Andrew Olsen:

Hey, this is Andrew Olsen with the Rainmaker Fundraising podcast. I'm super excited. This is the first in a special series of conversations on leadership that we're hosting. I'm thrilled that my friend Doug Smith has joined me for this conversation. Doug, welcome to the show.

Doug Smith:

Andrew it's an honor and I appreciate your leadership and it's been fun to watch you grow, and develop over the last, I don't know, eight or nine years that I've known you. It's just an honor to be on the show. Very proud of you, my friend.

Andrew Olsen:

Likewise, my friends. So for our listeners, Doug is a Director of Development at Light of Life Rescue Mission, but he's also Founder and President of L3 Leadership. I will just tell you, Doug is probably the most positive and engaging person that I know. So I am super excited to do you get a chance to hear from him today and to talk a leadership experience with Doug. So again thanks for being here. Tell us a little bit about L3 Leadership.

Doug Smith:

Yeah. So L3 Leadership, I became passionate about leadership at when I was a teenager. Probably around 18 years old when someone told me for the first time in my life that I was a leader. I don't know if we have time to go to my whole story, but I was a drug dealer in high school and really my life was headed nowhere really, really fast. Had to go to summer school every year just to get to the next grade and really never thought that I would ever amount to anything. Never thought I would do anything with my life. My dad's a bus driver and so obviously there's nothing wrong with being a bus driver, but I just thought, "Hey, I'll be a bus driver or a janitor, no big deal." I lost my mom my senior year of high school. That through an experience of faith and that experience, turned my life around and had several mentors come into my life and tell me that I had leadership potential, and tell me that I could make a difference with my life. I believed them.

Doug Smith:

Really that started this whole journey of leadership development and I'm sure we'll get into that more. But about five years ago I really felt a responsibility to be honest with you, to give to others and do for others what was done for me through mentorship. So we started this organization called L3 Leadership. We are obsessed with helping people grow to their maximum potential and to maximize the impact of their leadership. So we do that through five different things that we do. We have a podcast as well and so we come out with content every single week for free. It's usually a mix of interviews where I interview high level leaders, and then I do personal lessons as well. We have a membership platform where you can actually join.

Doug Smith:

In the membership platform we do live monthly calls where you get access to globally known leaders, and you have a chance to ask them questions, and learn from them. We have courses and all kinds of fun stuff on the back end of our membership platform. We do Mastermind Groups. This is our bread and butter. This is been the biggest source of growth in my life. So we intentionally get people together in Mastermind Groups that meet on a consistent basis to grow. We've partnered with a nonprofit in our city to do a leadership collaborative and then we do a one day leadership conference as well. So all of those things have one intention in mind, that's to add value to leaders.

Andrew Olsen:

That's awesome. So I think for our listeners it should be clear that Doug knows a thing or two about leadership. So let's jump into it. Talk to me about how would you describe your leadership philosophy?

Doug Smith:

Yeah, so John Maxwell's my hero. So someone handed me a John Maxwell CD when I was 17 and this was actually the start. A mentor handed me it and I listened to the CD, I knew nothing about personal development. I literally, after I listened to the CD, I called my mentor and I said, "Give me everything you have." John's been the most influential leader in my life for the past 17 years. So I pretty much adopt any leadership philosophy that he has. Its basic root. I believe that leadership is influence. Nothing more, nothing less. So whether you influence one or you influence millions, I believe that you're a leader. At the end of the day you have to at least lead yourself. If you are in a family, you have to lead your family. If you're in an organization, you probably have influence and leadership over some amount of people or responsibility. So I just come from the premise that everyone's a leader and everyone needs to grow to their maximum potential and if they do, they'll maximize that leadership impact that they can have.

Doug Smith:

At the end of the day it's all about people. If people aren't better as a result of leadership, then you shouldn't be in leadership. I think a lot of people get into leadership because they want the perks and they think that it comes with all these great things until they're in it and they get punched in the face. I see you smiling and laughing. I mean, to be honest with you, and we might get into this I became director of development almost two years ago now. Actually, I didn't even want the position to be honest with you. Again, I'm a person of faith and so through a series of circumstances I felt like the Lord was leading me to take the position.

