

Transcript: bigQUEST Podcast | S1, Ep 13

Tom Muccio on Leading A Collaborative Quest

Ben Ortlip: [00:00:00] All right. Welcome to the bigQUEST podcast with Andy Murray. I'm BenOrtlip, and Andy, we've been talking through the [5 Big Questions](#) that every great leader should ask before they start on a bigQUEST. We've covered those. And now we're going to pivot in the series and the season of podcasts. We're going to start talking to some practitioners who are out there doing this for real.

Andy Murray: [00:00:23] Yes. Hey, good to see you, Ben. Thanks for that intro. Always love listening to your intro audio clip there. It gets me ready for a tractor pull and doing great things with great leaders. Yes. Hey, it's been really good. You're going through those [5 Big Questions](#), talking about the core questions and now pivot to talking to real leaders that are doing it.

This is pretty cool for me because today we get to have a great conversation with Tom Muccio. And to give you some background to those listeners who may not know who Tom is, he spent quite a bit of his career as a senior executive at Procter & Gamble and really was the guy that pioneered the sales and the retailer and client partnership in a way that has never been done before.

Ben Ortlip: [00:01:21] Yes. Let me pause you right there because I want to make sure that people understand. So imagine the relationship between Walmart. At Procter & Gamble. I can't think of any two more iconic brands in the retail space.

And so imagine what it must have looked like for that relationship to start. And so here we have with us, the guy that's considered by many to be the architect, the pioneer, the chief negotiator for that relationship. Your history with Tom -- tell us a little bit about that. How did you first meet him? Because you guys go back a ways.

Andy Murray: [00:02:04] Yes, we go back quite a ways. I first met Tom in the end of 1990. I had been on a QUEST as a late 20-year-old at P&G. I had been there about nine years looking for great leaders to learn from. And I asked around to a few guys I knew to say, "Who would be the best leader you could go and work for to learn about leadership?" and they kept bringing up Tom's name. I kept crossing it off the list because he was in a place I had never heard of: Fayetteville, Arkansas. And I was like, "How do I even get there? And what is that? What's that about?"

But eventually I went down there and got to meet Tom and see what he was doing with his team. It was quite an impressive organization. And I thought, you know, this could be a quick 18-month assignment. I'll learn a lot from a great leader. And it turned into a career-changing life adventure.

Much of what you're going to hear about today is really the underpinnings of what bigQUEST is really about. So it's the [5 Big Questions](#) at the beginning. I've sent those over to Tom for his input and he said, yes, those are important. And so we'll get a chance to go through those now and without further ado, Tom.

Ben Ortlip: [00:03:12] Let's bring him in. Hi, Tom. Thanks so much for joining us today. So if our listeners haven't put it together yet, this is the godfather of the bigQUEST.

Andy Murray: [00:03:25] Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. And so, Tom, thanks for joining us. It's a real special privilege to have you on the show with us today and get your insights. I'd just love to go back to the beginning from your story standpoint. What I think a lot of people will be interested in is -- take me to that moment when you realize that something, there was a problem, something had changed between the supplier and the retailer, and there's something bigger that could be done. You know, what was going through your mind and how did you approach that?

Tom Muccio: [00:03:59] Well, actually the genesis came from a multi-functional group that was put together to answer the question, *Should we be going to market with our customers in the year 2000?* And so that group, we did all kinds of analysis inside, outside the company and we came back with the recommendation or the realization that our current model was broken and it was not gonna go well into the future. And the size of the prize could be huge. And if we didn't move and someone else moved first -- we were at really big first-mover advantage.

Andy Murray: [00:04:51] Yes. Well, when you stepped into that space and started looking at it clearly there's a lot of problems to be looked at and outcomes and such, and it gets shared with those [5 Big Questions](#) to start something like this. How did those relate to what you really ended up experiencing?

Tom Muccio: [00:05:09] Well, I tell you, they're fantastic because I was working backwards, thinking backwards and putting experiences and issues into the five buckets. And they're really perfect. And I also went back to thinking about various successful consulting opportunities that I've had that have resulted in major breakthroughs. And again, all five buckets are present.

Unfortunately I didn't have that roadmap to start with. So we had to kind of, it made it even more difficult, but the fact that you've got those five, they're spot on in terms of what people need to think through and help them guide their way. Really, really first class.

Andy Murray: [00:06:03] Oh, good. Well, thank you for that. I think a lot of those have been learned the hard way, and it is kind of nice to be able to get something that you don't have to learn the hard way through experience.

