

KPMG_APC-073 Privately Speaking FINAL TRANSCRIPT

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V0: Many responsibilities come with being a leader in a high growth company. Some of those are more emotionally burdening than others. As the work environment changed over the last few years, the emotional burden of leadership changed as well. How do leaders of high growth companies tackle this challenge and continue to set their companies up for success? In this episode of the Privately Speaking Podcast Series host and KPMG Private Enterprise partner, Erika Whitmore, sits down with Chris Hutchinson, CEO and Abundance Influencer, Trebuchet Group to discuss further.

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Erika Whitmore: alright, so excited to be here with you today. We've got Chris Hutchinson. I'm gonna give him a few minutes to introduce himself, but very, very excited about the topic that we have today. The emotional burden of leadership. So I'm I'm really excited the Prep prep itself was fun. And and all the time I've been getting to know Chris here over the last couple of years has has been great, so glad that you can finally join the podcast Chris. So I will give you. Pass it over to you for just a few minutes to introduce yourself.

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Chris Hutchinson: Eric, I'm very excited to be here, too. This is great. I mean, we've gotten to spend some time together. And I know that this podcast and you and the team are really focused on. How do you help companies that are in high growth situations do really well. And there's so many pieces. This is the piece that frequently gets overlooked. So it's going to be kind of fun to dig down into it gently. I should say, like mine. Pardon my introduction. So I've been doing this with my company for 21 years. I'm one of these founders that has these problems so that you know I can look in the mirror and go. Oh, there it is! Sometimes I get introduced as a recovering engineer. and then the engineers in the room get really pissed because they're like, what is there to recover from? But it essentially, it's around the the people. Components are as important or more important than the technical expertise of the systems we build. And so what our company does really is help leaders and teams work together better so that we can go make organizations effective and efficient it. We don't really come in and tell people what to do. We help on Earth what's there so they can use all that strength to go make things happen

(2:13)

Erika Whitmore: awesome outstanding. Well, so we're gonna dive in and again, I kinda like the way that you put this out there, Chris, how to successfully wrestle cause. That's, I think, what it is right with the emotional burden of leadership. So so I'm gonna let you kind of speak to this first is the awareness. Right? So so what does that look like?

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Chris Hutchinson: Well I think you know recently I got the chance to take a four month sabbatical And it was a really neat situation where, you know, it's long enough so people can't just tie a rope to the steering wheel and say he'll be back as as the founder. And and when I did that the folks that stepped in and sat down in the seat and did things later on. Said I had no idea that there was so much emotional work in leadership. Yes, and I said, Oh, really. you know, and they're like, now I know why, you know, sometimes you'd be like, this is hard, and we're like, that's easy. You know, this is not a big problem, so I think the awareness that it is in a Well, let me say this way unless you're pathologically, sort of damaged. You probably care about people. And when you care about people you get a sense of when things are going well or not, and that comes back to you in responsibility as a leader. If you feel that you're like holy cow, I have this responsibility for this organization or these people or this team. and we're not doing as good as we could. I mean, I think we could be better. But we're not. What's happening. What am I doing so? That awareness that it is emotional work trying to wrestle with people's highs and lows, and especially now there is a higher level of expectation. It's I mean, I've had people say I'm like a counselor, you know. People come in and say I'm not working out with my spouse. What do I do, and things that never used to come to work, because work and and life sort of blended during Covid. So it's it's a higher yeah.

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Erika Whitmore: And and you know, because we're focused on high growth companies. How a and II know the answer. I think I'm not. I think I know the answer. But I wanna hear you say it? How does that show up in high growth companies?

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Chris Hutchinson: Well, in high growth companies? Very frequently those are created around some one who had a great idea. And that great idea is a product or a service. And it's not a great idea like, Wow, I'm going to make this amazing company that's going to go deliver this stuff they're like, I'm going to go do this thing. And so it's very easy for that sort of infrastructure work that really needs to happen to be completely discounted. Like, just get these smart people in a room, get the best from the industry. Put Em all in room together, and then they'll perform like a you know clock that's usually the opposite of what happens. People are probably have some egos, and we start being really siloed. And that's not gonna help the organization. One thing that I like to share this is from engineering is, if we optimize every piece of an organization. It means the organization will be sub optimized. We sell 3 times what we can produce. You know, we we, you know, have an inventory way more than we can ever distribute. It's just huge problems. But inventories like this is what we're creating and distributions going, we're doing all we can. But if you optimize

the organization, it almost automatically means everybody except maybe one or 2 functions is sub optimized. People who are running hard in a high Growth Company. Don't wanna hear that like I wanna be running it 150%. I don't care what you want, even though I'm generating waste and problems for other people. Oh, by the way, the leader gets to see all this and figure out, how do I tell people we need to actually run together? Not just in the in the direction individually.

