



Episode 11: Taking a look back

Transcript

Mike Kearney: Risk, disruption, and crisis. Every leader has faced one or all of these, but few have been able to call upon past experiences to navigate through each, and emerge stronger and with a greater degree of confidence that their actions will actually result in impact. And, be ready for the next one in the volatile world we live in.

That's where *Resilient* podcast comes in. During the last 10 podcasts I've gained such a deep appreciation for what a leader absolutely has to consider, the approaches they weigh, and the ultimate steps that they take to overcome the big and even the small disruptions that impact themselves and their organizations.

I have to tell you that I have been incredibly fortunate to talk with former and current CEOs, board members, risk and crisis leaders, about their personal experiences. Each of these leaders come from different backgrounds both personally and professionally and have led through a diverse array of circumstances.

However, the insights and lessons learned from each of these individuals remain universally applicable to successfully leading through any type of crisis event. In this podcasts, I mine the wisdom of these leaders and share the nuggets. Share your own favorite lessons learned by tweeting me @mkearney33 with the hashtag #resilientpodcast or send me a LinkedIn message. That's Mike Kearney, last name spelled K-e-a-r-n-e-y

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And now for the top insights...

Mike Kearney: From my first episode with Bill Roper in sunny San Diego. Bill was the former Verisign CEO, who shared his perspectives on life in (and out of) crisis. My key takeaway is: crisis can act as a catalyst for positive change.

Bill Roper: Oh yeah. Well, first of all, nobody chooses a crisis as their change agent, right?

But sometimes it chooses you, and a sense of urgency and a mission always can drive the right things to happen faster. If you manage it right, it can help choose priorities. It can force you to make critical decisions that have been on the table but left flapping in the breeze, so to speak, to make them quicker and to go with them. So I think in a critical environment ... it actually doesn't have to be a negative crisis. It can be a crisis of too many opportunities and too much growth and you just can't do it all. And I've been in those situations. Driving change and taking advantage of it is rewarding and fun. I'd also say, you said, "What good can come out of it?" This sounds a little Pollyanna-ish, but I firmly believe that in most situations, and in Verisign's case I would make the case that it was, that by and large a lot of good came out of it. A very healthy, very focused, very quickly growing company, came out of the former company that was very slow growing, erratic on revenues and profits, and defocused. And even those businesses that were sold, by and large, found better homes—better for the business, better for the customers of that business, and better for the employees that were involved. And it brought out a lot of very good team players at Verisign who were able to exercise their strengths in a way that, you know, made them a lot more comfortable in their capabilities as managers.

Mike Kearney: Then from Eric Pillmore, former SVP of corporate governance at Tyco, who I spoke with on rebuilding trust after crisis in the beautiful park in Charlotte, NC. My key takeaway: be honest and transparent.

Eric Pillmore: Be transparent, get to the bottom of the facts, leave no stone unturned. I think human nature tells us, "Don't look there." But I think, to be honest, over time those things are going to come out. Get to the bottom of them as quickly as possible. We had one example where we uncovered a very significant, multibillion-dollar write-off, right before it was time for Ed to make his initial, kind of, engagement with Wall Street in the spring of '03. And it wasn't the news we wanted to roll out. But we rolled it out that day, and the stock price actually went up. So that tells you what investors are thirsting for in a turnaround.

Mike Kearney: And looking over the Hudson River in Manhattan, with Daryl Brewster the former turnaround CEO of Krispy Kreme; my key takeaway:

success is not only measured by financial achievement. Remember to think long-term and not just about the immediate future.

Daryl Brewster: I think at the high level, the idea that we not only saved the company but put in the framework and the longer-term plan that the next round of management just took to yet another level. I thought it was something I could really do. And I think we did it while cleaning up a big mess. And I think we did it in the right way. We never missed a day of trading on the New York Stock Exchange. We were close. We did not go into bankruptcy, although the first question at the annual meeting—we hadn't had one in several years—was, "When are we coming out of bankruptcy?"

We never went in. Because there was all the stuff that floats around business in these situations. So I'm really proud of how the team stepped up as a team, and took on some immense problems that weren't their doing, and led to some really remarkable results, and saved a business that continued to prosper beyond that.

Mike Kearney: And, I continued the dialogue in our episode four with Daryl, now in his capacity as CEO of CECP, where he and many of the world's most influential CEOs, are leading the charge to make a difference through corporate societal engagement. He shared his view on purpose-driven organizations.

Daryl Brewster: It's great to go out there and make some money, and there's nothing wrong with that. But how do you live a life of honor? And how do you leave the world a better place than when you got here—and do that while you enjoy it?

Mike Kearney: And who could forget the sage wisdom of Keith Wandell, former CEO of Harley-Davidson, on value-focused leadership? My key takeaway: humility and an ability to empathize regardless of your position is so important as a resilient leader.

Keith Wandell: It was always embarrassing to me when somebody would treat me like I was on a golden platter or something because I was a CEO. It was just—it was embarrassing because we're all just people. We're all made of the same stuff. We all care about the same things. We all have the same issues to live with in our lives. And I think if we all help each other more in those ways, then we can all just be better, the companies can be better, and—

Mike Kearney: You know what, I think going back to the comment we had a few minutes ago, the quote, "People will run through barbed wire." That's why. That's why. It's how you treat them.

