

Moontower Business

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And honestly, I feel the book is meant for humans. My editor and publisher, they always try to put things in a box, but when they say, who's the book for Kevin? I say, well, it's for humans. And that's honestly how I feel. And I have a sense you might feel the same way. That's really the spirit within which the book was written. (25:07-26:33)

Joseph: Welcome back everybody to another edition of the Moontower Business Podcast. This is your host, Joseph O'Bell, and today I'm speaking with Kevin Hancock, who is the author of [48 Whispers: From Pine Ridge and the Northern Plains](#). Kevin, welcome to the podcast.

Kevin: Joseph, hello, thank you for having me.

Joseph: Yes, sir. Thank you for being here. I'd love to get into the book in just a second. From what I've read, I really enjoyed it, but maybe you can just start off by introducing yourself to listeners and just talk a little bit about the stuff you've worked on in your career.

Kevin: Sure. My name is Kevin Hancock and I'm from the state of Maine. And I'm the CEO of our family business, [Hancock Lumber Company](#), which is actually one of the oldest companies in America that dates back to the 1840s. And I'm part of the sixth generation of my family to work there.

Anyway, two kind of key events that got me to the book that you referenced. In 2012, at the peak of the housing and mortgage market collapse, I acquired a bit of a rare neurological voice disorder that made speaking at the time particularly difficult. And I'm sure you can hear it's a bit unique just by listening to me today. And then a couple years later, kind of looking to regather my voice on a spiritual level, I began traveling out to the Northern Plains, and particularly [Pine Ridge Indian Reservation](#), where I, among other things, encountered this entire community that felt as if a piece of their voice had been marginalized or taken from them. All of that really got me onto the topic of using leadership to help others find their true voice, to know it, to live it, to love it and own it. So that's a long story made short, Joseph.

03:29 Joseph: Awesome. Excellent. Well, before we get into the book again, maybe we could just chat a little bit about your position there at Hancock Lumber. You're CEO, can you just maybe talk a little bit about your experience being an executive for a lumber company?

Kevin: Sure. Yeah, it's really fun and rewarding, first of all, it's all so very challenging. I know you focus on entrepreneurship and within a family business, I really come to learn that every generation has to be entrepreneurial because the world's always changing. But anyway, our company is integrated. So we own timber land, and we grow trees and then we have sawmills, and we

manufacture lumber that we ship all over the United States and the world. And then we've got it in New Hampshire, 12 contractor focused lumber yards that provide a full line of building materials. And we have 600 people that work at the company and certainly are navigating our way first through COVID and then through all the crazy supply chain issues and spikes and pricing and shortages and products has been a bit of an unprecedented challenge. There's always something new and different, no matter how long you've been in business. And you say I've seen it at all, you actually still haven't seen it all. There's always something new coming.

05:06 Joseph: Gotcha. Yeah. And I mean, the lumber industry seems to be a very interesting industry, and I've seen things on TV. I don't really have any personal experience on how lumber is made and stuff like that and how trees are harvested, but it looks like a dangerous industry, looks like there's a lot of ins and outs of it. And you touched a little bit about supply chain issues and things related to COVID. What are you seeing really are the big factors that are driving the price up for lumber right now and construction, and what's causing the bottleneck and supply chain?

Kevin: Yeah. Really tricks it all back to COVID and out it is just disrupted so many people's lives in so many different ways. I remember when COVID hit back in March the prior year, we, and many other manufacturers, ended up having to slow down our production because a lot of our customers suddenly got put on hold. They didn't know if they could work or if people would want to work. And you could only make so much lumber without shipping it. So when our customers slow down, we slow down. But then, like a great fake in basketball or a move in for a wide receiver in football turning to the sideline and then going up, then the economy actually took off, demand for building materials went up.

So at the same time that supply was constrained, demand took off. And that created that crazy spike in pricing, which has since rectified quite a bit, but supply chains are still very tight and they're very sensitive. The whole world really economically has adopted this kind of 'just in time' lean manufacturing inventory model. And it's got a lot of benefits as you know, Joseph. But it's got one big disadvantage, it's super sensitive. And if that flow gets disrupted, there's no backup supply to come to the rescue. And that's really, I think what the whole planet's dealing with economically right now.

Joseph: Gotcha. Do you think, I mean, we're gonna see this for awhile? Do you think we're gonna, it's gonna ease up over the next couple years?

