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# DOING THE OPPOSITE BUSINESS DISRUPTORS

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Conversations with  
*Jeff Dewing*

## EPISODE EIGHT

### Legacy & Leadership: Why It's Not About You

#### Jeff Dewing – Teaser:

*If you had to name one word, what's the most powerful word for any leader or manager? And you can even say this about life - the most powerful word is curiosity. Be curious, listen, be the last person to speak, absorb what's going on around you. You don't have to agree, but my God, have you learned?*

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#### Sam Walker:

Hello, welcome to Doing the Opposite: Business Disruptors - Conversations with Jeff Dewing. It's the podcast where we explore how leadership, culture, and courage can transform businesses and also life.

I'm Sam Walker. I'm here with Jeff Dewing, the CEO of Cloudfm Group, an organisation that he built from the ground up after losing everything. He's also a best-selling author and a keynote speaker. In this final episode of this series, Jeff shares what legacy really means to him and how true leadership is about building people and not empires.

Jeff, you've said legacy actually isn't about what you leave behind, it's about who you lift up. Can you unpack that?

#### Jeff Dewing:

There's a great book called 'Turn the Ship Around'. And it was about an American fleet of submarines. And there was one particular submarine that was the poorest performing submarine in the entire fleet. And the reason it was the poorest performing submarine was that every tour it went on, all of the crew left at the end of that tour. They never stayed. Whereas other submarines, the same crew stayed.

There was one particular guy who was training to become a captain for years and years and years. And eventually he got to his point where he's passed all his exams, and they said, 'Congratulations, you're a captain'. He went, 'Great, which sub do I get'? And he was given the worst performing sub. The book is amazing. It goes on to tell the story of how he, again, broke the rules because although he had to know everything about that nuclear sub, every piece, every moving part, whatever, he was a generalist, whereas different people in different departments were the specialists. And whereas in a typical environment, you'd go to the captain and ask permission to do stuff, he said, 'You never ask my permission. You

just tell me what you're gonna do so I know, right? But you're never gonna ask my permission'. And what he'd done was he empowered people to own their own station, their own environment. And it was just the way in which he tells his story. And he said, 'You know more about the torpedo section than I do. Yeah, I've got a generalist idea, but you understand how this stuff works, so just tell me what you're gonna do and why. And I'm not here to tell you wrong because I don't know as much as you do, but I just want to understand what you're doing and why, so I can learn from you'. Vulnerability, right?

Anyway, that's the gist of the story. Within one year, it became the highest performing submarine because the crew felt empowered and grew another five feet as a result of that, and they felt purposeful in what they were doing. And as a result, the reason when he was interviewed as to why he did this, he said, because I want this submarine to be the highest performing submarine when I'm not here. And that's the legacy that he wanted to build, and that's the way that we all as an organisation, as a human race, how we evolve. So legacy for me is knowing that in the event I chose to step away from this organisation, or even if I was asked to step away from this organisation, that the organisation would be as successful, if not more successful, on that journey because everybody was empowered to be their best selves, which doesn't mean you're a one-man show.

**Sam Walker:**

I mean, the story you've just told about the sub is a great story. I'm guessing that isn't a story that led you to the place you are now. That's something that that is a belief that you've held for a long time. So, where did that belief come from? Was it through practice, was it through intuition?

**Jeff Dewing:**

No, I think the point of life is you go through life, ambling through life, and you think you know where you're going, and then suddenly you change your mind. And the one thing that's missing in most people's lives is clarity or the ability to articulate clarity.

So all the things that I do and have done, I reflect on and think, 'yeah, I think I did the right thing there'. But if somebody asked me, I couldn't articulate it. So when I joined a peer group, which was called Vistage, where you've got a group of 14, 15 CEOs that meet every month where you share knowledge and you grow and you're challenged and you're accountable, and it takes away this legacy statement or this cliché that it's lonely at the top. You've now got people you can share stuff with that you can't even share with your wife, right? So what that took me on the journey of is with Vistage and the way in which it's structured and keynote speakers and whatever, what I learned from Vistage was how to articulate what I'm doing or what I want to do. Whereas before I couldn't, I'd have to spend four hours to explain why culture's important. Whereas now I can explain it a lot more articulately.

So when you asked me about 'was the book was the influencer', and the answer is yes, because the book articulated what was important and why. Whereas that before I'd said, Well, I just want the business to be as good as it was, and I wouldn't be able to articulate why or how. So it's helped me have clarity on what I'm trying to achieve, where journeys like

this and stories like this, you know, it just help you articulate what it is that you're trying to do.

