Announcer 0:00
Welcome to Business Owners Radio. Business Owners Radio, where established business owners get the latest insights, strategies, and practices to grow a sustainably profitable business. And now taking care of business your hosts Craig Moen and Shye Gilad.

Craig Moen 0:24
Welcome to Business Owners Radio Episode 199. Joining us today is Dave McKeown. Dave helps individuals teams and organizations achieve excellence by doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. He is the CEO of outfield leadership, and author of the Amazon best-selling book, "The Self-evolved Leader: Elevate Your Focus and Develop Your People in a World That Refuses to Slow Down."

Shye Gilad 0:54
Good morning, Dave. Welcome to Business Owners Radio.

Dave McKeown:
Hey, Shye. Great to be here with you and Craig this morning.

Shye Gilad:
Yeah, and it's great to have you here with us. We are so excited about this new book of yours, "The Self-evolved Leader: Elevate Your Focus and Develop Your People in a World That Refuses to Slow Down", So tell us, Dave, what inspired you to write this book? And why is it important right now,

Dave McKeown 1:16
I've had the idea for writing the book, probably for the last eight or 10 years or so. Most of my career has been in the world of helping leaders and leadership teams, elevate their focus, develop their people and get more done. And I was doing a lot of keynote speaking a lot of training and consulting with leadership teams. And there was something that struck me every time I got to the end of the session or sessions that we were doing, which was how can I ensure that what we're talking about what we're discovering around great leadership can have a lasting impact in this organization. And you know, there's only so much that you can do face to face one on one or one to many in a team, that eventually over time you start to think Well, there's got to be a better way to kind of scale the impact here. And so my thought was in writing the book, I would be able to leave folks with a real practical guide for becoming a better leader that they could put in place long after I was gone.

Shye Gilad 2:15
Yeah. And so tell us about this concept of the self-evolved leader, and what does that mean to you?

Dave McKeown 2:20
Well, I've done a lot of work in, particularly fast-growing organizations. And one of the things that have noticed over the years is that the way in which our leaders are showing up, is starting to

become less and less effective. If you think of a lot of the older models of leadership that are really grounded in this notion of leading through certainty you're leading from the front of the pack. I think that we've got to the point in our organizations in our culture, where that's just not possible anymore for our leaders, there are too many variables, there are too many complexities, there are too many moving parts. And the world is moving too quickly for anyone leader to really be able to lead with certainty. And so in the work that I was doing with leaders and leadership teams, I was starting to unpeel and unpack what I think we're moving towards in the world of leadership, which is really one in which is much more intentional. One that's much more focused on helping our people grow as we achieve our goals, and one that's desirous of leading or leaving their own leadership legacy. And so a lot of those themes you'll see run through the self evolves leader.

Shye Gilad 3:33
This is such a fascinating concept, Dave, I'm curious what first got you interested in the world of leadership and what has inspired you throughout your life to develop this practice?

Dave McKeown 3:46
I grew up in a household where my father back in Northern Ireland, I'm sure you can hear from my accent, not from Laguna Beach, where I live and I but back whenever I was living in Belfast, my father was a serial entrepreneur. He owned a ton of businesses in Belfast, which was not very normal at the time. And right from that early age, it just fascinated me this notion of like just starting a business, running a business growing a business building leaders. And throughout the course of my education, with high school, and then college, I just developed this deeper desire to one understand what it meant to be a good leader. And then ultimately, to help people develop those skill sets in that mindset themselves. I spent my college years interning with my father who was not by that stage of a business consultant over in Massachusetts. And it was during that time that I really got to see what it meant to be in the decision-making room of leading and growing a business and it just continued to fascinate me of how you can just bring a group of people together with ultimately disparate perspectives on the world and help them move towards a common goal or achievement. something greater than themselves. And so then that started my formal career, I started back in the UK working for Accenture, a big IT consulting company, and really enjoyed that was a great opportunity to experience what leadership meant that a really large, large organization, but my heart was always drawn to working with small to medium-sized businesses, really helping them navigate some of the complexities that fast growth brings, and how to help them make the transition that they need to, in order to move past that point of growing a business towards actually truly scaling a business.

Shye Gilad 5:33
It's so interesting to me that your father was this, it sounds like a really good role model for you.

