

Intro: Hello and welcome to leadership in challenging times on the NorQuest college podcast, hosted by Dr Jodi Abbott, President and CEO of NorQuest college, and Lieutenant, Colonel JC Wilson, third Canadian division headquarters with the Canadian army. This podcast, we'll discuss challenging and difficult topics affecting community, business and soldiers alike. The presenters may at times express their personal opinion or take a contrary position to expand the conversation, ranging from leadership to sensitive subjects to current affairs. The podcast will tackle issues in an open manner with an eye on identifying and expanding ideas from all sides of the discussion. Jodi and Jeff will now start the podcast.

Jodi: Welcome everyone to podcast 14 leadership in challenging times. We're really pleased to be here today with Marian Gayed, VP business development of NorQuest college. Welcome, Marian. And our special guest today is Julian Leblanc, who comes from Ottawa. Julian is known as a serial entrepreneur and comes from a sales background, has many, many years experience commercializing goods and services in a number of industries. I'm going to let Julian give us a little bit more of his background. I think it's a lot better to hear directly from Julian rather than

Julian: Sounds good. So let me break down in a few minutes. I think to give you a sense of why I love what I do and as my wife would say, I've found a hobby that pays in life. I am an entrepreneur today, but I didn't start off as an entrepreneur. I started off as a tennis pro of all things. I used to teach tennis in Florida and at a young age I got to see what world-class looks like. At one point we had one of the top juniors in the world training at our academy. And for whatever reason I developed this obsession of why is it that that one kid is separating themselves from all the other kids? Cause they all kind of look the same. And it's amazing how I've come full circle. So from tennis I went on, I'm from New Brunswick. So from New Brunswick, you either worked for the Irving family or the McCain family and I started selling French fries of all things and what an amazing run that McCain foods was.

Julian: I got to do all kinds of different things. I at one point ran the western Canada business and lived in Vancouver and Calgary for McCain. And those were amazing years. But my last role at McCain foods, I was the global director for a training and development and leadership. And what it gave me exposure was that there was a world outside of Canada, obviously in business and I got to work in over 45 countries and at the time McCain was scaling and countries like South Africa, China, India, and I just fell in love with the idea that I could help people at least or potential. And really what it did is it came back to my grass roots of coaching in tennis is I really discovered that my why in life was to help people unlock their potential. And so in 2012 one of my training partners that I was using at McCain, so we were using the Boston consulting groups of the world and the McKinseys, but where we're using this firm called blueprint management consultants out of Scotland. And I fall in love with their people. And what I found as we were looking at training programs is the material seem very similar, but the difference was in the people that brought it to life. And the one thing blueprint did, they only hired trainers and consultants that had walked a miles in the shoes of the participants. So in 2012 when I opened blueprint, it was under one premise and one premise only. I have to feel the pain of the participants that are in my room when I'm training and teaching. And I have a belief that education is what others try to do to you.

And learning is what you do for yourself. So I'd blueprint, we help people learn. And long story short, I started with my first startup to prove to myself that I could also be an entrepreneur. And here I am seven years later and I've got nine different businesses that are at play. I'm not going to talk about the four or five failures that I'm still recovering from, but I've got three of them that are thriving right now from renting Hearing aids were the first one to do that in Canada to a hockey shot where we sell synthetic ice, we sell training aids all over the world, all the, NHLers are using it, including a, the great Connor McDavid here. A did state a commercial for Adidas and they were using our products, which was really cool. So there you go. So I could talk about my passion that I have for this. I can't talk more about myself, but I could talk about the passion I have for, for entrepreneurship. So that's me. So I'm privileged to be here today, right?

Jodi: So it's interesting NorQuest college is on a really, really cool journey. So over the last eight years we've doubled our student population and we've doubled our budget. And what's neat about the doubling of the budget and that really allowed us to double our student population is we've really gone forward in the area of alternative revenue in expanding. Because whether it doesn't matter what company you are, if you're only sourcing one potential customer or one potential revenue source, you're going to have a challenge. So we took up that challenge, I want to say six years ago and said we have to do something to diversify. And one of the things we said we would do is become an entrepreneurial institution and academic organizations are not, that's not our history, our tradition. So it means that there's been a lot of new thinking, new ways of looking at things. And given that you have a focus on learning, not only education, but truly learning how, how would you infuse entrepreneurial thinking in a system where we now have a new strategic plan that's going to take us even further. And I personally believe we can't do it unless we're going to start to think differently.

Julian: Yeah. So first of all, congratulations. I think that's very interesting journey that you're on. If I think of entrepreneurship, I think it's a mindset. I think it starts with we're all entrepreneurs, whether you're, you have your own business, whether you're working for someone else. The people that I see in my daily travels that are separating themselves and adding value to what they do is because they truly own it. So I think one of the things as NorQuest on this journey, it's about figuring out what is the framework and how do you give freedom within that framework so people can truly own it. And what it probably means is that you have to push the boundaries a bit in terms of that framework and allow people to fail, but fail fast. And, and you know, I, I truly believe that sometimes you win, sometimes you learn, but you don't lose. And that to me is at the heart of being an entrepreneur is every time you don't get the result that's expected, as long as there's key learnings, the organization NorQuest will benefit tremendously from that. So it's, it's rewarding the process and not only the outcome. And that's hard to do because if you think about it, let's fall in love with the process and not get married to the outcome. Cause there's times that we're going to be ahead of the curve. You're not going to get the intended result. But it was absolutely the right thing to do. And long-term that'll set up NorQuest apart from any other, you know, institution.

