

LONGstorySHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



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I had my responsibilities as the platoon leader. And we had this code in the regiment; Don't expect your men to go up if you're not willing to go up. In the so-called book, the training book, it's never led by the officer. Patrols go out. Scouts out, or something like that. The leader stays in the back. But in our code, as the boys would say, You go first, buddy.

Don't ask anyone to do something—

Yeah.

—you're not willing to do yourself.

The late Senator Daniel K. Inouye learned the intricacies and demands of leadership on the battlefields of World War II. He took these lessons with him into the world of government and politics, where he became one of the most powerful and influential leaders not only of our state, but of our nation. In this edition of Long Story Short, we will look back at some of our previous Long Story Short guests and their lessons on leadership, including how the nuances of local culture helped to shape their ... leadership styles. Lessons on Leadership next, on Long Story Short.

Aloha mai kakou, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Master navigator Nainoa Thompson defines leadership as "stepping up....knowing ... the right thing to do,, and making it happen regardless of the consequences." Doing the right thing can sometimes require an extraordinary amount of conviction, courage, and the ability to inspire others. In this special edition of Long Story Short, we revisit some of the stories and challenges shared by Hawaii ... leaders. We begin with Thomas Kaulukukui, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Managing Trustee of the Queen Liliuokalani Trust, who, like Senator Inouye, picked up many of his first lessons in leadership on the battlefield.

I went into the Army in 1968.

You went to Vietnam?

I went to Vietnam for a year, 1969, '70.

What'd you do in Vietnam?

I was a platoon sergeant in the paratroopers. Uh, did well in training, because I had the Kamehameha School ROTC background. And I ended up leading a platoon of men in ... uh, basically jungle fighters. Young men, at the time, uh, um, they're like a pack of wolves. And they will do whatever the pack wants to do, unless there is an alpha wolf that keeps them on track. And um, if you're not that person, they will get rid of you and get somebody else. So, you know, you really have to learn to step up.

Was there any particular event or moment when this all came clear to you, when you had any epiphanies over there?

Well, it was clear to me from the beginning. It's uh, it's—you know, when you're with a group like that, it's really clear. Uh, I'd never been in a fight in my life. I was in three fights in the first month I was there, because the men decided to test me. You have to realize, this is Vietnam War—

And you—

--and look at the way I look.

Uh-huh.

You know, I'm not a six-foot uh, uh, fair-skinned, round-eyed person. Uh, I was brought in to lead them, and I was obviously Asian. So I looked more like the enemy, than I did look like them. So it was an interesting experience, because um, I was in three fights with my own men, um, shortly after I got there, because they wanted to test whether or not I was tough enough to lead them.

And part of it was your culture?

Part of it was what I looked like. Uh, part of it was there was another leader there who they wanted, who had been there a month longer than I was, and they weren't sure about me. So ...

So you saw no—you had no—you had to fight. There was no—

Gotta fight.

--other way to do it?

Yeah. Fortunately, I was a black belt in taekwondo by then.

Before I got there, so without having to really hurt anybody, I guess they kinda ... got some religion and said, Well, I guess he can beat up everybody else, so he's all right.

We were someplace where uh, another unit got in trouble, and they called us and said, You need to go help them. Uh, there's a battle going on, you need to go help them. And you need to get from Point A to Point B, right now. The trouble was, to go from Point A to Point B, you had to go between two hills. General rule, bad idea to go between two hills, because if the enemy is up on both hills, they're gonna ambush you, and you're gonna—you're never gonna get there, you're gonna be dead. So I called my squad leaders together. I ran a platoon of about thirty-five men. And I said, We have to go from Point A to Point B. They looked at the map, they said, We can't go through there. I said, We don't have a choice, because if we don't go through there, by the time we take an alternative route, our ... people will be dead. So I gave an order. All the people kinda sat around, and they looked at me when they figured out where we were going. And they said, We're not going. Now, think about the magnitude of that problem. Battle commander, give an order, people won't go. Okay. Squad leaders, gave an order, they wouldn't go. I tried to exhort them to move, they wouldn't move, because ... you know, the consequences were deadly. Uh, so finally, at that point, I got my radio telephone operator, made him saddle up, put on his backpack. I put my mine on. I said to everybody else, If you're afraid, I'll go save them myself; will fight this battle by myself. But you better hope I get killed, because if I'm not, I'm gonna come back and fix this. Off I went. Took the longest, slowest, smallest ten steps of my life down the trail waiting for—to hear if anybody else got up. And—and—and fortunately, I started hearing people getting up. They got up, and ... they followed me, and off we went, and we—we made—we made it all right. Difficult experience, um ... I'm not sure what would have happened if they didn't follow. But one of the things I learned from that is, you gotta lead in front; can't just tell people to go, especially if it's difficult. You gotta be willing to pick up your rifle, put on your pack, and lead in front.

