, and you have put me in a position, I'm likely to copy what you did, because I want the same results that you had. So I think that that is also true. I also think like a number of things in life, people don't really believe things should be studied and well understood. So, again, leadership, there are a tonne of resources, but if I have the sense that I'm doing my job and work is getting done, what I Why would I really study and care about it, or I'll just read a good leadership book. Okay. There are one or two things that are there that are interesting, and I'll put it to the side. So I think that's part of what we see in practice.

Jason Knight 09:55

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, but you touched on a little bit, but specifically Who is the book aimed at? Is it primarily aimed at new people trying to get into leadership and make that transition jump the chasm? Or is it something that's also really valuable for people? Maybe that have already been leaders for a little bit? And it's, yeah, maybe they're struggling a little bit, or they're not quite sure where to turn next, like, does it cover both of those bases?

Eb Ikonne 10:19

It does. I think the book is for anybody who wants to improve their game, so to speak, anyone

It does, I think the book is for anybody who wants to improve their game, so to speak, anyone who wants to become a better leader definitely will benefit from reading this book. And that's whether you've been leading for two days, two months, two years, 20 years, I even as I wrote the book, and I continue to look at my research, I uncovered areas where I know I can be better. And this is, you know, I'm saying this as somebody who pays a lot of attention to the space, and what good practices or even in quote, best practices might be. So for people who are stepping through people who believe like, I have the desire to lead teams to serve teams to help them get better at what they do, definitely want to read this book. So you go in with a healthy amount of information. And then for those who have been doing it for a minute, I still think there's something in there. In fact, I know there's something in there for you to benefit from your read it. Yeah, you'll get something

Jason Knight 11:16

Sounds good. I mean, I've looked for it, of course, it's a very comprehensive, a thoughtful book, digs into a lot of practicalities, and also somewhat the philosophy of leadership as well, full of insight. And obviously loads of great content, a few graphs and stuff as well, which is always nice. But it must have taken some time to write that reference. It edited. Good it just so and obviously we first spoke a few months back when we were first talking about maybe doing this interview, and it's obviously taken a while since then. But you obviously had started it before. Yeah. So it's a it's a big endeavour, right says, yeah. Why did you decide that? You know, in the position that you're in, you got a good job, you're a leader by day to sort of Don the author's black cape and, and hat to kind of do this and get this done right now? And why was it important to do that for you?

Eb Ikonne 12:05

Yeah, you know, hindsight being 2020, you want to point out one or two things and say that that's the reason why. But I think for me, it really came down to, I asked myself, What contribution could I make what tangible contribution beyond maybe speaking at conferences, or writing blog posts and the like, or just even mentoring people at work? Because I do all of those things, or being the best leader I can be for people to emulate? You know, what else could I do to help people understand a bit more how they could become better leaders? And I said, Well, let me put it down in a book. The other thing about it is I got a little bit frustrated with a lot of the leadership memes that I see out there, right, like leaders. You know, I don't want to call people out specifically, but there's just a lot of stuff out there that I'll consider microwave leadership advice it, you know, you just pop it in the microwave press 30 seconds of bingo. And we live in a society today where you know, people want fast food, have everything, the equivalent of everything. And I want it to say no, I mean, there's some good healthy stuff, it might be hard to absorb. Sometimes it might require discipline and practice. But there's information out here that will benefit people. So that's why I kind of went in this process of writing a book that I think took three and a half years to kind of fully complete. And I wanted to cover a couple of areas. So that also made it a bit challenging. And then I was overwhelmed with, you know, what to leave out that sometimes is, you know, you guys, you can write so many things. But, you know, I just said, let's give people something to start off with. And this is where we are.

Jason Knight 13:48

So to extend that Batman analogy, is there a Director's Cut coming out? Or just the kind of final edition of the book? And you're gonna put that under lock and key? Any any further additions?