Jodi: So, so in that what I'm hearing is you need nimble process to be able to give its, get there. So you, what I heard you say is we're gonna have a frame. And you can play all you want in that frame to be able to test things, to have things not work out and learn from what you need to do differently. So one of the conversations we're having in the organization really right now around leadership is the need to have some stability in certain things because there are certain things that you can't negotiate much with that you have to have some stable processes. But there are other places where maybe we use the stable process as an excuse to say we can't be nimble. And so, you know, we're, we're, I would say a mid size organization, 900 and some employees, we have people who have dedicated their lives to this institution and our learners. These are the people who have built the processes. So how do you move that process into it, into a different way of thinking that you can push the boundaries?

Julian: I absolutely love this model that we're now using at blueprint. And I've embraced as an entrepreneur as well, and it's called the 70 20 10 rule. And the idea is that strategically 70% of our efforts, energy investments are in the areas that's core to us. We have to do that. It's table stakes. So let's just continue to innovate in that space. But you know, the guard rails are pretty tight. 20% is calculated risk. We think it'll work. And 10% in the spirit of football, it's a hail Mary. You're throwing it out there and Indra Nooyi that just retired, the leader of PepsiCo. I love what she said. I think she was at the helm for 12 years and she said, my 10% outperform my 90% in the last 12 years because of ecommerce, personalization, you know, all these things that have come to play. So I believe within the structure here is we need to create a framework that allows us to have that 70 20 10 mindset.

Jodi: So if you're a leader, let's say you're a mid level leader in the organization and we're saying go for the 20 and the 10. Because you've always lived in the 70. Like what do you say to people? How do you, how do you create the environment where they'll actually step off the cliff and know that the organization's going to catch them?

Julian: Well, I think there's a little bit of rewiring. I'm going to share a story that I bumped into a few years ago and it really got me thinking about the difference between, let's call it breakthrough thinking and innovation. And basically it was a company in France where they sold champagne. They were in the champagne business and they hired a philosopher to come and try to change their thinking, which I thought was quite unique. And here's what they did and it was really neat. They said, okay, what are the five words that we use to describe what we do every day? So of course, so they said, champagne bottle, restaurant, grocery store of the five. You said, great, we can continue to innovate within that box. And there's nothing wrong with that. But if you want breakthrough, you need to open another box. That's why I think outside the box, but he really put a different spin on it and you cannot use any of these five words. So here's how it played out. It was fantastic. It was fantastic end result. So the philosopher said, so tell me what word could you use? And one of the employees said, uh, or the team members said, well, I think we're in the business of parties. Celebrations dies when people use our product. He said, great. Let's see how we could make parties better. So he asked the question, think of a good party and what made the party really good? And the answer, the first person said, when there's a good speech, keep in mind, this was in Europe. They send, when there's a good speech, it's a good party. When it's a bad speech, it's a bad

party. He said, great, how could we improve speechmaking? So they created a little booklet on how to deliver a great speech, whether it was the best man speech, whether it was a wedding speech, and the thing went viral.

Julian: So people would get their champagne boxes. But if they would've said innovate within the box of the five words, there's no way they would have come up with that idea of having a reference guide on how to deliver a great speech. So I think as leaders, let's call it middle management is we're doing this today. That's the 70% so we need to keep tweaking it. These are the five words that describe what we do at NorQuest, but we need to get comfortable with opening new boxes and then rewarding people even if they fail because if they played the process within that, that is going to serve us really well for the next 10 20 years and will future proof this college widowed depths.

Jodi: **So I'm going to ask you a finance question related to this. So if you do the 70 20 10 where should you put your resources? And I ask this because as an institution, moving into *Imagine 2025*, our strategic plan, we're talking about by 2025, 80% of what we do will be different. So I'm not going to bias the answer. I'll let you answer and then I'll jump in and I think Marian will as well.**

Julian: That's a loaded question, right? Look, I think, here's what I'm seeing, whether it's again, blueprint, we get to work with Fortune 500 clients every week, so we get to see how they think. And then as an entrepreneur, obviously you have to go execute and apply your own learnings is it's all about partnerships. I think in that 2010 there's enough people that are sharing a similar pain point that you have as you're looking to future proof your college. And it's how do we get these people to the table? How do we create an advisory board for instance around, uh, I don't know. Here we are in a podcast. We should have an advisory board on how do we deliver, you know, a world-class podcast, right? So we are doing it today, but how do we take it to the next level? So I think it turns a place in the bets. I think you still have to fuel that 70% because that's your core. That's what people expect. That's your unique value prop. The 20 and 10 is what's going to separate your self long-term. And I think that's where you have to look at partnerships because it's hard to fund, especially the 10% unless you know you have propensity for risk taking in your organization.

Jodi: **Well, and it's interesting because we, we actually put together a strategic investment fund. That I would say is to help propel projects that will lead us to the strategic outcome that we want to get to. But it's a good question for us to ask, are we only funding the calculated risk because we actually also need to fund the Hail Mary's. We do.**

Julian: You do.

Marian: **And I find some times people spend the calculated risk and make it look like you really are more of your core business but just a little bit more so therefore adds more risk and then we should invest in that. So I think we have to get better at sort of figuring out how do we vet ideas and I'd be really interested to get your thinking on that. What's, what's your process to vet new ideas? When do you know it's the right one? Um, how far would you take it and when do you know when to pull it and walk away?**

When to actually invest more money into it and, and when to let it go to the next level in the organization? Cause I think those critical decisions allow you to see whether you are successful or not and to know whether you should invest or not. And I'm wondering if you have a process around that or an example you could share.