**Sam Walker:**

How do you build legacy in practice in practical terms?

**Jeff Dewing:**

You bring people on that are better than you, you grow people to become better than you, and your job is to serve. You know, and this is a funny story. I used to say to my ex-wife when we'd be having banter about something, and she'd start annoying me about something or another. And I'd say, Do you know why you're on this planet? And we would have this debate, you know, this philosophical debate. Do you know why you're even here? She'd say, No, why? I said to serve me. You imagine what that went down. That went down so well. I said, but conversely, my role is to serve you. The point behind that statement is we're here to serve people, we're here to grow people. That's how we evolve. And by doing that, there's people helping us grow. That's the way the world goes round. But when you think it's about you, you're on the slippery slope. So this is the whole point. So when you go on that journey, it's about you serve people to make them their best selves, to help them become the best selves, to come out of their comfort zone, to watch the magic happen. And then suddenly things start. It's like the famous Barack Obama interview where he said, you have to work bloody hard, and it's about getting shit done, right? And it's not about the talk because behind politicians and the politics of life, it's about talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, score point, score, point, score votes. But no one's actually doing anything. The people that get shit done are the ones that make the difference.

**Sam Walker:**

So if that's your value system, that's great when you're here, when you're in the room. How can you and how can leaders ensure that actually their value system outlasts them?

**Jeff Dewing:**

So this comes back down to people again. Up until probably a year, two years before COVID, even in this business in its growth journey, I was working seven days a week, 20 hours a day. I was an animal, I was a machine, and I loved it. But my father passed away in 2017, and it caused me to sit and re-evaluate my life and what was important. And I made a decision then that I'm not gonna do this anymore. Life's too short, and life can go very quickly before you flash your eyes. So the reason that was so potent was because me and him were water skiing in the March, and he died in the August because he lost his mobility, his knee got damaged, and he just went downhill at lightning pace. And you think and think, God, it's that quick and that easy. I've got to stop doing this, I've got to start you know getting some value out of life. So that was the start of me rethinking stuff. I now do a keynote that says from 300 emails a day to three emails a week, and there's no material strategy behind that, other than when you empower people and you release people and you take off the chains and you take off all of the constraints, and as long as you've got clarity, those people will blow you away. And how many times do you think I've heard leaders come up to me when they're challenging my thought process and they say, But all these people you let work at home? How do you know they're not taking the piss and laying in the sun and just sort of

watching football. And I'm saying, because you're thinking about the wrong things. If you are measuring their output and they're happy about delivering that output, they will never, ever let you down. But when they have no clarity, when they don't know what it is they're supposed to be doing, then they're gonna kill time. It's just simple. So it only comes down to whatever happens to you in life is your fault. So if they are taking the piss, it's because of you, right? And it's all about how you treat people, how you make people feel, and giving them clarity. So I got from 300 emails a day to three a week by empowering people.

**Sam Walker:**

So it seems like there is a real real disconnect in in the right way between legacy and ego.

**Jeff Dewing:**

Ego is a man or a woman's biggest, biggest enemy. I mean, we had a saying again during COVID and on my journey of learning all this stuff, and I used to say, as we walked into a meeting room, I'd stop everyone outside the meeting room and say, right, take your shoes off, you leave your shoes and your ego outside the room. Your ego is not allowed in the room. And it's about truly helping each other rather than you know a pissing up the wall contest, which it's become so easy to do if you're in a command and control and if you're in a blame-cultured environment.

So you've got to create this level playing field where you realize that there might be different people in different levels of responsibility, but we're all human. There's no difference between any of us. Some of us carry more responsibility, but it doesn't mean that we're any better than anybody else. So the key to life is when you ask people around you, 'what do you think about this?' and you listen, when you go and ask people's story about whatever it is they're doing or they've done, when you're prepared to listen to the story, you learn. And you know, one someone said to me once, if you had to name one word, what's the most powerful word for any leader or manager? And you can even say this about life the most powerful word is curiosity. Be curious, listen, be the last person to speak, absorb what's going on around you. You don't have to agree, but my God, have you learned? And I've got a really good friend of mine who is my one of my dearest friends, and politically we are polar opposites. We couldn't be more opposite if you wanted to, but I don't convince him that he's wrong. He does try to convince me I'm wrong, but I don't convince him he's wrong. I say to him, I'm curious, why do you think that? Make me understand, right? Yeah. Doesn't mean I'm gonna agree with you, but I'm curious as to why you think that way. And it's about learning. Like, you know, life is everyone's a life learner, and those that think that they're not are gonna miss out on life.

