

Forge Podcast with Mark Heasman.MP3

Peter Wooding: [00:00:12] Welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast where we're joined this week by Mark Heasman. Mark has led many organisations over a 20 year career in the charity sector and currently leads Christian Camping International.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:25] So today on the Forge Leadership podcast I'm joined by Mark Heasman. Mark is currently the Chief Executive of Ormiston Children and families and Mark and I have known one another for a while so it's great to be here in your offices in Ipswich. Tell us a little bit about yourself and the role that you are currently doing.

Mark Heasman: [00:00:42] Well it's good to meet up again Simon. It's been a while and as you say we've gone in and out of different relationships in work and outside of work over the last few years. It's been great. My current role is the CEO of Ormiston families I've been for the last five years and this assignment is actually coming to an end in the next month or so. So Ormiston is a children's charity that's working with disadvantaged kids troubled families across east of England. We've got about 250 employees and about 3 or 400 volunteers so a nice size organisation that sort of reaching out into the local area. I've been here for five years prior to that was the CEO at Rock UK one of the Christian Outdoor centre groups in the UK and working providing outdoor education in a Christian environment to young people across the UK.

Simon Barrington: [00:01:32] So you have always known that you're a leader.

Mark Heasman: [00:01:34] I remember when I first left university and went into my first role as a graduate trainee at Royal Mail and you're very sort of open to new stuff then and was being taken through the various graduate training programmes and at one of those was when we were talking about leadership and we got into the whole debate around are leaders born or made and so on. I remember someone making the point well all leaders are born because they wouldn't be here otherwise. But actually they are made as well. And I found those early stages of my career really important in terms of defining what leadership was. So that was a big organisation with big structure and big processes in place to develop leaders. But actually as I've gone through in my career I've discovered that leadership is a very personal thing and we bring our own personality and our own experiences to the fore in actually being a personal leader rather than something out of a textbook. When I've seen leaders try and learn leadership and then apply it it comes across very false. And I think in my experience leadership has been very much something that I have tried to project my own personality and way of doing it rather than copy you or Billy Graham or somebody else in terms of their leadership style.

Simon Barrington: [00:03:01] So I follow you on Facebook and part of that is never a week goes by Mark without seeing you climbing a mountain or driving a Quad bike or skydiving or water-skiing or so m ething so there is a bit of you that has been brought into your leadership and the way that lead and how has that shaped you as an individual.

Mark Heasman: [00:03:27] Well I think there's probably three things that I would say not define m because my defining is the fact that I'm a sinner saved by grace. But in terms of the human perspective in terms of what defines me one is that I love being with and working with young people. Okay. Second is my faith. And thirdly is my love of the outdoors and bringing those three things together is always my sort of dream situation. How that then affects my leadership style I think means that when I've been in roles or doing stuff which hasn't involved all three of those I haven't been that comfortable. So I have perhaps felt a little bit exposed a little bit not quite as fulfilled as I want to be. So I've done roles where I've been CEO of organizations where perhaps you're doing two of those or one of those but actually to bring all three of those together is where I

feel most relaxed as a leader because because I'm using the full breadth of my I guess my interests and my abilities are completely aligned. Which is why I think the role I had at Rock UK was perfect in that sense and the role I'm on going on to but we'll talk about that later.

Simon Barrington: [00:04:34] And Rock was running an outdoor pursuits centre so you were able to bring that part of your personality, as well as your faith and your understanding young people to bear.

Mark Heasman: [00:04:43] Very much so. I think this is what I call the dinner party test which is when when you're maybe having some friends round for dinner or you have been invited out for a meal or something and people say What do you do. People can tell very quickly if you are really inspired and interested about what you're doing. And the dinner party test is, Oh I do a job and people can tell, actually he's not really very interested in that job or he's doing it to pay the bills.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:09] They can be very long dinner parties.

Mark Heasman: [00:05:10] They can be especially if everyone is in the same situation where everyone's moaning about their job it is like.

Mark Heasman: [00:05:15] But actually the dinner party test if you can be inspired about it and people can see you are inspired about it and that happens for me when those three things come together.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:23] For some people I'd say that's quite a luxury actually you know to pay the bills and pay the mortgage then I just have to take a job that you know fits the skills but it doesn't fit the whole of who I am. What would you say to them in terms of how they can go after that dream of bringing their whole personality to the workplace.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:47] Well I would say that first of all there are seasons in life so there are seasons in life when you're just having to knuckle down and do a role or do a leadership position which perhaps doesn't completely fulfil you but is the right place for you to be at that time and maybe part of that is God building up resilience in you or patience or long suffering or other skills that are being developed through that time. So I think back to my own career, so I've done five CEO roles they're not they haven't all been a walk in the park fantastic feeling fully fully engaged all the time but particularly in those early ones I was learning skills and being developed that have been in later ones really been tested and used because of those early skills. So I think sometimes when people are in jobs where they don't feel completely engaged just hang in there because you are learning something through that that will be used in time. You may now not know at that time how it's going to be used but it will be used.