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Erika Whitmore: So I love that. So give me a a a for example. So so maybe it's I worked with this, and I know you don't want to name names, probably, but I worked with this company or this company, and because I really loved how? Because it's almost like they were siloed, and they were all trying to do the best that they could. But they didn't have the company objective in mind, so then they didn't get where they wanted to go. Give us for

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Chris Hutchinson: Yeah so I can give you high-growth company. That's it's a startup. It's been a startup mode for a while. It's a technological company. I won't say where it is in and what it does. But but they had some people they brought in to actually take technological ideas and put them into practice. So they could actually produce the stuff right? The the people who are in the idea generation are like, it needs to be perfect. because that's where they get their value. It's like it needs to be better and better and better. And the people that are trying to create the factory to actually generate this stuff like, we gotta stop at some point and actually make this stuff happen. And they were in this incredible tension because it was like, No, no, but but wait. We could get this one more thing done, and then it'll be better, you know. And so everybody's running optimally. But the company was literally almost bankrupt because they couldn't actually get the product out even. And so they had to do like, we have to have a freeze on this which pissed. The people who are developing it off helped get runway for the folks who could actually get the product out so they could make money to then loop the cycle. Yeah, to continue to work on it. How long did that take to work through with the leadership team. you know. Stuff like that? Well, it had been existing for a long time, but until they got to the point where they had the funding and they were high growth. it didn't matter. They just could use the funding right. But then, so it it developed over, probably a decade. I would say that they were kind of cranking along, and then in the last 9 to it's easily 9 to 18 months. About 9 months is about like, wait. We need to make a change till when we can success successfully make. That change is is is, it takes like 9 months when you have a hard habit.

(7:39)

Erika Whitmore: yeah that make sense well, and probably even more important today for companies who likely are a little bit more focused

on profitability, you know, in terms of getting funded. It's a little bit slower than it was. Unfortunately, fortunately depending on how you look at it. So that focus on profitability, you know, more important than ever to make sure that you you get it right? So I'm gonna switch gears on us just a little bit and talk about the emotional burden in in terms of the founder. Because I think, hopefully we have some founders listening and or I'm sure we have many who were former founders ETC. So I I do that that's something that would be really interesting to touch on as well

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Chris Hutchinson: yeah founder syndrome is a you can google that when I when I bring up the symptoms to people they're like really? That's a thing? I'm like yeah its not just you its a system dynamic that occurs and so what happens is I start a company And I have a vision for what's possible, and I sort of create a strategy around that. How we can get there. And then we create a structure of roles and things, you know. When you start it's all you, and then you gotta give things away. Yeah. And then then that means you have roles. And essentially, you can't quite see, but my hands are horizontal here they all have equal weight and importance. Oh, and by, after the role is the person meet, so anything that's criticized about any part of that is a personal attack. It's a person like because I was. What do you mean? I develop that strategy. Excuse me, you know, where are you and Da Da Da, or this is my role. I do it well. And so it feels incredibly personal. And what I do is I. When II do this I write it down on Dry Raceport, and then I write it down for it vertically. On the top is the vision served by the strategy served by the structure served by the roles served by the people. And so, if anything changes above, everything below has an opportunity to change. And it's not personal. but that's really hard. It's like a identityectomy for for founders, because the emotional burden is I'm carrying all that stuff, and it's all mine, and it feels like a part of me. And until you can sort of step away from that and say I'm here and that's there, so we can all get better and put it on a get dry race board where we're shoulder to shoulder, looking at it and go. What can be better not. You suck, you know. So it's it's separating. That personal. I mean, taking it personally is what's got you here, and it's exactly what will drag you down if you don't sort of separate that and say, that's over there, I'm over here. We're okay.

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Erika Whitmore: That makes that makes a lot of sense. And and you know one thing, and we did not talk about this full disclosure did not talk about this in the prep. Chris. So I'm throwing a Zinger at you. But I think you know a lot of high growth companies, if that have really really strong cultures. especially when they're smaller and they're scrappy, right? That is one thing you see, sometimes they'll hire for it right now, that gets a lot harder, right as they get bigger. And so how does that? And again, this is the Zinger. I'm thrown at you. How

does that play into this? Right? So so at some point the company gets to a point where they can't rely completely on their founder. They're getting too big. So great problem to have. Right? That's what you want to do. We we did hire for culture. But, man, now I we thought we hired everyone for culture, but it's like not working as well like. Help me help me think through some of cause. I think those are some of the problems that that these companies face right?