And be willing to go it alone.

And be willing to go it alone, if you have to.

So do you have a, you know, 25-word nutshell definition of leadership?

I have a ... three-word definition, a three, word definition of leadership. My definition is that leadership is influence; nothing more and nothing less. If you have influence, and can influence, people and their thoughts, and emotions, and, actions, then you have leadership ability. That says nothing about your morality, because Hitler had leadership ability. But in—in a very ... condensed, sense, I think leadership is influence. And—and learning to, influence in a positive way people's thoughts, and emotions, and actions, were what—are the core of leadership, I think.

A wartime battlefield can shape leaders. So can growing up in a rural environment, where shared values help to create community well-being.... Colbert Matsumoto, born and raised on the Island of Lanai, is the Chairman of Island Insurance Companies. He also is a community leader in Honolulu, serving on ... nonprofit boards in addition to corporate boards. Glenn Furuya, President and Chairman of Leadership Works, a leadership-training company he started more than 30 years ago, grew up in Hilo, on Hawaii Island. At the heart of the leadership style of each of these men is their understanding of local culture, and how being an effective leader in Hawaii can be very different from anywhere else.

Being local is not about where you were born. You know, it's really about the kind of values, you embrace and the kind of philosophy that you use to guide your life, and the decisions you make in your life. So, there are many local people that you know, who were born and raised here that, you know, I don't think espouse local values. You know. But on the other hand, there are many people that have moved here that clearly you know, the things that make, I think, Hawaii special resonated with them, which is why they chose to, come here and live here, and stay here.

This whole idea of local culture and what works; it used to be that certain positions in Hawaii guaranteed authority and respect. But that's less and less true now; isn't it?

Uh, yeah, I think that's, definitely the case. You know, I think that you know, when I grew up which was when, you know, I think in the 60s, the plantations were still uh, very influential ... forces in shaping our—our—our community. And there tended to be, you know, informal, leaders within those communities that people looked up to provide leadership. So in like the time that I grew up in, well, the principal of the school was, considered a very important figure. Some of the union leaders were considered important figures. Some of the, plantation bosses were also—

M-hm.

-- looked up to as being, you know, important, community leaders. And so, um, people gravitated to them, and as they would in turn communicate, different, you know, projects or, concerns, you know, people would rally around them. And so, I think that those days have passed. I think that it's harder to get people to align behind uh, different initiatives. In my experience, you know, run across, two different kinds of leadership. One—one is, implied leadership; leadership that is the result of the position that you hold. And most people fall into the category of having power because of, you know, the implied authority associated with them. Whereas, you know, there are other people that, you know, have I think real power; a power that, you know, it generates from, they are able to assert themselves and the kind of vision and their ability to art—articulate concepts and ideas in a way that makes people feel like it resonates with them.

Definitely, you know, leadership requires a level of trust and confidence. It all starts from that. And if you don't have the ability to engender the trust of the people that you're trying to reach, you cannot lead them, you cannot convince them to move in any particular direction. That's why, you know, great leaders have a certain special ability to engender that kinda trust.

You know, you have to be able to stick your neck out, because that's how, you know, you progress. And, so asserting leadership involves taking risk, being willing to stand apart from the pack. And that takes a level of courage.

And so, you know, those kinds of leaders are fewer and harder to come by.

