

Welcome to

# Pushing Beyond Limits

No doubt about it, sled dogs love to run. It's in their DNA. But without the right leader, they'll never get to Nome. They need the right motivation, the right push. Race along with me and some elite canine athletes through Alaska's frigid Punchbowl Glacier. Mush!

# Pushing Beyond Limits: Alyeska, Alaska

In this episode of Leadership University we're going to explore:

- The impact of relationships on leaders and their team
- Specific habits and patterns that signify destructive relationships
- How effective communication and honesty produce successful teams

# Timeline

Your work in this episode will take approximately 3 hours to complete. The videos and online work will take about 2 hours. You will speak to your mentor for about 20 minutes. You will speak to two different team members for 20 minutes each time.

Video: Intro

# We Need Each Other

The need for connection begins before infancy and continues throughout life: from the womb to the tomb. If you are alive, you need it to thrive, period. We are fueled from the outside, from connection with others. Humans need connection and their systems are always searching for one.

# Go Forward, Move Ahead

We need each other, not only for the people-power it takes to get things done, but for validation, acceptance and energy. The fuel we need to survive and thrive comes from our relationships, from our trust in each other.

Think about a time when your team's energy was pushing you and your energy was motivating them. What did it feel like? What were you able to accomplish?

# Video: Relationships

# Searching...

A mobile phone without signal doesn't do very much. Sure, it might still be able to tell you the time or display a calendar of your events or serve as a repository of previous communication and photos, but without a strong and steady connection, nothing new or better can occur. Without a connection, the device has hit its limit. It continues to produce the same results, even if you try harder.

You are like that; I am like that. From the moment we are born, a "chip" inside each of us starts searching for a connection to the right network, one that will provide us with the energy and information to go beyond our present ability, experience, and performance.

# The Four Corners

The reality is that you are always in one of four places of connection. No matter what life circumstances you are going through on the outside—victory or defeat, or somewhere in between—there are only four possibilities of connection that you can be in with a person at any given time.

While there are four different kinds of connectedness—four possible corners of our relational space—only one of them will help you thrive. The other three corners will always diminish your performance and your well-being. The key is to get out of any of the other three and into the only one that works. Think of this dynamic as the geography of relationships, a map with four corners:

1. Disconnected, No Connection
2. The Bad Connection
3. The Pseudo-Good Connection
4. True Connection

# Corner One

As leaders, people residing in Corner One tend to create weak relational cultures. The culture might be high-performance and demanding, but people don't feel that their contributions are valued or that they are truly cared about. And even though there might be good business results, these are usually short-lived, and then the lack of deep, positive relationships and a caring culture begins to erode trust and goodwill. It becomes more and more toxic.

Have you experienced a leader who was disconnected like this? How did it impact the team?

# Extraction

Over time, those in a relationship with a disconnected person tend to lose heart and withdraw.

Think about your direct reports. If you were to ask them if they feel needed, valued, listened to, and taken into your confidence, what would they say?

# Do-It-All Yourself

But even if you're not totally cut off, it's still possible that your connections aren't as strong as they should be or as healthy as you want them to be, and you do have some Corner One realities going on.

This is very common for high performers. For whatever reasons, life has taught them they have to do things on their own. In very practical ways, they do not allow themselves to need anyone. And although they care about others and give to them, they are disconnected from their own needs. They are giving— sometimes a lot— but they are not taking much in.

It's easy for Corner One leaders to help others but difficult for them to rely on others for help, especially emotionally. Sometimes this is even the natural path by which someone gets into leadership: a kid is a doer, the family hero, or a caretaker— the one everyone else depends on. They are always putting out, performing for others, getting it done, and yet rarely ever taking in what they need from the outside world.

# Lonely At The Top?

Many leaders do feel alone, but it doesn't have to be that way, and the best leaders create conditions that help them avoid being pulled into Corner One. Certainly some aspects of leadership require making tough decision, being the one who owns it, the place where the buck stops. But leadership isn't supposed to be lonely or isolated. When it is, something is wrong, and it can be fixed.

When have you felt lonely in your leadership?

