

Issue 26

Realizing

LEADERSHIP

Everyday Leadership in Our World



John Baldoni in Conversation

LEADING WITH MOXIE

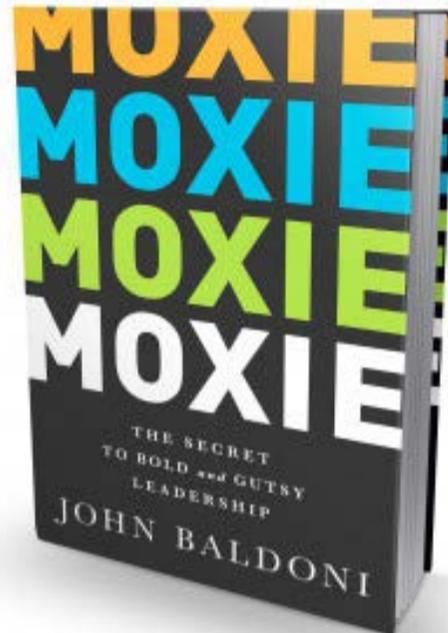
A close-up portrait of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark blazer over a light blue collared shirt. The background is a blurred brick building with windows.

Realizing Leadership in Conversation

JOHN BALDONI
Leading with MOXIE

with **LAURIE WILHELM**

Realizing Leadership in Conversation: John Baldoni



LW Hello and welcome to *Realizing Leadership in Conversation*. I'm Laurie Wilhelm and we're speaking with **John Baldoni**.

John is chair of the leadership development practice of N2Growth, a global leadership consultancy. He is an internationally recognized leadership educator, executive coach, and speaks throughout North America and Europe. John is the author of more than a dozen books, including Lead with Purpose, Lead Your Boss, and The Leader's Pocket Guide. In 2014, Trust Across America named Baldoni to its list of Top 100 Thought Leaders in Trustworthy Business and Inc.com included him as one of the Top 50 Leadership and Management Experts. John has authored more than 500 leadership columns for a variety of online publications including Forbes, Harvard Business Review, and BusinessWeek. His newest book is MOXIE: The Secret of Bold and Gutsy Leadership, which explores the grit and determination leaders need to exert to overcome challenges. John provides a roadmap for how leaders

can lead with greater awareness, more determined purpose and focused engagement in order to achieve inspired results.

John, thank you for joining us today.

JB Laurie, it's a pleasure to be here and be able to share some ideas about my brand new book, *MOXIE*. Thank you!

LW That's great! To start, could you please describe what is *moxie* so we all have a shared understanding?

JB Moxie, in its simplest definition, is guts, gumption, and determination to succeed against the odds and it's focused on your goals. The word, *moxie*, originally began as a soda in Maine and it is somewhat popular as a niche product in the New England area. *Moxie* comes from me because I'm a fan of old movies and very often you'd hear a character talking about another character with guts and gumption and he would say, "That person has *moxie*!" And while we often think, perhaps, that *moxie* might pertain simply to the male gender, it does not indeed and, as I explain in my book, I think in some ways that women have far more *moxie* than we men have and some of the folks I talk about in the book certainly demonstrate that.

LW Yes - you give a lot of really good examples that some people may be familiar with and others not but they all give context to better understand what is *moxie*. It's very well done.

JB Thank you very much. What I try to do is use the stories to exemplify what it really means to have guts and gumption and, as I will explain, what the concepts are throughout. Thank you for saying the stories worked because I think that's probably the most important element in the book.

LW You use the word, *moxie*, as an acronym for five traits of leaders and when combined, that leader has *moxie*. The subtitle of the book is, *The Secret to Bold and Gusty Leadership*. Now, when I think

of 'bold and gutsy,' I think of assertive and maybe even aggressive - take no prisoners - and then, in the book, the letter 'M' stands for 'Mindfulness' and that kind of took me by surprise.

JB Well, bold and gutsy, I wouldn't necessarily define that as aggressive but you certainly can and a couple of reviewers have noted that. But *MOXIE*, as you noted, is an acronym and the first 'M,' stands for Mindfulness. Mindfulness is being present in the moment. Call it a heightened sense of awareness, stopping to smell the flowers if we want to reduce it to its vernacular, and from a leadership perspective, leaders must be mindful, they have to be self-aware.

There's some research which I quote in the book that says only 20% of senior leaders demonstrate any degree of self-awareness. That study, I'm not going to negate it, but I think it's a bit unfair because I think what happens is that executives are so pushed and pulled in different directions that they become compartmentalized and they give themselves their own personal development short shrift. It's not out of ignorance, it's simply a lack of time or thinking. They're so focused on other things, other people, that they short themselves and this is why I wanted to talk about mindfulness.

