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Daniel Eckert on Rapid Gains From Agile Mindsets

Andy Murray: Hi, Daniel. How is it going today? Good to see you.

Daniel Eckert: Good to see you too, Andy. Good morning.

Andy Murray: Good morning. I want to start with just talking a bit about your career. You've had quite a career, bringing new ideas to market. When did you realize this was something you really wanted to do and put your focus on that as a career?

Daniel Eckert: Wow, that's a great question. I don't know if I had any type of moment, epiphany, I would say. But I would say it goes all the way back to when I was actually serving in the United States Marine Corps. A little bit of a funny story about that. In that, I was planning to make a transition to the private sector so, candidly, that my wife and I could actually be together for once. We had actually been married but apart, because of the deployment schedule that I had in the Marine Corps.

I knew I was going to make a transition to the private sector. But I didn't know anything about business. In fact, I was a history major when I went to undergraduate school. I think the only two classes that would remotely qualify for business would be a microeconomics class that I took, and the history of business that I took out of the business school. That was pretty much it.

I had a pretty strong suspicion I wasn't going to transition to become a history teacher. So I asked a few of my friends, who were actually in business school at the time, about what this thing called business was. No surprise, a minute or so into that conversation, they had said, "It's kind of dry. But we can give you some names of some textbooks, if you want to see what it looks like."

I ended up picking up a corporate finance textbook. I guess they say, the rest is history. I went to a deployment actually, out in Norway, and took my corporate finance textbook dutifully with me, to see if I could learn a little bit about business. I fell in love with the language of finance.

From that moment on, it was one of those things that, in order to keep my mind going, with the problem sets that I was self appointing to myself, I actually came up with a business idea. That business idea became actually my first entrepreneurial endeavor, around innovation, and really doing something that had never been done before.

In this instance, it was in the securities industry. I guess from that moment on, I was bitten with the bug of innovation, and the practice of innovation. Doing new things into the marketplace, that transitioned, post entrepreneurial career, into an intrapreneurial opportunity with then, at the time, JP Morgan Chase.

Andy Murray: Wow, that goes all the way back to the beginning then, for you.

Daniel Eckert: It does.

Andy Murray: That's quite a story. I wouldn't have imagined that. Perhaps thanks to Steve Jobs, who said, "I'd rather be a pirate than in the navy," he set the gauntlet there, of how innovation should be so different from a military-type framework. But actually, based on our discussions, you've brought a lot of the thinking in Agile, and how teams work, from your military experience. Maybe you can connect the dots a bit.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah. It's one of those things that, I don't think that myself, I connected the dots until later in my career. When there was a lot of discussion going on, around what Agile and the business practice of Agile look like. There were a number of senior executives that were really struggling with the frameworks, the methodologies, and in many ways the mindset.

I would be sitting in these meetings, going, "I don't see why this is so difficult for folks to grasp." I started to really search my own background, to say, "Why do I find this a lot easier to understand and grasp? What within my career would suggest that maybe I've seen this before, but didn't have the words or the definitions that we're using now, and the like?"

As I really thought through it, it really did start to stem from my time in the Marine Corps. Then as you and I have mentioned in prior discussions, the Marine Corps is one of these really, really interesting fighting forces. It's very small. When I was in the Marine Corps, it was only about 159,000 people. It's one of the few fighting forces that's fully integrated. Meaning it has air, land, and sea assets, to bring to bear against its mission.

Because it's such a small fighting force, it had to find ways to be flexible and nimble, to the needs of the US president, who would call the Marine Corps flexible, force and readiness, they would call it. They would call the Marine Corps to deploy early, and fast, and would be tasked against a variety of missions.

As a result of that, the Marine Corps came up with this concept called the MAGTF. Of course, like any military organization, we are acronym heavy. In the Marine Corps, MAGTF stands for Marine Air Ground Task Force. The way in which it operated, is that you as a marine would be situated within an administrative element, or what we could call in garrison, while you would practice your craft. I was a logistician by training, and I was assigned to a communications element.

But when the time came to either engage in an exercise, or engage in the actual event of warfare, or humanitarian peace-keeping, you would separate from your administrative element, attach into a mission-organized, task-organized, integrated fighting force, and would then work as that team to accomplish a defined mission. Once that mission was complete, you'd then be repatriated back to your administrative element.

That's just how the marine corps worked, and it was how they were able to get leverage from their integrated assets, against a unique mission.

You fast forward all the way to the business context, and Agile practice has many of the same elements that I just described from the Marine Air Ground Task Force in that there is a mission orientation; it requires an integrated set of individuals — a cross-disciplinary set of individuals, usually product, tech, business, but could be more extensive, especially in regulated environments; could involve legal, could involve compliance, could involve operational elements.

That team needs to form around what they're trying to accomplish and work flexibly together, bringing their own domain expertise to the puzzle. To then accomplish what they're trying to accomplish, and sustain it.