# Warning Signs

Here are the Corner One signs to look out for:

- Clinical: Increased stress; lower energy levels, concentration, and motivation; problems sleeping; increased fear and anxiety; increased levels of suspicion, distrust, and resentment; loss of hope and purpose.
- Relational: Not feeling as connected to others as you once did— even at home and in your personal life, more isolation, detachment from those you care most about, conflicts with those you're close to, shortness of temper, lack of patience, anger, or just not wanting to be involved or around others. Loss of interest in relationship, in being with people. Disappointment with relationship itself, and a feeling of just being cut off.
- Performance: Not getting the results you need and feeling as if it all depends upon you to do so; not being able to get “on top of it all,” procrastination, disorganization, lack of clarity about goals, feeling bogged down by tasks someone else should be doing, diminished focus.

Are any of these hitting close to home?

# A Quick Questionnaire

Do you have someplace where you can be 100 percent honest and vulnerable as to what you are going through in your leadership role: where you can totally be honest about struggles, conflicts, needs, weaknesses, etc.?

# Results

$\frac{3}{4}$  of the leaders I've previously surveyed have said:

“No. I have no place like I can be truly vulnerable.”

# Another Quick Questionnaire

Do you have anyone or any group of people who are totally committed to your growth and well-being as a leader?

# Results

$\frac{3}{4}$  of leaders previously surveyed said:

“No. I have no one who is committed to my growth as a leader.”

# Last Quick Questionnaire

Have you experienced anything in the last year that you would say has gotten to “clinical proportions” like burnout, loss of energy, difficulty getting motivated, concentration or focus problems, anxiety or stress, depression, an addiction or other bad habit, sleep problems, etc.?

# Results

$\frac{3}{4}$  of leaders previously surveyed said, “Yes. I’ve experienced at least one of those symptoms on a ‘clinical level.’”

# Alone Together

Those questions were geared specifically toward finding out how much just being in a leadership role had forced people into an isolated Corner One. It turns out, the majority were having or recently had that experience.

In which relationships might you be in a Corner One situation?

# Under Cover

What truths are you trying to avoid? How are you hiding?

# A Lonely People-Person

Life and leadership in Corner One has its costs. Corner One, the corner of disconnection, does not mean that you aren't a people-person.

Lots of people in Corner One seem to be people-persons, constantly helping others. You might be giving to others and having a lot of others around you, but you are not connecting to them so anyone is there for you, in the deepest ways that you need them. This is a recipe for burnout and diminished or limited performance at best, and failing or derailing at worst.

# Not All By Yourself

If you're feeling like you're in Corner One, there is hope.

Throughout LeadU, you've been cultivating a relationship with someone in which you've asked hard questions, been forthright with your struggles, and sought their wisdom:

That's right...your mentor.

# Mentor Moments

Think back over the previous conversations you've had with your mentor. In what ways have they reassured you?

# Best Practices

What is some advice your mentor has provided that you've been able to put into practice and seen positive results?

# A Corner Four Counselor

Make an appointment to speak to your mentor for a 20 minute conversation. Discuss the following items:

- 1) Express your gratitude to him/her for going through the Leadership University process with you.
- 2) Discuss the next steps in your communication and interactions. What feels comfortable for both parties moving forward? How will you maintain a schedule of “check-ins” to keep the relationship going (if both would like to continue with it)?

# Mentor Momentum

What are the next steps for you and your mentor?

# Finding Connection

All successful leaders have mentors. If your current mentor isn't meeting your needs, or he/she isn't able to continue with the ongoing relationship, who will you seek to be a new mentor? What other ways can you find support?

# Corner Two: The Bad Connection

Sometimes our relationships aren't distant, they are actually negative. It's a bad connection. We may think a bad connection is with an abusive person, but often times the negativity is more covert.

Instead, it is a connection, a preoccupation, or pull toward a person who has the effect of making you feel bad or "not good enough" in some way: inferior, defective perhaps, as though something is wrong with you.