Dave McKeown   5:39
In some ways, yes. Certainly, in terms of like, the world of work that he got into and what he was doing and what he was building, and he bought the built a consulting practice out in Massachusetts. And I think it definitely set up for me and an opportunity to see what it meant to

work with leadership teams and to see what it meant to walk a group of people through a process that would ultimately end them up in a better place. So from that perspective, 100% very good at what he did.

Shye Gilad 6:05
Yeah, it's really cool that you know, I'm teasing you on that a little bit. But it's not lost on me that a lot of business owners that I've talked with who grew up and family businesses, actually, as much as they learned that value of building something for themselves. And the rewards that come with that. And the challenges. Some of them have told me they've really had to unlearn a lot of old ideas about leadership, you know, so thinking about this, I'm curious if there were things that maybe you reflected back on and said, you know, Dad was amazing and inspirational all of these ways. But boy, there were some things here that really helped me realize that there was a need to do something different. Is there anything that sticks out in your mind?

Dave McKeown 6:45
Yeah, I think that dynamic that you talked about in terms of growing up in a family business, and the lessons that you can learn is quite common. Because often, if there's a foreigner owner, that then takes a son or daughter, or child under their wing, to show them the ropes, quite often, not always, but quite often the definition of leadership and how to lead that organization is very closely defined around that individual Founder. And so they bring all of the great things that help them grow the business and get the business off the ground. But with that comes some challenges. I think that a lot of founders have difficulty in moving away from that overarching model of growth, which is, let's just say yes, and figure out how we're going to deliver it later. A lot of successful businesses get off the ground by just telling the customer we'll do whatever you want. And we'll do it cheaper, faster and better than whatever our competitors are. And that allows you to get good growth. But often, that mentality can get really bedded into the organization on that's what it means to lead, we just say yes, and then swing for the fences and see if it works. And that's an asset up until the point of growth, and then it starts to become a liability. And it can become a little problematic. And we've actually stunted growth in an organization. If we're just constantly saying yes, and scrambling to deliver it.

Shye Gilad 8:08
It's such an easy trap to fall into, as far as let's do anything and everything the client wants, and they'll be happy. And we'll make some money someday and end up with this collage, or, quote, work of what you are and who you are and what you stand for. And it's really a untidy mess to clean up. So one of the things I ran across in your book that I thought was intriguing, and you call it the cycle of mediocrity. Can you share with us your thoughts there?

Dave McKeown 8:38
Sure. So I find that a lot of leaders and their teams get caught in this cycle where they're not necessarily delivering bad work, but they're certainly not delivering their best work. And it all stems from the fact that we live in a world where we've given permission to anybody to interrupt us at any time and assign whatever priority they want to on their interruption. And so we're living

in this world of the urgent where everything needs to get done yesterday. And what I see happening is a lot of leaders in their rightful desire to want to keep moving forward in an effective and efficient manner, ultimately end up taking on more than they should, and they start to lead through acts of heroism. And it doesn't have to be these big, huge, sweeping heroic acts, but just little things, like, you know, somebody on their team comes to them with a problem and they just go tell them how to fix it. Or worse still, they say, hey, just leave that there. I'll deal with that. And what happens over time is those acts of heroism from a leader ends up building learned helplessness in their team. So eventually, their team starts thinking to themselves, well, if I've got a problem or an issue or a challenge, why bother trying to solve this on my own because my boss is just gonna dig me out of it anyway, or they're gonna tell me how to do it in a different way, or they're gonna save the day for me. And so teams start to become disempowered, which then leads to frustration for them and additional burnout on the leader because the more that they take on the last that their team to pitch in themselves, the more that they get stuck in this cycle. And I have a lot of leaders come to me and say, Dave, this team used to be really self-sufficient, they used to really know what they were doing. And now they just don't seem to want to put one foot in front of the other. And I don't know why to which my response is almost always well, you're going to have to take a look in the mirror because that's at least one half of the equation. And so I find this dynamic happening in organizations of any size, whether it's a small to medium-sized business, whether it's got a very entrepreneurial perspective, all the way up to much larger, slightly more bureaucratic and process-driven organizations, leaders believe that their job is to help unlock all of these things for their teams that are constantly saving the day, which is having a negative impact on their team and their development.

Craig Moen 10:42
It's amazing how we walk into situations that it seems normal from their perspective, but looking at their organization and structure, it's very apparent where the problems are hitting this whole amount of self-evolved leadership, it implies to me that someone's got to evaluate themselves, and decide how they're going to evolve going forward. What's the homework that's involved there?