But talking about your experience, we'll just take the first one around the problem, you know, defining the problem you're trying to solve. What were some of the challenges and hard things you had to work

through -- big problems -- when you're doing something so new, like this that had never been done before.

Tom Muccio: [00:06:32] Well, one of the comments that you made was that where it seems counterproductive to spend a lot of time on the problem, it's actually enormously helpful to be attacking the problem from as many angles as possible and listing all the things that are potentially attached to it. And it doesn't have to take forever to do that.

But the way I like to think about it, it's like the blueprints for building a building. They're very specific and they're very detailed and whatever, and they're required to get the building to be built.

And the thing that really helped us capture the vision was when Sam Walton said to us, "If you thought of my stores as an extension of your company, we would do business entirely differently than we do today." And so that gave rise and that the concept that we pioneered, or that kept us motivated, we called it the one company operating model.

How could we create a system that would operate as if it was one company yet meet the needs of both companies individually, since we weren't gonna legitimately be one company. We had to be an overlay that worked for both companies and did it on a win-win basis. And so that was, you can imagine the number of pieces.

I described that as, it's kind of like a jigsaw puzzle, a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle, the picture on the cover said one company operating model, and then you open the box and inside there were a thousand pieces that had to go. But if we kept the picture on the outside of the box in front of us, then we could keep working on adding the pieces until we, till we made the puzzle line up with the picture.

Andy Murray: [00:08:41] Yes. You know, it's interesting, Tom, having a picture of an outcome that you want, really understanding the outcome without worrying too much too early, about what and how you're going to get there and letting that evolve as you go and get started. It seems to be such a powerful concept and one that you guys worked out really, really well.

I do kind of question anytime you try to set out on something new, there's a lot of detractors. There's a lot of people that would probably have something to lose if you were successful at that. And so what I've experienced is anytime you set out on a bigQUEST, you got to get used to eating problems for breakfast. I think I heard you say that once when I was on the team.

How did you get everybody on board? Or was this an outcome that everybody just put their hands down and said, "Let's go!" How easy was it to socialize and get through that, to get people behind this idea?

Tom Muccio: [00:09:40] Well, there were certainly many opportunities to do that.

And in retrospect, now I come to believe that every organization has a deep state and a swamp. The deep state is those people that are empowered, they're enjoying their stock options and all the power

and control that they have. And they really don't want anybody to rock the boat. They're very happy with the current system.

And then the swap is a bureaucracy that has built up over time. And you really need to take on both of those in many instances to get to the bigQUEST. So if P&G, which was a very data driven company -- what we were able to do was at the senior level and multidimensionally, help with data to show where the system was broken.

What did it look like through Walmart's eyes? What did we find in other industries, other companies that could be reapplied? And then obviously dealing with the swamp. That's one of those things that is incident by incident. Again, the picture -- I'm a big believer in having a picture in your mind -- and it was like the wiring on the back of a TV.

And so you had to really take all the wires apart and redo them or reconnect them to make it much more simple. That is totally possible, but it's, it's one step at a time.

Andy Murray: [00:11:24] Yes. You talk about the refrigerator diagram and the wiring. The way to get these two organizations, two companies on the same page around one company, I can't imagine the challenge.

Even just, how do you measure success because the measurements between both -- these wheels are turning at different speeds as even one point alone, let alone different metrics. So how did you come about trying to align two very different companies at the top around what you're going to measure and what success would look like?

Tom Muccio: [00:11:56] Well, again, that's back to defining the problem, understanding the problem. At this time, P&G had eight autonomous business units and Walmart had four business units. And so if you had a problem just hooking up A to B, now we really had an issue because you had eight voices coming from P&G plus all the functions in each of those eight, and the same thing happening at Walmart, with the different business units they have.

What we had to do was come up with a joint design. We called it a co-design and a joint business plan. And that joint business plan had to have a number of measures in it that would then be able to be translated and driven back to the business models in both P&G and Walmart, so that it made sense inside as well as when you put it together, it made sense for both companies.

Andy Murray: [00:13:00] Is that a challenge that you think companies still face today? Or was that something unique to that time period. Have you seen anything change in supplier-retailer relationships that has eliminated that problem forever, or is that still a relevant challenge when you are out consulting and working with different companies?

Tom Muccio: [00:13:19] I still see it over and over and over again. Most companies are internally focused. All the recognition and reward systems are based on internal accomplishment and they still work with their customers in a transactional fashion rather than a transformational fashion. And they there's still many companies where the relationship is driven by the buyer and the seller, yet in both companies there're a lot of different functions that are required in order to make anything really work inside that company.