It was a light bulb for me, a light bulb moment for me. Maybe it's because 25 plus years ago that I was included in this type of organizational model that I found it to be a lot easier to understand now in a business context.

Andy Murray: That's fascinating. I'm curious about how long the military has used this method, from a Marine standpoint, to take on an enemy. Because it wasn't that many years ago, I suppose, you lined up two forces and blasted away. When you think about Civil War and everything, this idea of a multi-disciplinary task force feels to me like it's arranged to tackle an environment of uncertainty, where you're not fighting an enemy that's using a playbook that you might have seen before.

I don't know if that's true or not. I don't know how much the history of that. But it feels a lot like the business world today.

Daniel Eckert: You're spot on, and I think the evolution, if I have my military history right, really started to take hold post-Korean War and Vietnam War. It was because the conflicts were starting to change in their dynamic. Candidly, it was also out of necessity. Because the Marine Corps had been significantly downsized post-Vietnam War and it had to find a new way in which to deploy, that wasn't just around a littoral mission. Meaning an amphibious assault, which was typically what you'd find in World War II, and even in the Korean War. The Marines were always known as a department, they still are, a department of the Navy, and they would move from ship to shore, and establish that beachhead element in a massive follow on land invasion.

Well, guess what? Uncertainty started to come into both the mission of the Marine Corps, but also the nature of fighting. As a result, we saw the Marine Corps start to adapt and change its approach so that it could actually meet the new challenges and the new needs of the modern fighting force.

That has sustained to this day and has continued to evolve. Not only from the first war that happened in the Middle East. But then obviously the subsequent war that has happened throughout the Middle East. The Marine Corps' combat mission has continued to evolve in these uncertain times, where you're dealing with potential urban warfare, an enemy that isn't coming to the fight in established lines. As a result of that, you're right. This VUCA world had to be adapted to.

I think you're seeing that also now in the commercial sector. Where we're seeing that volatility. We're seeing that uncertainty and that high need for change, but still, create a direction and a mission. It's probably why you're starting to see very similar elements, maybe defined differently, or used with different language. But a very similar approach.

Andy Murray: You know, it's interesting, Daniel. I heard Stanley McCrystal talk about Team of Teams when he came to the Walmart officer meeting many, many years ago. At that time, I had not really been exposed much to Agile. I mean, I understood it, but I didn't understand the structure and how people worked. Now, after being much more involved and experiencing it, what he was saying makes a lot more sense. Because it is that Team of Teams, and some of the models behind that, that makes it so effective, I think.

Daniel Eckert: I couldn't agree more. In fact, it's one of my favorite books that describes a business practice that is now taken out of business but put into a military practice. Out of necessity, General McCrystal had to find a different way to address, if I recall correctly, what was really seeing as a growing failure in dealing with a counter-insurgency in the Middle East.

He recognized that, while there were many, many special-operations elements that were working on the same problem, they weren't working in an interdisciplinary fashion to actually solve that problem. It sounds really, really, and eerily consistent to what you hear often in business contexts, in an uncertain time, on how to solve customer problems in an interdisciplinary way.

I think General McCrystal did a fantastic job teasing out his lessons learned, and then applying it beyond a military setting, into a commercial setting. On what we could draw from those lessons, to address uncertain times with speed and Agility. It was a great book.

Andy Murray: Yeah, it was. He also talked a bit about mindset. One of the things that you mentioned earlier, that I find often left out of the discussion, or not as much understood, is in the area of mindset. If you read any of the great books on Agile transformations, you get a good sense for the method. The method is a big part of it.

But when boots hit the ground, and you experience leading, in an Agile way, a customer proposition that's brand new in big corporations. Mindset and motivation — how do you engage people to do that? To become more important than what you read about in the Agile textbooks, where it just really outlines method.

In your mind, how does mindset, method, and the motivational elements behind that, how do those three things play out? Let's go to the mindset bit.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah. Look, mindset is another way to describe organizational culture. It's foundational. If you were to really think about where you'd start on this journey, for greater Agility, and I'll even leave out the methodology of Agile, but greater agility as an organization. It really does begin with a change in mindset, on how work can get done, vis a vis how it has gotten done in the 20th century, and even in the early 21st century.

This notion of having these strong, siloed organizations that can be independent of one another to go and accomplish a certain mission for a company, I think really, in this modern era, will only slow an organization down. It begins with thinking more boundary-less in your organization. Say, "What human capital assets can I bring to the table, to help actually address the business challenge I'm trying to meet? Or the problem?"In the product mindset it would be called the problem that we're trying to solve for customers.

If you don't have that mindset to actually start tearing down your silos and thinking in an interdisciplinary fashion on how you solve those problems for greater Agility, you'll continue to find and face organizational resistance. I don't mean resistance of the troops, per se. Because when folks actually do engage in these types of interdisciplinary projects in the past, you'll hear so many reports of the individuals that have participated in those as they don't ever want to go back to another way of working.

