

# Real-Life Leadership Reflections

with Nathan Bright



Episode  
**.03**



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Leadership  
Reflections.**

# Who is Nathan Bright?

Nathan is a degree-qualified and experienced leader.

He has extensive Human Resources, Safety, Line and Executive Management experience, leading significant organisational restructuring and change management projects as well as all things day to day HR.

Over the past 21 years since entering Norske Skog as an HR Graduate at their paper mill in New Zealand he has gone on to progress his career through working in production as a shift manager all the way up to Vice President Human Resources Aust/NZ for the past 6 years.

Since finishing with Norske Skog in December 2021 Nathan has been very active in his career transition and job seeking, which has provided him with some rest and reflection time, but ultimately finding new employment as the Executive Director People & Culture at Albury Wodonga Health, commencing March 2022.

Nathan credits much of his success to hard work and having an amazing wife and 3 fantastic kids!

## Summary of this conversation

This is a very real conversation about the challenges that leaders can face and the different ways to overcome them. Whilst the specifics in Nathan's case are not common, he shares some excellent tips for getting the best out of ourselves.

## Connect with Nathan Bright:

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## How to handle disappointment

There will be times where we step up for opportunities that we do not get; and in those moments we have a choice – focus on the disappointment; or act as if we already have the opportunity and continually push ourselves to step up. Being in the mindset of someone acting in the position we are striving for will guide our behaviors and get us noticed.

## Uncertainty & discomfort are normal

It is normal when we step up into something new, to feel uncertain and uncomfortable. EVERYONE feels it. When we can appreciate that unease is part of the natural order of things, we can detach meaning to it (eg. I'm not cut out for this...) and focus on building our confidence muscle.

## Building confidence

Title, qualifications, experience, years of tenure are NOT things that guarantee confidence. Confidence comes from putting ourselves in situations that stretch us time and time again. We don't build strong bicep muscles by reading books on body building and simply joining a gym – strength is built by PRACTISING what we learn over and over and building up over time. The same is true for confidence.

## Vulnerability is tough, but necessary

It is OK to share how we're feeling about things. Not only is it ok, but it is also powerful. Vulnerability can feel scary, particularly if we are not used to talking about our feelings, which is why it is important to build a close inner circle of people we trust around us. We do not need to internalize stress and pressure. We are not an island.

## The difference between assertive and dictatorship

There is growing appreciation for qualities such as empathy, humility and compassion in leadership, which can cause confusion in how to act, when a team are not doing what is expected of them. There is a place for assertiveness and upholding expected standards and this is very different to barking orders at people. Our goal should not necessarily be to be liked on a social level, but to be trusted, respected and fair.

## You can get through

No matter how bad a situation may feel, it will always pass. There will always be a way through, and we need to be self-aware enough to ensure that challenging times are not driving us into bad behavior and poor mental health. If we find ourselves struggling, this is where our inner circle comes in – talk about it, join community or sporting groups, start to exercise, cut out excessive alcohol and junk food – looking after our physical health will help us maintain optimal performance in our role.

# Key take-aways

# Claire Marwick

I honestly believe that I have been put here on this earth to shout from the rooftops that no one is 100% together, 100% of the time and none of us should use the false belief that we need to be, as a reason to NOT go out and do that thing, stand up for that promotion or start that dream business.

Through podcasts, coaching and custom programs, my aim is to support, energize, inspire, and empower; and you can connect with me via my website or my socials.

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# The mindset through disappointment.

**NB** You go from being the bottom at something to okay, and do quite well out of it. But yeah, in the first year, had a couple of classes on industrial and organizational psychology, which was all about psychology in the workplace. That really appealed to me. I went on to do my undergrad. And then to get into the post-grad master's program, the university only accepted 15 people each year. I didn't make it in to the 15. To cut the long story short, I went around all the lecturers. I turned up day one. I said, "Look, I want to do it. What have I got to do to get into this 15?" After going and seeing so and so, then up to so and so, the head of the department, back down to the lecturers, they let me tag along in the subjects, even though I wasn't in the 15.