Andy Murray: [00:14:01] Well, you know, a lot of team leaders -- I talk to a lot of team leaders here, being in this market, from suppliers -- I think sometimes they struggle with trying to think about how do you build a relationship at a more macro level still in today's tough times and retail environment? And any kind of thought you might have to a team leader that might be sitting here saying, *I see what Tom and that team did, but boy, to replicate that, um, it's impossible.* Yet I think when you first started it, there was a lot of impossible as well, but they turned out to be possible.

Tom Muccio: [00:14:40] Yes. As we talked earlier, first is you have to have a vision. And then one of the things that I think that we did was very smart within both companies is we sat down with all the senior management, the management of the various needs or the various business units, and we said, "Here's what we're going to try to do." And we invited them to ask questions; we invited them to bring up issues that concerned them; we invited them to give us ideas of where they thought there might be, this might be a good idea. As you can imagine we had a full bucket of potential problems and issues and very few things in the pocket of opportunities.

So what we said to both groups is we will acknowledge, recognize and put in writing all of your concerns. And we will, as we solve those concerns, we asked you to then allow us to cross that off the list. It's not fair to keep bringing up the same issue over and over again after we've solved the issue or satisfied you in some other way.

And so by doing that it enabled people to get it off their chest. We get to see what the issues that were going to have to be solved, to get their support. And then we kept coming back saying, *If we keep doing what we're always doing, we're always going to get what we always got.* So if here's the size of the prize and that we think is available and we recognize, we appreciate your concern, we appreciate your input and so forth.

And then what we did is monthly or quarterly or semi-annually depending on the group, very detailed review, which enabled us to say we've solved these three problems. Here are three new problems that come up and here's what we're thinking here. And at that time, within both companies, we looked to establish what I call early wins, which gave people a reason to believe. And it also generated business improvements and helped move the things that we were majoring on our joint scorecard.

Ben Ortlip: [00:17:11] So already I'm hearing some very significant... well, I could really tell that the bigQUEST framework was inspired by a lot of these experiences you had. That music means we're going to take a short break here and we'll be back in just a minute with more conversation with Tom Muccio.

Andy Murray: [00:17:32] Yes, Tom, I don't know how many people picked up on what you would just described there, but from being in a client role or retailer role, just kind of retiring from the Walmart experience, I don't think I recall -- ever -- a supplier coming to me and saying, "Andy, what's the biggest problem that you're trying to solve?" and then make themselves relevant to that problem.

It's just not something that's natural for suppliers to come into retail like that and have open discussion and say, "Look, let's get this on a list and then let's punch through them and then you can mark it off." And this point about being heard -- I can tell you for a fact, if any supplier did call on me that way when I was a chief customer officer at Asda, I would have given them all the time in the world. Because you're dealing with problems on a regular basis, and if a supplier makes themselves relevant to the problems that you're having, that's a fundamental insight on how you can get to bigQUEST type ideas and get them through.

So it's just great learning there of having the transparency and the acknowledgement of it, but then making sure that it doesn't come back to bite you later. **You don't rehearse the problems you've dealt with, you deal with them.** And that's a refreshing thing because a sales person's probably trained not to talk about the problems and get that off the list as fast as possible.

Tom Muccio: [00:18:51] The other thing here, too, is that what we do is not optimize the resources that are independent in both companies. So, if you think about it, the concept is a way to commercialize all the resources in both companies. When I say commercialize, we both had the same customer and for instance, I tell the story:

Walmart was ready, aim, fire. P&G was ready, aim, aim again, switch rifles. So one company was "Let's go quickly and we'll correct the mistakes as we're going." The other was very analytical and we're not going to move until we understand everything well. And that's very complimentary when you start putting those two things together. When Walmart was ready to go international P&G was already in 60 or 70 countries so we can help them do that.

And there were things, other things that Walmart did that were much better than what P&G was doing. **So we could take the learning that was in both companies and put it together. It's unbelievably powerful when you do it that way. And also there's a lot of speed and there's a lot of excitement created in both companies** as they see that it validates the fact that, "Oh, we have people that are pretty smart in this area" or whatever. It's something that most companies miss is what's available in, I believe this is not only in your customer, but the same thing as in suppliers.

If I went to see a company today, I would say to them, "Let's take a look at you in the middle, your strategic customer on one side and your strategic suppliers on the other side. And let's look at making that an ecosystem." Where there might be things my supplier is doing that I can then take and do, or that will be a benefit to my customer or vice versa.

