

Wynne Leon (00:02)

What does it take to create lift in our work, our leadership, and in our lives? In this episode of The Life of Try, I'm talking with Bruce Dorey, a mechanical engineer, coach, and author of Lift and a Whole New Way to Work. Bruce brings an engineer's eye and a storyteller's heart to big questions about how we learn, how we lead, and how we pass along the hard-won wisdom that helps the next person rise.

Together we explore the beauty of craftsmanship, the importance of mentorship, and why business loses something essential when it stops making room for people to teach, practice, and grow together.

Bruce also shares how tools like AI, AR, and VR can help us reset find flow, capture what we're learning, and keep honing our craft in a rapidly changing world. This is a conversation about leadership, learning, awe, and the very human act of helping one another get better. And maybe that's where lift really begins.

Not inside any one of us, but in the powerful intersection between who we are and what we're practicing and the people who help us rise.

Wynne Leon (01:20)

Hi Bruce!

Bruce Dorey (01:22)

Hello there.

Wynne Leon (01:23)

It's so good to talk to you. You are a mechanical engineer by education and trade. And I'm wondering, is that why you are able to create frameworks from your books? You know, first for passing down knowledge in Lift and then for maximizing productivity and finding flow in A Whole New Way To Work.

Bruce Dorey (01:42)

You know, I think so. Lift, the first book is a mechanical engineering metaphor. You know, this idea of lift, I always thought that was the coolest thing. you're an engineer, so you get this, right? There's four natural forces on the planet. Only four. gravity, electromagnetism, and then the two small forces of atoms.

And then there's lift, which is like a really powerful force used every day all over the world. And and it pretty well misunderstood. But

what the idea I had with lift was that lift doesn't exist inside of a wing. Like there's no lift in a wing. the lift

Wynne Leon (02:19)

Mm-hmm.

Bruce Dorey (02:20)

exists when a wing encounters the wind the air, the atmosphere. And

Wynne Leon (02:24)

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Bruce Dorey (02:27)

I use the metaphor of lift and leadership. That leadership doesn't exist in somebody's head any more than lift exists in a wing. Leadership exists

Wynne Leon (02:32)

Mm-hmm. Right.

Bruce Dorey (02:35)

at the intersection of a person and an environment and you you know, each of them takes a certain amount of tweaking to get right. And you gotta keep getting it right.

Wynne Leon (02:47)

Right, right, right. And so when you say lift is used all over the world, you're talking about really the miracle of of flight and airplanes, right, yeah. And I yeah. Yes

Bruce Dorey (02:55)

Airplanes, flight, sailing, all that stuff.

Wynne Leon (02:59)

right, right. I love how you talk about that intersection being necessary to create the the lift. Because you were identifying the problem that

we're not passing down our our knowledge in business from one generation to the next.

Bruce Dorey (03:17)

And I work for a big company. I work for a Fortune one hundred company. And I remember this was before I got into coaching and all that stuff. So this was sort of early in my career. And I remember somebody talking to me about mentoring, and they were they were the mentor. And I said, Well, what's mentor? Like, what do you guys do? And he said, it's kinda like I take somebody to lunch,

I have to do it once a month. So I take them to lunch. Then

I walk them around the building a couple of times and then I'm done. I check the box. and I thought, I did a lot of sports growing up and there's a lot of mentoring in sports I played a

lot of tennis particularly, and there's a lot of mentoring in that. I wasn't that great, but I tried hard. And

really good mentoring is really, really necessary. And we don't do it in business. Not anymore. And I blame Frederick Winslow Taylor. So well, Fred good

Wynne Leon (04:16)

Say tell me tell me why you blame Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Bruce Dorey (04:21)

old Fred. He was he was Fred Taylor before he created the time and motion studies stuff that he did. And he was like the first

management consultant and he basically helped Henry Ford come up with this brilliant idea that said, you want to break down all business into the smallest component, which requires no skill, no talent, and the lowest cost. And that way you can interchange people. but that idea,

went around the idea of craftsmanship, which is the the essence of one of the things I really love to talk about and and think about that the idea of this master to the journeyman, journeyman to the apprentice model, it's just so ingrained in who we are. It was until maybe the 20th century. And then in the 1900s, we

got away from that. And certainly you know, in the nineteen forties and fifties and sixties, it was gone. It was, you know, the era of the corporation and General Mills, General Food, General Electric, General Everything,

Wynne Leon (05:23)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (05:24)

and they didn't do anything in particular. They just did everything and bought up conglomerates and it just got rid of what I thought was, I still think is like the most beautiful

structure which is as I said this this master to the apprentice model not just

Wynne Leon (05:39)

yeah.