But—but those are the kinds of leaders that I think exercise real, ability to move people, to affect change. And I don't know why. I mean, it just seems that I don't find as many of those kinds of people around as I think used to exist in the past.

I really do believe that the upbringing in Hilo—one thing it does is, you know, you're humble. You you grew up humble.

Do you think humility ... we prize humility—

M-hm, m-hm.

--in the Hawaiian culture—

M-hm, m-hm.

--as well. But humility is seen as a weakness, other places.

Yes, it is. It's viewed in many Western cultures as a weakness. But to me, I think that's strength, when I can stand in front of my group and say, You know what, guys? I'm really sorry; I messed up, forgive me. You know, and just lay it out there. What's the—what's the alternative? What, blame people? Make excuses?

I do a lot of work on island style leadership, because I do believe it is a distinct and unique form of leadership. There's this thing I call the same-same equilibrium; the same-same equilibrium. And it roots back to ahupuaa, where it was—society was an egalitarian society, where everybody in the society had a role, and everybody did their part. But all of the contributors within that society were viewed as equal, so everybody same-same.

M-hm.

Right? Okay. So, here's the deal. Centuries later, the same-same essence mentality still is—is embedded in all of us. You've got to stay in this equilibrium, same-same. Everybody same-same, everybody does equal in their contribution. What's very interesting is, whenever you break same-same, okay, and you think you're—you act as if you're better, right—'cause if everybody's same-same, then nobody's more important or better than anybody else; right? But the

minute you break it—and this is where a lot of times people who come from away, good people, they don't understand this equilibrium. They break it. As soon as you get to this I'm better than you mentality, through your tone of voice, through your being too direct, not listening—

M-hm.

--showing everybody how smart you, the immediate response always is, Who the heck does he thinks he is? Who the heck does he think is? Immediate response.

Right.

And once that response comes out, you can't lead in Hawaii. Who the heck you think you are? And they don't tell it to you in your face. It's—Hawaii is—

They just turn away.

I always say—

Right?

--to my leaders that I work with, Hawaii is the world capitol of passive aggressive behavior.

I do a lot of work with mainlanders coming down, to try to help them understand some of these little nuances of this place. Do not break the same-same equilibrium. Because as soon as those words come out, that question pops, it's really hard to recover. The other thing with island people; they don't—they don't forgive. They—they take forever to let go.

The way I teach it is this. There are two types of leaders, Leslie. There's circular leaders. These are people are who are very collaborative, they're relationship-oriented, they're kind, they—they really engage people.

M-hm.

Circular. Island people are generally more circular.

M-hm.

Okay. And that's because in Hawaii, we're a three-way blend of cultures. We are influenced heavily by Eastern culture, 'cause in the 1940s, forty percent of the population of Hawaii was Japanese. So, heavy bushido code influence here.

The one element of the—the bushido code is this; you always operate from a sense of imperfection. You always come from a state of dissatisfaction.

'Cause—

Oh, I didn't know that.

Yeah. So, if you're always dissatisfied, and you're kinda imperfect, you always gotta work harder. You gotta try harder, you gotta study harder, you gotta go to school, you gotta learn. I never got praised by my parents; they never, ever praised, said, Good job, Glenn, won—you did a wonderful job. Nothing. And I think, bushido. They didn't want me to get all big-headed and arrogant, and thinking I'm better than anybody else; right?

Right.

So, they kept—they kept it really, really restrained, the praise and things like that.

M-hm.

And yet, we're all Americans; that's the Western influence. We're all Western educated folk. But at the same time, the host culture here is Hawaiian.

M-hm.

We have a major Polynesian influence. And there's no place in the world these three forces come together like it does here in Hawaii. So, the Polynesian and the Eastern, Asian, right, give us the circular. We understand circular; that's why people are so collaborative and warm, and aloha spirit, and ohana. Western culture is much more linear. You know, there's the goal, here's the plan, now do it. Now, move—

And if you have to run over somebody—

Yeah.

--to get there—

Right.

--it's okay.

Right.

'Cause that's the goal.