And then I talked to the first assignment out of the whole class, really, really gave it everything I had. A couple of people pulled out, which very early, not long after that, and I got accepted into the 15. So I was able to complete my masters. From there, I was fortunate enough to get a role as a HR graduate of Norske Skog Paper Manufacturing at the paper mill in the North Island in New Zealand. I did about a year there. I came over to Australia as a HR advisor at the Albury Paper Mill. I went from being HR advisor, then I went on to shift in production, and I was a shift leader or a shift manager at the time. And then from there, I was promoted to HR health and safety manager at the Albury Mill, and then from there to vice president human resources for Australia and New Zealand.

**CM** That is exactly why I wanted to have you on this series, because I think it's really, really important. The things that we've spoken about behind the scenes, your concerns about, "Well, what have I got to talk about? What would somebody want to hear from me?" I think there are so, so many more people out there that think like that, than think, "Hey, I am super skilled. Let me just share everything with the world. Everyone wants to listen to me." They're the people in the minority, not people like yourself. That's why I'm so thrilled that you are here. Why don't we start off? If you don't mind just sharing a bit of background, introducing yourself to those listening and share a bit of background into your career and how you've got to where you are.

**NB** Yeah, sure. Look, it started for me, probably, going to university in New Zealand and my entry into doing a master's degree sums up how I've actually gone in my whole career. I didn't really know what I wanted to specialize in at uni, so I took a very broad range of subjects in year one. I was actually having a look at my academic transcript the other day, and the subject that I got my lowest mark in my first year is what I've gone on to build a whole career around. So it-

**CM** That's funny. I resonate with that a lot.

## Claire Markwick:

Nathan, so thank you so much for joining me today. I really, really appreciate it. We've been talking about this conversation for a while now, so I'm thrilled that we're finally here. We're finally sitting down, and we finally hit the record button. So, welcome.

## Nathan Bright:

Yeah. Thanks, Claire. I guess there was probably a bit of procrastination on my behalf, which I apologize for. I haven't done anything like this before. I'm not overly comfortable talking about myself, but we'll have a go.

**CM** Wow. That's quite a story. I love that you said how you had no idea what you wanted to do when you went to uni. So you took that broad approach. I just resonated with that so much because I did the exact same. I did business and economics, so I had it completely, it was completely open. I did a bit of statistics, a bit of accounting, a bit of micro and macroeconomics, industrial economic, just split across so much. When you said about how the thing you scored lowest, that was what you went into doing in your career. I'm like, "Yes." The much also that I skipped were accounting, because it was double accounting on a, I think, it was a Monday afternoon, and that was student night at the union. So I'm like, "No, no, no. I'm missing out on drinking time if I'm in an accounting lecture till 6:00." And then I went on to become an accountant. So there you go.

**NB** Yeah. I think lesson number one, it's fine to not know exactly what you want to do, so long as you are doing something, and you're out there having a go. You'll find your way. Yeah.

**CM** Yeah. I think that's really great advice, and it's something I hear a lot in that there's people who think, "Well, I can't step up for that, or I can't do that because I don't have this qualification, or I don't have this ticket, or I don't have this experience." I don't know about you, but I'll be interested to hear your perspective. I'm not negating going to uni. So anyone listening, I'm not negating that at all. But it's not a piece of paper that gives you the confidence to step up and try something, is it? What is it to you? Do you think that makes you go, "You know what? I'm going to give this a go."

**NB** It's a bit of taking a leap of faith, having some confidence and going after what's sparking your interest or what you've got a bit of an appetite for. If you're feeling a bit anxious, because through my career, each time I've gone up into another role, I've very early on gone on, "I don't think I'm going to be able to do this. I'm not going to be able to learn enough. I'm not going to be smart enough." You go through all of that, but there's something that obviously lights the flame. You just have to have the faith in yourself that if you put the hard work in, because it's 99% hard work, it's amazing what you can learn. You get a bit of luck along the way. You make your own luck in that sense as well. So yeah, go after what's of interest. But if you are feeling like, "It's too much for me. I don't think I'm going to be able to do it," that's probably a good sign.

**CM** That's an interesting way of thinking.

**NB** If it's going to be easy, and you know you can do it, everyone's probably doing it. And are you really... What are you... What's the growth and the learning? The intrinsic boxes aren't really going to get ticked. I don't think.

