



Bryan Armentrout on The New Manager Mindset

Guest was Bryan Armentrout

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Transcription of Interview

Joe Dager: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Bryan Armentrout. Bryan is the owner of The Food Leadership Group, a food safety and quality systems consulting firm that compliments his thought leadership in the quality assurance/risk management space. Bryan, I'd like to welcome you and could you elaborate on introduction a little bit and give me that expanded elevator speech maybe if you would?*

Bryan Armentrout: I have worked in food for, gosh, time flies, over 20 years. I've headed up the quality assurance function for some of the major food companies in the United States. One of the things I always loved to do is when I go to grocery stores is point out all the brands that I've been responsible for within those companies. And so, my mom, Joe, once asked me what I do for a living, and it's kind of hard to explain so I broke it down to 2 main topics. If you're going out and you're buying a pint of ice cream, you buy it, you bring it home, and it tastes like you expect, and it's got chocolate chips in it, so wonderful experience. The second part that people forget on that and this is the trust

element of it is it doesn't kill you. People like me behind the scenes at food companies are making sure that that happens. That's been my passion and it's what I've been doing now for quite awhile.

Joe: *Well, you just recently published a new book, The New Manager Mindset. Could you make the connection between your background and the book?*

Bryan: Writing a book is something like most people, I read a stat one time, Joe, that said that 82% of people want to write a book. But, you don't really know where to start and I finally took the plunge and wrote the book and I started in October of last year, got it written and really my motivation behind that was looking back over my career, and there was a pivotal point and most people who work and it doesn't matter what you do, doesn't have to be quality, doesn't have to be food. If you're working at a company and you're busting your tail, and you're working hard, Joe, there comes a point in time where your boss recognizes it and says "Joe, you're doing a fantastic job. Congratulations, you're now a Manager." And, they put you in an office, and they give you a computer, and then you think to yourself "Oh geez, what do I do now?" The skill set that made you a good contributor, so being a microbiologist or working in a plant or whatever it was, now, is not the skill set you need to move forward, and that happened to me in my career. It was a pivotal point for me, Joe.

Joe: *I have to interrupt you a second, reminds me of that one Seinfeld show where George sat in the office there as a Manager and like "What do I do now?" right?*

Bryan: Exactly, exactly and I got, I was working in a cheese company, and I got sent out to a plant out in California, and I had no idea what to do, and I'm sitting at this desk and I would go into the staff meeting which consisted of the Plant Manager yelling at me for 15

minutes, and I would go back to my desk and say “Oh, what do I do? What do they want?” The people who reported to me couldn’t really explain it either because they hadn’t done it either. Luckily, for me a mentor came along, it was the Regional Quality Manager, and he sat me aside, and he taught me how to be a Manager, “Here’s how you make the Plant Manager happy. Here're the reports he’s looking for. Here’s the information that they need to do their jobs. You make him happy; your job’s going to be much better.” And, if it hadn’t been for him, I probably wouldn’t have succeeded, and that was the real motivation for writing this book, Joe, is I want to pass along that information for that person who’s sitting at that desk with that same feeling I had and to be able to succeed.

Joe: *Well, you know, you talk about the mindset, The New Manager Mindset, what’s new about it?*

Bryan: Well, here’s the problem. They don’t teach any of this stuff to you in college, and I broke it down in my book into 4 main areas. The first thing is it doesn’t matter what you do in your job, you’re ultimately selling to a customer, and those customers have needs, and there're reasons why they’re buying your products. Whatever it is, you need to understand what those things are. So, in the first section of my book, I go into how to understand how that is and how to link that to your job and communicate that within the organization because the bigger the company, Joe, the farther you get removed from that, and you lose sight. But, ultimately, if you’re working for a food company, back to my ice cream example, if that customer is buying that ice cream and that’s not the experience that they expect, they’re not going to buy it again. They’re going to move onto something else. And then, the company goes downhill. So, that’s what I get into with the customer. The next section, Joe, is very unique in that I actually talk about the philosophy of business. Now, when’s the last time you heard that?

Joe: *I think you hear it on a higher level sometimes but maybe not at the level of a mid-Manager or Managerial level too often.*

Bryan: I'm not sure. I'm not even really talking about management books, really good books like Stephen Covey and things like this where they talk about the habits of effective leadership or getting into 'Getting Things Done' by David Allen and the books that I read over my career. This is kind of taking it up another level and really backing it out to philosophy. Examples of Aristotle and Plato at how you actually view the world. Is the world knowable and understandable and you can perform experiments to figure out what's the right thing to do? Or, is it this strange amorphous thing that changes around? Those basic views and everyone has a philosophy. Those basic views shape how you do your job and if we become conscious and aware of how those processes work, it gives you a gigantic advantage on how you do your job.