Doug Smith:

Now two years later... It was a painful year and a half to start off that job but I feel like I was baptized and leadership. I've really had to grow and develop it. I just learned that leadership often sucks. Something that's helped me immensely is John Maxwell has been saying recently, "If you're a leader, there will never be too easy consecutive days in your life." I've just adopted that as a leadership philosophy because I have yet to see that happen since I stepped into this leadership role.

Andrew Olsen:

Oh man, I might need to get that as a tattoo. That's really good right there. So, based on what you said, I think you'd agree with me, if someone is not leading themselves well behind closed doors I feel like it's impossible to lead well publicly.

Doug Smith:

Yes.

Andrew Olsen:

Unpack that a little bit.

Doug Smith:

Yeah. Well again, I quote John all the time, but it's true. It's like if you wouldn't follow yourself, why should anyone else? I think sometimes people go into leadership because they just want people to follow them when they wouldn't even follow themselves. So yeah. I was doing a call yesterday where I was the only male speaker on a female conference. It was called Chic Influencer. I was just talking to people about, I think right now people have, are either realizing that they have done the leadership development they needed to become the person they need to be on the inside to lead through crisis or they haven't. I think this is when we're realizing why we need to become bigger, and grow bigger, on the inside and be able to lead ourselves. Because if you can't lead yourself in a crisis, how are you ever going to lead other people through crisis? So it's everything. So if you're not growing and developing on a daily basis, you're in for a rough road. That's all I can say.

Andrew Olsen:

So you've interviewed a ton of different leaders from many different sectors. I'm curious to know what's the... If you had to pick one thing, what's the number one piece of leadership advice you've ever received?

Doug Smith:

Yeah, so I'm about to turn 35 years old. I would say the most consistent answer that I think is fascinating, and I don't know your audience, but I think for young leaders, this is the best advice I ever heard. I always ask the question, "If you could go back and have coffee with your 20 year old self, what would you tell them?" And I would say at least 75% of the leaders I interview say in one way or another, "Just relax." Relax and realize that all the dreams and aspirations in your heart they're going to happen if you do the right thing, if you just grow and develop. They say over and over again do not miss the journey on the way there and don't look down on the season of development. We all need developed.

Doug Smith:

The reality is until we're in our prime, it's going to be 10, 15, 20 years before you get into the leadership role that may be in your hearts when you're 20. So I think for me, and again going back to something that John said, he just said, "Listen, in the beginning you're not very good and just be okay with that." I think about the past few years mistakes I've made is just like, "Oh my goodness." You just want to tell people, "Listen, I know I'm bad but I'm not that bad. Just give me a chance, let me grow." But what he said is so good, he said, "But if you do things right and you grow in the end, you're not as good as people think." Somewhere in between those two is where you should live."

Doug Smith:

So I think more than anything it's just enjoy the journey, do what you're supposed to do, grow every day, and it'll all turn out right. Don't stress out about, am I going to be... I actually put this quote on my thing. John said this, he said... On my LinkedIn today. He said "It was never on my bucket list to be number one, but it's always been on my bucket list to be the best that I could be." I think that speaks straight to the heart of what those leaders are getting at.

Andrew Olsen:

That's interesting. Okay, so next question. I'm curious about, you already talked a little bit about this in your intro, but what do you think the most important values are that a leader can demonstrate to those in her his care?

Doug Smith:

Yep. I think you have to lead by example. I think that's huge. You have to value people, and actually show that you care. But I'm also learning... So my nature is to naturally care for people. I value people. I'm very relational, but I've also had to learn and I'm still learning to be honest with you people also value candor. You can be a people pleaser all day and encourage people all day. But if you're not going to have the strength to tell people the truth and tell them what they need to hear to grow, eventually you'll lose their respect and you'll stop leading.

Doug Smith:

So that's been a hard thing but I think you have to value people, but also value candor. Actually, helping people versus just making them happy. I think that's huge. For me, one of our values the L3 Leadership is character. We believe the character development is the most important development. I was on a call the other day, I was interviewing someone and we were just talking about someone that we look up to that's in their 70s. I think in our generation it's so easy to look up to someone that's in their 30s and 40s and say, "Wow, I just want to follow everything they say." And everything they say is brilliant but to be honest with you... And this is including me, our leadership hasn't stood the test of time. It's great that I'm leading well at 35 but I really admire and look up to and wanted to learn from those leaders that are 70, 75, 85, and still have their marriage in tact, still have their family in tact, have done great things. But their life is more complete and they had the character to get them through.