Julian: Sure. And I think that's going to be a great book one day as well. If we can answer these six questions. That's um, so a couple of things I, I'm a big believer in lift and shift is if I look at the projects I'm involved in, you don't need to reinvent the wheel. So you look at what's succeeding in other industries and you learn, you become a student of it. You asked, you go to the third and fourth why and you really dig in. I think the lean startup philosophy that silicone valley is really embrace is the way to go. And the whole idea is quickly are we solving a problem? So let's start there. If we're not solving a problem, there's probably other solutions out there, then why reinvent the wheel at that point? Take something from someone else, bringing it to NorQuest. But ultimately what we're talking about in the 10% is solving a problem we haven't solved today.

Julian: So that means we are going at it from the standpoint of lean startup, which means we're going to build a product. We're not going to wait for it to be perfect. We're going to throw it out there, we're going to learn, we're going to measure, we're going to learn, and we're going to rebuild. And if we fail, we'll just fail fast. So then you're minimizing that strategic bet, that investment. So if this is a a hundred thousand dollars project, I would commit to \$10,000 and I would say, take me to gate number one or gate number two, then I'll give you access to the 20, 30 suites. You have to earn your way to get to the end, to the a \$100K. And basically what you become is in the spirit of, you know, cvcs, Dragon's den, Jodi's the Dragon's den that's looking at all the different bets that you have in opportunities here. You embraced the lean startup mindset. You go in it. And, uh, and that's, that's how I would, I would approach it

Marian: and going through that process allows you to take more risks, but knowing that you've got some rewards in your back pocket

Julian: and the beauty is if you stick to this, when you start measuring the results, the data will unlock the truth. So you're don't even need to be a spirit crusher because the data's going to say, I love your energy. You are solving a problem, but it's not big enough that we can scale this or you know, place a bigger bet and NorQuest so therefore, thank you for what you've done. We're gonna even reward you for that risk taking because you're showing other employees, other team members that that's what we need. And then you pivot, let's use the word pivot, then you go to the next project. The key is we have to be careful to fall in love with her. I love this quote. I think it's be careful of, of falling in love with your reference points. So you don't want to become a prisoner. Your reference point. I said today that was the right thing for NorQuest. It might not be in six months, but the market, the students will tell us that. And I think that's the key.

Jodi: So the process getting to step one. Yeah. I think sometimes we take a year to get to step. And the, the reality is that we want to reach research and analyze everything to death. I think part of it is we're taught that in academia we're trying to find the truth and so we're going to look further and we're going to look further and we'll look further. And to me this is the mind set shift that has to happen because we can't wait

a year and particularly what's happening in our environment. Our competitor is not post-secondary. Our competitor is everybody else out there. They're not going to take a year to assess whether it was perfect. They're going to move. So in the examples that you've been involved in, like what's that timeframe from ground zero in depth step one?

Julian: That's a good question. I think, you know, if you look at any, if you read any book, if you look at the doctrines on change and how do you drive positive change, those first 90 days are critical. I think when you get to day 90 you get a good sense of look, this is helping, it's feeding the ecosystem. People are getting energized around it. We might need to tweak it. And that's the, the whole philosophy between or behind lean startup. I think at 90 days even if you put a product that's half baked out there, that's at the 20% then you do the research and you look at the data and you've, you know, you work with the end user and that's the beauty now is this whole notion of ab split testing.

Julian: Do the same thing but do it three different times and the results will dictate where you should place your bet. So that's why I keep referring to the dragon's den is if there is a challenge, do we fund three ideas at 10k each that are trying to solve the same problem. And by day 90 you kind of have a sense of, look, this one is where we're going or you merge two of the ideas, right?

Jodi: You're getting, you're getting something from both of them, but it might not be the perfect.

Julian: Correct. You know, the one thing that spending time in silicone valley is I love the 10 x mindset. They always look at it and say, okay, if you think this a million dollar idea, so let's just use that reference point. What makes it 10? And you know what's scary? Most Times it's not that much to scale. It's really not is we just need to make sure that the formulas, right and then it's rinse and repeat. So I would approach it almost the same way is create healthy tension, healthy competition around challenging the status quo. And then, you know what? I think the ideas will fund themselves.

Marian: Do you think you need to or in your experience would you need to create an incentive system in place to allow for that to happen or the, the spirit of competition and winning and all of that would actually drive it forward?

Julian: I go back to one of the game changers. For me, it's amazing. Maybe it was just the timing is, I don't know if you've seen the Ted talk start with why by Simon Sinek. It hit me like a ton of bricks because at the time I knew what I was doing. I think I even knew how I was doing it. I had no idea why I was doing it. And you know, Simon says great communicators, people that create movements, they always start with the why. And I think as we paint the picture of what the future could look like for NorQuest is really, really engaging with the why. Getting people that are passionate, that are fired up, that see the value that they're going to create in this longterm vision. I think the reward is secondary. I really believe that, that the reward is secondary.

Jodi: And it's interesting because we're, I'm about to embark on work related to deep purpose. So when you, when you look at the college and you know, our mission and some will say this is the deep purpose is changing lives and strengthening communities. Okay. That sounds great. But I would say you can put, pick up any post-secondary plan, doesn't matter where it is and they're saying exactly the same thing. So you're not really differentiating enough. So as you start to go down the deep purpose route. And I would say even though many employees and NorQuest maybe can't articulate the purpose or articulate it a little different, I would say the people who are the most passionate had, have figured out that deep purpose and that's what motivates them to come back day in, day out, whether it's to their classroom, whether it's to, how are we going to, you know, take this organization to the next level and even when you have a slip back, you know, you've had a really crappy day. And it's like, okay, but we're going to get back up because we believe in what we do. So I think it ties a little bit to the incentive part. It's a different, perhaps a different type of incentive. That's the, they're coming back for the next day.

