

Wynne Leon (00:04)

Welcome to how to share. A podcast that takes a deep dive into collaboration.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, I'm with IT director, John Hernandez. John and I have worked on a couple of projects together so I can personally attest to his incredibly collaborative leadership style. John knows how to balance giving people on this team leadership, agency, and backup when needed. In short, he's a very good coach for a strong team. John tells us how he landed on this leadership style and how it's worked as his team and responsibilities have grown.

We talk about how people in technology can sometimes be protective of their knowledge and not want to share. And we discuss how AI changes the game for so many people in technology and how to wrangle it as an asset, not a competitor.

I asked John about how he adapts his message for people who are less technical. He reminds us about the power of telling a story and finding key beats, regardless of the topic. This is a great episode about how leadership, openness and curiosity translate to an infectious passion for sharing and for team building. I know you'll love it.

Wynne Leon (01:52)

Hi John!

John Hernandez (01:53)

Hey, Wynne!

Wynne Leon (01:55)

So good to see you. It has. But you and I have worked on a couple IT projects over the years. Yes, we have. I found them so fun because of your approach. We've talked about the analogy of sharing is something like the plot of a sports movie. The coach gets hired to make the team win. And along the way, they realize that to win, they must work together. And to work together, they need to share. ~

John Hernandez (01:56)

Likewise, it's been a minute.

Wynne Leon (02:21)

Tell us how that coach analogy applies to your work as an IT director.

John Hernandez (02:26)

You know, ~ it's kind of a big motivating factor for me only because, you know, as being someone who spent the better part of 25 years being the sole IT person at some organizations, I've had to essentially, you know, create environments where I could take a vacation or be away for a few days. Right. And when I finally got the ability to actually build teams for myself, you for my organization that I was working for,

and have help, so to speak, in the department, it was pretty obvious to me. It's like, OK, well, they need to know what I know. Or at the very least, they need to know what I do, right? And to be able to speak to it. So from the very beginning of becoming an IT manager or systems administrator even, I just developed the habit of just sharing everything that I could. And my expectation was never

for them to know what I know or to be able to do what I do, but at the very least be aware of it, right? And so that was kind of like the start of it, you know? And it didn't ever, course it was evolved, you know, throughout the years now that I'm managing a larger team, you know, when I came on board with Leisure Care, everything was kind of siloed off. You you had these individual roles, you know, within the IT department and they just had their own kind of assigned.

things that they did and they didn't branch out into any of the other roles. So you had like your systems admin who just worked on the servers and just worked on the portals, the web portals. And then you had your help desk technicians who just answered tickets, right? And they escalated about 80 % of whatever they got, because they didn't know how to do anything or they didn't have access to certain tools. And of course, as soon as I came on board, I was like, no, this is all going away. Everybody gets access to everything.

Everybody's gonna have to be able to do server troubleshooting, from server troubleshooting to desktop troubleshooting to email help, to all of it, right? And so over the span of the last five years, that's essentially what we've done. And now we've got a team of people that they kind of not so much siloed themselves off, but they've gravitated towards specific technologies that they've really enjoyed working with. So I have a SharePoint SME, have an Exchange SME, I have...

and they've kind of all grown into these individual roles. And also from like an expansive progression, like my thought process is these people that are working underneath me, eventually they're gonna move on. They're gonna try to get that systems administrator level position or a network admin position or even an IT manager or information systems management role. so allowing them to play in this giant playground that we have, which is IT,

I help them kind of develop these skills and develop passions for the work, right? Because at the end of the day, I'm very passionate about the stuff that I do. I'm very passionate about the tools that I like to use. So I've said to a lot of people, I'll sit down for two hours and talk to you about SharePoint and Teams and OneDrive. Which we've done, right? We've done.

Wynne Leon (05:39)

We've done that. I'm with you all the way. I love there's three things that you said there that are so key. First is sharing enables you to get help, especially if you are a one person team.

You're like, okay, I'm going to have to tell people what I do. I mean, that's so basic, but it's so true, right? The second thing is that mentorship, mentoring people.

to that next level and enabling them to both specialize and still be a part of the team.

John Hernandez (06:12)

Yep, exactly, exactly. And those are, and it's funny because like those two elements came very, very organically once I developed the ideology of like, nope, we're just gonna share everything, right? We're not going to keep people in the dark. And that's one of the things that I've actually noticed has come to develop quite a bit of respect and admiration within my team is that they know I'm an open book, that if they have a question about something and if I can answer it,

I'm going to give them the answer, right? They're, of course, caveats to that, right? Being the director of a department within an organization. And so I have to temper that. But on the same token, they know that if I can tell them, I will, right? They need to take ~ the steps. If they want to know, they know that they can just come talk to me. And in some cases, it doesn't happen. I have some members of my team that they just want to do the work, which is great.