Doug Smith:

So we always just tell people, focus more on your character development than anything else because if you don't, you'll never make it to your leadership finish line. My pastor always tells me, he said, "I think about 2% of leaders make it to their finish line, and it's primarily always character issues." So more than anything, grow your character. I think when you do that, you do lead example for your team and raise the bar for their character as well and I think that's huge.

Andrew Olsen:

That's good stuff. Character and candor. I love that. Let's talk about this. How do you approach this and what have you seen work best? Obviously, in leadership you can't force people to do things they don't want to do. Right? So no matter how hard we try and I'll tell you early in my career I thought force was the way to do it. I've learned painfully that it's not. But so what have you learned about how a great leader brings people along with them on the journey to get from point A to the leader's desired point B, but in a way that doesn't damage relationships?

Doug Smith:

Yep. So back to the candor, this is something I'm not naturally strong in and this was actually one of my pain points of 2019 in leadership growth to be honest with you. So I can just tell you what I'm learning. I can't speak from like, "Hey, I'm so good at this." But what I am learning is on the candor end, something that really sent me free. I actually had the opportunity to have lunch with John Maxwell in January. I sat down and I said, "Listen, I have this huge lit in my life in my leadership that I'm so relational and I care so much about what other people think that I'm unable to lead them the way I want to." He looked at me and he said, "Doug, I understand that." He's like, "Actually my CEO, I've had that same conversation with him." He said to his CEO, he said, "Mark, the good news is everybody loves you. The bad news is your leadership isn't enough to get people to where they need to go for the journey for our organization."

Doug Smith:

That resonated so much. And I said, "Well, how did he grow?" John actually said, "Well, I had to go through that same journey." So I said, "Please just speak into my heart and tell me what I need to do." This is going to be my statement of the year, maybe a statement of my 30s. But he just looked at me and I don't know why this went up, but he just said, "Doug, you have to make the decision to always love people but not depend on their love." I'll say that again because literally that changed everything-

Andrew Olsen:

That's huge.

Doug Smith:

Yeah, "Doug, you always make the decision to always love people but not to depend on their love." Actually all of these interviews I'm doing, I interviewed someone else who I've mentored him and asked him the same thing and he actually challenged this person, which I'm doing this week. He said, "Now if you're in that transition, I want you to journal and I want you to make two columns. I want you to make a column of Doug before and Doug the leader after. When you come up with that list share that with your team." So I'm working on that right now. "Hey, here's how Doug used to operate. I used to not be honest with people because I wanted them to like me and even if I was disappointed in their performance or whatever, I used to just et cetera." Then, but the new Doug, "Hey, I'm going to love you. I'm going to care about you, but I'm not going to depend on your love, and I'll love you enough to always be honest with you." So that's an example. I plan on sitting before my team.

Doug Smith:

Now I have acted on that sense my lunch with John and I would just say, and he helped me through these conversations. But just sitting down with a team member and one telling them that you love them and that you care for them, but telling them that you love and care for them enough to be honest with them. Then for me, I've had to learn and grow a lot in the art of how to have hard conversations. I actually have a system, and I don't know if you can include tools, but there's a tool we use at Light of Life called the Information Wheel. It's a process to help you talk out or write out a conversation. So I actually take that before I have any hard conversation and I'll write it out.

Doug Smith:

To give you some examples, it's basically like, "Hey, what is the sensory data?" So what is the issue going on? Then you say, "What are the facts?" Then you write out and journal, what am I thinking? Which is really helpful. Then you write what am I feeling? Then you go through a whole section on what are my wants? So what are my wants for the person I'm talking to? What are my wants for me? What are my wants for our team? And what are our wants for the organization? I share those with the people. Then basically you talk about action steps and say, "Hey, in the past I haven't been honest with you. So this may come as a total shock for you, but my current actions are I'm currently going to be honest with you and I'm going to tell you the truth. I promise to do that from now on. In the future, these conversations should be easier and pretty consistent, and it should just be a coaching relationship."

Doug Smith:

So I write out that conversation. I have it with the individual. When I meet with them I say, "Hey, I'm going to share this whole thing and I just want you to listen. Please don't interrupt. After I share I want you to repeat back to me what you heard." Then that gives them an opportunity to say, "Well, Hey, I heard this, this and this." They either heard you accurately or they didn't. Then you say, "Okay, yeah you heard me correctly. Now what do you think?" Then you do the same thing. Hey, listen to them and you just have a conversation. I think that leads to the conversations you need to put some intentional change plans, or what we call them, into place and just help people grow.