Bruce Dorey (05:40)

not just for the trade but for

Wynne Leon (05:42)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (05:42)

developing as a person understanding responsibility and getting along with people and all that stuff. That that that to me

Wynne Leon (05:45)

Mm-hmm. Well, and negoti

Yeah, and you made a great point about negotiations, right? it's such a complex interaction. you I mean you had so many great examples, but it's funny I was thinking about it yesterday 'cause I was staining a table with my kids and so I got the table ready and I got the brushes out and

I was teaching them, how to do the brush strokes and how not to make drips and and I was thinking about we just do this over and over again. It's part of being human to pass our knowledge on, and I'm not a master stainer by any chance, but you know, we do that again and again and when we're robbed of it within our business environments, i it it shortchanges us on both sides.

Bruce Dorey (06:32)

one hundred percent. One hundred percent. because kids learn, by watching you and then they mimic you. And it's all the little things like how do you relate to people that aren't catching on as fast? How do you relate to people that are not paying attention? How do you relate to people who are doing really well? And all of that stuff to me is

like central to being human. But I will say, and and I know you've traveled a lot too, I've had the luck the good fortune of spending time in Europe. So I spent five years in France and I'm by no means an artist, but I love to look at it. I love to go to museums and stuff. And

every one of them had a guild that they were part of.

you take Rodin, for example. I lived in Paris, about a block and a half from where Rodin's now gallery is. It's just a house, it's a beautiful house. But he didn't do a lot of his stuff. He basically had this team of people that he coached essentially. And they, you

Wynne Leon (07:30)

No. No.

Bruce Dorey (07:32)

know, it was casting and you know, he did the initial

structure of it,

Wynne Leon (07:36)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (07:36)
but then they poured the brass in it and they crafted this and he really trained like hundreds of people to do this. and Da Vinci's the same way, all the greats the Impressionists, not as much, but still quite a bit. They didn't do

Wynne Leon (07:50)
Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (07:50)
any of the basic stuff. You know, they taught people to do the brushes, to clean them, to do all that stuff.

Wynne Leon (07:56)
Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (07:57)
And you had to do all that stuff before you before you painted.

Wynne Leon (08:02)
Wow, that's amazing. Well, I love that that you offer some hope in Lift 'cause you say, and I'll quote from it, Richards Florida's research offers us some hope. He points out that the creative class has grown from just twelve percent in the population of the eighteen hundreds to thirty two point six percent in two in two thousand and twelve. And I and I love that because I I love that you're talking about that creative class and and

Say more about

Bruce Dorey (08:32)
Yeah. The gig economy. I was talking about this yesterday to to somebody that the revival of the gig economy is a good thing. people get freedom from, the office, that whole kind of structure of not

Wynne Leon (08:45)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (08:46)
working when you work. You know, having jobs at general something where you go to work and you don't go to work and you hate working and work is about just but

you actually do something you enjoy doing and then you learn how and why it's important to kind of get better and better at it. And then you learn how to do that. And I and for me,

that whole gig economy has taught us really like we've really returned to something that I think is important, which is the craftsman

Wynne Leon (09:18)

Mm-hmm.

Bruce Dorey (09:19)

model. And

And that that's where my next book's coming in, right? The the idea of the digital bell where using AI now, so AI is a really great master in some ways. I don't mean it in this Orwellian way. I mean it in that you can have it help you learn and retain knowledge without a big staff.

And without having to be part of a guild or anything, 'cause getting into a guild is not easy and it's not as prevalent as it was. And you can use AI to help you remember stuff and help you remember to do stuff and remind you of what worked and remind you of what you did in the past in your craft that that was working.