It actually is the mindset of leaders, to say, "How do we continuously apply this? In such a way that allows us to both operate the business differently, but also change the business, as we're going in this very, very adaptive model."

Andy Murray: You know, Daniel, it's interesting. A lot of the success stories on Agile have come from the tech industry, it's where it's been used the most. As omnichannel begins to compress two different cultures of physical and digital, there's a real desire to apply Agile to non-technical areas.

A question I've had: if you think about business in financial tech, or health services and such, to create a two-week sprint that creates a minimal viable product, which you can much easier do in tech, where you're standing up a prototype. Doesn't it become a lot more difficult when you're talking about a new credit card, or something like that?

How do you take that, and create anything that's a viable product in a two-week sprint? That's where I think some people are challenged, when you start applying the tech version of that. Where technology,

you could stand up much quicker and more easily, than an MVP on a physical product like a financial services, or a new health service.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah, it's a terrific question, Andy. The way I think about this is, particularly when you're dealing with highly regulated institutions and practices and services, the method and the mindset need to be separated. You can still maintain the mindset for Agile and acculturate your team for Agility, but the methodology needs to adapt to the practice at hand.

What I mean by that is, when you're dealing with a technology, let's say an exclusively-driven digital service or a digital product where a lot of Agile practices have evolved from. Many times those tools don't require the level of stability, scalability, and regulatory infrastructure to be supported. Therefore, that sprint methodology of two weeks, or I've even heard as little as a week you could start to see an actual shippable product in that space. But two weeks is typically the standard you'd hear.

It doesn't fit very well, let's say, for example, a vaccine. I'll take myself out of this from the Fintech perspective, because it's also a highly regulated institution.

But let's use a vaccine that requires an enormous amount of technology. But then, as we are learning, in this COVID world, the logistical footprint to actually then be able to distribute that is just as important. Some of the constraints of the innovation, as we know, are focused on cold chain.

Now you really do have an omnichannel solution that, if it gets wrong — I would say the best-case scenario, the vaccine is proven ineffective upon delivery. Worst case scenario, you may have an actual issue from delivering that to a human being, because you're obviously having to inject a vaccine.

How do you actually solve that, and use Agile practices, which I think we would all say, in the last year, probably have been absolutely applied to this particular problem, because of the exigency of what we're dealing with in the pandemic.

I think how that's done is, first it begins with mindset. You actually start to align your interdisciplinary functions to say, "How do we solve this problem?" Project Light Speed is a great example of how, or Warp Speed, I'm sorry, rather, is a great case in point, on how the government has applied these Agile practices to say, "What would be required to help solve this problem?"

Well, it's going to require a lot of different disciplines, and not just the medical discipline of understanding how to develop a vaccine. But now we need the actual producers of the vaccines. We need supply chain associations. We need to actually, how to forward deploy this? How to store it?

All of those things came in up front, and started to build the right task force model — both private sector and public sector — to be able to produce that. But the sprint methodology needed to adapt, because we may not haven't been able to see results in the laboratory for four to five weeks.

That's okay. I think this is a great example of how you can use the mindset, and then modify your methodology for your particular industry, your particular setting, but still see rapid gains in high-performing cultures built from the application of that mindset.

Andy Murray: That is a great example, and a great illustration of how to do it. I've never put my head around it in that way.

Thinking about the logistics of, when the FDA does give approval, you've got 24 hours, people getting vaccines. Someone had pulled that timeline, that critical path forward, to probably Day One. Which you wouldn't typically do in a linear waterfall-type project.

Daniel Eckert: You're spot on. I think it's one of those examples, we would use this often when we apply Agile, in my past lives — you have to think end-to-end. Just having a piece of the puzzle doesn't actually solve the problem. ***Being very crystal on what problem you're trying to solve, is a very, very important of this mindset.*** This Agile mindset is saying, "Well, we don't actually solve the problem until we start inoculating the population at scale." We can inoculate 50 people -

Andy Murray: Well you know, that's a great point. Because the objective might be to get it out there. But the outcome isn't "you've shipped a vaccine." It's people got vaccinated.

Daniel Eckert: That's exactly right.

Andy Murray: To understand the difference in the outcome. How often did you talk about outcomes versus objectives, in perhaps the military background? Or in some of the product work you've been doing? Where you can describe, "This is the outcome we want," versus necessarily, "Here's our objective?"

Daniel Eckert: Yeah. I think maybe I'm wired that way. It's this mission orientation, maybe, that was beaten into me when I was a young lad in the Marine Corps. That mission-accomplishment is really when you know the work is done. Now, there may be interim objectives that come through on a step-by-step basis and often can take spans of time, but unless you have full understanding of what defines mission-accomplished, it's very challenging to understand why you're actually hitting those inner objectives.