Simon Barrington: [00:06:55] When I was growing up in leadership in a big telecoms company. Actually people were kind of discouraged from bringing the whole of themselves to work. It was like well you do that in the evenings or the weekends but while you're here just knuckle down and get on. How have you created environments in Rock or in Ormiston that have encouraged people to bring the whole of themselves to work.

Mark Heasman: [00:07:24] The whole question of boundaries is a really interesting one in fact. So some some roles particularly here at Ormiston where there are some really quite critical safeguarding issues and issues where you're dealing with very troubled situations. I've been very clear with my teams here that they do need to have very clear boundaries and you need to be able to go home and you've been dealing with you know a kid in prison with his dad in prison who may never see them again and how do you unload on that. You do need to be able to switch off and you

need to be able to have a mechanism whereby you can unload shut the door turn that phone off and then engage with your family or in other ways. There are other situations in this role here but also in previous roles were actually that boundary is so blurred that it's two hands are completely meshed together. Now I personally quite like that I quite like it when work and life become one thing. I don't particularly like having things in separate boxes. I guess I think it's quite hard to maintain those boxes and actually when they start to merge a bit then then life becomes a much more joined up approach rather than its own separate boxes. But I do understand some people do quite like to keep it in separate boxes and keep things completely separate. Y.

Simon Barrington: [00:08:44] You're a Christian. You bring your faith into a secular context here but you've also led Christian organisations as well. Talk to us a little bit about how your faith has shaped your values that you've applied in all those different contexts. And maybe what's a different between the Christian context and here if anything.

Mark Heasman: [00:09:08] Well first of all I think running a christian and non Christian organisation is remarkably little difference. In fact the last two roles I've done both for five years both similar sized organisations. I would say other than the fact that you may start meetings with prayer, there isn't a huge huge amount difference. Both of them you need good commercial skills, you good leadership skills, you need good decision making skills you need to be able to delegate, to recruit good people to do all those basic leaderships stuff - communicate well build teams the fact and it's Christian and Christian is almost irrelevant. Having said that I would say the perhaps that sense of value and worth is stronger in and in a Christian organisation because I'm a Christian there is that sense of um really putting something back into Kingdom work here more directly through a Christian Organisation. That's not to say that running a non Christian organisation isn't doing that because I think as a Christian running a non-Christian organization we can be salt and light and that's what I was praying for when I joined here at Ormiston and I hope over the last five years that's been the case that people have said there has been salt and light that's come out Mark and seasoned that this non Christian environment.

Simon Barrington: [00:10:39] That's really interesting, so you talk about salt and light and seasoning. What has that looked like in practice for you. What is it that kind of shapes that for you here.

Mark Heasman: [00:10:45] Yeah well I think it's I think it's being consistent and true to your values. I think it's being it's not having a Bible open on your desk and sort of bashing everybody over with this is the verse I read this morning in my quite time because they wouldnt' last very long as a CEO. But I think what it is It is not being ashamed of it, being very clear that people know I'm a Christian and also being particularly careful around any organisation particularly at top there are decisions that are a bit borderline. There are decisions that have to be made where there is a bit of a grey area and it is always very clearly going on. No this is the right thing to do for the organisation and the right thing to do in terms of my values even if there could be a consequence organizationally that maybe isn't particularly good but it's sticking to what is right and people recognising and seeing that. Being being honest to yourself and what you stand for.

Simon Barrington: [00:11:43] Sounds like you have a very open and transparent kind of leadership style. How does that work in with your teams. How do you go about building teams where there's a shared set of values and there's a shared set of ownership of where you're going.

Mark Heasman: [00:12:03] I do enjoy working in a team environment. I really do and I find people respond well to being involved. I think the days of the very autocratic dictatorial leader is gone. This is my view. I think people like a sort of servant hearted leadership approach and a very collaborative approach and certainly my own style is very much. Let's talk about stuff together let's

get things out on the table. I'm more than happy to make a decision and I think people look for a leader to make the decisions and sometimes making the tough decisions but to do so having gained the input of people around you and I think people here have really appreciated the opportunity to be involved in developing the organisation. I mean over the last five years it sort of tripled in size people but that's not me driving that, that's organisationally the ownership of what's happened. So there's a sense of we're all part of that rather than it just being some charismatic leader who everyone is sort of following and then he goes and it's like well what happens next.