Wynne Leon (10:04)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So it sort of helps you specialize, gives you that access to the information that you need to keep upping your game. Is that am I

Bruce Dorey (10:16)

Yeah. You know, the idea is that you

you're learning stuff and kind of like tribal knowledge. when I do this, this really works. But you forget it and unless you have a way of capturing it, and you can capture it with notebooks and stuff like that, or that that's what they used to do. But now you can capture it with audio recording,

And have AI help you capture it too. And where I use AI and where I think AI is really, really useful is telling you how you did in your day. And getting away from the craft, you get it if you're in a meeting, for example, those meeting transcripts are pretty cool. Like I think AI to evaluate how you did versus what you're committed to.

Like if you say, you know, I wanna be a little more outspoken in this meeting and I wanna not back down when John pushes me and on something.

Wynne Leon (11:16)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (11:16)

I wanna, you know, say my piece or I wanna talk about this because I think it's really important and you don't do it, AI can help you get there, you know, say, Hey, you really sidestep this and

you violated your seventy thirty talk ratio, which you said you were gonna which you said

Wynne Leon (11:31)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (11:32)
you're gonna do. and and I think that is a way of using it without a big team, without a big staff, which is really hard these days, to kind of help you get ahead, make progress. Make progress. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (11:45)
Keep keep honing your craft. Yeah.

Well and you talk a lot about technology in A Whole New Way to Work. I mean you I'm gonna quote from your book A Whole New Way to Work. You write, The true potential of AR

which is augmented reality. And VR, virtual reality, isn't rooted in their ability to create entirely new worlds, but in their power to transform how we perceive and engage with the world we already inhabit.

Which is you know,

Bruce Dorey (12:17)
Yes.

Wynne Leon (12:17)
I haven't used a lot of AR or VR, so you're gonna have to tell me more about how how it helps us transform and find flow and

Bruce Dorey (12:24)
I don't know if you can see these. These

Wynne Leon (12:26)
Uh-huh.

Bruce Dorey (12:27)
are my these are my quest pro twos. I use

Wynne Leon (12:31)
Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (12:31)

them every day. so for me, it helps me relax, number one. And so I like to take breaks I'm trying really hard not to multitask in life, and I'm trying to really like

Then I'm gonna work really good, hard for 45 minutes. Then I'm gonna take a break and I'm gonna take a 20 minute break and I do a VR break. And you can go into a meadow, for example, or you can climb a mountain. I don't yeah, you climb mountains. I don't climb mountains. So or

Wynne Leon (13:06)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (13:07)

you could for me, I know this sounds crazy, but I like to there's a at there's a thing there where you go in the space station that's circling the earth.

And you just can sit there for 20 minutes

Wynne Leon (13:17)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (13:18)

and circle the earth and you go over the different continents and it's just so relaxing and so quiet. And I just find that it when I come back, when I take them off and I get back to work, I am refreshed and I am more, you know, present to kind of what's going on.

Wynne Leon (13:39)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (13:41)

that that's one of the ways I use it.

I think the other way

I'm fortunate because I live on a lake in northern Ontario in Canada right now for part of the year. So I can go outside and there are trees and but a lot of the year I live in Texas Dallas and there's not a lot of trees where I live. And

I can put on the headset and I can go into a treed environment, hang around, walk around, and get the advantages of the you know, it's called biophilia. And there's good,

Wynne Leon (14:15)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (14:15)

really good evidence that says that makes you feel better. it and it actually shoots off, neurotransmitters and all that stuff. And I just feel better and I feel more

Wynne Leon (14:25)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (14:26)

like somebody that

I wanna be around other people and I wanna talk to people and

Wynne Leon (14:30)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (14:30)

I'm just more myself and I'm not as, kind of angry with everything.

Wynne Leon (14:35)

Yeah. Well, you know, and you talk about a lot of science in your book and and one of the things that you mentioned specifically related to that that I loved was Dacher Keltner's work on the power of awe.

Bruce Dorey (14:46)

Yeah. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (14:48)

And and

how you can bring that in.

Bruce Dorey (14:51)

Yeah, that that is remarkable because that's a that's a such an underused thing. I don't mean to be trite, but what is it about a sunset that's so moving to many of in its own way, when you sit there and you get a chance to really hang out in a beautiful sunset or

You know, or a garden or whatever that might be, your baby looking at the into the eyes of your child, your your newborn, or you know, whatever that is that inspires eyes. So such a powerful

thing in life. I don't know what you call it really. It

Wynne Leon (15:27)

Hm. Well

it yeah, I mean it we talked about nature. I mean we talk about that sort of reset, right? That sense of you're participating in something bigger than yourself, maybe.