So you really do need to have, we called it in the Marine Corps back in the day, a true understanding of what we call *commander's intent*. Commander's intent was: at the end of the day, when all else goes to pot and the variability that you find once you cross the line of departure, as we called it, and your best-laid plan will then fall apart, it always does: What is the commander's intent of the outcome that's required so that you can push and empower your team and decision-making to the lowest possible level? But have a common understanding of what done looks like.

That's an incredibly powerful concept. That when I was task organizing a lot of things in business, I would continue to maintain that focus. I would use even language like that. I probably got curious stares from some of my teammates where I said, "Well here's my commander's intent, and here's what we know what outcome we're trying to accomplish."

Because it creates that as, I think we often say in business, that north star. Commander's intent creates that point of light that everyone can see, and work towards. Knowing that the journey along the way will have many, many different changes and adaptations that are required. But we know what done looks like.

I would say, one example I would use. When we were conceptualizing and developing Walmart Pay. This was way back in 2014, 2015. When Apple Pay had just been introduced, and Google Wallet had been at least announced, I would say. It was creating a lot of disruption in the financial technology community and in the merchant community because we had to understand whether this was something that was truly disruptive, how it would disrupt our relationship with the customer? Then, at what point in time would this reach actual saturation?

When at Walmart, we were looking at how to improve our overall checkout experience, using mobile, what we defined as done, was an application that dramatically improves the checkout experience at retail, at scale. That's an important comma, and two words at the end because we could have easily produced all sorts of novel and interesting technologies that would have gotten a great press release, and would have really showcased maybe our technical prowess. But if it couldn't have worked as easily on our most modern point-of-sale, in our most showcase-able supercenter, as much as it would have worked in a 30-year-old supercenter that hasn't gotten an upgrade in technology at the point of sale, and is still working on Green Scenes, we would fail. We would have failed in our endeavor.

Ensuring that you actually are crystalline about what you're trying to solve, and the outcome that achieves that objective, is so vitally important to this process and this mindset.

Andy Murray: Well you know, it's interesting. Even from a marketing perspective, that's one of the things I learned from Walmart, I would have many agencies come and produce brilliant ideas that would work super-well in three stores. "At scale" is a real delineation between what's really a true, scalable idea. It changes everything.

One of the things I've seen, Daniel, is a gap between the top strategic planning of an executive team and the Agile teams at the bottom, working from customer insight and flying and innovating on the way. Even a three-year plan that most organizations have to present as an executive team, or top team, senior team, there'll be things in there like strategic objectives, one might be, "We're going to have a digital transformation".

Well, what's the outcome? That is so not outcome-oriented! I would often chuckle at that. "What's the outcome you want from that?" You get to a very different answer than an objective of digital transformation. But yet, boards, executive teams are loaded today with seven or eight of these strategic objectives and imperatives that don't always cascade down to what's happening, from an Agile team, and teams of teams, that are up against real customer problems every day.

Have you thought much, or have you experienced that gap between the top planning parts, and the middle to down, trying to do innovation work?

Daniel Eckert: I have, for sure. It's funny that you use that example. I can probably try to count, but I probably would lose count of the number of times I've heard about companies that are looking for digital transformation experts. I always would scratch my head and say, "What does that mean?" I don't know how to even define what digital transformation is until we start getting more concrete on the objectives and the outcomes we're trying to accomplish with technology, which, I think is a way, or I guess a consultant-ese way, to describe what we're talking about:

How do we actually revitalize our business model that imbues technology in ways that helps us advance with Agility, and solve real customer problems? Whether that's a business to business customer, or it's a business to consumer customer.

That disconnect, I think often is a little bit that senior leaders haven't gone through their own transformation in mindset, and how they actually can align their organization for greater Agility, greater empowered thinking, and allow for that delegation to happen. Then provide, like I had said, commander's intent. But allow for the Agile teams to be empowered to find ways to accomplish variants of all of those things that bubble up into that broader outcome. For the board, and for shareholders.

They haven't gone through that process. They haven't seen it. You end up in this interesting, I guess you would say, environment. Where I think there is desire from the senior-most leadership teams, to make this transformation happen within the organization. But they're either ill-equipped, or they're, I don't want to say scared. They fear the loss of what they've been used to. Which is a lot of that command and control type of environment where we can provide a three-year plan, and then we direct that plan. Because that's what leaders do is we provide direction. Leaders should be saying, "What I really need to do is offer a vision and a commander's intent of what our overarching outcome needs to look like." Then delegate and empower teams, who are closest to solving those customer problems, to answer the call on how to do it best."

Andy Murray: Boy, that makes people so uncomfortable, Daniel. Because we've been trained, for achievement, we've been trained, so many leaders have grown up by having the answers. Or you're talking about something that's so unfamiliar to a lot of senior leaders about, "How do you not have the solution? You mean we're going to embark on this, and not know?"