You know, but in other cases, there are other members who really come to appreciate the fact that they can come to me for anything, right? And that I will share with them. And I've even done some training sessions, right? Where I've brought people, you know, within my department, you know, on board and got them exposed to, you know, things. One of the things we're working on right now is a huge data migration from our data centers, you know, and I've got two members of my team, you know, that are just kind of spearheading that for me only because I said, hey, we're going to do this. You want in? And they're like, yeah, that'd be awesome. It's like, okay, here we go.

Wynne Leon (07:33)

You know, that leads to the third point, which is the passion. mean, just people get excited. You know, that flow of energy, it just really builds when you have that openness, right?

John Hernandez (07:48)

It's funny, one time recently, I'd say in the last six months, I had an employee during an annual review process tell me that she felt stagnant in her position, which is, think, probably one of the worst things you can say to a guy like me, because I'm like, ooh, careful what you wish for. Because I've got stuff that I could give you to do. It's funny, because that one conversation

like all these months later, I remember having a conversation with her not too long ago. And she was just like, she was like, you're gonna have to fire me. I'm never leaving you. The fact that you took that one statement and gave me all of this awesome work to do, you

know, and she's become kind of like our SharePoint, you know, know, SME, you know, I mean, she'll be the first to say, I don't know as much as you do. I'm like, don't know, you've done some pretty cool stuff.

~ But she's just said like it's just so awesome that that you that you gave me this opportunity and all I had to do was ask for it Yeah, I'm like, well, yeah, come on

Wynne Leon (08:50)

Right. Well, there's another analogy that fits here that I think works for you, which is sort of as a band because you play in a band, and it seems like what you're doing also within your team is getting them all. ~

John Hernandez (09:05)

Right.

Collaborating, right? Cooperating together, right? Collaborating. 100 % collaboration.

Wynne Leon (09:12)

making music you you have that you have a rhythm you have a beat that you have to meet but everybody gets to play their own instrument

John Hernandez (09:19)

Exactly. Exactly. There's an ebb and a flow, know, it doesn't work all the time, but, that that's where I come in, you know, because I can kind of like look at look at situations and, if somebody is kind of floundering, you know, I can step in and go, Hey, is this too much for you? Is this, know, need help? You know, should I bring somebody else in? Should I hand it to somebody else? You know, you know, and the goal is to kind of take ego out of the picture, right? You it's not, it's not, you know, I'm not going to look bad at you, look down at you if, if,

You've bitten off more than you can chew, because trust me, I've been in this industry almost 30 years. I have totally bitten off more than I can chew, way more times than I can count, you know?

Wynne Leon (09:56)

I can list that too. What's interesting about being in the technology industry is that oftentimes technology people hoard their knowledge because they think this is what's going to set me apart or sometimes, and I'll totally cop to this one too, if I say too much, I'm going to reveal how much I don't know because technology changes so fast. It's that openness that you're talking about really helps to change both of those.

John Hernandez (10:25)

us. And to be honest, like I've had members of my team who have since moved on that did kind of share that ideology. it was like almost ingrained in them that they had to make

things complicated so that only they could do it, only they could work on it. Right. Or they, ~ they, they, they kind of rifled through topics in an effort to kind of get people to, you know, get people's eyes to roll into the back of their head and not understand what they're talking about. Right. Whereas for me,

You know, I pride myself in being able to explain very highly complicated things to a casual, to a layman, you someone who's not in the IT industry, you know, I'll break it down into analogy for you if you need me to, you know, so that you can understand what it is that I'm talking about, you know, especially when it comes to elements like cybersecurity, you know, like I need the CEO of a company to know what could happen if we don't buy this particular product or we don't deploy this particular solution, you know.

and what those ramifications could be. And it's money, know, and it's time, it's resources, that are on the table, if we don't do that work. But from back to an employee perspective, you know, I have had individuals that have kind of railed against that ideology of like, you know, we're a team, we all need to work together and we all should be able to support each other, right? You know, less so myself and I'll be the first one to admit like, you know, I'm not so much expecting

other members of my team to be able to do all of the administrative tasks that I do. ~ And oddly enough, since I've been kind of, you know, espousing this culture within my department, the members of my team now have actually stepped up and said, hey, you need to take time off. What do we need to learn how to do so that you can take time off? I'm like, okay, all right, cool. I get it.