Bruce Dorey (15:41)

Right, right. I wish I had a better way of saying it, other than reset is a great way to say it or reframing it so that you get out of the day to day

Wynne Leon (15:54)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (15:55)

morass and you can

That's another reason I like it. I just realized it. That's another reason I love that the meta app where you're circling the globe and in this

spaceship and you realize you're just one of little little guys down there. And there's a million there's billions of us. And my

Wynne Leon (16:13)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (16:14)

problems aren't so big, you know. They are my

Wynne Leon (16:17)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (16:17)

problems, but there's a lot of people and my problems

Wynne Leon (16:21)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (16:21)

aren't, you know, they're just

tiny and I'm just a tiny little guy on this planet. And I

Wynne Leon (16:27)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (16:27)

don't know. It it again, it just kinda pulls me out of the the morass, out of the mud.

Wynne Leon (16:33)

Yeah.

Well and you write in your book. thirdly, there's an area of creativity, play, and collaboration with AR and VR that I call connection. Here you leverage your creative, collaborative, and leadership strengths and gain motivation from the experiences of mastery, autonomy, and connection evoked in this area.

Bruce Dorey (16:56)

Yeah. And what I'm talking about is playing games.

Wynne Leon (16:59)

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (17:00)

Playing video games are awesome. I'm no master of them, but you can really get lost in some of these games.

the technology when you go in these things are just remarkable how you just really get immersed in the environment and you can spend two hours in there and you improve your level and you get better at something And it's not about shooting and killing. It's about, you know,

Wynne Leon (17:23)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (17:23)

getting through this and getting out over this maze or getting figuring out how to get through this passageway. And you just feel good at, you know, it's a it's that experience of getting better at something, which is really cool.

Wynne Leon (17:36)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. And you talk about AR and VR pushing pushing our boundaries, helping us change and transform, truly, right? Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (17:45)

Yeah.

You know, I don't think I don't think T V was all that different or radio was all that different. I mean, people used to say bad things about radio, you know, that it was unnatural

Wynne Leon (17:57)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (17:58)
and it's you know but you could make make the case for all kinds of new technology. But this is this is a new technology in my opinion that's just a step function above everything because you can

Interact with it. It's not a lean back in your chair, turn off your mind, watch TV. It's not a veg thing. You gotta, lean into these games. You gotta learn. You gotta think, strategize, plan.

Wynne Leon (18:25)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (18:26)
and it really evokes this experience of getting better at something. Like you can really achieve something. There's a lot of books written about this by very smart people.

Wynne Leon (18:38)
Yeah, well, including you, I would say. And

Bruce Dorey (18:40)
Yeah, but

Wynne Leon (18:41)
and you are a really good storyteller. You introduce the behavioral resource research both in Lift, which, talks about passing on, our metis, if am I saying that right? Right? And and and

Bruce Dorey (18:51)
Yeah, metis, metis, yeah.

Wynne Leon (18:53)
and honing our craft and going back to that craftsman model.

And passing that on from generation to generation as as well as a whole new way to work. you interweave your own personal story, but in Lift you introduced the story of Miracle on the Hudson, which was

Bruce Dorey (19:09)
Yeah.

Wynne Leon (19:10)
flight fifteen forty nine, am I right? Sully's Sully

Bruce Dorey (19:12)
I think so, yeah, yeah. Sully. Yeah.

Wynne Leon (19:15)
landing in the Hudson River. And in A Whole New Way To Work, you interweave

a character that's the amalgamation of Alex Lowe and Alex Honnold into your story. tell me why you chose stories to help tell these

Bruce Dorey (19:30)
Sure. Well I start the book Lift with somet to me is a really important thing that a as a pilot when you hand over control you say it's your airplane. So that's how I start the whole thing. It's your airplane. And that really that sort of metaphorically is what Sully is doing to the second in command.

So the SIC sits there and he sits there for hours and hours and hours just watching the pilot, that second in command is kind of this idea of passing the craft. And the craft is landing an airplane when the computer says it ain't gonna work, and everybody

Wynne Leon (20:15)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (20:16)
says, like, he's gonna die,

and he makes it

there's all these people who after the fact that they say all these things that he just got lucky and this guy did something really, really remarkable that just took a long time to learn. Like you had to really,

Wynne Leon (20:32)
Right.