This person could be a boss, a board member, a customer, a friend, or a direct report. They come in all sizes and shapes and affiliations. But the one common ingredient is that they have the power to make you feel bad. High expectations, perfectionism, unreasonable demands, a critical spirit, withholding of praise, shame, guilt, put-downs, silence— these are just a few of the many ways that a person like this can hook someone into feeling the Corner Two bad connection.

# Currying Favor

Your leadership, energy, well-being, focus, and passion get diverted and diminished in Corner Two. You start playing defense, trying to catch up. You try to get back to even, to a place where the other person will feel good about you again and you can feel good about yourself, so you spend inordinate amounts of time worrying about being good enough in that person's eyes.

In reading a description of a Corner Two relationship, did a particular person from your past or present spring to mind?

# The Impact Of Corner Two

The experience of being in Corner Two is a universal human experience. Still, I have been amazed by the number of extremely high performers, some admired all over the world, who have confided to me that someone has the power to make them feel not good enough. From sports to business to entertainment: I've met superstars who cannot shake the feeling of disapproval and disappointment from that particular someone.

Perhaps you have been in this corner in your own life. Things might be going well, or you might be in a tough time. It doesn't really matter. It has more to do with what that particular person thinks of you than how things are objectively going. It is about their disapproval or criticism or lack of support for something not being as they think it should be— not helpful criticism, but rather a critical tone, spirit, and connection.

# Stuck In The Corner Of Two

Besides making you feel bad, probably the worst effect of Corner Two is what it does to your performance and your functioning. No one delivers a great performance while lost in negative self-evaluation.

# What If Number Two is You?

When someone is pushing you into Corner Two, you feel the pressure. It builds in your psyche.

But what if YOU are the one pushing people into Corner Two? Sometimes it not easy to see when you've crossed the line from motivating to manipulating.

I want you to open a few of the recent emails you've written to your direct reports. Is any of your language infused with these elements?: Overly high expectations, perfectionism, unreasonable demands, a critical spirit, withholding of praise, shame, guilt, put-downs, silence...

# Proof Is In The Email

What did you feel as you were re-reading those emails? If you saw Corner Two behavior, how are you going to change the way you interact with your team moving forward?

## Corner Three:

### The Seductively False “Good Connection”

Let's face it, no one wants to feel isolated, alone, or inadequate. Those are all pretty unpleasant feelings, so at some point, your connection-seeking chip is going to say, “Enough of this. I want to feel good.” So it finds something to connect to that feels good.

Whereas a Corner Two connection leaves you feeling bad, or not good enough in some way, in Corner Three it's the opposite. You may feel great! The positive feelings take a variety of forms: the attachment to promotions, awards, or positive results, the next acquisition, the next big product launch, celebrations, accolades from others. It's all an attempt to soothe the soul. The problem is that painkillers do not really cure the disease. They just ease the pain, temporarily and superficially making one feel better.

# Addicted To Good Vibes

I have seen leaders addicted to good news. They want to hear only about what is going well. It feels good. They want to be surrounded by employees and board members who tell them they're great and their ideas are stellar. They love the idolizing fans, the status of their position, the accolades, and all the other perks.

When I was working with one Corner Three CEO, I saw the phenomenon more than once. Each time he was confronted with a failure or a setback, he would soon come up with a glitzy new strategy or campaign that would capture his energy. The next shiny object. It would get him all excited so that he would be over the last letdown. Once his board started to recognize the pattern, they had to stop him from venturing into another launch of bliss, but until then, his Corner Three escapades cost them plenty.

# The Quick Hit Of Flattery

Flattery is perhaps the worst drug of all for Corner Three leaders. They thrive on it, and unfortunately their position puts them in the exactly right circumstance for the pushers of this drug. They have the title that makes them feel that the flattery actually means something about them, when in reality they are being controlled and manipulated by the flatterer. Many people think their way up the ladder of success is to flatter their leaders. While this is a death trap for both, for the leader it is often a drug with an extra-strong appeal, and an equally diminishing effect: it actually makes the leader dependent on the people he or she is leading.

Have you ever worked for a Corner Three Leader? What was that experience like? How did that person respond to flattery or lack thereof?