But yeah, the people will come up with the answers as we go. It's such a foreign concept, that we've not been trained, or had those experiences — many, as senior leaders — it's probably no wonder it's such a big leap for, especially those senior leaders that haven't worked in a dot com, or a digital pure play.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah. Look, I think everyone loves the feeling of having a completely baked cake so that you can just exercise assembling the ingredients, and throwing it into the oven and you know it will taste well. The challenge in modern business today is, virtually all of it is technologically enabled. The speed at which customer expectations are changing, with the enablement of those technology-led solutions, doesn't invite that ability to be so well-defined. It's messy. This is very, very messy business going forward. You have to develop a level of comfort in not knowing, but having an understanding of what the outcome might look like. But be okay with teams coming up with different answers, different solutions that achieve the same outcome, and enabling them that canvas to do so.

It is unsettling if you haven't been in that type of environment. Again, like we began, maybe I just gained comfort with that because it was beaten into me so early on in my formative stage as a leader where: *war is messy*. We called it the fog of battle. That fog of battle makes even tying your shoe difficult.

You have to grow very comfortable in saying, like as a platoon leader and even as a company commander where you may have accountability for 250 plus marines, as a 24- or 25-year-old, the minute you cross that line of departure and fire is coming at you, you're not going to know what's going to be happening on your left flank. The only person who does is that fire team on the extreme left flank. They know the weather, the terrain, the enemy that they may be facing on that left flank. You have to empower them with decision-making rights, on what they need to do, to continue forward against that commander's intent to accomplish the mission, and be okay with it. Because you're not ever going to know what's going on in the heat of the battle. You'll have a general sense, but the rest of it, you have to leave up to your team.

Andy Murray: Well you know, the good news is, for those senior leaders that might be listening to this, that haven't grown up with an Agile set of experiences, the methodology is so well-understood by so many, that you can learn. You can learn what that means, versus a methodology that doesn't exist. There is a patterned approach, that you can, if you're a learner and a passionate leader, you can access the way to come up to speed and learn this.

I think the alternative option for many senior leaders is to, if you've got four or five big things you want to achieve, then you stand up a skunkworks project with a great line manager, that had proven results in a command and control way. But old Joe there, he really gets it done, let's put him in charge. Sure enough, it's a disaster, for several different reasons. Because it didn't have the interdisciplinary feedback and input along the way.

But that's the more common approach, is to take it offline as a skunkworks. Which is miles apart from standing up an Agile team, and supporting it properly.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah, I think you're spot on. I was going to put that finer point on it as well. What I would not be an advocate for, particularly in very, very large organizations, is having an executive committee decision, "We're now going to practice Agile," and then try to roll it out to the entire organization. Because there are areas where the Agile mindset needs to take time and take hold, and you don't necessarily need to change the entire team structure to do so.

That's typically the true run-the-business side of the house or let's say, in the compliance organization. Could they benefit from Agile practices? Absolutely. Will they eventually get there? For sure. But to come to an organization and say, "By the way, we're all now going to practice Agile," that will just create chaos.

But that's different than what you just described. Where if you actually do want to practice Agile, but you apply it by saying, "We're just going to create this skunkworks, and they're going to be the only individuals that are going to be tasked with innovating or using this type of methodology," the challenge you end up wrestling down later, you just kick the can down the road, is when it needs to be incorporated into the business to take advantage of all of the functionality at scale that an operating business actually provides, it falls flat on its face.

Because oftentimes, the skunkworks either weren't given access or explicitly hived off from access to the run-the-business individuals, and therefore didn't think through, end-to- end, what success may look like when it has to be delivered to that customer that they're serving, business or direct-end user, at the operational scale that the company is working at.

As a result of that, you miss things. Finding that balance is such an important element of the practice of this, which then pays forward to the run-the-business folks, they get access to how this mindset works and can take and glean learnings from it, to apply to their particular elements over time.

Andy Murray: Let's talk a little bit about the leadership characteristics for this type of work. Because I think one of the things, Daniel, is a lot of people wait to be assigned something of interest in innovation, or some kind of thing. But some others don't wait for permission. There's opportunities around, and the ability to take on and lead in this way is not necessarily something you have to wait to be given permission. Because what you're really saying is, you want authority. To be given authority to take that on.

You started as an entrepreneur where you didn't wait on permission. You saw an opportunity and you took it. Which may be why you are the way you are. But how many of the big things you ended up working on or doing came from fiat of a more senior executive versus something as you saw the opportunity in the gap and you leaned into it and said, "Let's go do this".

Daniel Eckert: Yeah. It's funny. When I look back on my career, I would say very, very few of the innovations we've brought to market at scale were as a result of someone from on high saying, "Thou

shalt go do this," and you now have all of the resources and the team available at your disposal to go get it done.

I'll use an example from my early Walmart days, actually. We had built and delivered really what was the first quote/unquote neobank, or challenger bank, in the marketplace back in 2012, in partnership with American Express. This was from when, at the time that I was leading financial services, we were analyzing the industry, and finding that at the time, if you remember, 2012, towards the height of the great recession, maybe just starting on the downtick. But at the time, banks were reviled by Americans. They were not trustworthy, or at least that's how Americans would claim they were not trustworthy.