**CM** And it gets boring, doesn't it? Comfortable can get boring. I find comfortable gets boring anyway. I know that I'm someone who's driven by variety, so I like to have lots of different projects and lots of different things going on at the same time. Some people looking in on my life would go, "Oh, my God. How can she keep it sane? How can she keep herself together? There's so much going on." But I love that you said that each time you've stepped up, you haven't known if you were able to deal with it. You didn't know if you knew enough. You didn't know if you were qualified enough. I think, coming from the female perspective, I feel that's a very common thing in women. And I'm finding the more conversations I have with men, I know this might sounded like a sweeping generalization, but it's so common across the board. We don't go into things with 100% confidence that we know exactly what we're going to do and exactly what the outcome's going to be, do we?

**NB** No. It's great to hear, because I'm not obviously going around talking to people around, "Let's peel some layers of your onion back and find out what's going on," and you are. It's refreshing to hear that. It makes me feel a little bit normal. Because each time in my career I've stepped up, and even with going through a transition which we might talk about shortly, the confidence, you are not oozing confidence that you're going to keep the goals in the next chapter. Well, speaking for myself, I can't speak for everyone. But I've always taken a lot of self convincing and self talk to give it everything and make a go of it.

**CM** Yeah.

**NB** Normal.

**CM** It's 100% normal. It really is. I'll put it out there to anybody listening to this as well. If you're feeling like, "Oh, no. I can't possibly do that because I don't have that degree. I don't have that title. I don't have that experience." That is not the reason to not do it. Like you said previously, if you're not feeling that little bit stretched, then, or if you are feeling that little bit stretched, then it's probably the right thing to do. Isn't it? Because you're going to grow into the role or grow into the position or the project or whatever it is, aren't you?

**NB** Yeah, you will. It's okay to share with people that you trust, people that if you're lucky enough to have a mentor or a coach or your partner, your wife, your husband, even your kids. It's amazing when you share a little tidbit about my confidences down, "I'm not sure if I can do this." Friends, they'll throw something in that'll give you the boost that you need, the boost of confidence you need. So yeah, don't be afraid to share how you're feeling.

**CM** I think that's a really valid point as well. And this, again, I've heard this from someone just recently, again another male, saying that it can be really hard as a man. Obviously, I'm not one, so I don't know. I'm open to hearing your thoughts on this, to be vulnerable, to open up and to say, "You know what? I'm finding this really hard. What would you do in this situation? Has this ever happened to you? Can you help me out here and can you make me feel a bit more normal?" To me, I'm talking to people all the time. But is that something that you've learnt is really vital to your success and sanity, I guess, through your career?

**NB** Yes. Under certain situations make it easier to share the vulnerability. There's no doubt that I've feared doing that at times. I think it depends on the relationships. A lot of it comes back to the trust that you have around the people that you're bearing all. Sometimes it's easier with complete changes in saying that, which there's something in that. But yeah, look, I have. Fortunately, I've always had some good people around me along the way that when the chips have been down, I have been able to be pretty vulnerable.

**CM** I think that's a consistent theme that I'm hearing through these conversations and plenty of others that I'm having as well. We are not an island. We don't have to do anything on our own, do we? Even as a solopreneur in a business that we operate on our own, or whether we are part of a team in a big organization, we don't have to do things on our own. To build that network of the right people around us is really important, isn't it?

**NB** It's extremely important. I think when I've had my toughest times in my career and been faced with the most adversity, particularly in the last few years, having some good people around to support, guide you, let you know that it's okay to make and that you will get through it.

## There's power in vulnerability.

**CM** Yeah. I think that's probably a pivotal thing for people to hear, isn't it? That when we going through... If we've stepped up into a leadership role, for example, and then we come across, then something happens, there's a circumstance, there's a situation, there's an event, whatever it might be that it really challenges us, it can be very easy to go into, "Well, I'm in this role. This is my job to fix it, and I have to fix it on my own." We internalize all that stress and all that pressure, and you are nodding away like, "Oh, my God. Yes, I resonate with what you're saying." Can you? You must have had moments in your career where your resolve has been truly tested. What is it that's helped you through those challenging times as a leader?

**NB** Look, there's probably a couple of examples that pop to mind. One's a little bit more, it was quite tough, but it's a little bit more lighthearted, and I still use it today. I wouldn't mind sharing that. And then another one, and the second one's extremely meaty, which I'd also like to share and talk a bit about today.