The other thing that this does, it allows you to grow better business people because they get to see a broader playing field. They get to play at a broader playing field and that allows the talent to continue to grow and grow and grow, so you'd get really much better, much more grounded leaders in my view.

Andy Murray: [00:21:41] Well, speaking of talent, many people like to have a pretty clear career path with a lot of certainty, *If I do this, I will get that*, as they go. And then when you talk about a person joining a team like you were creating, that was doing something brand new, there's a lot of uncertainty with that. How did you deal with the issue of getting top talent to join the Quest that you were on given they were going to go into a lot of unknown territory?

Tom Muccio: [00:22:09] Well, that's a great question, Andy. And one of the big systems that we had to work out were the personnel systems to be able to support this bigQUEST kind of thing.

The problem with recognition and reward systems is that they work: you get what you reward, you get what you recognize. And so what we had to do is make sure that whatever we were doing also benefited an individual as well as both companies. And so for instance, we addressed career pathing, where all of a sudden we were involving people from marketing, people from finance, logistics and others to work on this customer team.

So we had to do some things. One, prove that those functions actually added value and made a big difference. And once we were able to do that, which was easy, we then said, *Okay, how do we incent people to want to do this?* So for instance, when a new person would join finance in P&G, their second assignment would be they have to go to a plant or cost accounting assignment -- that they had a career path.

So what we did is we added being on a customer team as a career path enhancer for someone or a next step for someone in finance. We did that with each of the functions. And then it was a question of selling people -- like you said you were looking for a place to go where you could grow faster -- we provided that environment. We told people, if you come down and work on this team, it's like playing in the NFL on Sunday. I mean, this is not for the faint of heart. If you're not willing to count the cost and sign up then don't come. But if you do come, you're gonna, you're gonna grow like you'll never believe, you're going to have opportunities like you've never had before. And then it was my role as the team leader to make sure that they got recognized and rewarded in their functions and in their next assignments, including being promoted if that was the right thing based on their contribution.

Andy Murray: [00:24:33] You know, that's that marketing pitch, it reminds me of the, when PX90 first came out, which I said was the worst marketing ever, but it was brilliant, but they started marketing this PX90 and saying: *Look, you need to do this for 90 days. It's going to nearly kill you. And it's going to be super hard and you're about going to die. But then you're going to get this outcome as crazy.* And I said, boy, what a horrible marketing for that? But it's true. It's true. They know something: that people want to do things that are hard sometimes, you know, that that's the passionate leader.

And it sounds like what you did was create a filter between the leaders that just checking the boxes, getting through, because that pitch to me works really well for a passionate leader and that, because they really do wake up, do something.

Tom Muccio: [00:25:17] Yes, that's exactly what we were looking for is people who wanted to try to do something, who wanted to grow. If you think about sports, people are more attracted to a team that wins a championship that even being the most valuable player. And so what we said, my speech at the beginning of the year would go like this, thinking of us as a football team: "Okay. All right. We want to go undefeated. We want to win the national championship and we want our players to win the top award at every position."

Well, obviously you got to start by winning as a team. And if you win as a team, the individual awards pretty much take care of themselves. If you have someone making sure that it's known what they're doing and they get fairly recognized and rewarded.

Andy Murray: [00:26:21] What a great way to motivate people. And, you know, we look at what we're trying to do with this framework of mindset, method, but then also motivate, and what's the motivation? You've got to motivate people. What other ways did you motivate or provide motivation to keep the energy going? Keep at the Quest? Because this was a 15 year journey for you, I believe, from when you got started to go on from under \$400 million to an \$8 billion business. That's a long journey to stay the course on and make it work. But how do you motivate?

Tom Muccio: [00:26:49] Well, you know, it's amazing. We underestimate the potential of people.

And if you give people an opportunity, if you give them encouragement, if you give them the correct tools and you give them a vision to be working against. Then do their recognition and reward broadly for the team, as well as for the individual, it's amazing how the cream will rise to the top. I don't know how many people say to me. "I never thought I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing."

A lot of that becomes self-motivating. I would guess it's kind of like a track star or swimmer who, you know, they keep measuring themselves against their personal best. And if you keep giving them the time and the coaching, they just keep improving their personal best.

Andy Murray: [00:27:49] That seems like such an obvious thing, but the truth is, I saw some data from Gallup that 85% of employees, in big companies especially, are just disenfranchised. They're just not

fully engaged. And that seems to be almost criminal is the word I'm looking for. Why do you think today there is so much disappointment, if you will, or disengagement by so many in the corporate world?