Right, and there are a lot of island people who are just very linear, too. The biggest mistake you can make in Hawaii is take your linear approach, and slam it on the circular. Right? And then, that equilibrium gets broken. Who the heck does he think he is?

You've gotta be both. Circular, collaboration, involvement, build a relationship. But at the point of execution, we all gotta go linear; we've gotta get the job done.

I've always believed, Leslie, that whenever you impose things on people, when you just shove it in, you'll get compliance. They're gonna do it, because I'm afraid if I don't do it, they're gonna scold me or fire me, whatever. When you inspire people bottom-up—

M-hm.

--you get commitment. That's real leadership.

Teachers are among our most important leaders. They have the power to influence and shape the minds of young people who will ... become the next generation of leaders. Kumu hula Hokulani Holt, who is also the Cultural Programs Director of the Maui Arts and Culture Center, and Dr. Maenette Ah Nee Benham, Dean of Hawaiiinuiakea at the University of Hawaii at Manoa's School of Hawaiian Knowledge, are two such leaders. Their career paths are based on kuleana, the responsibilities handed down to them from their families and ancestors....

Hula has always been in our ohana. My grandmother was a kumu hula, she had seven daughters. Of her seven daughters, three became kumu hula. And of her granddaughters, first just me, and now my sister. And then of her great-granddaughters, my cousin Melia.

When did you decide you're gonna be a kumu? Or—

Oh, I didn't.

--did you decide?

I didn't.

I guess that's nothing you decide on your own, right, in the hula world?

Yeah, yeah; I didn't decide. My mother decided for me. She said, Well, I think it's time for you to—to begin teaching. And I went, no, that—that belongs to other people, that doesn't belong to me. And she said, No, I talked to your auntie, and I think it's time for you to begin teaching. So I went kicking and screaming, but I went.

What kind of a kumu were you and are you?

I believe that I'm—I'm pretty strict. I hope to instill in my students a love for hula, but also a love for this place that we call home, and for all the many generations of people that came before us that created the—the chants and the songs, and the movements that we use. What a kumu hula is, is we want things our own way. And we demand that.

It is your world.

It is my world. I always tell my students, This is the world according to Hoku within these four walls.

And as a kumu hula, you get very involved in other people's families.

Oh, yeah.

They become your family.

Oh, yeah.

So you're privy to a lot of the struggles that—

Yes.

--people go through.

Yes. You know, you get parents coming and saying, You know, my daughter's not paying attention to school, Kumu can you please talk to her? Or, you know, someone's marriage or passing; you get involved in your students' lives, and it's a good thing.

Halau provides, focus, it—it really gets you to appreciate every little thing, I believe. And halau is not only learning hula, but it also teaches you about yourself. How to push yourself a little bit more, how to think about the welfare of others within the halau, and then that translates to others outside of halau, how to practice or do Hawaiian values, because that's what you must have in halau as well, how to get past pain and tired, and late hours for a goal that you would like to reach. So those are all life lessons also.

So you were possessed at an early age of a conviction you wanted to lead.

M-hm.

Why?

Because I was always told that I would. I was always told. My grandmothers—both my Grandma Ah Nee and my Grandma Padeken explained to me when I was very young about my name, Kape'ahiokalani. And it is a name of—of one of my great-great aunts, who was a chanter in King Kalakaua's court. And basically, what they said to me was that because I held this name, I had the responsibility of—of remembering the moolelo of our family, and I had the responsibility of contributing to ... the health and wellbeing of my family. That was it. That's what they told me. And ... you know, I said, Okay. Because that's what you do. Your kupuna tell you that, and you say, Okay, so what do I need

to do?

And there are all kinds of ways to accomplish that too.

Yeah, there's all kinds of ways to do that. And I just found this to be my journey, you know, in educational leadership. I just found that to be what really gets me excited, um, what really inspires me is—and it all started because um, in fifth grade at Koko Head Elementary School, Mrs. Kwon made me do flannel board stories for the kindergartners. And I loved it. I loved just telling stories, creating stories and telling them to young kids, and watching the light bulbs go off. So my first job was as a kindergarten teacher. What a great job, you know, where you get unconditional love every single day.