Simon Barrington: [00:13:11] So in both your last couple of roles you've done five years do stints. Is that because you think you have a specific set of skills that are appropriate to certain organisations at the different times in their lifecycle.

Mark Heasman: [00:13:28] That's a good question. Yes it's a bit like a job interview. Can I have the job please. I think I think ah personally I am an activator so I will action stuff and get stuff moving. And I like things needing to be changed. So in that sense it is that sort of transformational change bit that drives me and excites me. I'm not particularly good and we each have our own abilities I'm not particularly good at maintaining a status quo. Some some leaders are very good at that and actually relish that but I like to sort of take things through a transformational step make sure that it's bedded in and then and then generally it's time to pass the baton on. Now the last two roles that has been after five years. The next role. Who knows. But but but it's as long as it takes.

Simon Barrington: [00:14:20] Do you think there is a certain fit for a certain type of CEO at a certain time of an organisations life.

Mark Heasman: [00:14:26] I do. Most definitely. I think some organisation very clearly want a stable secure safe pair of hands perhaps through a period of crisis or through a period where there has been a lot of change and I think probably in Ormiston now that's what they need here actually. I know they are in recruiting at the moment for a new CEO and I think they will be looking for somebody who's going to very much build on what's happened rather than rip it all up and start again.

Simon Barrington: [00:14:52] So you come across as someone who is really self aware. Self aware of what you're bringing to the table in terms of your faith and passion for young people and the outdoors. Self-aware in terms of the style that you have and what kind of roles might suit you. How has that self-awareness grown in you over the years and are there ways that you've been specific in developing that self-awareness.

Mark Heasman: [00:15:25] I would say again it's a helpful observation I would say a few things. One is I would say working with people who you really respect who aren't in your management line or your governance and so. So you know working with people like yourself and others over the years has been really helpful for me to understand how I operate and how I fit in. People who you can trust who can be honest with you who can give it to you straight without necessarily trying to fluff it up for you. I think that that's really helped the self awareness bit. The other thing I think has really helped the self-awareness bit and it's just the nature of doing various roles over the years I've done a lot of profiling. So personality profile that sort of stuff and they can be a little bit like oh here we go another Myers-Briggs but actually once you've done a few you do begin to start to get oh this is how the world sees me. It's like a mirror on on you really and how you react at work how you react at home, how you react in a stressful situation and I found them very helpful to understand how people see me which then I can then hopefully reflect back as you say to what people see when they when they engage me in a work particularly in work context.

Simon Barrington: [00:16:44] Well that's certainly one of those tools I uses the Johari's Window

which talks about our blind spots and how feedback can help those blind spots. I'm really interested that you say it's people outside your direct line of governance and management who are most in the place to do that. Are there things that you've deliberately done to help build those relationships so that people can speak authentically into your life.

Mark Heasman: [00:17:10] I mean people hate the word networking and it sort of this sort of poo poed how dare you talk about this it's just manipulating your friends but I can't think of some trendy management word to use for it. But I think networking in its proper sense has been the most useful thing for me probably over the last I've been in CEO roles for about 20 years now. Over the last 15 20 years has been the most useful. And that has been by investing quality time with people not just the sort of cursory you know how how are things that after a conference but actually meeting up for a meal, getting a group of people together as we've done in the past to talk through issues that we may be facing in the work context but also getting people who are in that professional area together. So for example when I was at Rock I would get together a number of CEOs of other adventure centres around UK not necessarily Christian ones but who could advise on how you're approaching stuff. Here at Ormiston I've done similarly with with other CEOs running children's charities around the UK. Just just to engage with them and understand the issues with no agenda no sense of yeah I want your job or I want your business but actually how can we learn from each other and generally people are very open to that. They really are. Particularly if you go in in an open way with no sort of agenda and are prepared to invest the time to making the time to say now let's meet up for dinner and let's spend a few hours and discuss you know a particular issue that I'm struggling with. People like to help. People like to engage.

Simon Barrington: [00:18:50] Would you say that it's the fact that you've been willing to be open and to give of yourself into that has shaped that environment in which other people are able to give back to you. Do you kind of have to take the first step almost.

Mark Heasman: [00:19:04] It's quite often I think that's the case actually yeah I think it is people we're all busy aren't we. You know people who are running organisations in leadership roles have got full schedules full agendas and actually to fit something in it's sometimes a real pain. But people like to feel wanted and I think going in with a can you help me yeah which is how I've done several times. People have responded really well to that really well to that actually.