There are oceans of studies and oceans of books on mindfulness but not as much as it relates to leadership. Mindfulness as an internal thing is being present in the moment, and being aware of yourself, your strengths, your shortcomings, but for a leader, that's not enough. You have to be situationally aware. You have to be able to know what's going on in your environment, both in your office environment and company, but also outside. More importantly, mindful leaders are those who can walk into a room and know in an instant how their own people are feeling. So mindful leaders are those who are cognizant of how people are interacting: Are they up? Are they down? What do I need to do as a leader? So this mindfulness is both internally and externally focused.

LW Your book really had me take a look at mindfulness to recognize and acknowledge that being mindful is challenging and powerful at the same time.

JB It's an active process. One of the things that is key to mindfulness is reflection and a lot of senior executives I've worked with, even though they're pressed for time, they do take time for reflection. Some set aside a half day a week or a half day every couple weeks just to do 'think time.' And sometimes that think time is with a trusted associate but whatever it is, they make time for it.

You don't have to be closeted in your office to do this think time. John Maxwell, the great leadership author, talks about having a 'thinking chair' and when he sits in this chair, that's his think time. He will come up with ideas for presentations, or books and articles, whatever John does. Others, it's taking a walk, it's a moment of reflection. It's simply that active process of putting yourself where you're going to be reflecting on what's going on.



LW With reflection, I'm just thinking of a manager who has gone through their day and is going home in the car and can use that time for reflection. What kinds of specific things could they be thinking about to make this a really beneficial exercise?

JB I'm going to give a mantra that I've shared with many, many people over the years and it's something I borrowed from our US military. It's three things a leader or manager should be thinking: What's happening? What's not happening? and What can I do to influence the outcome?

'What's happening?' is pretty easy.

'What's not happening?' - you have to think. Are people not engaged? Is our product not selling? Are people working well together? All of these things.

'What do I need to do to influence that outcome?' is where the leader engages himself. This is what I need to do or maybe not do.

So those three questions: What's happening? What's not happening? and What can I do to influence the outcome? Those three questions can spur a degree of reflection.

LW You have a quote in your book by Donald Altman, "Mindfulness changes our experience of whatever is happening." So this can give us fresh eyes, when we're in the mindset of mindfulness?

JB Right. Donald Altman is a dear friend of mine and also a psychotherapist who has written extensively on mindfulness. Donald has taught me about the mind-body connection and it gets into meditation, but also simply breathing, focusing on your breath. You don't have to formally meditate, but slowing things down and active presence.

The other thing about mindfulness is intention, and intention leads to purpose and purpose is a topic that I've written about extensively and I think mindfulness certainly contributes to purposefulness.

LW *MOXIE*, as we said earlier, is an acronym for five traits: Mindfulness, Opportunity, X-Factor, Innovation and Engagement. Of those five, which is the most difficult for a leader to achieve and why?

JB That's a good question. This might not be the most difficult but one that a leader needs to focus on all of the time is Engagement. We as leaders seldom accomplish anything by ourselves - it's only with and through the efforts of others. So engagement is an active process and engaged leaders are creating conditions for people to succeed. They are putting others in positions where they can put their skills to the best use.

Now, engagement is the six-dollar consultant word but what it really means is do people like to come to work and do they feel that their work matters. That's at its basic form. That's what engagement is all about and it's up to leaders to foster that so people want to come to work and want to do their best work. That is probably the most challenging aspect, certainly in this book, is how do you create this active level of engagement day to day, week to week, month to month and so on.

LW And what's also interesting with this engagement piece in *MOXIE* is that it's the most external to the leader.

JB Yes, without question. When we're talking about *MOXIE* - Mindfulness, Opportunity, your character which is the X-Factor, and Innovation - you could think of those as more inwardly directed. Engagement is getting out of self and that's why I explored it in this particular book. This book, *MOXIE*, is a twin to a previous book, *Lead with Purpose*, and *Lead with Purpose* was about engagement and with purpose - outwardly focused on the leader's interaction with the organization. This book is a little more about the leader's engagement and purpose as it relates to self and that's where moxie comes in - where that guts, gumption, resilience, and determination that will enable a leader to make a positive difference.

LW Within the engagement part in the book, you talk about introverts and engagement because introverts tend to be much more internal individuals. What are your thoughts on that?