Doug Smith:

Just, I think this goes back to leading by example. Don't ask someone to grow and, and tell them that they need to do more if they don't see you doing that. If you want to talk about teachability, we have a quarterly retreat every quarter with our team. One of the questions we always ask with our team in this retreat or ",Hey, is there anything causing disunity or distrust, or holding our team back?" One retreat in 2019 the team was very candid with me and it was awkward, right? My whole team's there. Basically, this one team member said, "Doug, you're the lid." I thought that's special, thank you. I just sat there and I'm like, "Okay." And everyone's nodding their head. I'm like, "Okay, but as a leader, what do you do in that situation?"

Doug Smith:

For me, I heard it, I received it, I assessed it, they were right. So I had to change and adapt. I changed and adapt and I grew and I'm not perfect, but it made me more self-aware. It made the team realize that I'm not only going to ask them to change, but they can ask me to change because we all need to grow better together. So I hope that helps but that would be my process and what I would tell you for coaching people and getting them to move in the direction you want them to.

Andrew Olsen:

Yeah, I think that's really insightful and it's really interesting to me that your team was able to give that feedback because one of the things I hear all the time from leaders is I can't get candid feedback from my team. Right? A lot of that's about the culture that we establish and how we create that conversation about feedback. So, it sounds like you, for all the challenges that you've had there's a really intentional way that you've developed that conversation internally so that people feel comfortable and safe to give that feedback. Right?

Doug Smith:

Yeah. I'll just say that. So we do that in our quarterly retreats and that's not an open invitation for me it's really on our team. We certainly wrestled through other issues. But in my one-on-ones with everyone that reports to me, I'm always asking... Leaders say that all the time. But two questions for the leaders that say that don't get feedback. One is, do you ask for it? Here's a novel thought. If you've never asked for it, no wonder you haven't gotten it. The second thought is if you've received it, what did you do with it? Did you get defensive and shut the person down and say you're an idiot. If you did, you're going to be surrounded with people who will never give you feedback and never say anything to you cause they're intimidated by you. You have to model teachability. If you're not teachability, that's your lid as a leader and that will hold you back for the rest of your life until you learn to be teachable.

Doug Smith:

Last thing on teachability I've actually been credited for being too teachable but again, this goes back to the sensitivity of being a people pleaser. I'll hear one person say, "You got to do this." I'm like, "Okay. And okay." Before I would say in my growth journey that I would adapt a feedback just to make people happy versus adapting because I wanted to get better. So I've had to learn to actually say, "Okay, is this something that I actually need to grow in? Or is this something I'm just doing to please this person?" That's been a world of difference in growing.

Andrew Olsen:

Awesome. So I want to ask, and get your candid take on this, what's the biggest risk you've ever taken as a leader? And what did you learn from that?

Doug Smith:

Oh geez. Well, risk management has never been a strong suit of mine. I'm growing in that area. For me it's a risk starting all through leadership and jumping out there. It was a risk taking the new role as Director of Development. I think throughout your leadership journey you're always going to have to take risks. I would just always just say it's worth it. When people are on their deathbed, they usually... One of the major things they have regrets about is they didn't take any risks. So as a leader and if you're going to grow, you're going to have to take risks and realize you're going to fail and it's okay. It's how you respond in failure.

Doug Smith:

Actually I was just having a review with my boss yesterday and my first board meeting as Director development was a huge failure. Actually, I'll just be real candid. That's just who I am. Andrew... Anyway, a company and someone I know developed a report for us and I thought it was really good. So I handed it out to the board members, but I couldn't explain anything on it. So my first board meeting, all of these board members started looking into these reports and asking me questions and I shut down. I'm like, "I don't know." They're like, "Why would you give us a report you don't know how to explain?" So, you want to talk about walking home with your tail between your legs. But in the midst of failure and taking risks, what happened? I could have gave up, I could have quit, I could have said, "I'm not meant for this." But I got back up again.