Wynne Leon (12:08)

Full circle brings us back to your first point, which is that you needed to tell other people what you did so that you could get help.

John Hernandez (12:15)

And so, yeah, it's interesting when you say that because I do believe that there is that whole fear of job security, right, within our industry, you know, in IT. And I've seen it firsthand.

Wynne Leon (12:26)

And AI is going to change that though. mean, back in the day when we learned and we were sys admins we'd go buy a book. Yep. Right. But now, you know, all the, a lot of the know how, a lot of the problem solving, I mean, not just AI, but just the internet, can search up a problem to an error message, a problem code, all that stuff.

John Hernandez (12:46)

All the time. My Google foo is strong.

Wynne Leon (12:48)

And then that makes what we bring to it is that ability to synthesize knowledge, that ability to forecast what's going to happen. It's all those things that come from sharing, right? ~ That openness, that sharing of knowledge helps us do that human work much better.

John Hernandez (13:08)

Exactly. We leverage AI currently in a couple of different avenues. We are ~ currently toying around with Copilot because we're a Microsoft shop. ~ I use it to build documentation, to build policies and procedures. We have AI baked into our remote management suite for troubleshooting tickets and that stuff. I don't know if it gets leveraged a whole lot, but it's ~ I know that there's a couple of members of my team that use it to build PowerShell scripts to automate things.

Yeah, it's a part of our toolbox.

Wynne Leon (13:40)

Well, and for big data crunching, cybersecurity and the security aspect of it really can make a difference because

John Hernandez (13:48)

We

actually just pulled the trigger ~ on a penetration testing tool that leverages AI.

Wynne Leon (13:54)

Right.

Because it can do those automated tasks, but that frees us up to the thing that to the sort of circling back to what you're saying, which is the way that you lead your team allows for that openness and growth. We don't have to hang on to the things that we know to differentiate us because

John Hernandez (14:14)

It's very much a paradigm shift for sure. And it's continuing to happen. I think the next five to 10 years is gonna really kind of reveal what our role in the industry is gonna look like once AI has really kind of taken over a lot of these elements. And my hope is that it just frees us up to be able to be more collaborative and more engaging with each other. cause I mean, the human element is never gonna go away, right? There isn't an AI right now that can do what I do or even another member of my team.

Right. Will there ever be one? Maybe. But how good would it be, you know, in a face to face interaction with like, you know, retiree, know, someone like one of our residents, you know, or another human being, right? Yeah. You know, and that's that those are all questions that I think, you know, that's that's a few years down the road.

Wynne Leon (15:02)

Yeah, that's true. But I think it gets to another point, you you and I joke about how we can geek out about this technology. And we have. But when you're talking to someone who isn't a technology person, and we have to explain that as you saying, whether it's the, you know, talking to a CEO about the complexity of the security, or talking to a resident or caregiver about how to take advantage of it.

~ There's a selection of audience that you do to change your message and what you share.

because otherwise we can flood people with too much information.

John Hernandez (15:46)

Yeah, you know, and it's funny because one of the things that you have to develop early on, especially if you're going to be in this industry, right, is the ability to detect when you've lost them. When you're starting to say things, you know, it's like, I mean, I can speak in three-letter acronyms all day long, who's going to understand that? You will understand that. Others not so much, And so, you know, and there are varying degrees, right?

Wynne Leon (15:58)

Yeah, right.

Yep.

John Hernandez (16:15)

like to the extent of telling a story that actually explains what is really going on and what gives them the key beats of what they need to just using one acronym and then explaining what that acronym is and how that impacts the topic of conversation, right? So that they're at least kind of brought up to speed so that they're maybe learning something while you're kind of discussing this particular topic with them.

all the way to just spending an hour getting them 100 % up to speed with everything that's going on, with all of the individual elements, And showing them via like a PowerPoint presentation or like a whiteboard. I used to whiteboard all the time when I was working for digital streaming and aggregating companies when I was explaining RESTful APIs to the CEO, right? And how they funneled data or funneled information back into our data center, that kind of stuff.

you know, being able to like gauge the room, right, and then speak to that level, you know, is crucial. And I don't think that's something that can really be taught, you know, you have to be able to see it at their level, but also see it at yours and kind of meet them somewhere in middle, or maybe at their level.