Dave McKeown 11:09
Yeah, I think you're hitting on a really important thing. And there are actually two aspects of that fallout. Number one is the notion that there is value in becoming a great leader just in and of itself, regardless of the results that it gets us. And I think that we've lost sight of that, for a great many people that progression through their career into leadership roles, is just one of Well, that's what happens, you know, we just you do a good job, you get promoted, you do a good job there, you get promoted and, and there's just a sense of upward development and promotion throughout a career, because we're getting results rather than because we're actually taking the time to develop our leadership skills. And I think combined with that is our organizations have done a bad job, not all of them. But a great many are doing a bad job in developing the leaders that work for them. And that starts right from a hiring decision, somebody does a great job functionally, we make them the manager of that team, whereas doing the work, and managing and leading people are very different skill sets, they actually require, in some cases, a very

different person. And so part of the book and back to the original question of why did you write it was, I think that those leaders who are going to be effective over the long run, first of all see the value in developing leadership skills, and mindsets and talents just because of it. But secondly, have a deep desire to push for that themselves. So to your question created a deep understanding of where I'm strong as a leader, where I'm weaker and harder, close some of those gaps so that I can deliver great leadership for my organization.

Craig Moen 12:36
When it works, it's impressive, but it really takes a lot of effort and soul searching to understand that, as you say, or 50% of the problem. So much is just evolved as far as you do a good job, therefore, you become a manager without any insight other than role models within the organization itself, which may be toxic already. So what are some outside sources, obviously, your book is a great resource for this discussion and for looking inward? Any other insights as far as things they should be aware of things that they should be spending their time involving themselves in to refine their leadership skill?

Dave McKeown 13:17
I think that it all starts with an intention. So so much of what we do on a daily basis is reactive to whatever is latest and loudest and whatever comes at our desk and seems the most urgent and so just even taking a step back and taking a pause and saying to yourself, okay, well, how do I want to show up as an effective leader for my team. Today, I talk about the self-evolved leader's mantra, which is, my focus is to help my team achieve our shared goals. And in doing so, to develop into the best version of themselves. I think those two things need to happen concurrently. Too often we're focused on how can we just achieve our goals, and we leave the piece around developing our team. And if we can be just a bit more intentional about how we show up particularly around that second bit, it can pull out a lot of that toxicity, it causes us to slow down a little bit more to evaluate collectively, where we're going as a team to help ensure that our team has bought into that overarching vision of where we want to get to, and that that they're co-creators and our success rather than having this kind of boss leader employee relationship. So intentionality for me is a huge thing.

Craig 14:26
And along those lines, the element of the actual business itself and its future, how can we align ourselves to make better decisions about the actual long-term strategy and future of the business?

Dave McKeown   14:39
Yeah, I think that's huge. And I think often what we see happen is particularly in founder-owned businesses, the vision for the organization rests solely with the founder-owner. And ultimately, that's not a scalable place to get to because at some point that founder-owner may not be as involved. They may not be able to continue to rally that cry around division. And so the more that teams can enter into a process where they're co-creating the vision for the world that they want to see, or for a mission that's higher than themselves that they are actually part of building that collectively with the leader, you're going to get much more buy into it. And alignment really

in any team organization comes down to connecting the actions that any employee takes on a given day to that overarching vision. And if more of those actions take us towards it, then we had a good day, if more of our actions and decisions take that away from achieving that vision or that mission, then we've struggled. And so that first step of actually getting your team, your people to really take part and have that ownership over your vision and your mission is a really good first step to ensuring that the actions that they take on a daily basis are going to bring us closer to achieving that.

Shye Gilad 15:57
Dude, that's really some great insight. And I can understand it and implement that. So I really appreciate some of the feedback there. One of the things also came across is the term "micro disciplines", and you got some great reviews on that. And I wondered if you could share that with our audience more.

