

Mark Sanborn

Mike: Mark, honored to give us a chance to spend a few minutes talking about your new book that called "Potential Principal", your system closing a gap between how good you are and how good can be. I've had the honor to hearing you speak at the national speakers' association conference and been a fan not the words you say, but heart of your message.

Mark Sanborn: Thanks, my pleasure. Great to be with you.

Mike: Can you give us a short background on you journey focusing on the message of leadership and total performance. How did you get where you are today?

Mark Sanborn: Well, I'll try to do the reader's digest version, because I am 59, so if I take too long and get to thorough everybody will disappear.

I started speaking at the age of 10, for a farm agent at the youth organization. I grew up at a farm and I entered a contest, did really badly. Got interested in public speaking because of that dismal failure

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my first attempt, fast forward to high school I was National President later of the future farmers of America today, called the FFA, but early on I got very interested in leadership, and speaking is such a key component to being an effective leader, speaking and communicating, and those two skills really develop simultaneously. I went into sales and marketing, started speaking full time, at the age of 27, for some 30- 32 years speaking and writing books, that's the reader's digest version.

I have worked unfortunately with some 2600 clients, companies I've learned a great deal from every client I have worked with, sometimes I've learned how to not to do it, but more often I have learned what you should do to be successful, and this book is depending on how you count both. number A if you exclude the book I contribute to this book really was born out of working glass, that are among of best work they do, because what I have realized, is that the people who most need to hear sermon generally don't go to church, and people who hire speakers or consultants are coaches or outsider resources, they are often in my experience among the best in what they do.

You are teaching them in how to go from okay to mediocre, from mediocre to pretty good, pretty good to great, you're dealing with the people who are trying to go to best, to even go to better, and as you know I said in the book, the only thing that beats best is better. That's really what the focus this book is about.

Mike: I love that principle is that shared, when we are talking earlier it's one that I've to live out in just the course couple of weeks, because the accident while I am trying to save my dog from getting run over by a car, I fell and broke my arm and sprain my wrist and my elbow on my other arm. First question people ask is, how is the dog?

Mark Sanborn: Well, I hope you're both doing okay.

Mike: Doing okay, but I learned to put my ego in my pocket but it's been interesting is because that chapter in your really spoke to me. Because, just the last couple of weeks, I've had to look at measure not myself on how I was and how I wanted to be, what am I doing better today that I did yesterday? With the leadership you have

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worked with, what is the big road block that you have seen, the leaders face when trying to deal with the concept of measuring themselves with being better, as supposed to being perfect or great.

Mark Sanborn: The primarily road block everyone faces is a lack of awareness. You can't improve in something you are not trying to improve, the only thing that gets better accidentally is wine, the rest of us have to work at it. I think that leaders like the rest of us, gets so caught on the day to day operation, you know responding to problems, phone calls and interruptions, running a shop that they don't make time for improvement and improving learning as a leader has to be intentional, you don't accidentally learn.

As leaders we learn from experiences by choosing to look every day experiences that we could learn from but often, because we never slowed down the time enough to extract the lesson or reflect from the experience, we lose precious opportunities.

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The first key is, awareness. the second I mentioned to you, is that you got to make time to get better. People say, oh I don't have time. You know we all got the same amount of time it's about how you allocate it, Somebody may say you don't have to get better. That is America, we can choose to be mediocre that is one of the freedoms we enjoy, but for the people that I've worked with, the people who are besting to getting better.

Those people that make time.

And the third part is you got to have a plan or a process, and when we wrote, when I was writing the book I say, we I have worked with the research team, we did some research and found that 57% of the people we surveyed is that they have a commitment to getting better, but only 30% had a specific plan. There is a big disconnect of being aware and desire of improvement and knowing how to do and having a specific plan to do it. So, that is one of the reasons why I wrote the book, the book gives people some various specific and simple ideas on both where to get better and how to get better, that's is really the two primarily focuses of both.

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Mike: You talk about the awareness component, I've spent almost 30 years in the executive search industry is what led me to focus on speaking to leaders about being able to grow as leaders in developing high performance team. I literally got a chance to watch turnover and disengagement take place right in front of me, and that what I became committed to try to help resolve those situations.