# The Corner Of Warm Fuzzies

Corners One and Two are downers, but Corner Three lets the good times roll. It's fun. High energy. Electric at times. The person or leader who is experiencing Corner Three is on an endorphin high. Champagne is flowing; high fives rule the day. Sometimes entire companies can get caught up in the hype.

I have run across many executive teams who wish their CEO would turn around from facing the outside world and look at them, connect with them, be involved with them and what they have going, instead of flitting around the country or the world hanging out with "important people" and attending events that make him/her feel cool.

# Outward Bound

Certainly part of a leader's role is to be a public spokesperson and a corporate diplomat. But that's not what I'm talking about. There are certain leaders who begin to give their teams the impression that his/her visibility in the outside world is more important than the real work.

The feeling that it's all about the leader doesn't wear well. The leader who doesn't want to hear any criticism or disagreement with his/her ideas loses respect after a while. The connection runs shallow, and the shielded one looks out of touch, shallow, and self-centered. There are a thousand ways we humans have come up with to self-medicate, but they are all ultimately a trap of our own devising and lead to diminishing performance.

# All “Yes” Is A Big “No-No”

Take a mental look around at your team. Have you hired “yes-people” who may be afraid to challenge you?

# Shiny Objects

Are you so focused on positivity that you're moving from project to project to avoid "bad vibes?"

# Is The Energy Real?

Think about your team. How do they bring positive energy into a situation? (Is it through collaboration and achievement or through flattery and false connection?)

# Three-Corner Roundabout

These corners aren't fixed. Much like human relationships, they are dynamic. We move through the corners at different times and in different situations.

It's the Three-Corner Roundabout. You might have been there.

You start in Corner One, feeling a bit alone and by yourself. You reach out, hoping for some support or a sense of partnering or community. But you have unwittingly drifted into Corner Two, into some kind of connection that ends up making you feel not good enough. Now you feel some version of inferior. Well, enough of that, right? So you do something to make yourself feel better. Let's take a trip into Corner Three, whatever your medicine of choice. You imbibe for a while, feeling some relief, and then, before too long, it feels empty and you're back in Corner One or Two. This cycle could go round and round.

# Round and Round

Have you ever experienced the Three-Corner Roundabout in your leadership? If so, what was the circumstance? How did you feel when it was happening?

# What's Next?

Is there anywhere else to go? And if there is, how do you get there? Let's meet some new friends who know a lot about building strong, collaborative relationships. You may want to bring a jacket.

# Video: Interview

# The Perfect Team

You may have watched that last video and thought to yourself:

“Way to go, Mitch. He trains dogs who are literally bred to do the task at hand. It’s no wonder he’s successful. But I look around the conference room some days, and it feels like I’m working with more junkyard mongrels than champion athletes. How am I supposed to lead these mutts on a 1,000 mile journey?”

Did that thought cross your mind?

# The Lead Musher

As Mitch stated, dog sledding is the model for the ideal relationship between a leader and their team.

However when you're thinking about this metaphor, I don't want you to picture yourself as Mitch, the record-breaker.

Instead, picture yourself as Mitch's father in the 1970's. You're fresh off of the plane from Minnesota, working to compete in the first Iditarod. You're putting it all on the line. Will you survive the journey?

# No Leader Or Team Is Perfect

As a leader, you're often put in unfamiliar situations. You've got to throw yourself into the challenge and problem-solve it: make the best of the situation.

You may have a team filled with people you've hired, or maybe it's all people who've been assigned to you. Rarely is a leader in a situation where they are able to create their own dream-team: controlling all the variables from each person's career from their first job onward. (That would be a bit intense, right?) Great teams are made, not born.

# We All Have A Backstory

Each person comes to the workplace with his/her own history and baggage, including you. You can't erase the past, but you can work together to make a better future.

What Mitch and his father both learned is that communication is the basis for a trust-filled relationship and those relationships create a cohesive team. To make real change, we have to rely on each other.

Whether it's huskies or humans, a leader has to earn trust and uphold appropriate boundaries, otherwise team performance suffers.