**CM** Absolutely.



**NB** The first one was, I'd just started as a shift manager and working a night shift. I'd come across a couple of gentlemen that had made beds for themselves and was sleeping on the job. Not uncommon to nod off on night shift. I'm not against falling asleep on a night shift, but we had had a machine breakdown, and there were sirens going off. These guys were choosing to sleep rather than help their teammates out with fixing, repairing the breakdown. And then when I woke them up, they argued with me around, "Well, it's not my job to be doing that." And so then I thought, "Well, things are going to go this way." I was very new in the job. Anyway, after a very good process and going through it all, I dismissed both of those guys.

One was very young and was just starting a young family, and the other one was pretty experienced. So it had complete opposite ends of the spectrum. What happened after that is the entire crew turned on me. They made life very difficult in the sense that it was just passive resistance at every turn. I had swung from being very tough to being very sensitive and soft and pandering to all their needs. The more I did that, the more they hated me, and it got... It's very lonely being a shift manager, because 70% of the time that I'm at work, I was the only management rep on site, and then the rest was the blue collar workforce, the unionized employees. There was no other management reps most of the time. And yeah, it was getting very lonely, and I was probably at a very low point.

I was questioning that, "Did I have the ability to do this? This is the wrong choice. I didn't have the skills. I didn't have the confidence because it was a production based job, which I didn't have the background." And really, I was at, probably, breaking point where I was going to give up. I'm sitting at home one night, and I was watching David Attenborough show on the TV. The lions always catch the wounded zebra at the back of the pack. I'm sitting there, and I'm like, "That's me, that wounded zebra. I'm limping. I'm the slowest running here in the pack, and the lion was the proof. I've got to change this situation around." And so I went back to work, and I really did step up.

I took a couple of the tougher guys on, I took them to tasks. We had some very difficult one on one discussions in my office. I said, "If you're going to carry on like this, then you are going to be going the same way as those other two." I became the lion. It was just a case of it. When you are wounded, and you are going slow, you are likely to get eaten. Whereas I thought I was trying to do the right thing by being nice to them all, but it just made the whole situation worse. Once I turned that around, everything changed, and we went on to have really good four or five years. They were a great bunch of guys. We got on really well. We set all sorts of production records. It was a good example where you can be too sympathetic, if you like, rather than showing a bit of empathy. This is what I'm about now. Let's get on with it.

**CM** I think you've made a really great... Thank you so much for sharing your story. I think it's made so many points. I can't possibly pick up on them all, because that'll just take up this whole podcast just in now. But I think what I'm hearing, what we hear a lot, is that leaders nowadays need to be more empathetic. They need to be more vulnerable. They need to be more caring. They need to show the softer side. We need to develop our soft skills. We need to think of people's mental health and all this sort of thing. It can create mixed messages, can't it? Like you say, especially when you're new in a position, you can create all these questions in your head of, "How am I supposed to act? How am I supposed to act? I wonder what I'm supposed to do. How should I respond to this?" And that uncertainty...

I love that analogy of the wounded zebra. I think that's amazing. To what I picked out of that, was that you didn't turn to become this tough, aggressive, assertive boss. You dialed into that inner confidence. You were like, "I can't keep going like this. I can't be the wounded zebra. How can I step up?" That's what I heard in that story.

**NB** Absolutely. Become the strongest, fittest zebra. You don't have to become the big main lion that's going to go around and eat everybody. Become the fittest stronger zebra, and you're always going to be up front, right?

**CM** Absolutely.

**NB** Probably more there.

**CM** Yeah. I love that. I think that's super valuable.

# Uncertainty and discomfort; it's a part of the process.

**NB** Yeah, it's a fine line. But I think depending on the situation as well, you certainly do need to be mindful that you don't always... You can't go too far in terms of being overly sympathetic and too understanding when, particularly in a business context, when you still need to push forward.

**CM** Exactly. That's something I resonate personally with as well. I remember the first time, the first leadership role that I was promoted into, I was so young, so naive, had no idea whatsoever. The biggest thing for me was I just needed everyone to like me. And so I was... I just wanted to be friends with everybody. I'm a very sociable, chatty, carefree person, so there is an element of that in my personality. But at the same time, I was so conscious of not being liked. I probably overcompensated the friendly social side of things, thinking I'm going to be the best boss out there, when really, I wasn't giving my team what they needed. They needed that structure. They needed those boundaries, just like kids, isn't it? Anyone listening with kids, to be the best parent, we need to have ground rules. We need to have boundaries. We need to have bedtime. We need to have manners, and we need to remind our kids of that. That's what creating a functional household looks like. So why should it be any different in a workplace?