One of the things, that learned in the last year was that what separates the CEO's from all the rest with the same situation, they all have more work than what can be usually done with any day's period of time. The question is, how do the better ones have the ability to determine what are the two or three things that are most valuable to moving team forward. This is what provides leadership strategies for making an effective leader. Is there anything in the principles that addresses how do I choose two or three things that will generate the most productivity for me and those I am responsible for.

Mark Sanborn: Well, I am going to go backwards a little bit to an earlier leadership book. The resources in any organization are your time, your expertise to your team, and that's it.

Everything flows from that, so if you are not focused, you're wasting, you are disposing the available resources. I wrote about how to create shared focus by identifying why I call, MVP activity, most valuable activities and here is how you identify, you say, what are six or eight things that I could every day that gives me the biggest payback on my investment time and expertise and that is really may take a while to determine, to prioritize which of the six to eight most important, but you can tell very quickly that filling out expense kind of form, doesn't create revenue, you can tell very quickly that taking an unexpected sales calls on the phone doesn't create revenue, and you start getting rid of the time wasters and the insignificant things that add up and you identify what important activities you need to be doing and you schedule more time to get those things.

Well, here is the problem. A lot of leaders focus once and then they never change that focus and, what we worked yesterday, or the month before, or the week or year before may not work as well today or tomorrow or next month. So, what I 'm saying in the new book, if you don't focus based on your goals to get better, based on your

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agenda, based on change, if you do not refocus what you and your team do, you will only repeat what you and your team have done. How many times have you been in a meeting, when somebody comes back and announces a new initiative, everybody is excited but everybody goes back to their cubicles and, everyone's goes back to doing the same thing before the new initiative.

Mike: Right.

Mark Sanborn: So, not a chance, you can accomplish anything significant in term of initiative for a change. but there are going to be some things that you less or more off, something that you need to start doing, something that you need to stop doing.

Mike: That's key aspect, specially something I was looking at this morning is making decisions based upon sort of linear direction meaning that the way today is, they will always be like and in reality, and I if make these decisions based on today, circumstances are going to pop up tomorrow, next week or next month. There will be new sort of circumstances. The focus needs to be re-determined or in your case or refocused.

Mark Sanborn: Oh my, now we're thinking about this, it was quite some years ago, we had 8 track players in our cars and I actually remember installing my own brackets underneath the dash of me car. Then I determined I had inadequate technology, we went to cassettes, then our cassettes players became obsolete and we went to CD and now I have a new car that doesn't have a CD player in it but it has USB port. There are a lot of organizations still using their 8 tracks and some cassettes tapes and some have CD's. They haven't stayed contemporary with new techniques or new technologies that don't allow you to stay even and that's incredible.

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Most people are only trying to stay as good as their competitors but they could allow you to get ahead. That's really the name of the game, how do you create a strategic in dominated advantage in your market place.

Mike: Curious about this. One of the best customer services books that I

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have ever read is that the Fred Factor which you wrote, I even gave it to one of my clients who reached out and spoke to you afterwards. Because of reading the book he really shaped a whole marketing game plan around the principles you talked about.

In Fred Factor your postman was an inspiration for you book, where did the premises or this Performance Principles first appear.

Mark Sanborn: You know, it came from my work when working with really successfully individuals in the organizations and wanting to codify what it is they did or could do to get better. I you know the Fred Factor is story driven. Fred is a real person, it's not a fable, I've talked to Fred two weeks ago, he is doing great, but this book was based on the idea that we all know try to do good, just not how good that we could be.

Throughout my life I've been encountering people who have done things to some are, mind boggling, that made me look at my expectations within me. I set my expectations to read 500 books in my lifetime. Very few people read 500 books in their lifetime. Most adult today get out of high school or college are able to read a few books of nonfiction in their lifetime so it's obvious that we often underestimate what is possible, psychological, organizationally or interactively. That's why I wrote the book, to give people an approach, you know they aren't any books out there that we found in our research that the address is principle how do you narrow that gap between how good you are and how good you could be.

Mike: What steps that you have seen that could do that are not easy but would offer opportunity to increase productivity in their team.

Mark Sanborn: I believe clarity provides everything. in every year that you begin with the vague idea, you end up with vague or unexpected results and one of two things happens. Either people don't launch from clarity and they waste a lot of time floundering or they once had clarity, but they lost it. They got side track or distracted maybe by an opportunity, maybe by a problem, so first and foremost you have got to be crystal clear on what it is you are about. What is your value proposition, because if you don't have a compelling why behind the what, you will you will lose your enthusiasm and your interest. Once

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you have that clarity, then you build out around that.