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Chris Hutchinson: A, absolutely. And there's no like one magic bullet or or thing to make that work. I'll tell you one way, and it's gonna sound. People use this, and it doesn't work well. But I saw qualify it. So, because we'll talk about values and values are frequently aspirational ideas of how about who we should be. And in fact, it's who you're not being, and you better go do that, or else right? But when you actually I talk about building an egg shell structure is just enough structure around what's there so it can evolve and grow. So it's we actually have times when we sit down and say so. What were the times? We did something when it wasn't easy, when it was hard when we bled. But we did it anyway. and reverse engineer out. What are those? What are those lived behaviors? I'll call him that way, and those are the things that it would like. Well, you know, we got on a plane, even, you know, and took something to a customer, and at 9 o'clock on Thanksgiving to go do something.

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Chris Hutchinson: Well, it sounds like you have a pretty deep care of the customer, right? But we don't say you need to care for the customer, and let's show it, and you can reverse engineer out. Who are we? Because these are the things we'll do even when people go. That's stupid. What are you doing that for? Just take the easy route that can help people have, and especially the story. That's how that perpetuates that culture you're trying to do, and you pick the ones that are great, not the ones where you know bad things happen. You pick those and say, this is who we are, and when we're talking to people, if they don't fit with this, let's get out. Yeah, southwest has a great thing, where they actually will take pilots to come in and have them go down and get shorts at the company store, and then do their whole interview with the top of like suit and then shorts. and if they're unwilling to do that, this is, you know, I don't know if it's still pies, they're not a fit. Yeah, so so super interesting. Yeah, so it's thinking about those things. Not just to be hokey to really think about what are the things that when push comes to shove this person's gonna be lined up with everybody else versus saying, Hey, my problem, you guys look like you got a lot of trouble. I think I'm going off to another High Growth company. See? Ya. yeah, I really like the story aspect, right? Because I think that that that res that can resonate right? You'll remember. That's the way we all remember things speeches of people when they share something, and I almost don't remember their name, but I can remember the story that they

have. That's what you want to latch onto and use to the benefit of everyone.

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Erika Whitmore: So you would say that that should actually be part of developing your company values.

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Chris Hutchinson: Yeah, I would do that because most people do aspirational values. Let's be this and this, instead of who are we? Really? It might be something you're working towards. But don't put it in there because people will go well, that's not us. This whole thing is garbage.

(13:40)

Erika Whitmore: I like that. Yeah. I love that. See? Now I got off on the tandem here.

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Chris Hutchinson: No, it's totally good. There's there's this is such a rich place because it's UN. It's untraveled. You know, people that have gone through multiple failures. They get this. They say, you know what we're gonna sit down, and every person we're gonna see, what do they bring both in super power and kryptonite? And how are we offsetting that? Not that everybody's perfect, but in a team we need each other, and we can go. Make great things happen much better than if we're all individually just, you know, I one what's wrong? What's wrong with you? You're way behind us.

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Erika Whitmore: Yeah, absolutely. So. So when do companies come to you versus? When should they come to you?

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Chris Hutchinson: That's such a great question. Oh, my God! Well, a lot of times we get seen as urgent care. and somebody will come in and say, Okay, I have this person named Eric Whittmore, and we need to fix her. And so you know, what are you gonna do to do that now? Luckily, actually, most of our clients don't do that anymore. Because they I don't know. We just attract the right people who say, Hey, we're having a challenge in our company, and we really need to support stuff. And we have multiple people that are struggling. And so can we have a conversation around what's possible. And how can we help cause. There's also the tools we have, but it depends on where we're going. sure and and what we're trying to do. So I think a lot of folks come with. As we say, the presenting problem is usually not the real problem. It's not probably you, Erica. It's probably, and I'm making this up. By the way, it's not. You might have a really good sense of harmony, and you are the first, the canary in the coal mine that's starting to go who? It's not feeling right for me and and other people

like. Well, Erica's kind of like having a hard time versus saying, Eric, as our warning system that we are starting to tread into place where we're gonna have stress fractures. And it's gonna pull the company. Oh, we're gonna get an offer to be bought. Now it's all about each person rather than us together, you know. But it so it's you're thinking about those things. So I think times when people really should go see folks like us and would be like, we're really trying to get traction towards somewhere. And it's just not happening. We we aren't kind of being the best of ourselves. People are starting to sort of take care of themselves and whatever's left over. Maybe somebody gets it. So when a team is, and it's not all lovey. Debbie hugs. It means I'm willing to step in there to Erica. You're having a hard time rather. My accountability to you is I need to take something out of your backpack because we're walking slower because you can't walk that fast.

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Chris Hutchinson: What can we do together? How can I help you? And those teams go a long way because everybody's making up for each other's limitations, not trying to just shine. and the leader has to set the aspect, I think, of. What are we doing here together versus like? If I endorse you and say, Well, Eric, you're having a hard time. Sorry about that. You're on a pip or something. And then this other person you're doing so great. I have just endorsed individualism, and we don't have a team. And now everybody's like, just take care of yourself. and that's the death of many companies, because when you suboptimize that to that function. you're not going to. Really, the company's not going to succeed.