Kevin: I do think it'll ease up, but I also think we've all come to see that COVID is very unpredictable, when you think it's over it isn't, and I think we're gonna need an extended period of settling back in to allow everybody to get back into their routines. There are so many components, of course, of people being able to work and the economy needs everybody to work, to operate at peak potential. And it's still just a bit too delicate, but I would guess a year from now, it'll be more normal than it has felt so far this year.

08:25 Joseph: Gotcha. I'd like to switch gears now to your book. I have a copy of it. I've read the whole thing. I really enjoyed it. It was interesting. I had never read a book like that. It has a full story and then it has pictures that you took at the reservation. And so it was an inspiring book. I think I told you earlier, it was very relaxing to read, and it makes me really reflect on life. And I've had conversations with friends and my wife about what I've read in this book. And I think it was a really interesting journey you took going to Pine Ridge. And I guess, can you just talk about the inspiration behind writing this book and sharing these pictures with people after your experience there.

Kevin: Sure there are a lot of layers to it, as I'm sure you felt when you went through the book, but essentially, I was trying to recover at the time from a wound, a wound to my voice, which was a bit trauma based. And I was searching to regain my balance and as an active CEO, I felt a little awkward

at first, Joseph, leaving my company, leaving my job and heading out alone to this remote Indian reservation and really the surrounding Plains wilderness beyond that. But what I drew from that was the power of really reconnecting with self in a bigger, better 24/7 go world. Our roles can be all consuming. And I had lost track a bit of my own identity, separate from my roles and going to this community where nobody knew me, which had a really deep indigenous spirituality and where the power of plains, if you've ever been there, is just so dramatic that all of that really helped recenter me. And it was beautiful to me, but also really thought provoking and this collection of ideas that I ended up writing about really about self-actualization, coming into our own voice, the future of humanity, reconnecting with nature, all of that came through me while I was there. And then I tried to redeposit as much of it as I could in this book, 48 Whispers, so that it could be shared.

Joseph: Gotcha. And I think what resonated with me is just you talking about a lot of people have a very busy life in their careers and things are just moving so fast and you're always focused on what's coming up next. What do I got to do tomorrow? What do I got to do next week? And it's hard to kind of stop and focus on what's going on right now and in living in the present. When I've been able to take little getaways here and there and spend time in nature, and when you just see things slow down and you're living in the present, you're actually seeing your surroundings and being happy with the present moment is so big. It's so different. You know what I mean? And I thought that was just, that really stood out to me in your book.

Kevin: Yeah. And thank you. And I'm glad that it spoke to you that way. And for me, in part, coming from a CEO corporate background, the whole experience, a little bit, has been about putting work back in its place. Where, yeah, it's important and we're enthusiastic about it and we're competitive and we want to do well, but it shouldn't be all consuming. It just shouldn't. Work should be a generative additive component of a broader, meaningful life.

And I hadn't seen a lot of CEOs advocating for that. Having experienced a bit of it myself, I really wanted everybody within our company to have the same types of opportunities in terms of work life balance. And then to start to spread that message, because here's what happened to me in a nutshell; the more I took time to serve myself, like spending time on the Northern plains, the better I actually got at my work.

So taking that time to get away from me was not detracting from my roles. It was strengthening my ability to contribute to my roles. One of the key messages I really tried to send in the book is that done correctly, being selfish is selfless, because when we listen to that inner voice and do those things that make us light up, that's when we give the most back to the world around us as well.

Joseph: I think that makes a lot of sense. I mean, being able to do that and just kind of detaching yourself from the hustle and bustle of everyday life is the equivalent of just pressing restart, refreshing your batteries and just coming in with a clear mind back to when you go to work. And I can see how that makes you more productive, more prosperous.

Kevin: Yeah. And one of the big things I think is missing from our lives today, as simple as this sounds, is the time to stop, breathe, sit still, and think. And that's also a real theme in this book, a heightened sense of awareness as individuals and then collectively as humanity to just pause and think a bit about where we're headed on a personal level and a collective level. And this book, as you know, contemplates such things. I contemplated a bunch of thoughts around that subject individually and then collectively for humanity as a whole, because I think at the end of the day, what's the outcome, Joseph or the action item from the book? I would say it is, let's be intentional about our lives. Let's really get centered and balanced and healthy from within and hear that voice that resonates in the heart and let's live with intention. It's so easy to just get robotic in this world we're in today and the books about really breaking out of that, past it, through it, beyond it.