# Corner Four: The Real Relationship

Corner Four is a place where people have true connection. When you can find a place to be authentic, you gain access to the resources that have been wanting. Finally, the fuel and fulfillment can get to the need. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Every great leader has opened up to someone who could meet a need, whatever that might have been. The range of human needs is broad, but the way to meet those needs is very narrow: it involves humbly and honestly embracing the need and reaching out.

- Sheryl Sandberg had Larry Summers
- Henry Ford had Thomas Edison
- Michael Jordan had Phil Jackson

# Top Leaders Know

In the more than twenty-five years I've been working with high powered CEOs and other top performers, one characteristic stands out: the leaders who accomplish the most, thrive the most, overcome the most are not afraid to say they need help. Most of them have come to me of their own volition— the so-called self-referred, as opposed to those leaders who've been required to get coaching by their bosses or boards. They show up with an agenda, a list of things they want help with. Some of them are running Fortune 25 companies, overseeing billions and billions, and they say, "I need some help." I'm often awed by their humility. It is simple honesty about what one needs, even if that person is "great" at so many things.

So they ask for what they need. They embrace their need, and they connect from an authentic, vulnerable place. They grow. They learn. They thrive. I love getting to work with that kind of person. Be one of those, no matter where you are. Humble yourself. Head to Corner Four and seek someone who can meet the need that you have. Whether for emotional support, courage, wisdom, expertise, or pure community, go to Corner Four...and stay there.

# Candor Is Key

Recently I was in an executive team meeting where we had discussed the Four Corners. After understanding this point, the chief marketing officer said, “OK, so we are all in Corner Four here, right? So, there is something I have to say about the way we have been looking at this project.” He then went on to say some pretty hard things for some to hear, but it went well. It had helped that they had just talked about this very issue.

In Corner Four we care about each other so we say the truth. We take it constructively, not personally. Very powerful stuff.

# Speaking Their Minds

What are some ways you can encourage honesty on your team? How can you help them to be more vulnerable and open to you and each other?

# Video: The Right Push

# The Push Gets Us There

A push is when force from the outside makes us go farther. It provides more energy and intelligence in the form of challenges that ask us for "more."

But as research shows, not any old push will do. We need the right kind of push from the right kinds of people, "Corner Four" pushers. They must have two factors in their push:

- They will push you to go farther than you've gone in the past, encouraging you to develop new skills in order to reach the goal.
- However, they will not stretch you to a point that will overwhelm you or take you backward.

This balance, between not letting us stay where we are, and at the same time, not pushing us too far, is the essence of the "right kind of push."

# A Push Beyond

Think of a time when you have needed a push to get past your perceived limit in performance, either personally or professionally.

- How did you discover that you needed a push from the outside?
- How did that push come?
- Was it motivating or demotivating?

# A Push For Performance

Was it too small a push or too large? What did that push do to help or diminish your performance?

# Too Much?

Just like the sled dogs can sense when they are being pushed too far and throttle back their efforts, people often react in the same way.

Go to a team member you're leading and ask them:

- Do you think I challenge you? Why or why not?
- Do you think I overwhelm you with challenge? Why or why not?
- How would you suggest I challenge you more or more appropriately?
- How might I help you?

What were their responses? How do you intend to act on them?

# 1,000 Miles In 8 Days

Think about your role as “Lead Musher” on your team:

- Are you and your team setting appropriate, small and achievable goals that are aligned with the big goals you have set?
- Are they helping you monitor progress in ways that are helpful and specific?
- Are you celebrating small wins?
- Are small steps being valued as well as home runs?

# Cultivating Community

Speaking of celebrating small wins: Plan an informal meal meeting with your team to kick-off or celebrate a project. Order food, make it a little festive, but don't make it such a major event that the planning becomes burdensome.

As part of the lunch, ask a few questions that each person will answer such as:

What excites you about this project?

What are your concerns about it?

What are your ideas for building a stronger team?

Make sure team-members know they are free to be honest without judgement. Be sure that the questions provoke honesty, not anxiety.

# Getting Together

When do you plan to have your meeting? What will you be celebrating?  
What will be the questions and goals?

Video: Outro