E Eb Ikonne 13:59

Yeah, you know, I don't know. It's, it's interesting to think about that. I've thought about that a little bit. And I, you know, folks have asked if I'll add anything else. So we'll see. There are other topics in this space, like followership, you know, people get a little squirmy when we talk about followers in the context of leadership, but I don't know how you can have somebody who leads if there are people who are not following and just, it doesn't compute for me. So if there's somebody leading, then there has to be people following. And so writing about that, I think is something I want to do, because I do think there's this stigma associated with that as well. That's not helpful for any of us.

Jason Knight 14:41

It makes sense. But you open the book with a question, or the first chapter is a question why assigned leaders? Yeah. Do we really need leaders in today's Lean and Agile world?

E Eb Ikonne 14:51

Well, there are many who believe we don't well, or more specifically, we don't need a signed leader. So this is where it gets interesting. People often say everyone's a leader. And you know, in a way, that's true, right? Like, it's as true as saying everybody is a chef, because you know, I can boil water, right? Well, I'm definitely not a chef. But well, if you can boil water, maybe you are, but I haven't, I don't find that everybody is a leader meaningful, because Sure, everyone can influence everyone, we can all do these things. We all do these things every day. But in the context of a business, right, leading means a whole lot more, right? It means providing direction on where we want to go and facilitating that we go in that direction. So, you know, the question is, could we do this without having somebody assigned? And as a social scientist, I would answer the question honestly and say, Yes, I mean, theoretically, you could. But you know, in theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they're not necessarily. And so what we see happens, even in small groups, is that when somebody is not sort of a sign to kind of steward this process, things more often than not, you know, fall down or don't progress. So this is why we are where we are today. And this is not me, suggesting that it couldn't be some other way. What I am saying is when we observe the way things work today, that's the way it works. And I think for good reasons as well.

Jason Knight 16:29

Yeah, it's interesting, actually, I was listening to an Ask Me Anything with Marty Cagan yesterday and caught a part where he was asked a question along the lines of can empowerment work for all teams, or there's some teams that just can't do it? Because of course, if we're saying that you don't need leaders, you're really saying that the teams themselves are basically going to sort this all out? And I think you use the analogy in the book

of like, ants, for example. Now, Marty's answer was, well, some teams are gonna fail, because they've not been given the support that they need from the leadership of the company to help them succeed and help them to take advantage of that power or that empowerment. And I guess that really touches on your point there as well, like, you need people to set the stage and to, quote unquote, lead and not micromanage, but still provide that context, provide that guidance provide the overall direction. And as long as then the team underneath them, if we use the typical org chart type diagram, are then able to then go and do that. And it's this kind of command by context, I think they call it or whatever they say in the army

E Eb Ikonne 17:28

Commander's Intent

Jason Knight 17:29

Yeah Commander's Intent. But what are some of the hallmarks of effective leadership as far as you're concerned? I mean, we've talked about whether we need leaders, but if we do need leaders, what are some of the traits that those leaders should have?

E Eb Ikonne 17:43

Yeah, so we focus on one thing all the time when we think about leader effectiveness, and that's did the job get done? Right. So that's, that's almost table stakes. So that's, you know, did the job get done is something that is always of utmost importance. But what distinguishes in my view, effective leaders from ineffective leaders is not so much did the job get done? Let's just assume that that's actually something that happens. It's how did the job get done? And what did the people that are part of that process experience along the way? Did they have the support that they needed? Did they develop and grow as individuals contributing? Right? Those are to me the things that really define an effective leader, did the leader provide the inputs? You just talked about the commander's intent, if that's the case, or whatever inputs are needed to make sure the team knew where they were going? And what would make sense for them would be things that I would consider as being part of an effective leader. How does the team feel about their leader as well, I think is very important. leadership. Leadership is one of these things that is socially constructed. So anybody can go on LinkedIn and say, I am a leader. Okay. Sure, you can say that. But that's not as telling as if to say, if we ask the people that you think you're leading, if they consider you a leader, like if they truly consider your leader, that probably is the litmus test right there. It's not your LinkedIn tagline. It's what the people that you interact with, think about you. If they consider you a leader, then, you know, maybe there's something there. And that's probably because you're doing some of the things I mentioned.