They really were looking for a solution that made sense from a trusted provider. It largely was trying to avoid what was increasingly a fee- driven type of product just for their everyday checking accounts, and in addition, they wanted somebody they could trust, they wanted a brand they could trust with their money.

This was just qualitative research that we were doing as a team. We came up with this notion of, while we were a great leader in serving the un- and under-banked populations, we saw there was now a growing population, about 54 million households, that would classify themselves as "unhappily banked." Almost like they were in a bad marriage. But they didn't know how to get out of it.

We started to think, "Well, we should be able to help that. With our size and scale and our ability to innovate with partners, we should be able to help that." But on the backdrop of this, Walmart had actually attempted to get into core banking, back in the early 2000s.

Andy Murray: Yeah, I remember that.

Daniel Eckert: It was messy. Congress, lobbyists, the banks, they were all very, very fearful. Candidly, we were licking our wounds from our attempts in doing so. This was not a very comfortable idea, to try to pitch to senior leadership at Walmart.

I still remember. I walked in one day. Had a one on one with our CEO at the time. I had just very, very quietly said, "About the B-word." He goes, "What do you mean?" I said, "The banking word. If I could find a way to actually deliver the exact same mandate, the same mission that we were trying to accomplish for our customers in providing a better way to bank without being a bank. would that be something that you might have an interest in?" The individual said, "Yeah, I guess. I'm not sure how you'd do that. But think about it, and let me know."

Maybe for me, I'm one of those folks that, I don't ask for permission twice. I went back to my team and said, "Okay, we got the go button. Let's try to figure out how to make that work."

Andy Murray: You took that as a yes.

Daniel Eckert: About eight months later, I still remember. About eight or nine months later, I knew we had worked furiously. We sourced a partner. We developed the technology. We actually started to think about what the distribution model would look like, that that we could implement this at scale, all 4700 stores, and digitally with a mobile app. Took over American Express's roadmap on this particular platform, to build this thing. In an offhanded way, nine months or eight months later, the CEO said, "About that thing we talked about a while ago. How's that going?".

My response was, "It's launching in three weeks." He went, "Oh, really?"I said, "Uh-huh, we're launching in three weeks. This thing is going."

Andy Murray: I love it.

Daniel Eckert: His response was, "Good luck. I'm glad that you actually took the bull by the horns, and let's see how it goes."

Andy Murray: Boy, what a great story. You know, it's so encouraging for people that are just, they want to do it, their passion's there, but they think they have to have permission. I would just say, "Look. You know, what you want is alignment to the company purpose, for sure. If it's on company purpose and on-brand, then take those steps and do it."

Now, I do have a follow on question to your story. How do you get people, and why would anyone want to join your Quest when the best path to promotion, it has been proven, is to do things that have been done before? Don't take risks and just work on things that are certain — get there, and just do it as fast as you can. I mean, you're asking someone to join your team, to do something that might fail. That may not have all the right levels of top sponsorship that it should. That seems like a big career risk. How did you, outside of having pictures, how did you get the team to sign on?

Daniel Eckert: It was a big career risk for me too, included. I have always found, and you have to recall, the backdrop of some of this was, these were individuals that were on that path. But they still merrily joined the Quest that we were onto. It began with, like you had said, alignment with company purpose and culture. The vision we were trying to set for ourselves, is to really, and this is an overused phrase so forgive me, but really *change the game* on how customers could be better served. In a very unique way that only, or as only, at the time, Walmart could do.

But it could apply to many other companies as well. As only "insert company name" can do. Painting that vision on the "why" we're trying to accomplish what we're trying to accomplish. To invite them, to bring all of their skill and all of their ability, to that objective. To that outcome we're trying to accomplish, I think is what becomes really energizing for folks. Yes, career ambitions and promotions, they factor into the equation. But I've never seen teams more engaged and more happy, than when they understand the vision, the why behind the vision, and they feel that they are absolutely co-contributing to its accomplishment.

Yes, that takes a little bit of a different leadership style. Because you actually do need to practice what you're preaching there. You can't say, "Here's our vision. Here's our north star. Now I'm going to tell everyone how to do it. I'm going to direct it." You actually have to say, "We want you to be involved and bring all of your intellectual capacity and your passions."

Oftentimes, what I would find in my team is that the role that the individual, I would say "technically" had in their job description, and the role that they may have been playing on that Quest, could be two different things. That's okay. That gives people permission to play outside, or color outside of their lines, in ways that they're passionate about. The reward then is to be part of a team that actually has been able to accomplish something that, candidly, is a once-in-a-career type of thing. I have been very fortunate to have about five of those, with teams like this. Naturally, promotions happen out of that. Because you see people's real aptitudes, their real passions. It allows them to be better placed against their strengths as well.