Simon Barrington: [00:19:30] One of my previous guest on the podcasts, Sim Dendy whose a pastor down in Romsey in Southampton said "can you help me "is just another phrase for vulnerability. It's a longer way of saying vulnerability. So is there a sense in which you have to make yourself vulnerable. Do you have to open up with people and how have you gone about that.

Mark Heasman: [00:19:51] Yeah most definitely. I think I think it's that sort of two ears one mouth thing. Generally speaking personally generally people are quite opinionated about everything and are very happy to tell you what they think about stuff. So what I've found has worked really well for me is generally to be a listener not to try and have to show people my knowledge and my experience but actually to say. Tell me about your knowledge. Tell me about your experience. Tell me. Unload on me because maybe 80 percent of it is going to be of no use at all to me but actually 20 percent of it's really helpful and will really help me to grow as a leader or to deal with that particular situation. So it's definitely for me that the listening aspect is the is the biggest part of it. I feel very strongly about that much more so than the. Let me tell you about me. But yeah people want to know. Happy to talk about it like we are doing now. For me it feels really uncomfortable because I'd much rather be interviewing me. I'd much rather.

Simon Barrington: [00:20:58] Maybe we'll do that some time. Actually I haven't nobody has interviewed me on this podcast yet. So I'll take you up on that in a few weeks time. Now you're

about to move on to a new role. Tell us all about it's a global role.

Mark Heasman: [00:21:15] Okay so so I've been appointed as the the International Director, Global CEO for an organization called Christian Camping International CCI which is a group of associations of organisations running camps, outdoor centres, adventure centres, conference centres run by Christians around the world. So we're in 23 different countries at the moment the biggest is obviously the states generally the biggest in most things. CCI has got a big operation in the UK where there's 200 outdoor centres and conference centres in the UK. And they are all around the world. So my role is very much to provide the glue to bring that together that alliance of associations and to grow it into new areas because if you look at all of the research into when people are converted the vast majority people are converted before they're 18 and of those the vast majority are converted either through youth groups or camps. So in terms of mission it's one of the biggest missions but yet it's so off the radar, it's unbelievable. So part of my role is to put it back on the radar. This is a massive mission opportunity.

Simon Barrington: [00:22:25] Did you have an experience like that yourself in terms of a camp when you were growing up that's shaped, you're obviously very passionate about it that has shaped you.

Mark Heasman: [00:22:35] I did. I mean I've been involved with Christian camps and outdoor activities pretty much all my life actually and as a child would have gone on camps and been and that's probably part of my love of the outdoors it's come through that actually. My kids are all involved with Christian camps now either attending them or leading them and and as a as a practitioner I just see huge value of the outdoors as a way of leading people to Christ.

Simon Barrington: [00:23:02] And what is it about the context of those camps and outdoor activities you think that focuses people's faith brings them to a point of decision within within that context or strengthens their faith.

Mark Heasman: [00:23:16] I think particularly when people are away, particular young people away from home and the sort of the trappings and comforts of home they're very open to sort of new ideas and there's the whole outdoor bit there's something very spiritual about the outdoors - whether it be the mountains, the sea, a great view, you get that sort of sense that there's something bigger than me here and actually using that in the right way can be very very compelling for a young person. Plus people who are very open to have deeper conversations in those environments than they perhaps would do at school or any group

Simon Barrington: [00:23:52] Yeah brilliant. Now you going to be doing a lot more traveling and seeing these camps in different environments how can we pray for you. What are the big challenges that are facing you as you step into that role.

Mark Heasman: [00:24:07] Well. thank you and I really really will be appreciating people's prayer and I think prayer for my family that I will be traveling more that they would be able to cope without me. I'm sure they'll be delighted but that they would cope without me and the prayer for the worldwide community of CCI that they would we would jointly grow together we would we would learn to love each other as we get to know each other over the next few months and years and then there's the funding for the work. I mean this whole sort of how do we make the whole thing happen. It's very much funded by the States at the moment. How do we create a mechanism which is enabling us to grow this mission field internationally.

Simon Barrington: [00:24:46] Mark Heasman, thanks so much for joining us on a podcast today. And we will pray for you as you take on this new and exciting global role which seems right up

your street. So thanks so much for joining us.

Mark Heasman: [00:25:01] Thank you very much indeed.

Simon Barrington: [00:25:03] Thanks for listening. If you've enjoyed this week's podcast and don't miss an episode by making sure you subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher, Tune in or SoundCloud or wherever you get your podcast. And don't forget that we love your feedback. Email us at hello@forge-leadership.com or follow us on Twitter or Facebook.