Julian: well I'd like to just build on that because there was an example I use when I lead strategy workshops and it's the Coca Cola example. So Coca Cola's vision is happiness. That's their vision. Now aspirational, what does that even mean? But that's their vision. What they have that's very powerful is an internal rally cry that it doesn't matter you talk to, they would tell you that what we are trying to do is be an arms reach, a desire. So just think of the power that for a second. So if you're operational, you're looking at this saying, hey, like right now in this room, if there's not a coke product, they're failing. They're not an arms reach, a desire. I see Aquafina, that's Pepsi. So they fail. So they would say, how do we connect better with colleges, with NorQuest. But when it forced them to do is suddenly you've got 16 point of interruption, let's say in a grocery store.

Julian: Arms reach the desire next to the pizza. Even on your way out. Off premise have to get in the water business cause we're going to get shut out of of the schools because of sugar, have to get in protein. That's the new thing right now have to get in cannabis distribution because that's where the world's shifting. So really I think as you look at this is, let's call it the why is what is the rally cry that if I opened the door that every single person at NorQuest would say that's what I'm driving towards. And once you have that, then you can look at your role and say what I can do for my teammates and myself to take one more step towards that is this. And in order to do that, I'm going to have to take risks. And in order to take risks, I'm going to go back to my process.

Julian: I'm gonna embrace lean startup. And in order to fund that idea, you know, NorQuest is going to look at and say, well we can fund one 10th of it to start. And then the process will dictate where we funnel our money in year two or three. So I think it's, it's from everything you're saying right now. First of all, it's amazing that you're on this journey because I don't see that. And I have to share a quick story. It's amazing laws of attraction that I'm here today. So I was working on a project and I got to work with you, Jodi, which was with CICan, that represents all the College Institutes Canada. And so I got to see a lot of colleges across the country. And there was a running joke that I had with the CIGAN team. I said, I will buy only one sweatshirt from the college that I go in That energizes me, inspires me. And I see leadership and I see something different. And the sweatshirt that I bought was the NorQuest sweatshirt.

Jodi: Woo.

Julian: And there's some great colleges across the country. You have amazing colleagues, Jodi from, you know, from Halifax to, to Edmonton, to Calgary, all of it. It's all good. There was something unique in this building. All of it. The people I met, the experience I had. And isn't it funny that here I am, you know, eight months later. So, so energy is powerful.

Marian: It's funny, we kind of call it the secret sauce. There is a secret sauce here. You know, I can,

Jodi: I think Marian coined that.

Marian: People were laughing at me when I first said that when I came here because I couldn't unpack it. You know, you go into an organization or you meet a family or you meet a new friend and you could sort of figure them out right off the bat and you could kinda tell what their characteristics are. When I got into NorQuest after the first three months, I'm like, I just can't un pack it, but I get this feeling that we've got a secret in the organization. And I think that's a big part of who we are. It's, it's everything that we do together that makes us unique and it, and it drives our purpose and it's a silent, it's a silent driver for our energy in our efforts here at the college. And it seems to permeate whether you're a staff members student or someone who just comes into the college, they get the same level of feeling. So it's kind of, it's kind of cool. And we have a great opportunity to unpack that a little bit. And drive words that describe that secret sauce in our purpose.

Jodi: Yeah. And it's, I think it's interesting. I think NorQuest has somehow always had a secret sauce. We didn't talk about the secret sauce. We also, I always said we were, I described us as an apologetic college that we didn't bring what we have to light. We didn't shine the light on it. We didn't tell the world. Interestingly, we had a former government employee that we used to work with a lot from advanced Ed was here and actually came through our innovation studio last week. And as we came into this building, our Civic Employee's Legacy Tower, she had been in the old building before it had been renovated. And as she was leaving, she said something has changed here and it, and it wasn't just about the building, but she said, you know, when it came to NorQuest before I knew you had a purpose, but I always felt sad.

Jodi: And so I said, well, how do you feel today? She said, I feel so energized and happy. And so, and she said, I can't put my finger on it. I don't know what it is. And so I think, you know, for me it's that deep purpose and it's, we all know what it is Sorta, but we haven't named it. And I think if we can get to really naming it, then we can say, okay, now what more can we do with it? Because there's so much more that people need to know about us that need to access our services, that companies will say, holy Moly, you are the solution for our problem and we can help you as an institution, even figure out what your problem is. And so I see that there is, there's just incredible potential here.

Julian: Well, it's interesting too because really I think as the fearless leader of this institution, your job is energy management. You're creating energy and when you have purpose and when people know exactly the contributions that they're, what they're doing every day, what it means to the NorQuest is let's say longterm plan that gives you energy, that gives you a collaboration, that drives creativity. Now we have to have a process though because you know, energy, if it's not contained as we know can also be very dangerous. But, but absolutely. I think you're the chief energy officer here.

Marian: No, I was just going, I was just going to say, I think, I think the energy that we create is to help other people find their purpose in the organization. Yes. So by knowing ours, we give them the opportunity to find their purpose. I mean, we hear that a lot from our students. And I think it's very inspiring to know that you can come to education institution, not just find a career path, but to have a life plan. And that life plan I think drives their success in the future. And so that's cool.