My friend Joe Callaway recommends a book called, "Boys in the boat". now I do not read the book but thanks to my pal Joe I know the premise of the book. These guys were training toward the Olympics, the rowers organize their efforts around the very simple question, Will it make the boat go faster? And that's a beautifully example, when you talk about your studies on simple leadership, it's a simple premise, now it is not always easy, its often difficult to implement because, when you have a fast boat, making it faster is not you can do something simple like, oh we shall wax the boat so that it will go faster, no.

You already done everything that you can legally do, to make the boat go faster so you got to look at everything from the rowing technique to the people who row the boat, the mechanics of the boat to the water properties and that to me, is such a great example of being crystal clear, will it make the boat go faster? Because that is the point of the arrow everything follows that.

So, the first thing everyone needs to know, is that if leaders want to be productive and they want their organization to be successful, start with clarity. Then use clarity to shape culture. Culture is huge right now, I debated to write a book about culture, because my goal is to make it easier to grasp understanding and act on, and the thing about culture, we can complexify all day all but ultimately culture is sum of everything we believe we say and do, and you know people often think, you always said it brand is a promise, no brand is a reputation. Reputation created by culture and you could have a goal to have a whole class service provider, but if unhappy untrained employees in your corporate culture, people aren't going to buy that, they are going to experience less than spectacular service.

Once you got clarity, you have got to translate that clarity through the cultures so that everybody knows what their roles in is creating those outcomes so those are two places that I would start with, and where I advise clients to start when they are prove their performance.

Mike:

Yeah, and when you are describing about data, and engaged culture is one of the main pulse points of any organization. But you were

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explaining that, the thought that I have was when we talk about concept of a better potential principle, is there something that comes to your mind without giving an actual case study, when somebody wrestle with the subject of clarity, is there one or two things they could do? when they try to apply them, whether or not to be perfect or make quantum leaps but what can they do to be better to determine clarity and building clarity in the group?

Mark Sanborn: Sure, so in terms of determining clarity you got to realize you can't be all things to all people. You got to recognize it good is the enemy of better. Jim Collins in his book "Good to great", he had three intersective circles, one which is profit and one is what you could be world class in and third is what you wanted to do, or could do with your capability in the organization, because if you just do what you want to do you may not make money or world class, or if you try to be world class in something you really aren't capable of or interesting in doing you have some problems too.

I would refer people who really want to do a brainstorming session to look at Jim Collin model or to just ask yourself, what are the six or eight things if we did consistently day in or day out, would will this move closer to our ultimate goal. In terms of getting that into culture that is about creating shared focus and that is about meeting every one of your direct reports and asking them about prioritize, what are the 10 most important things you believe you are paid to do each day.

1 being important and 10 being the least important, and you as a leader look at list and make sure its playing from the right sheet music, because you might find doing something that shouldn't be doing, you might be somebody who has number 9 that thing you want them is out is put number 1 or 2, so managers are focus but leader create shared focus, will go a long way in viewing your clarity throughout the culture.

Mike: That is huge, because it fits in line with my executive search background one of the key areas that causes performance to go down is so you have somebody on your team that does not understand their role? Do they have clarity on that and then what I think what is more important is in order for you to get engagement

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do they understand its value to the project of the department or the company? True synergy and employee engagement come into play when somebody puts their heads and their heart into action to contribute to the group. Is there an area that you see or have experienced that leaders wrestle with, is there something that sort of stands out in your mind?

Mark Sanborn: Holy smokes, there are various things leaders struggle with, I think some of it commons ones, a lot of leaders' struggle staying on track both organizationally and individually, with the diversity and generations in the workplace, what is relevant to a baby boomer generation may or may to the millennial, so I think irrelevance is the generic challenge across generations that all leaders face. If your product is being irrelevant stop buying it, when your message stop being relevant people stop listening so that's one challenge.