Dave McKeown 16:17
Sure, happy to. So I started using the term leadership discipline a couple of years ago because I was getting fed up with the conversation about whether or not leadership skills are hard or soft skills, I think it's something that we often use as a cop-out, where we sell you know, leadership skills or soft skills, the hard to train the hardest SAS against the hard to practice the really hard to just implement, as, in the work that I was doing with leaders, I was thinking that that's just it's kind of nonsense, you can learn and practice to be a good leader in the same way that you can practice being a good cook, or a better guitar player or a different language. It's just all about understanding the opportunity that you have to practice and what your outcome is. And so I started talking about leadership disciplines in that context because the discipline we all understand is something that we can grow and master and develop. And I think that there are some super high-level leadership disciplines that our leaders today need things like being able to master our attention and have those difficult conversations and delegate effectively to their team. But actually, what I started to see on those really effective leaders were these much less obvious, almost ephemeral behaviors that came out just at the moment and you would only see it for a moment or two, it would just be a flash, and then it would be gone. And I started to realize that there were just sort of these micro disciplines that really great leaders put in place. And so just to touch on a couple of them, things like taking a pause. In situations, we have a tendency to fill the silence with our thoughts, our perspective. And so whether we just have a great idea that we want to share with our team, or we've just heard some negative news, or there's a new crisis that's come in, rather than just rushing to action immediately and trying to jump in and saving the day effective leaders just take a minute they take a beat, they take a pause, they let the silence do the heavy lifting to give the room in the space for other people in their team to share perspectives before they jump in with their own perspective. So taking a pause is a really helpful micro discipline. Another one just to touch on is the need to push for clarity. And so often, particularly in team situations, folks walk away with just a slightly different or slightly nuanced understanding of what was discussed what was agreed what the next actions were, and what I personally am responsible for. And really great leaders take that moment to just push for clarity so that everybody's really on the same page about what it is that we're going to do next and what your role is. And on doing that. And those two micro disciplines

combined with another four that I've seen, great leaders just start to implement them in a really intentional way, and get a really good positive output. I'd the back end.

Shye Gilad 18:57
Dave, I want to thank you for giving us this new language around leadership and how to think about how we show up every day. Help me understand, you know, got the book, Love the book. What should I do next? You know, where do you start when you're working with people? What are sort of the first steps that everyone listening right now can take to become a better leader tomorrow?

Dave McKeown   19:18
Well, if you've got the book, The good news is the penultimate chapter has a full 15-week process that you can implement that takes everything that we talked about in the book and put it into place. One of the goals that I had, whenever I wrote the book was I didn't want it to just be this overarching kind of philosophical perspective on leadership where everybody thought, Well, that was interesting, but what do I do with it? And equally, I didn't want it to be this overly turgid academic workbook. And so I had this quote that I'd written for myself at the beginning of it that said, between the philosophical and the practical lives progress, and so that penultimate chapter, really walks you through the 15 weeks to begin to put all of this in place. The first step in all of that, and what anybody can do right now, even if they don't have a book is to start to pay attention and be observant of when they personally get pulled into that cycle of mediocrity. So watch yourself throughout today or this week. And notice those times where something arises somebody bring something to you or something hits your email, or there's a phone call from a client, and just watch and notice your behavior, do you immediately jump into try to save the day? Or have you built a good process with your people that allows you to filter that work out into your team, and for it to come back in a way that's timely in that it's completed to the satisfaction that you would have that gives them the opportunity to grow and develop, just start to notice that and pay attention to it, see where it's problematic, and see where you might want to start to tweak or change?

Shye Gilad 20:47
Well, Dave, we want to thank you again, for the incredible advice today. I mean, this has just been such a thrill having you here. The book is "The Self-evolved Leader: Elevate Your Focus and Develop Your People in a World That Refuses to Slow Down". David McKeown, thank you.

Dave McKeown 21:02
Thank you, Shye. Thank you, Craig. Great to be here with you both.

Shye Gilad 21:05
Is there anything else you'd like to leave with our listeners?

Dave McKeown   21:08
You know, what I've been saying a lot recently is, control what you can control and don't worry about the rest. There's a lot going on in the world minute that's way outside our ability to control

it. And sometimes we get a little distracted by that. Focus on those things that you can make a real true difference to today, aim to get 1% better every day, and you'll start to be on your path to leadership excellence.

Craig Moen 21:29
Our guest today has been Dave McKeown, author of the new book, "The Self-Evolved Leader". You can learn more about Dave as well as find links to his book, a free guide entitled "Six secrets of effective strategic planning", and the Outfield Leadership site on our website at Business Owners Radio.com.

Announcer 21:51
Thank you for joining us on Business Owners Radio. We hope you enjoyed today's show. As always, you can read more about each episode along with links and offers in the show notes on our website, Business Owners Radio.com. We want to hear your feedback. Please leave comments on this show or suggestions for upcoming episodes, telling your fellow business owners about the show, and of course, we would love the stars and comments on iTunes. Until next time, keep taking care of business.