Julian: Well, what you can't fake is positive energy and purpose. And I can tell you when I visited last time I was here and I went into your daycare, I was like, this is where I would drop my kids if I lived in Edmonton, if I could, because that was real. The authenticity, what people were doing, their, the pride, they demonstrated how they connected with the kids. You know, those are the things, those are the tell signs or the signals that say that you're onto something good. The bottle, that sauce or the magic

Jodi: Well, and it's, it's, yeah, it's interesting because the energy, so you feel energy in the building. You saw energy and felt energy in the 1000 women childcare center. So oftentimes when you have energy, you also have the crazy idea. Sure. Right? And sometimes that guy, I think of my time at NorQuest, I'm sure everybody and I'm looking at other people in the room. Probably seven years ago thought, oh my God. Yes. Right? Because you put out a crazy idea and then you back it up with a plan to get there. So I want to talk about you. What was your craziest idea and where did it go in your entrepreneurial life?

Julian: Yeah, so my craziest idea I think was when I was 19 years old. I always, so typical Canadian kid played hockey, still play hockey, love it, but excelled at tennis. And I wanted to go on a scholarship in the u s because if I was going to play pro, that's what you do. And I broke my arm playing tennis in grade 11, and that's a critical year and it just didn't work out. So I started, I went to school a first year and after my first year I realized I still need to chase that dream. So I left. It was University of Moncton. And I remember my parents gave me a car and I drove to Boca Raton, Florida. And I had one connection there and I made my way. And suddenly I was working this tennis academy. So that proved to me I could do anything. It really proved to me, I'm an entrepreneur. I believe in myself. I'm playing in. The biggest, you know at the time is, you know, you're a big fish in a big pond if you're a good tennis player in New Brunswick. But then you go to Florida where it's the global hotbed. You have to figure out a way to make it work. And it was a way better coach than player. But it's amazing how that gave me confidence in. It's most of the projects that I'm involved in where kids, I coached tennis at one point and now it's transitioned because we built trust in those earlier years and you know, now we're trying to change the world together. So is that what that would be one like crazy ones I think.

Jodi: **That's cool. Yeah. And you didn't fail.**

Julian: I learned a lot. I don't think I got the first six months were tough. But once I persevered and gritted it out, then it paid off. And then after university I actually went back and then worked in the, at the time, the richest country club in south Florida. And so amazing. And to this day, my two girls are now in tennis and now it's the full circle of life. But yeah, it was definitely you know, my coach tells me every day or when I work with him, confidence is a choice and I love that line and he's an ex professional golfer so he's got credibility to say this, but he says what gives you confidence, knowledge, people you associate with, skills, practicing. So if I do all these things, there's no reason I wouldn't be confident in what I do. But yes, I go back to that one year that gave me my wings, my confidence winning.

Jodi: **That's, that's interesting. Now you talked earlier about having had multiple businesses. And that you don't talk about failure, you talk about learning. Can you share one of those learnings with us and I think it's always helpful to hear other's experiences where they've gone up and they've slid back and they're hanging on by their fingernails. Because one, I think we all experience it, but we don't talk about it enough.**

Julian: So very, it's a, well, I turned into a personal story because of what we were trying to do. So my younger brother that I was his tennis coach, and he's an entrepreneur, a very successful entrepreneur right now. His first startup was called hour of balance. And the idea was he was working at Sunlife at the time in Montreal in their, in their call center. And they had just been awarded like best place to work in Canada, one of those big awards. But yet there was like 42% of people that weren't showing up at work because difficult work, you know, some of the call centers, it can be repetitive and so forth. So he said, what could I do to really help people want to love coming here? Cause I love coming here and I'd love to see, you know, people take this to another level.

Julian: So he came up with this idea, which was, what if we convince HR to give every employee half an hour of free time, if they gave us half an hour. So it was like a matching program and within that hour they could take it anytime during the day and it was to work on passion projects. So for instance, they had yoga classes, they had guitar classes. They had some people that would just go do their groceries because they didn't have time to do it at night. And it was a huge success. I mean it was such a success and when they tried to scale it at Sunlife, they gave all the reasons why it wouldn't work. So my brother got very disappointed, left, but it was his idea because he was doing this on his personal time, not during the day that he built the idea and he got one contract, a company to bite on it.

Julian: And the first one was Fairmont hotels cause the call center is in New Brunswick and Moncton. And I'll tell you if you read the testimonials of what we did for people, you know, people were like, you've saved my marriage. You know, I've lost this weight because they could invest in themselves. They were doing stuff during the day that they could invest. Their productivity was off the chart. Like Fairmont was loving it. The problem is we couldn't monetize it properly. So it became almost like a project of love. Like my dad was retired, but he was driving a van to bring people from, you know, the

office to a gym. We had, you know, two of my brother's partners were staying at my parents house. My parents were feeding them. I was early investor. So it was my middle brother. And we say to this day, we will come back to that when we have philanthropy money because we saw the impact on people.

Julian: And funny enough, my brother's second startup won an apple design award, was featured in entrepreneur.com product is being used by all these fortune 500 companies. But as he says, our balance was still my baby. I just couldn't monetize it. Now the good news on that one, we didn't know when to walk away. We could, we could have stayed a little too long and I think we could've lost a lot of money. So at least we were able to say, look, it's more of a hobby. And yes. So that would be the learning and the learning was we fell in love with the idea, so it became very hard to walk away from it because we were seeing the impact. I mean you were bumping into people saying like, literally you've saved my marriage, you've made me a better person. And that was very powerful.