Andy Murray: The other thing that's interesting there is, there is quite a bit of discretionary capacity that's untapped. You hear all the time, "Take an initiative. Let's lower costs 20 percent." Well, that doesn't get me too excited. Everybody would say, "Well, no one has a lot of time. Gee, we're overbooked as it is."

But then you put out an exciting opportunity to be part of a Quest or something new like that. All of a sudden, the time shows up. It's that idea, that that discretionary capacity is waiting. I think Thoreau got it right, when he said, "Most men live lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the music still inside them."

You see that in the workforce. There's a great book out by, it's called *Alive At Work: The Neuroscience of Helping People Love What They Do* by Daniel Cable. Their research said that there is actually, in our DNA, a seeking system to go after adventure. What you're tapping into, and what you've tapped into so many times, is that DNA thing that's there. The seeking system, as it's called, to go try things. I think that is so overlooked in so many organizations, because we've been scaling optimization, not scaling innovation.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah, you are spot on. I've seen it over and over again. I'll use another example very quickly. Again, back to the discussion around Walmart Pay. When Walmart Pay was actually formed in concept, it was a white paper that a team of two other individuals and I had co-written, and presented to the board in, I would say it was February of 2015.

Board presentation went fine. I always find them neutral to downside, when you actually present to the full board of directors of any company. But it went quiet after that.

I had felt like this was, it was a side hustle that I had been asked to actually help at least produce this strategy. Then nothing had happened for about two months, until the CEO gave me a call and said, "We want to hear a little bit more about how we would actually do something in this strategy." Of course, my

immediate reaction was, "Look, I've got a day job. I'm running a very large P&L. I did a burst of work for a period of time to get that strategy out the door. But I don't have resources or budget." I didn't even have an inkling of how we would do it, per se. But called to the rally of, "Okay, how could we actually accomplish this type of objective?"

The meeting went, I would say, very well. It was a two-hour meeting, just about three or four of us. The response was, "We need a prototype by August." This was now April. "We need a prototype by August, and we want to be in market by October." Walmart had never worked that fast on anything, per se. My immediate response is, "I don't have a budget. I don't have a team. I don't even have technology resources that are assigned to me. How am I going to do this?" Candidly, the response was, "Well …"

Andy Murray: "You'll figure it out."

Daniel Eckert: "I guess you're going to have to figure it out".

Andy Murray: I knew it! "You're going to figure it out."

Well that's right up, the next question I really wanted to talk to you about is, as soon as you take on something like this, you get bombarded with obstacles. You become a dragon slayer. The more obstacles you get, the better you get at solving them. Tell me some of your learnings on slaying dragons.

Daniel Eckert: Oh, yes. You are -

Andy Murray: One you told me was how to horse trade. Which I thought was brilliant.

Daniel Eckert: Horse trade is definitely one of them. Boy, there's numerous examples I could draw from. But I think you do get better over time. In understanding that, when you take on a bigQUEST like this, you're going to find obstacles almost immediately, and dragons you're going to need to figure out how to slay. Some of the tips and techniques that I've used over time first begin with empathy. When I hear of an obstacle, I hear, let's say a cross-functional counterpart of mine, who may not have been involved on the early decision, or early initiative, and now is coming up with 700 reasons why this can't happen, won't happen, is probably illegal, and you might go to jail, let's say.

I start first by trying to walk a mile in their shoes and really understand, with empathy, what's causing the obstacle to occur in that person's mind? There may be some very legitimate things that we have to address and we need to overcome. But I would much prefer to overcome them by inviting them to help co-solve the problem, co-create the solution, than to say, "You are now an adversary, and I need to figure out a way to defeat that adversary."

Maybe the dragon analogy is not a great example. It's rather by saying, "You bring a level of subject matter expertise that we should listen to." Now the question is to reframe the challenge of not, "Why can't we?" but "How could we?" "What's the art of the possible, with all of that incredible domain expertise that you now bring to the table, of telling us why the current structure might not work. What's

an alternative structure that could work? What if we tweaked X, Y, and Z? Would that actually change the issue? What if we thought differently about solving the problem entirely?"

Bringing and inviting adversaries in for that co-creation process I think is really important. Then I think secondly, you talked about horse trading. Sometimes, that still won't work. Because it may be a resource owner. It may be an individual who says, "I know how I can do this, and I actually had the ability and the wherewithal to do it for you. But I'm just too darn busy. Or I've got other priorities that I'm working on, that don't fit within your priority schema."

Oftentimes, one of the approaches I would use was, actually try to understand where there's mutual gain. Then we start playing, like you said, the horse trading game. "Well hey, if we can apply this technique, or this tactic, or this level of expertise to this particular problem, you're going to gain a learning curve efficiency against the priority that you're also struggling to get done. If we work together, we actually can kill two birds with one stone, so to speak." Which is a terrible analogy, but you know. You get my drift.

Andy Murray: No, no. I do.

Daniel Eckert: I would use that often.