Jason Knight 19:21

Yeah, that's fair enough. And I think it's really common for leaders to try and take some of the credit or all of the credit for the tea, or you kind of touched on it yourself earlier, like weak leaders, again, propped up by the efforts of their team, and that makes the leader look good. And then a leader takes all the credit and gets to do the presentation on the stage. That's right.

And it's this kind of, yeah, leaders eat first in that sort of situation, then a guess which is, yeah, again, something that I think you and I would both push against, right. But that then moves on to this concept of servant leadership. Yeah. Which, again, is something that you talk about in the book, but that's not like a concept that no one's heard of before. But here's a phrase you could probably consider It kind of a bit of a cliche, the actual phrase, certainly, these days, like everyone says it you probably read about in every book, right? Some people even probably know what it means. But but it's obviously a really important concept in the book and in general for leadership theory. But stepping away from the phrase itself, what are some of the hallmarks of good servant leadership as far as you're concerned?

E   Eb Ikonne   20:21

Yeah. And so before we step away from the phrase, you know, there were a number of theories that I thought could be beneficial for anybody who's aspiring to be a better leader. But you're right servant leadership is the one that's talked about a lot by people. And I love the way you said it like some, some people might actually get the definition of it, right, because the reality is, most people don't. And you know, both of us are very familiar with the Agile context. And we know that one of the things that made servant leader popular in the Agile world was the association of servant leader with the scrum master role in the scrum guide. Right. So I think correcting what a servant leader is, is, I think it's extremely important. And so basic hallmarks of a servant leader, honestly, is to provide their team or whoever they're leading, just more broadly, what they need to succeed in their job. And that's the team as a whole, right. And there's some attributes of that, you know, whether it's displaying empathy and connecting with people and, or even just listening, and spending time talking to people and understanding what they need. You know, part of it is making sure that people understand where we want to go, and presenting a coherent sense of, here's the direction we want to move in. Again, when you're serving the team, it's really this idea of making sure they have everything they need to be successful. Now, some people especially in the West, often interpret that as being a doormat, or somebody that the team walks, walks on. And that's not what it's supposed to mean at all, you know, servant leadership is this countercultural view of leadership that thinks about it from the way I show up for my team is to be in service to them, as opposed to showing up to command them around and boss them around and tell them what to do on my behalf. So it's really a flip on what we think about and there are a lot of leaders who crave control, you know, who actually lust for power, if I was going to put it that way, power over. And this is really servant leadership is about power with potentially and power even under, which is I'm going to use my power to support and prop you up and make sure that you have what you need to succeed. Of course, with anything, servant leadership can be taken too far. And I talk about this in this chapter on servant leadership, even share some of my experiences where in the interest of serving the team, you go too far in preventing the team from actually developing. And that's something that leaders need to guard against. But I will say that I rarely see leaders going too far in supporting their teams, I see too many leaders not going not making an effort, throwing their teams under the bus immediately. things don't work out because they're really in it to protect themselves and maintain their status in the organisation...

Jason Knight   23:19

And pay rises and key to the executive washrooms, right?

Eb Ikonne 23:23

That's right, you know, the corner offices and all the goodies that come with maintaining that office.

Jason Knight 23:31

But it's interesting, because that reminds me of an anecdote I sometimes tell about me and my dad. So my dad's a plumber, he's always been very handy kind of a tradesman. And I'm absolutely none of those things. And what we would tend to do is, for example, be doing a sort of a father son bonding thing, maybe doing some patching up of some vendor on the outside of the house or something like that. And I'll be gamely trying to do my best to patch up all these cracks and stuff. And he'd be kind of patiently watching me. And eventually, after a while, he's given me a crack, and then he'll come over and then do it properly. For me, the scraper might slip off and start again. And it's like, I guess, for me the the whole idea of do what you said around being there when you needed is to work out when the exact moment that you need to do that is not do it too soon, and disempower the team but not do it too late, and therefore just rain Hellfire down on them because everything went wrong. So it's a really tricky balance.