Jodi: **Well, and even the learning from that. The initiative itself you walked away from. But you had two things I think that came out of that. You haven't lost the idea. So you can actually take that idea into organizations and you can sell the virtue of the idea because of the experience you had. And you can also say, hmm, we learned to walk away. That's really hard to do. And that's what I see sometimes in the college. We build something up. Our employees work really hard to come up with the idea. They build it and it's really hard to pull it away. And it's a little bit like the stop do list because in organization, do you have to be laser focused? Yes, but we all say, oh my God, I'm too busy, I'm too busy. And then you, you know, as a supervisor you can say, well we're going to stop doing this and you know, for 10 seconds everyone goes, Yay, I'm going to stop doing it. And then they go back and go, oh but I built that. Or you know, we'll just tell the person we stopped doing it. But then you find, you know, spreadsheets and other things that are like breadcrumbs to the project that won't die basically. And so it's, it's an interesting thing on how do you motivate the stop, do list and actually have it stop when you are so personally invested in building it. It's tough.**

Julian : Well one of the questions that really, that project shed light on me and I think I use it every couple of days is when you, when you say yes to something, what do you saying no to? And you can't just keep saying yes because being strategic cause you have to say no and no, just means new opportunities. As Richard Branson once said to the definition of no. So I think that was a key learning for us is Canadians, new Brunswickers pleasers. That's all great. But there is a place that I think maybe the model would still be alive if we would've learned to say no in a few areas as well. And we will come back to it. I love what you just said there. I was listening to a podcast and someone was talking about Peter Drucker, the famous management Guru, and he had already written like 20 books at the time, and they said, so what's your favorite book? And without missing a beat, he goes, my next one. No, it's true. So that's what I feel about the projects I'm involved in. That's how I feel about our balance is that was just, it wasn't meant to be, the timing wasn't right. But if we solve the problem and we impacted so many people, something will come back at one point around that project.

Jodi: So you just said something that twiggged something important for me. You said the timing wasn't right. How do you have, if you're a let's say you're an up and comer in the organization and you're talking to executive or middle management and you come forward and say, I have this great idea. And someone says, well, we tried that 10 years ago in a failed.

Julian: The spirit crusher.

Jodi: How do you, how do you deal with that? Because you know, what you just said is maybe the timing wasn't right then, but something has changed in the context of the environment, the people. How do you push that through? Because you know, I often say to employees like, we want to hear your ideas. And then I'll hear, well, I tried but I'm giving up because the ideas are pushing through whatever the barriers are. And I think there's many of them. And I think as leaders, our job is to remove those barriers. And maybe we're not doing a good enough job at removing the barriers.

Julian: Well, it's interesting the, um, what the work of Carol Dweck, I don't know if you're familiar with the growth mindset. It's fantastic. It's funny, I saw it in my seven year olds class the other day too. So schools are really starting at a young age to say, you know, your job is to a growth mindset. And I think entrepreneurship combined with a growth mindset is a powerful combination. One of the guys that worked for me was a, he was doing some work with Microsoft and he noticed that there was only one poster in their board room. And I loved it. It said, are you operating with a fixed mindset or growth mindset? And it had a checklist and they basically said, if you're operating for fixed mindset that get out of the board room because you're not gonna add any value. And the difference was very simple. You can look at everything as a challenge, but the same situation and growth mindset says, what a great opportunity. A fixed mindset doesn't want feedback. A growth mindset says bring it on. So I think is the ideas. We're not going to tolerate a fixed mindset. We are always going to tolerate a growth mindset. We're going to reward people that are trying to work the process. And even if we fail, we'll even celebrate a failure because we thought we did everything right. The timing just wasn't there.

Jodi: Right. Right.

Marian: The timing. Yeah. It's quick. Critical.

Jodi: Yeah. And it's interesting when, um, when you talk about you see something as a barrier versus bring it on and one of the um, key attributes of NorQuest college we call it really our personality is bring is challenge positive and what that means. And it was, it was an interesting journey to get to that when we were doing our brand work because people are, that's not appropriate grammar challenge positive. Like what are you talking about buddy? It's, it is the, it doesn't matter what the challenges. We're going to either find a way around it through it. We're going to kick it out of the way. And I would say that our development as an organization and you know, our, our growth in students, the impact we're having in the community has come from every employee who's been able to embrace that challenge. Positive mindset. And yes, we have the rules and we probably have too many of them new. We need to work

through that. But I also think we can't forget that, you know, that we have said to people, this is our personality. This is has to become our personality when we work here.

Julian: That's good. That's really good.

Marian: I want to reference something that you were just speaking about that growth mindset and feedback. So I'm curious, what's your philosophy on feedback or coaching to other entrepreneurs or individuals that show that entrepreneurial mindset, that growth mindset, um, to help them sort of persevere through the naysayers and the fact that they might not get the results right away, but the, are working through the process and they are progressing and succeeding, but not by the definition of others around them, whether it be someone within the hierarchy of the organization or a peer group, um, or someone who reports to them or whatnot. What, what would be sort of your thinking on that?