**NB** No, it's not. It's parent first, friend second, in a sense. I've got a pretty clear view on that. It's very hard to be, if you are the manager or a team leader, it's very hard to be genuine friends kicking around socially outside of work and be the boss at work. I've had a lot of people tell me, "Oh, yeah. But when I'm friends with them, I can get better outcomes from them at work, and I can work alongside them. Because we are friends, they'll do things easier for me and everything like that." That may work for some people. If you can pull that off, that's fantastic. It's probably not for me. Because like you, I liked to be liked and was craving that early on.

And then I had to make a choice early in my career. Am I going to be... Do I want to be liked? Or do I want to be a leader? If it's to be liked, then I'm not on a leadership journey. If I want to be a leader or a senior manager, then I've got to be less worried about the like, more restricted, because you can always have other friends that aren't at work. And you can get you're unliked and unpopular and all that kept from your sporting club or whatever-

**CM** Absolutely. Yeah.

**NB** ... than blending the two at work. And look, it wasn't for me. Some people may be able to. Fantastic. But I couldn't.

**CM** I think that's another really valid point. What works for one, it doesn't have to be a blanket that, "Oh, my God. That's what I need to do now." And so there might be someone listening to this or any of the other conversations in this series. They're like, "Oh yeah, that's really cool. But no. Oh, no. I don't agree with that." Therefore, they disregard the entire message. I would encourage anyone listening to take the bits that resonate with you and take the bits that work for you and respectfully leave the rest and appreciating that everyone has different points of view, different perspectives, different situations, different opinions. And that's okay. Isn't it?

**NB** That's totally okay. After getting over the hurdle of why would anyone want to listen to me chatting with you? I thought, "Well, maybe if somebody got one or two small things out of the chat that help them, then that's great."

**CM** 100%. And it's taking your own advice, isn't it? If you feel a bit stretched, then it's the right thing to do.

**NB** Right thing to do.

**CM** You mentioned a second situation that you wanted to share.

**NB** Yeah, sure. The Albury Mill where I was working, we had a double fatality in May, 2018. It was actually my old proof that I just talked about.

**CM** Wow.

# Confidence through consistency.

**NB** And then there was a third employee that was a contractor who nearly died. They had a couple weeks in a coma. And then unfortunately, and this is where it gets really sad, is one of the other crew members took their own life. They blamed themselves for the incident when really, it was no one's fault. It was hydrogen sulfide poisoning in May, 2018. Luckily for me, because I knew all the guys really well and all the managers and everyone else at the mill, I was in Sydney. I was at the Sydney office on the day, and I was no longer directly working for the Albury Mill. I was in my regional role. But I came back immediately, and I ended up taking on a fairly sizable role through the recovery mission where I liaised and coordinated and led the families, the insurance and the legal component of the recovery and then went right through the prosecution.

We were prosecuted by Fair Work. We pleaded guilty, and then we were prosecuted. And then I made a video of the actual incident as an educational piece for industry. The reason for bringing that up around when I was truly tested and what got me through was this time round, it really was the people around me, the other leaders in the business, my boss at the time, my wife. She was on the tail end of every day when I was at my tireddest and crankiest. And one of the families were neighbors just up the road from us as well, so we'd been around to their house to visit them. Yeah, look. It's the worst scenario you can get in your working life, and I hope that no one ever has to go through it. But it really, looking back on it now, wish it had never happened.

I'd do anything that I could to have changed it. We don't, it can be tricky what you say, but from the Norske perspective, we don't blame any one individual. It was a very tragic incident. We didn't know we had such high concentrations of that gas that could be formulated. We had not formulated it. It grew anaerobically or organically in some water and then converted to gas. But looking back, it was everyone, the sense of community that stuck by everyone at the mill and the way that everyone got around each other, and that everyone fell into that niche area to help pull through, really was... Yeah. And leadership, I think, was one of the big things that got everybody through, leaders doing their bit. No one was trying to outdo anyone else, or underdo anyone else.