Eb Ikonne 24:27

It is definitely an art more than it is a science. But where you know, you can only develop that sense or the intuition is probably the best way to put it by interacting and spending time with your team and getting to know them and really be interested in supporting them. Because if you're not interested in supporting them, then you'll never spend the time with them. And you'll never come to a point where you have this kind of innate sense for where you need to interject yourself or pull yourself Right. So being, you know, stepping into the servant leadership perspective is not something you can do from afar.

Jason Knight 25:08

No, but that's an interesting point, actually about the afar thing. And I'll cover that the afar thing in two different ways. Firstly, of course, with remote teams, that's obviously changed a lot by especially through the pandemic, but also the general trend for outsourcing and offshoring. Like, how are some of the ways that you've seen work best to maintain that kind of level of engagement? remotely from afar over zoom over whatever? Like? Are there some sort of tips and tricks to do that properly?

Eb Ikonne 25:36

Yeah, properly is an interesting way to ask the question. But I would say what's worked for me is connection. So we're not physically connecting. So the next best thing we can do is virtually connect and be when we were physically together, we would connect, you know, serendipitously, we would walk around and bump into people and have hallway chats, well, you almost have to manufacture some of those things. Now. Yeah. And so the only time if the only time that you're talking to people on your team, but you're in your organisation is when it has

to deal with resolving a problem or getting a task done, then you're never going to build that relationship. So in a previous role here just few months ago, I have one Tuesday, a month where I met with my direct reports, we had lunch together, and we just talked about everything from what's the latest show on Netflix to whatever the case, maybe I would randomly reach out to people in my organisation and just ask them how they were doing, how things were coming along, and trying to create that sense again. So from a remote perspective, those are the types of things we I think we need to do if we want to continue to be able to serve, you know, offshoring, outsourcing is a very different ballgame. And because the whole nature of that relationship really is transactional, right, you're paying somebody to do something for you, because you think in many cases, that it is a more cost effective decision to make. And I think that that whole decision making structure that we set up for that introduces a whole set of challenges. But what I will say even in that situation is they're still people on the other side of that contract. Yeah, right. And so you can still once again, say, let's find a way to bridge the gap. If you were if you were contractors in our building, we'd interact with you in a certain way. So what's the How can we do this, even though you might be in a different country, continent time zones away? Again, it can be even more challenging, the further the people are away. But I think you just need to think about it, and then be a little creative on how you want to approach it.

Jason Knight 27:49

But that touches on my second point about the forthrightness, right? Because you and I have chatted about this before. And I know you talk about it in a book as well, the concept of adapting leadership to map and track with different cultures that you might be interacting with. So obviously, you're in the US, you've got a certain working style over there. I'm in the UK, we've probably got a similar issue, but somewhat a little bit different, much more passive aggressive over here, I guess. But we've both worked with remote teams all over the world. I know we talked about that before. And we've worked with teams in India, we've worked with teams across East Asia, we've worked with teams across, all over the place, all over Europe, and everywhere. And they all have different characteristics, different ways of working different cultural norms. And there's no one size fits all. So if we were to take that example of trying to find a way to work with them, effectively, remotely as you would have to do with those teams, how can we make sure that that is effective and take account of those cultural norms?

E Eb Ikonne 28:48

Yeah, that's a great question. I'll just I'll just add something to your your observation, and then answer your question. And even in the same country, our teams are very diverse. Yep. Right. Even in the same country, like I've led teams with people from a whole bunch different continents, different countries, different depth, cultural heritage, and they all show up to work with different expectations and how they want to interact, how they want to be led. And so leaders need to understand that just fundamentally that in a world filled with diversity and people showing up in different ways, it's important to understand that one size doesn't fit all. And you need to be willing, like you've taken this job, you need to be willing to say I'm going to adapt and make adjustments to support people based on where they're coming from, even in my local contexts, even in my country, even my home office, and then when you're dealing with teams that are in different countries and maybe you know not as even diverse in the faraway country, maybe everybody in the faraway countries from that country, then it's