Julian: Well, a couple of things. I think if so, I'll look at it from first. From the standpoint of my personal experience of all the things I've done as a leader that's still trying to figure things out every day was a 360 feedback and that 360 feedback was harsh because you look at yourself in the mirror. So I'll give you an example. If you think you're a positive person, but you look at your 360 feedback and 14 people that took the feedback say actually you're only positive when things are good, you're very negative when things go sideways, you have no choice but to deal with that reality. And if you think of what you described there, it's all about emotional intelligence and it all starts with self-awareness. So it's fostering a culture of, I don't think you can never give enough feedback. I truly believe that and I think there's a place for formal feedback, but really the magic happens when it's impromptu after a project.

Julian: And one of the things that I've noticed, it's just an observation. Don't know if I'm right yet. I don't have any science to back this up. But my experience with all great companies I work with, even the best ones are still failing in one area. We're really good at debriefing when we don't get the result we want. We don't actually debrief when we get the result. We want to capture that secret sauce to come back to what you've coined here at NorQuest. I think whether we got the result we wanted or we didn't, it should be the same debrief process because if we've done something right, how do we scale? So really, I'm kind of coming at it from different angles, but I think it all comes back to driving self-awareness with individuals, which means you need to get a lot of feedback. Some of it is formal, like a 360 feedback or proper 360 feedback.

Julian: And then secondly, it's creating a coaching culture. So that's a whole other level, which means you don't have managers here, you have coaches. And that means you have to empower your people to be able to have those conversations and not to be afraid to have the critical conversations. And you know, there's a difference between culture for high performance and coaching because the person's not delivering the goods right. Again, do you know who we invest? Most of the coaching, the people that are struggling, why aren't we coaching the people that are doing great things cause they're the ones that are, can do to take the risk and that is going to elevate NorQuest and then

people will just follow and lead by action. So you've got great questions every time. You really always here.

Marian: So maybe just speaking a little bit, but the scaling up process, and this is, I'll honor this question to one of our staff members, Andrea Erickson, she's in business development. She's been working on a really amazing project, one of a kind here at the college and one across the country product. She's done quite a bit of build up over eight months to get it to where it is today. And her question is, how do you move from the build stage to the sale part, with a new idea in a market that's still growing or burgeoning that you might not just have a foothold yet, but you know, you're at the right place. Um, and then she sees it as a different skillset. But she's asking herself, is that just a different thought process? And if so, how do you shift from that build mode to the sale mode to scale up and to start to penetrate the market faster? I'm using sales language now.

Julian: So I understand that language. That's good. You're, you're fitting it. You're right into my a sweet spot. I've got a perfect example because I just had the opportunity to see something here that I think is world-class and groundbreaking and it's the work that you're doing with virtual reality and nursing. So I got to experience that and being someone that has one foot into, let's call it education that's trying to help people unlock their potential and one foot in entrepreneurship. My first question was, wow, I hope we have IP on that thing. Because secondly, I was like, there is a huge opportunity here. What we're doing here, we could actually monetize that idea. So we're selling it to like you look at the u s where it's all privatized. Do you know the Cleveland groups of the world? They'd pay a lot of money for this. Secondly, then we can give some of the learnings to the rest of our colleagues across the country.

Julian: So I think it's rewiring herself to say it's okay to actually monetize an idea and then also share best practices and do what we do. Because the why here is very clear. We want to build better communities, we want to help our peers across the country. I get that. But my first thought is you've built it so you need to go from the what is the, what could be and we need to fall in love with the what could be in the, what could be in this case is that's global application. You're solving a serious problem. I mean being around, you know, nursing homes and as an entrepreneur, we, we, we've started dabbling in that space and there's not enough good people to keep up with the demand. So I think NorQuest is solving a problem. And I think we should combine that idea when entrepreneurship and I think there you go, you've got an idea and no, those could fund the next 10 ideas cause that could create an incubator.

Jodi: well, and I think it's interesting because the word monetize is not a word we would use around here. Right. And so, but we need to, so I think we shouldn't shy away from coaching this in a different language. I think we need to say no, this, we do need to monetize. Instead what we tend to do is, well, we'll research this and then we'll give it away to the world. And so, you know, I one I love that you went and looked at what we're doing. We had, we had people come in last week who looked at it from the government side and they were like, holy, of course we have no idea that you've been doing this, but the, the, the mentality there isn't going to move us. Your kind of mentality to say, okay, we're going to it. And what it means is that all the other things

you want to do, and this is our approach to really profit and purpose, is that if we could monetize what we did there, then we, the purpose part of it is we're going to make money off it. Yes, that's the profit piece. But the purpose piece is we're going to be able to do more as an institution because the money is going to go back into it. It also means we can share it with others because it's been paid for and it's going to continue to bring a draw into the organization rather than a sucking out of the organization. And this is the piece that I believe is missing but an incredible opportunity. And the innovation studio that we sit in now doing the podcast is where this work is happening. So we have these incredible ideas. We have incredible employees that are doing this work. It's this other lens that we need to, not overlay but pull up those ideas. And I do think it's, how do we pull that up to say holy, like our faculty developed this. You guys are amazing. Now let's turn it into some cash because that cash is going to help us move our mission.