And I know you've said you always want to be a teacher.

I always—

No matter what else you do, or how you do it, you want to be a teacher.

Yeah. Always; always. And that came from the stories and teachers over the years. You know, and good leaders are great teachers. The genius of leadership is living into grace. And it's—it's that—that idea of creating a space where people can feel really safe, even though you say the worst things. I want you to feel safe here, I just want you to feel safe. And no matter what you have to say, no matter how angry you are, go ahead, go and do that. And when you're pau, let's get to work. You know, cause otherwise, we're not gonna get it done, we're not gonna—we're just not gonna do it. And that's how I—that's how I lead. You know. And I try really hard to listen; listen, listen, listen. And as I listen, you know, I try to move it back to the core issue, as you said. Ask more questions about how that has to do with the issue, keep moving it, moving it, moving it.

But sometimes, there is no consensus.

And sometimes there's not.

And then you have to figure out—somebody has to call it.

Yes.

This is not gonna be solved this way.

Yeah. And I do that. I do that too. You can ask the people who work for me. You know, it's very open, we're safe, we're gonna talk about it, and this is how—this is the road we're gonna take. I'm not afraid to do that. No; I'm not afraid to do that. It's—it's nice to know—I want people to know that everybody has a voice. You know, everyone has a voice. It's a labor-intensive process, but everybody has a voice. And in the end, you know, there will be - everybody will

know that there will be uh, a direction we're gonna go. You know, and move on.

Because people want closure. I mean—

Yeah.

You can't talk everything to death.

Yeah. In a microcosm, yeah, you know, we have a lot of diverse perspectives, but across the United States, across the globe, you know, there isn't one way to do anything. But I do think that we're reaching a time where there—there are more young people and young leaders who are seeing the promise and the potential of bringing together different groups, and really talking about hard issues, of renewable resources, about food safety, about education and wellbeing that's very issue-oriented. And doing it in a way that is grounded in our religion, our stories. I think we're ready at that point to do that, and I—I think that's—that's our work at the University to help prepare, you know, my community leaders to be able to do that.

I learned that, you know, you do good work. You have good intentions, you know. Doesn't matter, it doesn't matter how much I can tell you about what I wrote, or what I studied, or what whatever, right? What matters is that I have good intentions, and I work really hard, and I try to be fair in everything that I do. And I try to be kind, you know. And I—and I lead in grace, developing a space where people can feel grace and welcome, you know. And then, we'll move forward. Ohana does not always mean that we are of the same blood, ohana means that we can agree on a set of principles and a mission for the work that we're doing, and we're gonna be innovative and entrepreneurial, and we're gonna work together really hard to get there. That's ohana.

Humility, trust, listening, fairness, influence... all important qualities that Hawaii's leaders say are critical to good leadership. These are values that we can use in our own lives, whether it is how we act with our families, in our jobs or how we conduct ourselves in the broader community. Our closing words of wisdom will be from the late Skipka Dias, legendary football coach at Farrington High School in Honolulu.

Mahalo to our Long Story Guests who have shared their stories and insights with us, and mahalo to you for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha a hui hou.

I developed um, an acronym. And the acronym was spelled out HEART, H-E-A-R-T. And—and each letter represented a basic tenet and belief that ... you want the other person to acquire and mind for the young kinds. And the word HEART, the five five words are H refer to humility, the ability to ... you know, to ... listen to another person and ... bite your tongue if—if he's saying something that's different than what you want. But being humble is a quality that is really, really ... sought after for a lot of people, but never acquire. But humility is a

good one. E, education. That one was very, very significant in my family's upbringing. A, attitude; a positive attitude, making sure that, you know, whatever the goal, whatever the project, you set yourself out to be positive and g—and get the darn thing done. R, responsibility. You gotta be responsible for all the things that you do, and sometimes for the things that your friends and your loved ones are doing. But being responsible in that manner has—has some beautiful connotations that—that grow from it. And then T, of course, stands for team.