important for you to take the time to understand how those people approach working together. You know, some people come from backgrounds with high power distance I come from when I have almost Nigerian heritage come from a country with high power distance. Kids are supposed to be seen and not heard that kind of stuff, right. And when somebody in a higher status or higher rank, says something to you, even the way you disagree has got to be done very carefully, which is very different here in the United States, where you still give people some respect, but you might be freer to disagree. Yeah, in a certain way. And so understanding that in a country with high power distance, people might be reluctant to tell you no, it's very important, because then it changes the kind of questions you ask, right? You don't go in thinking, Well, I'm going to get all this feedback, because no people are probably not naturally going to give you this feedback until maybe they've come to trust you. Or understand that high power distance might not mean as much to you. So it's really important for leaders to take the time to understand the cultural differences when they're working with faraway teams. Unfortunately, not enough leaders do this.

Jason Knight 31:08

Absolutely. It reminds me of a story from novos walls, which was talking about how they try to export Netflix's culture to the remote Netflix offices all around the world, and obviously, had the inevitable car crash when they tried to do that. Because again, this whole kind of take no prisoners, high performance, everyone be radically candid type approach just didn't work when you went to someone like Japan, where they again, have that power distance, and everyone's a lot more, I guess, reserved when they're talking to power. Right?

E Eb Ikonne 31:36

Totally, totally. You have other examples where people you know, you don't mix pleasure with with seriousness, right, and, and other things like that. So it's important to be culturally aware, for sure. cultural intelligence is really important for leaders.

Jason Knight 31:52

The one thing he talked about near the end of the book is the importance of taking care of yourself as a leader. So taking care of yourself personally, yeah, this really resonated with me, because I think that, in some quarters, there's this kind of idea that you kind of get to leadership, you've won the game, everything sorted out now you can just get on and lead. And actually, as far as I'm concerned, I mean, obviously, leadership's really hard, in general. But it's almost like your problems only just beginning in some ways, because you've got a whole new set of problems, plus all of the problems of the teams that you're working with and responsible for plus probably the load of imposter syndrome on top of that, because you're not sure if you're worth the job. Right. So it's really good to see the idea of self support being called out. And I think you put it nicely when you said, you can't be a good leader, if you don't take care of yourself. Right. So what are some of the ways you'd advise a leader to take care of themselves?

E Eb Ikonne 32:47

Yeah, so there are a lot of important things in this area. And we probably don't have enough time to go through them. But I'll start off with look after your personal health. Like I think that that's really important all the way from getting a good night's sleep. I actually saw a research study this week that showed that managers that did not get a good night's sleep were more likely to you know, act in toxic ways. The following morning, I've actually not seen that that piece of work done but fascinating, right? So yeah, getting a good night's sleep, eating right getting exercise, all those things, just looking after your your health and your well being your personal health. And well being is so important. One of the ideas that I talked about in the book is this idea of a greenhouse and setting up for yourself a greenhouse. And what that means is making sure that you have you have as a leader a good support system as well. So you don't want to be in an environment where you're really finding it very difficult for yourself to thrive and do good things. I think it's Esther Perel, who said, you know, the quality of our life is determined is ultimately determined by the quality of our relationships. And that's true at work as well. So if you have terrible relationships at work, it's going to be very difficult to enjoy that. Take the need to take your time off, you need a journal, you need to meditate. A very important point I want to say here's part of a leaders job is to support their teams, and team members. And it's important to understand as well, like when you've done all you can do and you can't continue and you need to go in a different direction. So sometimes leaders, the effective ones probably do this more than the ineffective ones because I think ineffective leaders probably don't engage as much. In fact, I know they don't engage as much they, when it's not working out, they just say that's it, you're gone. But effective leaders really try to make things work they try to engage and so they face the danger sometimes of sticking in it too long and not knowing when to say you know, this is really not gonna work out let's do something different. And so Understanding that not everything you're gonna do is going to work, whether it's with people, whether it's a decision you made, and being comfortable with that is very important for yourself care for sure.