JB Well, they're the quiet leader and I talk about Doug Conant. Doug was a very successful leader and he now runs a leadership consulting firm and has written a book called, *TouchPoints*, but Doug in his own words is an off-the-chart introvert. He was as a very successful executive and was appointed to run Campbell Soup Company when it was going through some very dire circumstances. He realized that he would have to get out of his shell, as all introverted leaders who succeed do. So he forced himself to do it and he forced himself to engage with others because the people in Campbell's were looking to him for guidance and leadership. He had to be that central figure that people could rally around, not himself, but the ideas that he was proposing and he needed to engage his senior team.





There is an advantage that introverted leaders have and that's that they are observant. One of the things that leaders get in trouble with is that they talk too much. And you think of an extroverted leader, you think of Bill Clinton. He's always on in a public setting. Put him in a room by himself and he probably goes batty. Those leaders are good for rallying people but at the same time, they have to throttle it back. They have to listen more than they speak. For introverted leaders, they, by nature, have an advantage because they observe and they listen. Now the challenge for the introvert is to get out of one's skin and to interact so it's a balancing act.

The standard profile of a successful leader on the Myers Briggs scale is an extrovert. Well, I've worked with a lot of senior leaders who are introverts. They simply, like Doug Conant, have accommodated the needs of the organization and learned how to deliver their message, be fully engaged and fully present with their people. At the same time, they have this inner gift, I think, of the ability to observe and then to reflect on what they're observing.

LW And with the mindfulness trait that you start *MOXIE* with, the introvert is already inclined that way.

JB Absolutely. I think that a more introverted person is probably more inclined to be more mindful. So what does that mean for those extroverts? Well, it's simply practice, practice. In the book, I wrote some things I learned from Donald Altman, some breathing exercises to do. I've had the privilege of teaching up in Banff Centre, which is an arts and development centre north of Calgary, and one of the things I learned up there was the mind-body connection through arts. I worked with a dance troupe and they were all about expressing ideas through movement and body gesture. Those of us who live in the cognitive realm, which is most information workers, we're all in our heads all the time and we forget that body connection. Mindfulness on the other hand, puts us in connection with our bodies, through a very physical act of breathing, of regulating our breathing, taking deep breaths. Feeling if your body is engaged or disengaged and this is that physical presence that should be a very important dynamic in leadership and I think we forget about it a little bit.

LW Yes, I think you're right. Now, when someone is not in a senior position, they're a middle manager, they run a department with a few people in it, can that individual have *moxie* as well?

JB Absolutely! I don't think that some people have more inclination to moxie than others. Moxie, in its root form, is really about guts and gumption. What does that mean? It means resolve. It means conviction. It means resilience. And I've written about this extensively that we often overlook resilience and there's no shame in being knocked down. It's what you do next that matters.

Anyone in any kind of management position at any level must learn to be resilient because you're dealing with 'no' and certainly those on the front line and in the middle are dealing with more noes than yeses. So how do you interpret those? What is it that you do?

There's a wonderful quote from the famous basketball coach, John Wooden, who says, "Don't focus on what you cannot do, but focus on what you can do." Sometimes we become overwhelmed by the circumstance and say, "Well, my boss won't let me do this," or "He won't do that." Well, start thinking about what you can do. That's a form of resilience. That's a form of moxie so without question people in middle management and on the front lines can have moxie.

LW Can someone *moxie* upward?

JB I think it's in the sense of leading up - yes, that's influence. I think that what happens with moxie is if you're perceived as a person with determination and resilience and perseverance, you will be noticed because you get things done. As long as you don't overdo it and cop the attitude, "My way or the highway," but if you demonstrate resilience, if you know how to address failure, learn from failure, you will stand out, without question.

LW What can someone do right now after listening to this - obviously they should get your book! - but what can they do right now, today, to start to lead with *moxie*?



JB I think it's to take an inventory of what you've accomplished and where you want to go. Sometimes we overlook our accomplishments. I mean, think of all the good things that you've accomplished in your life: graduating high school, going to college, getting your first job, starting a business, embarking on your career - all of those things should make you feel good about what you've accomplished and that should engender a feeling of confidence. That confidence, you could look at it as a form of your moxie, will enable you start thinking about, "Hey, I can make a positive difference," and leadership is all about making that positive difference. So I think it's taking that personal inventory, saying I can do this and focusing that energy on what it is that you want to achieve.

LW John, this has been a fascinating and very helpful conversation and I really appreciate your time and sharing *MOXIE* with us. Thank you so much.

JB It's my privilege and thank you very much and I appreciate this opportunity.

Connect with John Baldoni

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