Andy Murray: Yeah, well I'll just give a firsthand story. You probably don't even remember this. But you were launching this whole new Walmart at the time, called Mobile Pay. You needed a lot of design and marketing resources and the person I had assigned to the project came to me with their hair on fire, saying, "We need this, and we need it in a week and a half. Daniel is doing this thing."

I said, "What's Daniel smoking? That's a six-week project. We can't do that in two weeks!" So she invited me to this, what was this super-secret place, with a super-secret thing. I really felt special, like I was being invited into this amazing project. You did a great job of pulling, and going after my entrepreneurial Achilles heel, to make it sound very entrepreneurial, very exciting. I just drank the Kool-Aid, and all of a sudden I was pulling resources out of everywhere to help you. Even though it wasn't on my list at all, at that speed. It was crazy.

But there was something. You wanted to belong to something that sounded really exciting and new. I think the way you told the story to invite people in to co-create, with a lot of latitude. Because you kept saying, "We'll design whatever you want. This is yours to bring to life. Look how this is going to transform things."

I drank the Kool-Aid pretty quick, and I think we freed up the resources. Then some very senior person said, "We don't like the word mobile." We scratched that and started over.

Daniel Eckert: That would be our chairman.

Andy Murray: Yeah, him. But you know, you do practice what you preach on that. I guess the last big question I would have is, you mentioned it a little bit. But there is something about looking back on your career. You mark that career by those moments, where you were a part of something really big, and got excited about that. Have you carried any of those tribes forward with you into life, that you can look back on, and still connect with, and they still talk about it the same way?

Daniel Eckert: They do. It's one of the things that, thank-you, by the way, Andy, for all of your support, in the time that we were able to partner together. I just want to go back to that real quick, and then I'll answer your question. What's so important in building that type of Quest-like vision and empowering the team is you also have to be able to, as a leader, ensure that everyone is winning and getting credit. To share liberally the success among the team. As opposed to defining it as the success of the leader.

It's so very important to feel that the thing that you're accomplishing is owned by everyone and that we win together. We also are challenged together to achieve it. It's such a vital component to the mindset, to ensure that everyone felt like they have a piece that they can win with, and you share that credit liberally, is so important. It's often a leadership lesson that we miss, and it's so important to do. To your question -

Andy Murray: Well before you go on to that, there's a great book about The Pirate's Code. If you've studied anything about pirates, if you're part of the pirates, you share in the spoils. The spoils in modern day time is a shared story. To be part of that success story, of what you're talking about, is very much a great pirate's mindset.

Daniel Eckert: Yeah, you're absolutely right. To your question about that, around tribes that have carried forward with me, and when we discuss some of the things that we were able to accomplish together and even were able to continue forward with some of these. It's probably my greatest joy as a leader, and as a teammate — is what I like to describe them, alongside them and serving them — is when we look back on those efforts, those initiatives, or even just a time frame, where we had a run, so-to-speak, a list of innovations in support of a customer. A growth story that you could look back on, and go, "Wow. We just did that." When we get together for your favorite beverage, often, in fact almost always, the response I will have is: "That was the best time I've ever had in my entire career." I'm constantly hearing, "I'm longing to see it and find it again," once a chapter like that closes. Because it is a remarkable environment to operate in. It's a high-performing environment to go in.

Very rarely during that time frame did I hear any of those individuals — at one time, there was a team of over 900 people working within this particular area, to a tee. I visited them in India, I visited them in the west coast, east coast, in the center. To a tee, I would not hear individuals saying, "Well what about my promotion?" Or, "What am I actually getting out of this?"

In fact, there was just a joy to be part of the team, and good things happened to that team, and still continue to happen to that team, because of that. I think the greatest gift I could provide to that team is

allowing them the ability to pay that forward to the next team that they're part of. To continue to rekindle that in their adventure going forward.

Andy Murray: What a great story. I think your passion about helping future leaders, new leaders, current leaders, re-create that experience for themselves and their teams by sharing some of these principles, that's what this is really about. That's really what bigQUEST is all about, is just helping more people that may not have had that opportunity yet. Or want to lead a team, to do something really meaningful and important, and then have that benefit of what it does for others. There's nothing else like it, and there's just else like it.

What you've shared with us today, Daniel, will go a long way, I think, in giving some more tips and guidance and perspective, that is, that kind of leadership is accessible. It is accessible to anyone that has a passion for leadership, and to do things. You don't have to be given it from a title. It doesn't come with a company culture that says, "This is the only way to do it."

You can do it anywhere. Because everything that stands in the way is just one more dragon to slay, and you can get good at that too. Boy, I really appreciate your time today. It's such a joy to talk to someone that has the passion to lead people to the land beyond the land they know.

Daniel Eckert: Absolutely. It's what I'm so excited about, in what you're doing here with bigQUEST. I think it's a really, really important thing. I was just absolutely honored and privileged, to spend a little bit of time with you today.