Tom Muccio: [00:28:20] Well, I personally believe that part of it goes back to the recognition and reward system. And part of it is people -- there are a lot of people that are looking to manage their own career as opposed to how do I contribute?

And as I contribute and make a bigger difference, then I'm going to get bigger and bigger elements of responsibility.

If you remember on our team, we celebrated all kinds of special -- when we made an accomplishment or achievement, we celebrated as a team and as individuals. We had huddles every Monday morning for the whole team so that everybody knew what the objectives were or what we were trying to do this week, where we needed help.

Then the whole concept of servant leadership. I always believed that the leadership team is there to remove the roadblocks from the people that are driving the breakthrough. And so even when it was time to do celebration, every time we had a record month, which was pretty frequently, we would get big barbecue grills, put them out on the lawn and the leadership team would cook hamburgers and hotdogs for the rest of the team.

And that sent a big signal of how valuable we thought every team member was. And I constantly would preach. *I want to see everybody's fingerprints on this success. And everybody has an opportunity to get their fingerprints on the success.* We even celebrated sometimes when there was a good idea that failed. And we said, you know, that was a great idea. It didn't work because we didn't execute it right, or maybe it's just ahead of its time.

We had a guy on our team who went back to P&G to get them to do trial sizes on shampoo and whatever. And he was booted out of Cincinnati. They said, that's a dumb idea. Well, now look at every store that has big sections for travel sizes. And we gave him an award for doing that because we, all on the team believed it was the right thing and sure enough, it turned into a department.

Andy Murray: [00:30:47] It's just timing. I can think of other guys that had some ideas that didn't get sold through, me being one. It took about 10 years, maybe 15 years later, for it to land. You were the first guy to come up with artificial intelligence as a way of leveraging data. But you're right -- 10 years ahead of its time. But we had the capability in the early nineties to take Walmart's data and P&G's data, put it together and have it create, through algorithms, unbelievable opportunities to improve the shopping experience for our customer and increase our profitability and sales. And now here we are.

Andy Murray: [00:31:42] Now it's reality, but you know, there were a lot of ideas being kicked around. And I think the secret of having an ecosystem of ideas where test-and-learn budgets and slush funds, and it's not just a one-off thing. You have to create an environment to create and test and launch small

ideas to continue to de-risk ideas as they go. I think that's an important concept. That it wasn't just about somebody having an idea, you had to have a way to fund it and get it going.

Tom Muccio: [00:32:12] Yes. And that was one of the real benefits we had -- Walmart was very much a try-things company and P&G was very much a test-market company. So we married those things together and we would go to Walmart and say, give me 20 stores and we will try this idea in 20 stores. Then if it worked for Walmart and worked for P&G, we knew exactly what the investment was going to be and what the payout was going to be. And the beauty of that is you can have multiple tests going all the time.

The other thing we learned, as you mentioned, is we needed to have some funds to be able to take advantage of opportunities, opportunities to try something, opportunities to go in a different direction. Most companies understand R&D from a product point of view, or even R&D from a manufacturing processing point of view. But there are very few companies that invest any money at all in R&D with their customers or their suppliers in the business processes and breakthrough ideas. And I think that's absolutely huge. I have never seen where people have invested in that and they did not blow themselves away by the return of that they got on the investment that they made.

Andy Murray: [00:33:42] Ah, that's fantastic. A great principle to, to work through. It's really a new idea to have R&D funds for a transactional relationship in the front end of a customer journey, between that in that supply chain.

Tom, one last question. We'll talk about "every single day" and having some habits that work show up every single day as a way to reinforce where you're trying to go. One of the things that I remember distinctly that you modeled really well was asking that question almost every single day: What does help look like as a leader? So maybe you could expand upon why that was such an important question to you and how you used it as a way to keep people engaged.

Tom Muccio: [00:34:26] Well, first of all, once you have a vision you can then unleash the organization to say, "Every day, we want you to be working on bringing the vision to life from your perspective or your area of responsibility. We want you to continually be thinking, *Is there a way to do something better, faster, cheaper?*" I described this as a giant rubber band, and the rubber band is either pulling toward the vision or you're bringing the vision back to current reality. And this way you empowered the entire organization to constantly, every day, be looking at ways that they could contribute.