**Sam Walker:**

As somebody who has lived so many lives in one, and you have at different times in your life had different motivations, you've had probably different purposes, you've had different set of values, perhaps, or perhaps not, some have carried you through, but you know, some have changed as you've changed and grown and evolved. How do you today you know, you're coming up to a significant anniversary in your business as well in 2026? How do you personally define success today?

**Jeff Dewing:**

Success is decided by a word I used earlier, and that is fulfilment. And now that sounds a bit fluffy. So, how do you get to fulfilment? There's a thing called, which some people will be aware of, there's a thing called Ikigai. And Ikigai is a Japanese tradition that's been going on for hundreds of years, and loosely translated means the meaning of life. And Ikigai asks four simple questions. There's a bigger huge story behind it, but I'll keep it simple. Ikigai asks four questions. What are you good at? What do you love? What difference in the world are you gonna make? And what can you get paid for? Because you've got to pay your bills, right? Now, if I just asked somebody out of the blue to answer that now, you would struggle. Most people would struggle. You've got to sit and think about this. This is a deep thought process. So to bring that to life, when I owned the football club, what am I good at? I'm good at inspiring people. What do I love? I love getting more out of players that are winning stuff that they didn't win before because of the inspiration. What a change in the world am I gonna make? I put Clacton Football Club on the map. They hadn't won anything for 50 years, and for five years they won everything. It was on Sky TV, we were doing incredible things, winning shitloads of prize money. Could I get paid for it? No. So it's not sustainable. That's why it was never ever gonna go beyond where it went beyond.

So when I then came into the world of Cloud and launched the business, I asked the same four questions. Do I love what I do? God, I love it. Am I good at it? Yes, I'm good at it because it's been successful. I'm good at inspiring it. I'm not the person who's made it successful, the people have made it successful. I've just given permission to make it successful. What change in the world are we making? We've changed a £200 billion industry. We've changed the attitude of a £200 billion industry for the better, and it's improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people that are working in that industry because everyone is following our journey. Can I get paid for it? Hell yeah. So every individual, and we've put every one of our people through Ikigai, and we say to them, it's gonna take you three months, six months, it might even take you a year. Sometimes it will change. But when you can answer those questions, you're on the journey to fulfilment.

**Sam Walker:**

When you look back, what are you proudest of?

**Jeff Dewing:**

I'm proud of what everybody in our community has achieved. I'm proud of seeing people grow. I'm proud of you know the two or three women I've mentioned that have launched through the business despite having loads of children. I'm proud of people that have joined our help desk on 20 grand a year and are now you know account directors at 32 years old, commanding and managing a 15 million pound account. You know, to see these people grow is off the scale. and you know, that's the bit that that makes me smile when I go to bed every night.

**Sam Walker:**

So, what do you want your legacy to be? If you were to write that now, if I was to give you a pen and paper and said, write it down, you know, all bets are off, what do you want your legacy to be?

**Jeff Dewing:**

I would say, and it's quite interesting because sometimes when we have these deep and meaningful conversations internally, especially between me and my board or me and my strategy team, and the number of times that they've talked about a challenge they had, a problem they had, and they said, And you know what we said in the meeting? I said, What's that? I said, What would Jeff do? And that's not what Jeff does in solving a problem, it's what would Jeff do? And the answer has been Jeff would say to the team, what would you do? It just opens the door to having the tenacity to solve a problem that we all know within us are capable of doing.

**Sam Walker:**

So thinking back on your story, on your journey from that, you know, kid at 16 years old who went out into the world of work, all the ups and downs that you've had, the successes, the failures, times where you didn't know what to do next, times when you were sitting in your garage and your dressing gown for six months. But importantly, that was such a key part of your journey. It wasn't it, you know, it was necessary to move on. But putting all of those things together, building the success that you've had, building the legacy that you've had, if there was one message that you'd want to send to a young entrepreneur to remember your journey, what would it be?

**Jeff Dewing:**

It's not about you.

**Sam Walker:**

Not very much pen and paper needed then. Simple as that!

**Jeff Dewing:**

It's not about you, it's about the effect you have on other people.

**Sam Walker:**

What a way to close this series. Jeff, thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you.

And thank you for listening to Doing the Opposite Business Disruptors. This season has been all about conversations with Jeff Dewing. Of course, to find out more, get yourself online, [jeffdewing.co.uk](http://jeffdewing.co.uk). A massive thank you to Nichola Crawshaw at Cloud and also to Michael Blades at What Goes On Media. I'm Sam Walker, and Doing the Opposite: Business Disruptors has been a What Goes On Media production.