Julian: All it does is your words matter. We are going to monetize so we can fuel our other 10 investments to impact more people and to feed the ecosystem. And I'll just share a perfect example. About seven years ago with my best friend from New Brunswick, we created this company called hearing aid, rental.ca. And what we do is we rent hearing aids. Cause number one reason people don't wear hearing aids is price. And then number two, stigma. Why do you need to own a hearing aids? It makes no sense as to do pushing assets, a grudge purchase. All you care about is the hearing. So we said, why don't we rent these brand new hearing aids month 36 we refurbishing, we send them to third world country. It's had such an impact on the profession. It's incredible. But the reason I share that story is out of this, I have the fortune over the last five years to work with one of the biggest manufacturers of hearing aids in the world and what I do as part of blueprint, my other company, is we do the training and development of all these audiologists and HIs across the country. And you know what's amazing? They do not like the word sell because they got into the medical profession because they didn't want to sell. They want to care. But my challenge is. Nothing happens until the hearing aid goes in that year. So we've changed the language and basically what I'm saying is let's make it easy for people to say yes, because we're not making it easy. Your stories aren't good enough. Your influences influencing skills aren't great. You're not, you know, really understand the patient needs. So how we're changing the industry is we're getting them to brace a say. It's okay, it's okay to sell something, right. These are the greatest people you've ever met this profession. I don't know where they find these people. Every time. I'm always so inspired, but we've had to do the shift, the word monetization. I started with getting to yes, influencing. Now I'm at to selling. It took five years to get to use the word selling because it was the dirty word in the business. Right, right. Business was our a dirty word. Right?

Jodi: **Business was when I think in probably, I was here for about a year and I said, you know, we're in business. And it was like, Oh my God. And you know, I had members of the executive around me saying, no, we're gonna change the word. And I'm like, no, we're not gonna change the word. We are in the business of education and it's, it's not a bad thing. Look at the learners that we produce. Look at the graduates that go on to employment. Look at what happens to their families when they're earning an income. So we have, I think we sometimes got caught up in kind of red herring arguments and I think we're getting better at that and we're being less apologetic for the language and**

we bring people to the story because you still have to bring people along that storyline to get them there. But we need people to understand there is a shift happening in the world and um, it will either lead that yes or we'll be left behind.

Julian: Well said. Yeah, no, really well said.

Jodi: So I think, Marian, do you have any other questions for Julian? Any, anything else?

Julian: I've got a question for both of you. I'm big on - most organizations what I see is they have the skillset or capabilities that drives a behavior that drives an end result. I think world class organizations do the complete opposite. They stand in the future. They decide what they want that future to look like and they reverse engineer it. They say what kind of behaviors, capabilities, skillset. So let's stand in the future. You mentioned your strategic plan, paint the picture for me of what NorQuest could or should look like here at the end of this plan.

Jodi: Ah, this is interesting. We just did a time capsule and there you go. And I had to write a letter for 2069. And as I wrote the letter, I thought, I think I'm not being creative enough. I'm not seeing far enough in the future, but what I see, you know, with our 2025 plan, yes, we're going to have 40,000 learners. Yes, we're going to have a larger budget, but I think we're going to see a revolution of post-secondary education. My wish is that we see a revolution of post-secondary education. We will maybe have bricks and mortar. We maybe won't. I think it's that we will take learning to wherever the individual is that needs learning. I would love to see a whole different credential system and I might get calls on this one. But I really would I think students, and not just students, I would call students, learners, clients, customers, employers, they need what they need and they need it as quick as they can get it, but they also want quality. So how do we create a system where we have micro credentialing and I don't think those are even the right words because that's old mindset credentialing. No, it's not old mindset. It's what we live with. It's, it's our current mindset. So I think we, we, I would love to see that you can create the learning that you need to get the skills you need so that you can be successful, but you can do it partly at NorQuest college, partly at the University of Alberta, partly at NAIT. So I think that, that, that is very different. And, and I also see that there is opportunity for us to learn from the private sector.

Jodi: I think we're trying to do that and we're trying to lead in that area. But I also think the private sector can learn from the public sector because the complexity of what we manage in a public sector environment, um, are there are things when you peel the onion back that entrepreneurs, businesses, midsize industries would go, you have to do what? And I belonged to Young Presidents Organization and in my forum group you know, in the last couple of years, you know, sometimes the jaws drop when you say what you're having to deal with. So I think we need to get rid of the barriers in there. And there's somewhat false barriers between private industry and public sector organizations. I think we just need to have that shift and fall to the ground.

Julian: Fantastic.

Jodi: **Marian, now you're on the spot.**

Julian: How do you follow?

Marian: **I'll try to add to it. Um, there's a, there's a lot of market information that says the future requires that we need to skill up and become lifelong learners. Every few years, we might be doing different things. You might be a lawyer today or an accountant tomorrow. And you're going to change careers a lot more than what we do now. And my hope for the future is that education work are not two separate things that they become one that we really close the gap that educational institutions become at the fingertip of workers and learners and high schoolers and children. And you don't have to get into the system to access it. It could be as easy as buying something on Amazon, but it could be an experience that we could potentially create in addition to that educational experience for them. But I think there is a great opportunity for us to close that gap between work and education and create a fun new space, a hybrid of both and utilize anything at our fingertips to reach that purpose. Because I do think you can have fun at both things and putting them together. It makes it even more exciting in your life.**

Julian: That's inspiring. It's a good combo.

Jodi: **So I'm going to wrap us up. I would ask Julian, is there one last message you want to leave with our, our listeners and our learners.**

Julian: I'll finished with a quote? Why not? And I think fortune favors the bold, and I think we've got to be bold because if we can't create the future here, who's going to do it? You have permission to lead. And that's not, that's hard to get permission to be entrepreneurs. Permission to have a growth mindset, permission to challenge the status quo or even break it down. And I can't wait to follow the NorQuest story because I feel vested now. So I'm part of your story. So there you go.

Jodi: **That's, that's great. I'd like to say thank you very much to Julian Leblanc and Marian Gayed. A great, great session and thank you listeners for listening to leadership in challenging times.**

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