And then what I would do is walk around from office to office finding out *What are you working on? If you're successful, what's the payout going to look like, or what difference is it going to make? What other resources or what other things do you need to be able to pull that off?*

And then I would just say, *What does help look like?* And it was amazing. I would guess 90% of the issues that people said, "If I only had this, or if only I could do this," that was totally within my ability to say yes,

or to fix or to make it work. My job was to remove the roadblocks for them. So instead of addition, we created a team that was doing geometry. We had 15, 20 issues every day being worked on.

Andy Murray: [00:36:16] That's fantastic. Tom, as you look at the current world and the current reality of what we're living with and you look out into the future, what, what gives you hope? When you look at a business and people who will take the opportunity to take on these types of Quests that are transformative to your life as an employee or a leader, there's a lot out there to look at and a lot of challenges. I know you and I talked earlier, there wasn't a single barrier that proved to be impossible.

So when you're looking at the future today, there's a lot of young people coming into business today and probably have a bit of a bleak outlook of just all the challenges and barriers, what gives you hope for the young people coming into business and careers today, and for those that are on this journey?

Tom Muccio: [00:37:07] Well, one: the role of technology is going to be so important, is so important and will continue to be. And if you see the speed of change that we've experienced, if you take everything from you know -- my grandkids don't even know what blockbusters were all the way up to Netflix and streaming and whatever.

And if we think the pace of change is going to slow down, we're crazy. So because of that, you have got to keep your organization and your people relevant. So that's my hope: the environment is going to force people who want to be winners and actually successful in the world that keeps evolving.

You're going to have to have new business models like this. I'm convinced that if I went into a company and worked with them with their strategic supplier -- themselves and their strategic customer -- there's, there's all kinds of money, margin, ideas, speed, ease of doing business that would have to happen.

In fact, I do a fake conversation where I call off one of my suppliers and say, "Hey, we were having our leadership team meeting and someone suggested maybe we should do more business with you. Would you be interested?" Well, of course he shows up in the office the next morning. So as we meet, I say to him, "Hey, tell me what your company's working on?" and again, people will talk to talk about their company just like they'll talk about their kids. I can do it all day long. So then I would say, well, "Tell me what, what, if anything, could we do that would help you achieve your objectives?" And the answer was, "Well, you make us do an RFP every year for our pricing. And that really just takes an enormous amount of time." I say, "What's a fix look like?" He said, "Well, if you could trust us with a three-year RFP and we can do some minor tweaking, but not a full one, that would certainly allow me to have more resources going against building your business instead of trying to maintain it." So then I would scratch my head and say, "Hmm, help me out. Is there something you could do that would be an incentive for us to want to do that?" And immediately he says, "Well, sure. How about if I do just-in-time inventory, which will take all that inventory off your books and and that will improve your cashflow."

It's those kinds of conversations that need to be taken, and then they need to be taken with the senior level so that things can actually change. If the senior level doesn't buy in and help the sponsor the risk, it won't happen within the company. People will just continue to do dumb things because that's what the system rewards.

Andy Murray: [00:40:35] Well, it takes a little bit of leadership beyond a transactional approach to everything and getting out of that transactional style to realize that we're all humans and there's a human side of leadership. There's an understanding of how to build trust and relationship. And I think that's so key to what made you successful as well, building those relationships at the top.

I've seen the notes you would send to your clients CEO on just, "Hey, I was thinking about you today and a challenge you might be up against, and this might be helpful." And just putting yourself in that servant mode of serving others constantly at every opportunity, it creates a wealth of, of opportunity and relationship. So, that was really impressive for me as a key learning.

Tom Muccio: [00:41:22] Exactly right. **It's just not about improving the transaction. This is about transformation. Nobody asked Henry Ford how to make a faster horse.**

Andy Murray: [00:41:33] Yes, no, nobody did.

Is there anything else, Tom, that that's on your mind today as you enjoy this beautiful day, you're in Arkansas. What you might want to say to people that are thinking about taking on a Quest and trying to do something more impactful, important, and are at that edge and looking out saying, *Okay, should I do this or should I not?*

Tom Muccio: [00:42:01] Well, I would say if you're going to have to work for 30 or 35 years, do something, that's going to make a difference rather than just coming in everyday and slicing the baloney into a pound or a pound and a half. And I just think there's magic in releasing that part of people. It's inside them.

And again, giving them a vision, giving them tools, giving them opportunity, giving them encouragement, giving them recognition and reward. I'm convinced that leaders who learn how to do that can really transform the business results of their organizations.

Andy Murray: [00:42:47] Well, if you create that experience for others through your leadership, you don't know where they're going to go in their career and make a difference.