**CM** There was no ego games going on. It was just everybody doing their job.

**NB** Yeah. It was people. You saw people at their rawest, at their purest. I wish we could have done more for families. You wish that you could change the whole course of events. Sadly, we can't.

**CM** Yeah.

**NB** But it was a very tough time. It was the toughest in my working career and seeing the pain on families, loved ones and colleagues, just people in constant pain every day is challenging enough in itself.

**CM** Absolutely.

**NB** But ultimately, you can get through that stuff. You'll never be the same, and you'll still think about it a lot. The days that you think about it, you get a little bit further apart. Our pain will never be, it doesn't even compare to that of the families. And I'm certainly not after any sympathy or empathy at all. But yeah, a lot of people did it pretty tough. You can get through, and there were some small positives that come out of it.

**CM** Absolutely. Again, thank you so much for sharing that story. I know that couldn't have been an easy one to recall and retell. What can you... An event like that, I can't even begin to imagine. I would go out on a limb and say most people listening to this won't even be able to begin to imagine what you, as a leader, went through during that time. What has that time taught you about yourself, your leadership, your capability?

**NB** It's taught me that you can get through. You can get through. No matter how bad it gets, you can get through. And then you've got to make choices along the way. It also taught me it's very easy to get into bad habits, isolating yourself, eating, not exercising, drinking too much. You just get into this... To cope, you tend to default to the easiest things at your disposal. Going for big, long runs or getting counseling and things like that, are not so easily at your disposal. They seem they're in this too hard basket, but they're actually the best things for you. Once you push through, and you learn what's good for you and what's not... I learned what was not good for me, first.

**CM** You learned the hard way.

**NB** It takes a long time.

**CM** As I think most normal people would.

**NB** Yeah. It takes a long time, still learning. Probably will always be. But yeah, you learn what's good for you, to not socially withdraw, get into your clubs and doing stuff with your friends. I'm talking about leaders and work colleagues. I'm not talking about... I'm not giving advice here to families, because that's a whole nother complexity that I think would be a whole nother level of challenge.

**CM** Absolutely.

**NB** I respectfully appreciate the lifelong sentence that they have. Yeah. I think you learn what's good for you, what's not good for you, then you can get through it. And probably now, what are we coming up four years accepting that things won't quite be the same for you. That's okay. There was a bunch of us that went through it, and there's still quite a few of us that catch up. We talk about it a little bit and... Yeah.

**CM** I think that loops back to what we were talking about before, doesn't it? With the vulnerability piece and also having people around us. We don't have to... That was a monumentally huge event in your life, in your career.

**CM** Hopefully, people listening to this won't have things of that magnitude to work through, but I think the lessons and the learning and the advice that you have shared of getting yourself through that in as much as, well, it's a hell of a lot easier to reach for the wine bottle at the end of the day or the beer bottle or the whiskey bottle or whatever it is. It's a hell of a lot easier to get snappy with the wife, get snappy with the kids, to bury your head in the sand, than it is to eat healthily, exercise, go and seek help. That's, I think, a very, very normal response. But I think it highlights what, when you came through the other side of that, it highlights the importance of having those people around you, doesn't it? That you can call on for different things.

**NB** Yeah. I was extremely lucky that I had a great boss, the regional president was... He and I, we went through it at our executive level, and that's a different, different place to be going through something like that. And yeah, I'd like to think we were very supportive of each other. We had a very trusting relationship. Very, very fortunate there that we could both be vulnerable with each other and trust each other. And yeah, we had the longest journey through it all, because we closed the mill down a few years later. Not to do with the incident, to do with the state of the newsprint industry was in severe decline. So we sold the paper mill to Visy and then made everybody redundant that worked there. That was end of 2019.

**CM** Itself, probably another very challenging time.

**NB** Another, another time. Maybe another story for another time.

**CM** Yeah. But I think it just goes to highlight, doesn't it? That it is being very real, and this is the very real leadership stories that I want to get through in this series. It's not dandy and rose tinted. There's real shit that goes on every day, isn't there?