Bruce Dorey (20:32)
you had to do things that were really counter to

what a maybe a young pilot would think. Like he had to sort of like put the nose down and get some acceleration so that he could lift the nose back up again. And a lot of really

profound things that experience teaches you. You know, I were talking about earlier, when you're gripped in the fear of climbing a mountain

crashing in an airplane, your flight or flight takes over if you if you don't have the experience to say, okay, take a deep breath, like Alex Honnold has to do every once in a while, right? Take a deep breath.

Wynne Leon (21:06)

Yeah, right.

Bruce Dorey (21:07)

Okay, just the breathing exercises or whatever that is. You just have to learn to do that. I thought Honnold and Alex Lowe

God blessed his soul was just an

these are people who in my opinion, they don't talk about being masters. They just go out and do it

they're not posting pictures of themselves.

They're just up there doing it because lived in a van and did

Wynne Leon (21:34)

Uh-huh.

Bruce Dorey (21:34)

what he did because he loved to do it.

He really didn't care if he became a superstar, which he's a big star now. You know, he gets

Wynne Leon (21:39)

Yeah, right.

Bruce Dorey (21:41)

millions of dollars just to show up at events and stuff like that. He didn't want any of that necessarily. It just he just wanted to climb. And it and he still does. That's if you hear him talk, he's like, man, I just want to find good mountains.

Wynne Leon (21:53)

Yeah. Well what I love about both those stories, both the pilot world where there is a convention for passing on that knowledge. For, both honing your craft and passing it on.

Bruce Dorey (22:03)

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (22:04)

But also I know very well in the climbing world, climbers pass on their knowledge to other climbers, whether it's a guide to a client or you can see this in Free Solo with Alex Honnold,

climbing with Tommy Caldwell. They do it over and over again, they just pass on that knowledge of, well, you know, you could do the nose this way or you could do it that way, but there's a huge culture of sharing that experience. Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (22:27)

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. It's

exactly, exactly what I'm talking about. And that experience, so again, you know, it's stretching the metaphor, perhaps, but

Wynne Leon (22:38)

Yeah.

Bruce Dorey (22:38)

it lifts up the other person. They feel

Wynne Leon (22:40)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (22:41)

better, you know, they feel like it's possible and they feel like what was really hard

a really good coach will tell you the truth and say, Well, I'm scared too, you know, but here's

Wynne Leon (22:50)

Yeah. Okay.

Bruce Dorey (22:52)

what you gotta do or here's part of being a great mentor is creating

Path that's easier for the next generation, not harder

Wynne Leon (23:00)

Right.

Bruce Dorey (23:01)

and and more possible.

Wynne Leon (23:02)

Right. you've given us so many ideas about how to lift others, how to use technology to to break through the the chains of our routines and pass on that knowledge and hone our craft. So thank you so much, Bruce. I really appreciate you coming on and talking about your books.

Bruce Dorey (23:22)

My pleasure. Thank you very much for having me, Wynn.

Wynne Leon (23:27)

Thank you for listening to this conversation with Bruce Dorey. I love the way Bruce helps us see that lift doesn't happen in isolation. It happens in the meeting place between who we are, the environments we move through, the tools we use, and the people who take the time to teach us what they've learned along the way. If this episode has you thinking about your own craft,

How you learn, how you reset, and how you keep growing, I hope you'll take one small idea from Bruce and try it this week. Maybe it's creating space for awe. Maybe it's using technology more intentionally. Maybe it's passing along a bit of hard-won wisdom to someone who could use a little lift.

And if you'd like to keep exploring how we recover our energy and create more sustainable growth,

I recommend listening to my Life of Try episode with Dr. Mike Rucker: How to Overcome Burnout and Build an Upward Spiral of Growth, Fun, and Resilience. In that conversation, Mike shares why fun, connection, and renewal and restorative practices aren't distractions for growth. They can be essential parts of building resilience and moving forward with more creativity and joy.

As always, thanks for being here on The Life of Try, a place for stories, conversations, and reminders that growth often begins with one simple choice to try. Until next time, keep noticing what gives you lift, keep practicing what matters, and keep trying.