Mike Kearney: The next one comes from Jackie Rice, Target chief risk and compliance officer, who reflected on her experience in creating a smart risk culture. My key takeaway: don't fear change. It's okay to fail and learn from failure.

Jackie H. Rice: Historically, there may have been a feeling that the company was too risk-averse. And so how do we equip our teams to feel comfortable taking risks, failing fast, learning from that, and then, again, hopefully taking the next risk in a smarter way?

The beautiful thing about where we are with our program at the moment is, because we are evolving, we can try different things. And we can try it, and if it doesn't work, that's okay. As long as we learn from it and bake those learnings into whatever we decide to do next.

Mike Kearney: And, so applicable in today's uncertainty, Barry Salzberg, former Deloitte Global CEO; my key takeaway: there are upsides to downturns.

Barry Salzberg: You don't indiscriminately make a \$300 million investment, you don't go out and buy a company just because the best baseball teams are made in the off-season. You don't do it during a recession just because you want to say you did.

But if the opportunity presents itself and you can create an opportunity that matches the strategic imperative of your organization, it's a pretty good time to make an investment. You've got to have the staying power, the patience, the courage, and the wherewithal to be able to withstand some deficiencies associated with your investment, because not everything goes perfectly by any stretch. But if you are, and you have that strength, it's a pretty good time to make a proper investment.

Mike Kearney: And, I continued the dialogue in the next episode with Barry Salzberg, now in his role as a mentor and educator, where he talked about leading by example. My key takeaway: know yourself and your values and live by that.

Barry Salzberg: I have this view which is why I make this at the very beginning of my course that when you're a leader and you engage in interactions with people, build teams, make decision, drive culture of the organization, respond to crisis, whatever, you don't want to sit down and then say, "Well, who am I and how should I go about making this decision?" You want to just go about making the decision. And you want to do that knowing that it's founded on a set of values that will serve you well over time.

So I tell everybody that you may think it's a waste of your time right now to put this down on paper. But trust me, in a year from now or two years from now or three or five or fifteen, you're going to look back. And I tell them you should even memorialize it and keep it on a little card if you could. I have not done that, honestly, but every time I think about it I should. You know, what are your values? Keep it in your pocket and remember this is who you are.

And when you routinely do things that demonstrate that those values are you, you may not need that card. But I think, by and large, it's a good thing.

Mike Kearney: And the takeaway: diverse perspectives are important.

Barry Salzberg: I think that it really does give food for thought that creates an outcome that would be better than not having that input from diverse perspectives.

And, by the way, today diversity is so much more than what diversity meant when I was a young professional. It isn't just gender, it isn't minority or ethnic diversity. It's sexual orientation, it's age, it's thought. It's a new category: introvert versus extrovert. I mean, I can go on and on and on about the categories of diversity and how important it is to tap into high-quality thinkers that are from a different kind of category, however you want to define it, as you are.

Mike Kearney: And, I had a great conversation with Mark Riley, Louisiana's deputy director of disaster recovery, who shared his view on building a foundation of trust. My key takeaway: leading an effective team is not about dictating but using the collective strengths of the individuals within a team.

Mark Riley: Another General I worked with one time I asked him, "Well, how did you become General?" And he said, "Because I'm a generalist. I know a little bit about everything but I know I don't know everything. So I surround myself with experts that know—and I listen to them as I'm making my decisions." And I thought that was a great piece of advice too.

But you've seen leaders that come in and say, "I know everything so just listen to what I have to say and do it," you know. And to me that misses the organizational imperatives that are already there in place: the idea of a team. A team is going to be more successful than an individual is. And it misses that if you just come in and dictate.

Mike Kearney: And from Mandeep Grewal, head of customer experience for United Airlines, who shared her view about enhancing the customer journey.

My key takeaway: genuinely caring. People remember how you made them feel.

Mandeep Grewal: Ultimately, it comes down to whether we are able to make that subtle connection with our customers and whether they see how genuine we are in our outreach to them and how genuinely we care about them in the times like when you described when you have delays and things like that that are out of our control.

What you described is very interesting because we have been seeing more and more stories like that come our way.

In fact, I think just last week I got another email where a customer was absolutely praising this pilot and just talked about how he had observed one of our pilots in the gate area going around and seeking out children and giving them extra wings and talking to them. And not only that, then he helped one of our elderly customers actually onto the plane and settle her down. And this customer's observing this. And he thought it was just absolutely phenomenal. We're very proud to say, more and more, we are hearing about these stories. And they're just absolutely incredible. Those things, those small things, are very big things. They are the ones that make all the difference in how our customers perceive us. And they see that we're not just a company that's just running a business. We're a company that actually cares.

Mike Kearney: Well those are my top 10 insights from the first wave of the Resilient podcast series. I hope you find the personal stories about how these dynamic individuals led through crisis, navigated through disruption, and managed through significant risk events. I know I've gained a deeper appreciation for their struggles and I am so pleased to be able to share their transformation stories.

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Also, hit me up on LinkedIn or Twitter. I've been getting great input from all of you, ideas around what guests I should be bringing on, ideas for the podcast. Please, please keep it coming. I've actually met a lot of new friends. So hit me up.

My last name is spelled K-E-A-R-N-E-Y. Michael Kearney on LinkedIn, MKearney33 on Twitter, or just Michael Kearney. Please keep the feedback coming. It is unbelievably helpful.

And, remember, leaders who embrace risk improve performance and are more prepared to lead confidently in the volatile world we live in.

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