I also think that one of the things that leader struggle in secret is confidence, so the better you become the more you fear falling from grace. I talk about how to be best at keeping getting better and I talk about how to do it. but the problem is, leaders become very defensive. They stop playing to win start playing not to lose. They look at what they accomplish and the results they turned for the shareholder and they start to get very defensive and sometimes what they do is, they stop growing and start maintaining and of course, that's a short-term strategy. I never obovate rolling the dice, betting the farm, taking the risk that's certainly not what I recommend. But you have to ask people, are you planning to too safe, are you playing it too cautiously, are you being too conservative that you are missing out growth opportunities?

Mike: I ask that question for a reason I found when I was talking with people, sometimes as we build a leadership program, where we climb on top of the pyramid in other words, where there are not a whole lot of people we, become isolated.

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A lot of times it feels lonely and sometimes it feels it's just me, alone. I have been surprised the higher up you go in the organization the more the imposters syndrome pops up, when somebody gets to that

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stage and feel like, "am I really as good as people think that I am?" Not only are you as good as people think but a lot of times you're even better.

I love the idea of this principle to help people stretch to what I can become who I am intended to be.

Mark Sanborn: I think if I can interject, cause I', kind of ADD and I forget. I think the imposters syndrome can be a good thing. It causes us to not look at the abilities have but it brings up the question of do I have a certain amount of humility? Almost every person that I admired my closest inner circle, these pretty great men and women who accurately self-reflect and allow BS doesn't sneak in.

I once heard pastors says, only those that realize how unworthy they are to preach the gospel are worthy to preach the gospel. It sounds like a riddle, but what that means is that only if you really question whether you are authentic can you ever really be authentic because you maybe laboring under pretense. If you stay stuck and pastor says, you need help, but when you occasionally bump up against it, that's just life and God's way to keeping you humble.

Mike: You bet. and it goes back to one of the principles you write about and spoken about today is refocus and whenever you bump up against those things, they healthy way of how to deal with this. It helps you to refocus and take action to whatever steps that you need you to be able to continue to move forward. I am kind of curious about, we have been talking about your leadership perspective. In kind of wrapping things up let's spin in the other direction look at it from the employee or the follower position. The reason I use the word follow a lot, when I speak about leadership there has to be individuals who have somebody who they choose to follow. When I use the word choice, autocratic, or dictatorial management style doesn't work in the long haul.

That's why people follow leaders. Is there a trait that pops up in your mind that sort of resonate above others of what a leader should be to get people to be truly engage to their mission?

Mark Sanborn: One of the things at the top is connection, because people don't

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change outside connection. When I have unmasked what is the biggest change in leadership from the past 30 years I say the biggest change is followership. While people choose to follow, it is not good to refer to them as followers, because they, especially younger employees they wanted to be treated as contributors and collaborators and team members and colleagues.

You bring out much more than do what I say what I do, you tap into the expertise to the group and so I understand fully, this person has chosen someone to take guidance and direction from. I get that, but I say leaders change your language because when you change you talk about the people on your team you will change the way your team performs. You will raise their self-esteem, you will raise their commitment when you talk about them in terms of team member collaborator and I always say, I learned it long time ago the hard way 40 years ago. but I always talk about the people on my team. There is no upside in referring the people who you pay as your employees,

Mike:

I believe whole heartedly, that it's small words simple words we say have great meaning or great distraction, and if you want people involved or you creating an atmosphere where they truly feel like they are contributors and you are able to recognize importance and recognize them as a group and the word is **us** as suppose you or me, there is power that.

Wrapping things up, as I look at your books that you wrote over the years, I've been a fan not just the way you put words together, but the messages that comes from your heart. It is easily to see both. Is there a question about a your book that you wish that I have ask that we haven't covered that is somebody who could be in a leadership role would be important to them to grasp and try to implement?

Mark Sanborn:

Well if you have ask how can I find more about the book, go to the potentialprinciple.com to learn more about the books and if you want to learn more about my work, there is lots of free resources, videos, a blog, marksanborn.com because I like to produce more bright ideas on a day to day bases, and I try to disseminate through social media, internet and through my various works.

I hope people to be able to finding out more about how they can

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narrow the gap, between how good they are and how good they could be

Mike: Thank you very much for your time and your heart that you have shared today, and I'm encouraging buy the one or more books Mark has written on leadership, employee engagement. You can find him at marksanborn.com. Mark thank you for being with me today.

Mark Sanborn: Thanks. Great to be with you

Mike: Appreciate it.