And I think several people that worked on your team are now in leadership positions of big companies and have gone on well. And I know for a fact they reflect back to these experiences that you were key to and create for others. Once you've had that, you want to recreate it yourself for some other team down the road.

Recreating that idea of how you get people to do meaningful work, co-create, learn that you can eat problems for breakfast, they're not barriers that are insurmountable and everything you see is just a barrier to be overcome. It's not something that should stop you automatically.

Tom Muccio: [00:43:31] You're exactly right. What do we use to say, *Turn a barrier into a speed bump*.

Andy Murray: [00:43:38] I love it. It's just another speed bump. So that's great. Well, thanks Tom. You've been great. I really enjoyed our conversation today and I'm sure you're gonna see a lot of your ideas through flow-through as we build more content and resources for a bigQUEST. Just don't ask for a royalty.

Tom Muccio: [00:44:03] It's like, I just want to be in the group photo for when it wins! You know when the horse wins, everybody goes and there's a snapshot of people. I just want to be in the winning photo.

Andy Murray: [00:44:19] You definitely would be in that photo. That's a guaranteed thing. Absolutely. I bet you're in a winning photo of a lot of guys.

Ben Ortlip: [00:44:25] Speaking of, I want to be in that photo, too.

We want to thank Tom for joining us today. Thank you so much. This has been great. Andy, I'm really looking forward to unpacking with you about this conversation going forward and that's going to be fun. So I look forward to that.

Well, what a great conversation I think we could talk to Tom forever.

And I noticed whenever you guys are together it's just such a camaraderie. I can tell that that was one of those just real moments for you to that season of life that you interacted with Tom. The other thing is I heard an awful lot of bigQUEST, you know, sort of monuments or milestones in there. I heard him talking right off the bat -- there's just, exuding from him is a mindset. One of the thoughts that I had was you, was that a bigQUEST for him or is that just the way he is, you know, to walk into a situation like that?

Andy Murray: [00:45:24] I think it's the way he is. And as it does raise one of the questions on, you know, what type of leader is right for that?

But I think Tom always had a way to role model: no problems are insurmountable, take on the new, don't be satisfied, make life great for other people and make work meaningful for others. And so I think that's the way... I've served with him on outside boards as a non-executive director for other companies, we've served together, and he brings that attitude and spirit to wherever he goes.

I'm sure there's a lot of things you learn about that as you work through a Quest, but he and I had talked earlier. I asked him the question, "Was there a problem that you ever got that seemed impossible to

solve?” And he said, “You know, they might have seemed that way, but if for every single problem we found a way to work through it.”

And I think that's the key. If you were to try to sort all those problems out before you get started, you'd never get off the dime, you just wouldn't. But there's so many more stories of where he had to work through barriers internally in order to get where you want to go.

And what I took away from that too, is that you can't wait to be anointed from a senior executive to say, “Hey, Andy, can you go do this?” That might happen. **But there's so much out there for you to pick up the chalk and take on your own and getting leadership support, it's just one of the barriers you overcome and that's the pieces of the puzzle you work through. It's not, it doesn't have to be the starting point. If you wait to get permission, every day that goes by doing work that's not you forward and creating excitement in your life and for others, it's just a day wasted.**

So that's the key lesson for me with Tom is that **he wasn't at the very top. He didn't wait to be at the very top. And he brought those ideas forward and learned how to get the support he needed.**

Ben Ortlip: [00:47:23] Yes. And one of the things that I noticed is that it must have been just an absolute thrill. But I wonder if you're even aware of what a great thing it was because there really was a culture.

Just as a shopper at Walmart, from my perspective, you don't think of Walmart that way. You don't think of them as organizationally best in class. You know, you think of them as the brand that makes things accessible for a lot of different people. You think of them as kind of trying to hit the middle in terms of brand positioning on a lot of things.

But what I've found as I've listened to you and you're talking to some of these different colleagues that you had in the Walmart community, it really does represent -- there's a culture of just excellence that really just exceeds what the brand puts out. To me, that's unusual.

Andy Murray: [00:48:24] I could see why I could see why you would say that.

I mean, if you were shopping in a store, you feel like this is a good experience you're getting, but the discount price, you know, I can understand that point of view.

But when you do get inside and have had a chance to work in that environment, you realize, some of the best technology, best logistics, best thinking in strategy and merchandising. It really is a culture of trying to be continuous learners and self-starters, and just the speed and the velocity is mind blowing. I've worked on the agency side, I've worked in the supplier side and then I've worked, you know, in the retail side. And I've got to say, I did enjoy the retail bit the best because the speed of the game is so high and it's so fast and you really see results very quickly from what you do. So it's a bit of an intoxicating environment to work from.