**NB** Yeah. After the incident, that was in May 2018, and then I was trying to get fit and then snapped my, I rupture my Achilles tendon at the end of 2018. And you're like, "Now I'm trying to do the right thing, and I was-

**CM** I'm still being gassed. I'm still being gassed.

**NB** ... I'm still being gassed." And then it was less than two years later, I ruptured the Achilles tendon on the other side after I'd come right and trying to get back and do exercise things again. But the moral of a story was don't play the high end pack sports like basketball and try to start to get fit. Go walking and slow jogging instead. It was still on me too. Don't give up on the exercise piece. It's good for you. Just find a different, a more suitable-

**CM** Yeah, a more suitable pass time. I'm really curious with this question given everything that you've shared. How would you define success as a leader?

# Reflect on the small wins.

**NB** Yeah, it's good. That's a good question. But it's not necessarily getting the big gold medal or the goal or whatever. Certainly, that is successful if you... I think it's, if you set a goal and you get the goal, if you set a goal and you get very close to the goal, if you improve from where you started, that's successful. Somewhere along the way of really just improving on your baseline on what you were doing that's success. I know I'm guilty of it, not just stopping to reflect a little bit and go, "Actually, that's... I've come. I've improved." But that is success in itself. It's quickly move on to the next thing, and then you can lose sight of what's important, the little things.

**CM** Yeah, 100%. It's something that I talk about a lot and work through a lot with my one-on-one business clients, is that ability to recognize and celebrate the small wins along the way. We might have a big goal that we're aiming for, and maybe we smash it, and then it's like write next goal. We might smash it, and next goal. We might fall a bit short, but it's okay. We've still moved forward, and we move on to the next goal. We are in this, I feel, and anyway, that we are in this society where it's hustle, hustle, hustle, and it's push, push, push, and it's performance, performance, performance. I honestly believe this is why we are really starting to see a lot of burnout, see a lot of stress, a lot of overwhelm, just because we are not stopping.

We're not reflecting. We are not looking back and going, "Wow, look at where we were 12 months ago. Look at where we are now. Maybe the goal's still way up here. Maybe I've still got a long way to go, but look at where I've come." I always use the analogy again of parenting. I bring kids into things a lot. Imagine... Our youngest is eight, and he talks about, we were literally just filling in a school form last night, and he was talking about his goals for the year. He was like, "Oh, I need to get better at my division and my decimals. I'm really not very good at them. I need to put more practice in. I need to put more focus in."

Whilst I love that awareness in him as a parent, it also worries me that his focus is on having to do so much better instead of, "Well, last year, I didn't even know what a decimal was. And now I know my 0.5s or my 0.25s. Isn't that awesome?" I think it starts really young, doesn't it? If we think about how would we talk to an eight year old child about their goals and their progress, and then translate that to ourselves, we've probably all got a lot to learn about being a lot more compassionate and kind to ourselves, don't we?

**NB** Yeah, and being patient and in the moment. That's a big thing that I'm trying to really work on. The parenting with your kids is a great analogy, because I think we underestimate how much they learn from mom and dad just by subconsciously and from watching and absorbing. And they become... They start to mimic and model how we are. I'm pretty sort of, "Go. Go. Go." And then being too hard on myself if I haven't met the targets that are sitting or whatever, when really, success is, there's much smaller things than that. I think we've got to try and be more in the moment, appreciate the little things, be a bit more patient. Yeah.

**CM** 100%. You've probably covered it throughout the stories and the conversations so far, but are there things that you've put in place through all the ups and downs that you've had in your career, all the lessons you've learned, all the hindsight, all the reflections, are there things that you have in place now that you consider non-negotiable things to help you perform at your best?

**NB** I think that's a bit of a shortfall for me, a growth area, a weakness, when I think about that. To be vulnerable on that one, I'm not good at non-negotiables. That creates... Yeah, you end up taking on too much for saying yes to too many things and too much pressure on yourself. And so I think you need some non-negotiables. I guess the closest thing I'd have to that, to a non-negotiable, is always, honesty is your best policy, and always cooperating. Even in leadership, in negotiating big contracts and things like that, you can be going pretty hard, but in a sense, you cooperate and try and get a good outcome for the business, which keeps everybody in jobs. But not all parties always see it like that. It's not always that simple.