15:15 **Joseph:** That's a great message. And I love it. And maybe you can kind of tell listeners a little bit more about your experience spending time in the Pine Rangers reservation, I believe is the Sioux Indians and just the different experiences you had there and what you got to see and how you felt about it.

Kevin: Yeah. So I first traveled there in the fall of 2012. And I've since been there over two dozen times, I was actually just there last week on a Buffalo hunt of all things, Joseph, which was an amazing experience. But anyway, the Pine Ridge reservation is the biggest, most remote, statistically poorest and historically, probably, the most famous of all Sioux reservations on the Northern plains. It sits in the Southwest corner of South Dakota right on the Nebraska panhandle, on top of it. And it's home to the Oglala Sioux tribe.

And this community is mesmerizing to me because on the one hand, the history of how they got there is so not okay. So sad and disturbing and kind of mind numbing. I used to think that genocide, historically, was only something that ever happened somewhere else, but it happened here in this country. And I don't know that we fully reconciled that and today this community is economically very poor as a kind of direct result of its history. And yet in some ways, it's hard to describe, it's perhaps the happiest community I've ever been to. These people have just this amazing sense of spirit and resiliency, and finally their connectivity to the earth and their understanding of the rhythm with which nature flows. These were all just themes that were irresistible to me.

So I kept going back and not with any specific mission to fix, save, or change anything there, it was more simply this; I see you, I know you're here. And were fellow humans. There's a shared humanity here, and I believe you are important. And people ask me what I do when I'm there. And I used to struggle with the answer, but now I tell the truth, Joseph, I don't do anything when I'm there. I just literally hang out with people who live there. And I think it's because I haven't been on a mission other than connectivity that the community there has accepted me so well. I've been given two Lakota names and been made part of two Lakota families and have dozens of friends there. I've just been given so much more, I feel, than I've given in return.

But sorry, not to drag this on. I think that what's really cool about that for them is they're used to people going there to give things to them and for them to realize that they've got so much to give to the world around them, which is totally true, but just helping them realize it and affirm it. That's very rewarding for me.

Joseph: That's great. And I mean, obviously you've had an amazing experience there and you got to meet some great people and become friends with folks at Pine Ridge. How was it when you first got there? I guess the first time you showed up, was it a challenge to kind of, to meet people and to connect? Or was it just very inviting from the beginning?

Kevin: Yeah, no, I was nervous the first time I went, I felt out of place, and I felt a bit awkward and I but what essentially happened is I had made a first friend who agreed to host me. And she and I became friends, came to know and trust each other, and that she kept introducing me to more people and that just kept snowballing. All it really took to break down those perceived barriers was the gift of time and I think interestingly enough, the lack of an agenda. I had no expectation of what I needed to get out of it other than being present.

Joseph: Excellent. Excellent. And another thing I really enjoyed in your book reading about is how you explained that you had this medical issue, and you didn't view it as a downfall. You viewed it more as a blessing, that it changed your life for the better. And sometimes it's hard for people that are faced with something like that to look at it that way, but you looked at it in a completely different lens and you feel like it made your life better. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Kevin: Yeah. Yes. And it's a bit part of why I'm so thankful for Pine Ridge and the people there. It was where I healed. My voice, a decade ago, we could not have done this interview. Today you could tell that my voice is funky or unique, but people can hear everything I'm saying, and I can speak really without any pain or problem. And I got that back at Pine Ridge, by spending time there. And in time I did come to see my voice condition as a blessing because it knocked me out of the robotic trance-like routine I was in of just being an everyday common CEO, running a company the same way everyone had run companies for generations in this country. And it got me reconnected with my own identity, separate from my role, which really helped me lose a good part of my ego in my role, and then allowed me to see my role differently, which was really this. Back at work with our 600-person employee team, I could use the partial loss of my own voice to disperse power, share leadership, and give everyone else a bigger voice. And that gave me a brand-new mission around work and leadership that really inspired me and having been on that path for a decade now has really transformed our company in terms of the experience that people who work there have, most importantly, and then secondarily, the way the company performs. So as I gave up control, if you will, the company itself and the people that worked there took off and all of that really was a gift in hindsight, that came from the restrictions in my speaking voice.