Doug Smith:

I determined, anytime you take a risk and fail, just make the determination that you will never do that again. Every board meeting I've had since it's been great and I've earned the board's trust and respect but that came through massive, massive failure. 2019 was a brutal year for me because of the risk of taking on this new role. But 2020s been unbelievable. I would say without having to go through 2019 I would have never made it to 2020, and there was at least a dozen times in 2019 where I just wanted to throw in the towel and just go crawl in a hole and never come out. So risks are always worth it. Just realize you're going to fail and be willing to get back up and develop tenacity. It's the only way you'll grow.

Andrew Olsen:

All right. Thank you. I know we're close to time for you here. One more question though.

Doug Smith:

Sure.

Andrew Olsen:

As a leader, you're always on, right? You're always on at Light of Life in your Director of Development role. You're always on L3 Leadership in your President role. You're always on at home as an active husband and father. You're always on in the community, you're always on with church and other volunteer relationships and responsibilities. How does someone, like many of the leaders that we're probably talking to right now that's doing these kinds of things, find the opportunity to recharge? Talk about that a little bit.

Doug Smith:

Yep. So I would say until January 2020, I was horrible at this and never took a break. Then I started getting good at this and then COVID-19 happened and that all went out the window. But what I will return to and actually things are starting to get more normalized after that first month of COVID-19 which was crazy. But I would just say this and again, I'm a person of faith. There's a book I read this year that literally is the best book I've read in the last five years and it's called The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comber. Again, the Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer.

Doug Smith:

Now again, he's a pastor so, for those of you who aren't a person of faith, it may not be for you. But for me he spoke to so many things in that book. But the two things that really transformed how I live and rest as a leader, are one is the implementation of a Sabbath. Before if you would've said Sabbath to me, I would just like laugh and be like, "Whatever." But he actually, I'm an Enneagram seven, I want to make everything fun. He made it sound fun. There was a quote in there, it's basically like, "Man, your Sabbath day." For those who aren't in faith it just means a whole day off where you don't do anything having to do with work. You don't think about work, you don't solve problems, you just have basically you rest and have fun.

Doug Smith:

There was a quote in there where it basically said, "Our Sabbath or our rest day should be the day we look forward to most each week, and the day that we reflect back on most throughout the week because it was so meaningful. It's a date filled with friendship and memories made with your family, and day sleeping in, and cooking meals together." So my wife and I started implementing that and it's been unbelievable. Alongside with that he also encouraged you to do a digital detox. There's a phone app called, I think it's just called Moment, In the Moment app. It's wonderful and they have a bootcamp to help you have a digital detox. It literally cut my phone time in half, which was absolutely amazing. I had no idea how addicted to my phone I was.

Doug Smith:

The scary part is it tracks how long you're on, which most phones do, but it also tracks how many times you pick up your phone a day. You want to talk about a scary stat? That's scary. So I would just say implement a day off where you do nothing and you solve no problems. Of course there's going to be days where you have to do something but make it a sacred day for you and your family, and do a digital detox. It'll be one of the best things you do. So that would be what I would tell people.

Andrew Olsen:

Awesome. Doug, thank you so much for being here. Thanks for sharing your insights with us. How can people get in touch with you if they want to learn more about L3 Leadership? Want to learn more about Light of Life? You in general, what's the best way?

Doug Smith:

Yep. For Light of Life, just go to the lightoflife.org and you'll see everything there. We're based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and we're a nonprofit that serves the homeless men, women and children of our city. So if you're in Pittsburgh, we'd love to connect with you, would love to have you come down to the mission for a tour. If you're into leadership development, you can just go to L3leadership.org and you'll find all the ways to connect with us on there.

Doug Smith:

I don't know when this will air, but we just released a free course for leaders called How to Lead Through Crisis? This is something we're doing for our members on a consistent basis. Where, we're going to be developing courses to help you grow and develop as a leader in addition to those live monthly webinars. But this one's available for free for the public. So if you think that would add value to you, you can just hop on our website and get access to that. So Andrew, thank you for having me. I love everything you can do. I learned from you literally everyday I feel like. So I'm just thank you for being a leader, putting content out there, everything you do matters. I'm just honored to call you a friend.

Andrew Olsen:

Hey man, appreciate you. Same here. I also learn from you every day. In fact, I was listening to one of your recent podcast this morning before we jumped on this. So appreciate everything you're doing for the community and thanks for being here.

Doug Smith:

Thanks, man.