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Erika Whitmore: That makes a lot of sense you know. how about bringing it back to relationships and trust. That was something that we touched on a little bit earlier and and just kind of talk to me a little bit about that aspect, right of leadership and the emotional burden of leadership.

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Chris Hutchinson: That's a perfect connection. Because to be basically to to take on that burden means you're going to need to be vulnerable. Yeah, you're going to be open to things that aren't going the way you intended. There's gonna be things that I thought I was trying to do. And the impact was the complete opposite side. If I'm open to that and can say, Wow. you know, what what happened to you? I saw this impact that didn't look really good rather than you sound a hard day and and then you'd say, Oh, actually, here's the way I took it, as you said, you know. Gosh, we need to get somebody who can really do the work here. And you thought it was a personal criticism of you. And I was. I was talking about something completely else. If I if I'm willing to go in that space, you can trust that I have your back. I it's an emotionally safe place, that psychological safety thing.

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Chris Hutchinson: And when we get to that, I think then people will be willing to say, Hey, I disagree with you because I know you're okay. And I'm okay. And the commitment we have is so much stronger. So so it's really vital. And we and we have that deep commitment. I would hold you accountable. And like I said, it's not always, you know. Accountability sounds punitive usually, but it could be. I'm going to help you out because we all lose if you lose exactly, exactly, exactly, exactly. And and so I think the leaders thing is like, where are we headed? I want your inputs in this, where we struggling, what can we do about it? And being willing to take the first step to say, I don't know. I need some help we need. We could be better. I'm sort of struggling here, which is anathema to many people who like. I just want a big wake behind me, because I'm going so damn fast. But that leaves trails of carnage right? So if we can do that all together. everybody makes it. That's best, for I mean, if you have somebody off for themselves, that's different. But in terms of if you're willing to be part of this team to make this great mission happen. Well, by the way, here's your job.

(19:00)

Erika Whitmore: Awesome. So. Chris, I wanna make sure we have a few minutes for you to kind of say. if if I wanted somebody who is listening. Here's the top 3 things that I want them to think about. and and take take your time right? Like II because I do think we've we've kind of covered a lot of ground today. But I but I know they could all like each of these subtopics could be, you know, a podcast in and of itself, or work, workshop or etc. So so if I'm and I'm a founder or I'm an executive at one of these high growth companies, or I'm aspiring to be what are what are my top 3 things

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Chris Hutchinson: great question. The first thing is that, Erica, I would like you to know, and everybody who's listening to know you are not alone. You are not alone. There are many, many people who have experienced similar things. It's not really actually about you, even though it feels incredibly personal. So that's that's the most important things. You are not alone. Other people have done this. You're not all by yourself, even though you feel that you're not effective enough, or you're frustrated or whatever. There's many people who are just as frustrated and effective. The second thing is, I believe there's hope. I believe there are many, many people who have worked together to figure out, how do we leverage our strengths with each other? How can I? You know the thing that I hate with paperwork is something that somebody else loves to do, and they might not want to get up on stage and talk to people. I love to do that so together way more right? But I have to be open about what my kryptonite is. So you know, you're not. Basically there's hope, if you're willing to be vulnerable. Do some hard work and invest in yourself and others in

time, energy, and sometimes funds, which is number 3. Getting a partner makes all the difference. Otherwise I'm stuck in my head and trying to figure out so that can be. It depends on what you're trying to get, you know could be, hey? I need to talk to somebody about this emotional burden. It could be a therapist. It could be a coach. Yeah, our mentor, right? And then there's also the pieces that's actually, I think, a predeccessory step to then go working. How do I build good relationships? And then how do we go make this place better. Most people go to the technical part first. Yeah, that requires the people being trusted and equipped. which requires me to know myself. And being an action. So I mean, whatever piece is missing, I think. Go find a partner that you can work that doesn't tell you how to do it. They help you uncover what you're strong at, and where your limitations are

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Erika Whitmore: perfect. That is awesome, Chris. And with that thank you so much for joining me today, I always enjoy spending time with you. But I'm I'm so happy. You were able to make the podcast today and and take the time to do it and and give some wonderful perspective to our listeners. So thank you so much, Chris.

(21:50)

Chris Hutchinson: Erica thank you for having me on and and I thank all your Listeners, for going out and doing that hard work and rising to the challenge that you think a better world could be possible. And you're going to engage other people to make that happen. I know that's what you do, Erica, and it's great to be part of this.

(22:04)

Erika Whitmore: Thank you, Chris. Awesome. Have a good day.

(22:07)

Chris Hutchinson: will do

(22:08)

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