Joseph: That's a great outlook in life. And I think this book is amazing. I think a lot of people enjoy it. What would you say is your target audience for this book?

Kevin: So it's so tricky. It's such a non-traditional book. Like you said, you probably hadn't seen one quite like it with part of its photojournalism, really trying to reconnect with nature and really trying to tell the Pine Ridge with pictures, that the other part of it are these meditations. And honestly, I feel the book is meant for humans. My editor and publisher, they always try to put things in a box, but when they say, no, who's the book for Kevin? I say, well, it's for humans. And that's honestly how I feel. And I have a sense you might feel the same way. That's really the spirit within which the book was written.

Joseph: I agree. I mean, obviously it resonated with me, but I think that people from all different walks of life will connect and find good messages from your book. So the book has great pictures. I really enjoyed looking at the pictures. Is this something you picked up before? Are you into photography? Or is it just something you just did for the book? Or how did that work out?

Kevin: Yeah. My times on the plains were so magical and mesmerizing to me that I had a camera, and I had a notebook, and I couldn't stop taking pictures and couldn't stop writing. I was just so enamored with where I was. Now, and this drives my mom a little bit crazy, my mom's kind of the great photographer in the family. She's got a giant, expensive camera and all this stuff she has to plug around. My camera fits in my back pocket. I never studied photography, but the more I started taking pictures, the more I learned what worked and what time of day. And it was really learning to photograph nature from nature. And it was really learning the art of photography in a very just authentic way.

And originally, I was taking the pictures for me, but the more I kept showing 'em to people, they were like, wow, these are pretty dramatic. These ought to be shared. But again, that's the spirit of the book, too. I wasn't a professional trained writer. I was not a professional trained photographer, but when any of us connect with that which releases a spirit within us magic comes out. And I really wanted this book to be a bit of, again, every human's photojournalism book, every human's book of thinking and imagining and creating. And I really loved that it wasn't fitting a traditional model or stereotype of what a book should look like. I didn't want that. I wanted it to be something different.

Joseph: Love it. You've also written other books. You've written a couple other books. You want to just touch on those a little bit?

Kevin: Yes. I've done three and they were all connected to this 10 year journey of my voice disorder, Pine Ridge, Northern Plains, and then rethinking leadership at that moment. So my first book which came out in 2015 is titled, [Not for Sale: Finding Center in the Land of Crazy Horse](#). And that book chronicled my first six trips to Pine Ridge. The second book I put out is titled [The Seventh Power: One CEO's Journey into the Business of Shared Leadership](#). And that book really picks up on some things we've talked about today, but then focuses on flipping the script on the traditional leadership model of power to the center and building a new model, which is power to the individual. And then my most recent book, which we're chatting about today, is 48 Whispers. So it's all three of them and all three of them are right on Amazon or anywhere books are sold.

Joseph: Excellent. One thing I liked about the one suggestion you had in your book is that folks read through it one time to get the whole understanding and then put it somewhere cozy in your house where you can go to relax, somewhere like a sofa or something, and then read through it slowly and listen to the different messages and let them resonate with you. And I've read it through once. And I plan to go and do what you suggested because it was relaxing, like you said, reading through it. But I think letting it kind of simmer and reading it slowly is the way to go as well.

Kevin: Oh, that makes me happy. And I can't help but think Joseph, the big joy of the book for me is the way time and time again, it connects me to people who I never would've met otherwise, like yourself here today.

Joseph: Excellent. Thank you, sir. I guess where can listeners learn more about you and learn more about your book and where can folks purchase your book?

Kevin: book? Yes, thank you. So I've got a website dedicated to the ideas we discussed today and that site is www.thebusinessofsharedleadership.com. On that site, you can find all kinds of resources, writing, the books and you can communicate with me directly, and I love to listen to people who've taken a look at my books and have thoughts to share in return.

29:05 **Joseph:** Great. Well, Kevin, thank you so much for coming on the podcast and sharing your story and sharing a little bit about your book. Listeners, I highly recommend that you pick up 48 whispers. Kevin I'll put your website and the Amazon link in the show notes so folks can know where to go. And again, thank you so much and hopefully we can have you again on the podcast sometime.

Kevin: Thank you Joseph, I loved it. Be well.