But there's so many principles we could apply from working at that faster pace and being able to test something and see the actions of that, put an idea in the store and see it work. It's that kind of speed of idea to market, it's just nice to see that happen. I think Agile technologies being moved into more core businesses is also a place that we're starting to see some of those benefits of getting ideas to market faster and how that inspires people to stay in the game, be really coming up with more and more ideas to win.

Ben Ortlip: [00:50:01] Yes. And when we've talked about Agile in previous podcast conversations we did note that we usually think of Agile methodology really as being related to very tactical projects, but we are seeing it move into the mindset of leadership there, too.

Another big thing that I saw in Tom's conversation was just the prevalence of an outcome. It was sort of a mindset of the outcome, but as we look to sort of codify some of what goes on there into this bigQUEST framework, outcome was one of the most prominent pillars that I observed as you guys were talking about how to get people around a bigQUEST.

Andy Murray: [00:50:50] That's interesting you say that. That was my take as well.

If you look at the [5 Big Questions](#) we have, they really over-indexed on having an outcome that drove all clarity, alignment, everything else. It really did come down to that. You're absolutely right. I think that was their secret superpower -- they had an outcome that they got top leadership of both companies bought into, and boy, that was such an unlock for them.

Ben Ortlip: [00:51:18] Yes. And if there's a second for that, it would be the idea of co-creation which was just very, very much a part of the whole MO for them: we're going to go to each person. It was almost like they brought that sort of same customer-focused approach or mentality, that perspective, to the internal customers. I wonder if that's part of the secret sauce for this is that, you know, they're so customer centric in the first place that then it just becomes a natural disposition for them to think of all of their colleagues, all of their peers, all of the vendor partners and everybody else, to think of them like customers and treat them that way and to look beyond the transaction of what they're trying to achieve, and to think of it more in terms of how it affects the relationship and that relationships can take them so much farther than any transaction would. So that was also very interesting to see.

Andy Murray: [00:52:15] Yes. I couldn't agree more. I love that thought and my own experience has been that you really had an ideal opportunity to get your hand prints, as he said, on it. I saw the plaque where everybody in the team signed on the values that we were committing to, and it was always about getting your fingerprints on it and being part of it. So it becomes part of your story and the power of a shared story where you're part of the story is I think a big part of the secret sauce on motivation.

Getting people motivated because people like that, people want to have a sense that they created something and, and you know what, Ben? I think there's another thing here: sign your work. We've lost the art of signing our work as artists, and I think what Tom allowed you to do is sign your work.

Ben Ortlip: [00:53:00] Yes. Well, my final thought on this conversation is just really a high level observation that the outcome, the final outcome, and maybe a by-product even of this journey, this bigQUEST approach, as I just watch you guys interact together, there's just a sense of warmth, there's a reflection, it's almost nostalgic as you think about this.

And like Tom mentioned, if you're going to do something for 30, 35 years or more. it might as well be something that you really are glad you did. And just to see just the chemistry between you guys, I could tell looking in that it was a special relationship, that the whole experience was special to you guys.

And I know that's something that you talk about a lot in bigQUEST, the training and everything else. So that's something that I think is really a great testament to the value of adopting this bigQUEST approach. Part of this is that you had some great experiences and we're looking to codify that.

You've been able to take the concepts for bigQUEST, you have codified it into an actual framework. You've replicated it successfully in a variety of different environments since those days with Tom. So that's going to be fun for us to unpack together going forward.

And I know that we've got a couple of other great interviews that are going to be additional journeys down memory lane a little bit, but more than that, compelling examples of how the bigQUEST framework has been applied in some of the examples from your past.

Andy Murray: [00:54:48] Yes, we're going to hear from one gentleman coming up that I personally didn't work with as much, but at the same time we'll reflect probably some of the same sentiments of Tom, of wanting to recreate these exemplary moments. When you go through the hard things together with a group of people and how that becomes something you want to recreate again and again like I've said before, once you've been on a Quest like this, you just want to get on another as a more thrilling way to do work.

And I think that's there are many, many people like me that work with Tom on that journey in their career that remember and reflect with the same amount of emotion and energy and are out there trying to do that again in the environments, they are in their circumstances, wherever they are, because it's just a much better way to approach life and work for yourself and for other people.