But I think the honesty piece which my grandmother taught me as I was running from the police one night when I was very young. Because I was meeting up with some friends in a park, and they had some alcohol. The police had found out, and I come running home. I jump over the fence, and my grandmother goes, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Oh, well. The cops were chasing us." "Well, why were they chasing you?" "Oh, well. I don't know. I hadn't done anything. The other guys had the alcohol there. It wasn't me." And she said, "Well, honesty is your best policy. Only run if you're guilty." And I'm like, "Oh, yes-

**CM** Damn.

**NB** ... I should have hang around." So yeah, for the non-negotiables, you do... I'm looking for some things in that regard around to just be less than the washing machine of everything.

**CM** I don't think you're alone there. Well, I know you're not alone there at all, because I've asked that question of everybody in this series. You're definitely not alone in responding that way. But I think I want to point out a few things that I've heard you say that I actually think are things that you've built into your day, maybe without even conscious awareness of it. And that's the knowledge that you need to look after yourself physically, that drinking things away isn't the way to go, even though we might still dabble into it every now and again after a particularly tough day, which is perfectly fine, but knowing that that's not the path to stay on. Being fit, having people to talk to, having the right people around us, all of those are things that, through your stories you shared, you call on now. I would like to highlight that, to me, they are things that you've built into your way of being. And living in the moment, like you said. Celebrating those small little moments too is so important, isn't it?

**NB** Oh, it is. It is.

**CM** Yeah.

**NB** But yeah, it's easier said than done for someone like me, but I am certainly aware of it. Awareness is-

**CM** Is the first and biggest step.

**NB** Yeah. It is the first and biggest step. I do have plenty of self awareness, but then in making the change, taking my own advice to be more... It's more of the patience and being in the moment and reflecting on the small things as successes as well. That's really what is a big focus for me moving forward. And then I think it's going to have a knock on effect to not getting so stressed when everything's, when the glass is overflowing. Because what I've learnt recently, because I've been made redundant myself from Norske Skog, so I'm going through transition, is that the stress is, quite a lot of it, is what you put on yourself.

**CM** Yeah.

**NB** A lot of people don't care, really. I know that sounds horrible, but you can be at home beating yourself up about something when really, you are probably the only one that actually cares so much about it. I call it self harm. I've actually got a saying for it. I'm like, "Nathan, stop self-harming, because no one else cares." Look, people care. Don't get me wrong.

**CM** I know. I hear you.

**NB** People absolutely care. But there is a point with a lot of stuff, particularly superficial work related stuff, people really don't give a shit. You're beating yourself up and stressing yourself out when the sun's going to still come up tomorrow, the jobs are still going to be there to get, the task list's still going to be there tomorrow. Yes. You got to be very good at prioritizing and knock the high prioritizing stuff off. That's important. But yeah, work on the prioritizing getting that scale down, rather than trying to knock everything over.

**CM** Yes. I think that's awesome advice, which is a really neat segue into my final question, which again, you may have answered. But hey, let's go there anyway. If you, looking back on your career, if you could give your teenage self one piece of advice, just one, what would it be?

**NB** Ooh, it would be not sweating the small stuff. It would be being more patient, not sweating the small stuff and think the highest thought more often. I mean that in the smallest of ways. Driving along, someone doesn't indicate, or they've stopped in a hurry in front of me, and I'm like, "You plunker, what do you..." And then that creates stress in me, when really, something could be happening in the car that I don't know of that's caused them to do that. Because I'm sure it happens to me. I forget to indicate because someone's not put their seatbelt on. You got to think the highest thought more often than not. It's very easy, and I'm guilty of it, to just default into that lowest denominator thought, when that's probably only the case 1% or 2% of the time.

**CM** Absolutely. And then, like you say, wherever you're going, you are in that negative energy. You bring that negative energy. What I say all the time is what you focus on is what you get. And I'd literally just done the video on that now, is like when you focus on shit, all you get is more shit. And then your day just spirals downhill, doesn't it? That's when you go home and hit the bottle and argue with your partner, and it all just goes into this self-declining spiral. So I love that. Love that advice. Nathan, thank you so much. It's been a fabulous conversation, and I know that everyone listening is going to get some great value out of it. Thank you. I really appreciate your time.

**NB** Oh, look. Thanks Claire. If people get one or two little things, if I've been able to help them, that's great. In the end, it was very easy talking to you. You made it very easy. So thanks very much. All the best.

**CM** Pleasure.

**This too shall pass.**



# The Winding Road

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