Jason Knight 35:12

Yeah, I think also can be interesting if someone doesn't have that support network that you just touched on. And I only have the people that I work with and potentially are responsible for, actually, to talk to you about something, what tends to happen when times are tough is that they just kind of rein that down on the team, and don't protect that team from some of the things that maybe that team isn't necessarily ready to hear yet. That especially if it's something that's kind of in flight, or something a bit sensitive, or something that really needs to be developed more or get to a point before it's actually suitable for human consumption, right. And what you then get that is these kind of stressed out massively under pressure leaders that just start to massively ineffective because all they're doing is being a conduit for every single problem they've had, and just blaming it on their team. So that's why I've personally massive fan of this idea of getting that mentorship network, you know, getting your own people that you can talk to and just decompress away from the people that you're supposed to be protecting right.

Eb Ikonne 36:14

I think that's fantastic advice, you know, finding a mentor, finding an executive coach, depending or just finding a coach there, those are so, so valuable. And having a social network that outside of your work context that can be of support to you so important, like all aspects of

our life intersect. And for a long time, we've done this, we've tried to create this artificial separation between the office and the workplace, and ego back to the industrial area where a father or mother would go to the factory and clock in and be at their station all day, and then at the end of the day, clock out and leave and work was put behind them in theory, right. But that's not the way it happens. If you're having a difficult time at work, it impacts probably your life outside of work and vice versa. So one of the ways we can help ourselves with dealing with our work challenges is having a support system outside of work as well. I can't tell you how many times I've called people that don't work in product development, who don't have any idea of what I do. And just call them to say like, I'm dealing with all these craziness, and just having them listen to me. And you know, encourage me is I found it like priceless.

Jason Knight 37:28

Yeah, 100%. And it's definitely something that I think need to just keep on top of and, as you say, kind of reach out when you need it. So I want you now to imagine an ambitious young product leader, either just starting out, or maybe just about to start out just to take that first step into leadership, and they have no idea what they're going to do. What's one piece of key advice you'd give one starting point or one starting piece of advice you'd give that ambitious young product leader? Wow, that aside from read the book...

Eb Ikonne 37:57

Read the book! Well, you know, I think the the advice I would give that person is to recognise that, you know, you're not perfect, you're going to make mistakes. But what separates, in my view, effective leaders from ineffective ones is that effective leaders are committed to becoming better at what they do. And so just be committed to becoming better at what you do learn from your mistakes, and work on your craft in a way it's it's a craft, it's a practice that needs to be worked on and done. Right, you get better by doing right the the more you work on listening to people, the better you become at listening to people. So that's just the way it happens. So that's probably initial advice I'd give to them step into serve. Might be Advice number two.

Jason Knight 38:51

Hey, guys, stop putting that muscle memory up. Yeah. And where can people find you after this? If they want to find out more about the book, maybe tap you up for some leadership nuggets, or just generally have a chat with you about product?

Eb Ikonne 39:03

Yeah, so people can find me two major places. I'm on LinkedIn. So Ebenezer Ikonne and you search for me there, you'll find me. I'm also on Twitter, @eikonne... you can find me there. Let's connect. And you know, that's kind of where I leave my nuggets and ideas on leadership. Just feel free to reach out for sure.

Jason Knight 39:26

Absolutely. So obviously always really good to have these healthy debates and challenge each other's thinking as well. Yeah. Well, that's been a fantastic chat. Obviously, I really wish you the best of the book and really appreciate you spending some time talking about some of these themes. Obviously, we'll stay in touch. But that's for now. Thanks for taking the time.

Eb Ikonne 39:43

Thank you very much. Listen, I've really enjoyed it.

Jason Knight 39:48

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you do again, I can only encourage you to pop over to OneKnightInProduct.com, check out some of my other fantastic guests sign up to the mailing list. Awesome. Live on your favourite podcast app make sure you share with your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now thanks and good night