Wynne Leon (17:31)

There's a couple of things that you said there that are so interesting because they're sort of kind of key to there, which is, you know, the key beats, you know, and telling a story because it doesn't matter what kind of information that you're sharing, right? You're you're figuring out what those things are and using that telling that story to share the passion.

Right. Because story is how we share passion ~ with all.

John Hernandez (17:52)

Right.

I call it the pitch, right? Like I'm selling something, you know, even though I'm not really selling it. I'm trying to get them to buy into it, you know? And that's kind of how I approach it, right? Because at the end of the day, what I want is for everybody else to be as passionate about it as I am. I want that passion to be infectious. ~ And the only way that I've seen to do it is to get them excited about it, you know?

Wynne Leon (18:23)

Right, right. Well, it's funny because we had a podcast with Peter Samuelson, who is a filmmaker he made

Revenge of the Nerds, ~ okay. of Pink Panther, Arlington Way, anyway. But he talked about pitching scripts to somebody who's, you know, as he said, highly trained in the skill of saying no. And it was like he said, the way that you have to do it is to tell that story. If you want to open somebody else's heart and you you're to have to find that story, figure out how to pitch it. And then you can

you know, pass on that vision. So whether we're talking about films or technology, it's the same.

John Hernandez (19:06)

I have a regular saying to my team, hearts and minds. That's how we win it.

Wynne Leon (19:09)

~

Yeah. there any ~ hearts and minds that you've found you can't crack open?

John Hernandez (19:22)

To date, there have been a couple, you know, that just... And it wasn't so much that I didn't win them over as much as it is that they just were utterly overwhelmed and there was nothing that I could do to really make them feel better about it, you know. They understood where I was coming from. They understood the need or the reason, right? But it was just beyond them, you know? And I think it's...



It's not so much even a generational thing because this particular individual that I'm thinking about was my age, right? He just never was exposed to the level of technology that I, you know, engorge myself in on a daily basis. so, and it's funny because it was actually about something that I felt was pretty important, which is like a password management, you know, which I know you've done a podcast on, right? And it was very fascinating for me to like watch that podcast and think about it. like, man.

Wynne Leon (20:02)

You

John Hernandez (20:19)

I totally get some of those elements. I personally have seen how not having it can have an impact. And then this individual, I think he eventually ended up just getting better about how he generated his own passwords, made them more complicated, more complex. He was still writing them down in a little notepad, right?

Wynne Leon (20:46)

Right.

John Hernandez (20:47)

It's like, okay, man, you know, just don't share that with anybody. Keep it in a safe, keep it in a locked drawer at your desk. Just don't stick it on a sticky notepad and stick it to your monitor. But yeah, so there are elements like that, right? Like now explaining high level things like, say for instance, a penetration testing tool. When I go to a C level or an executive who knows nothing about IT, I just don't look. This is a tool that we use to test to find out what we don't know.

Wynne Leon (20:57)

I'm

John Hernandez (21:17)

Because at the end of the day, it's very much less important what I know and it's more important about what I don't know. And how do I fill those gaps? And I tell them, look, we have all of these other tools, we have all of these other things that we've implemented that are getting us to a certain level. But we don't know what's waiting around the corner and how do we prevent that or how do we do the best we can to be prepared for those kinds of...

zero day events as they call them. even just a conversation like that is enough to kind of get them engaged and get them interested. it's like, so what does this tool do exactly? And then we can kind of drill down and have those elements. But yeah, there've been others that have just like, no, this is just not for me. I don't understand. If you say we need to do it,

we'll pay for it. And I've literally had that said to me before. If I convey enough passion and enough...

drive and enough reasoning to tell them, this is what we need to do. Nine times out of 10, get the okay. And they're just like, I'm gonna trust you. I'm gonna defer to you. You're my expert. So you tell me what it is that we need. It's like, okay, I can do this.

Wynne Leon (22:28)

And I get that about the technology, but what I love about what you've shared is sort of fundamental to sharing altogether. mean, your passion comes through, your openness comes through, your curiosity comes through. I mean, those are the things when we share that just are multiplied. Infectious. So good. Well, thank you so much for sharing your infectious enthusiasm and for sharing. My pleasure.

John Hernandez (22:47)

It can be infectious.

Wynne Leon (22:57)

With us. Thank you, John. Thank you.

Thank you for listening. Our music was written for us by the incredible duo of Jack Canfora and Rob Koenig. For show notes and more great inspiration see [avitiva.com](http://avitiva.com)

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