Joe: *Could you give me some examples?*

Bryan: Oh, absolutely. So, I worked with an individual early in my career, and this was a key learning point for me, and I go into a lot of detail in this book of how I learned this. We would sit down for meetings, and we would plan out over the course of the quarter how we were going to do things. Well, then the plan would go awry, and I would sit down with him and say "All right, let's figure out what went wrong here." And, he would pretend like those earlier conversations never happened. So, from his viewpoint, if he simply wiped out that reality, it never happened, but it did. And so, we had to learn from that and move forward if we were going to repeat that mistake. Ultimately, he didn't succeed in that job. Now, he was a very nice man. I enjoyed working with him but that philosophical view that he had, that he was completely unaware of, and I didn't know about it at that time to help him. But, that really hurt his career.

Joe: *How did you as a new Manager, I mean how long have you been in management now? Let me ask that question.*

Bryan: Well, so I'm in my late forties, and I've led quality assurance functions within food companies since I was 32.

Joe: *Okay. So, awhile now, right? But, I think one of the most specific things that I took from the book and listened to you talk beforehand and just a couple of e-mails with you is the reliance on that mentor.*

Bryan: Yes.

Joe: *Okay. How important is that for someone to have a mentor, let's say?*

Bryan: It's very important, and they've been down the path that you're going down. So, if you want to accelerate your growth, don't go out and just try and do it on your own. Learn from people who've been there before. If you want to start your own company, if you want to start a consulting firm, get yourself around like minded people and understand those principles that are necessary in order to be a successful manager. Generally, what people do, Joe, is they just kind of look around and try and mimic what other people are doing. Well, those other people don't necessarily know what they're doing either. Figure out who's excelling, approach them. People love to help other individuals within a company or even within their particular industry to succeed, and it's extremely important.

Joe: *Do you think companies do a good job as far as acquiring mentors for new managers?*

Bryan: No.

Joe: *Would that be something that you would think that should be part of, let's say, development before, during and maybe after when you become the mentor, right?*

Bryan: As an example, if you're working in a production facility, so you're brand new in a plant, and you start your job. You're assigned someone to train and in most jobs in life; you get someone to train you, for Manager, no. Now, with that training part that happens in a plant or at a single contributor level, they're helping you, and they're helping to develop you, but they're also evaluating you, "Is this the right person for the job? Can they perform it quickly and accurately?" Or, "Okay, they're doing the job, but this person needs some oversight." Or, "This is not the right person for the job. We need to move him to something else or find a replacement right away because it's just not going to work out."

Joe: *As a new Manager, what are some of the pitfalls that you face when you sit at that desk the first time?*

Bryan: It's that fear. It's the fear of the unknown, and that grips all of us. You're in a new role, and you're not quite sure what to do. So, you go to the meetings, and you don't say anything, and you wait for someone to say something and then you latch onto that. It's, once again, it's that guidance piece. So, the biggest fear and this is kind of where the cover of my book came from, which is a person sitting behind a computer, sweat pouring off around their head of "Oh my goodness, what am I going to do?" It's that during the headlights, "What do I do?" but you're too proud to ask. That can really sink your career quickly.

Joe: *When I'm sitting here thinking about the rational thinking and practical tools, is that*

what you kind of centered upon in the book? I mean the more 'how to' and the, you know, 'nuts and bolts' of things.

Bryan: The next section in the book, so the first section is on the customer, the next section's what we're talking about now is this philosophy of business and how you look at the world. The next section in is systems. So, how do you put together the proper systems to do your job? Now, most people look at it in terms of their role, but everything in a company is interconnected. So, quality and business and sales and the executive leadership and operations and legal, all of those are interconnected and those people who'll manage those functions are in the same position as you. If you can go in and explain this framework and systems within that philosophical framework and help them develop out their jobs, your career is really going to move up quickly.

Joe: *What was the fourth section there? You said you had 4 sections there.*

Bryan: The fourth section, Joe, is you can't do this on your own. You have to surround yourself with excellent people in order to do that, and you have to be very selective about whom you hire, not only from a skill set, "Can they actually do the job?" But, is this somebody who fits in with the culture of the company, who can help contribute to it? And, is this somebody I want to work with? Is this somebody I can enjoy being with at work, who sees things from the same mindset as I do and we can help and collaborate these things. When people are on my team, I'm not their boss. We're part of the team. We're all working on these things together. And, there's, I'll throw this question at you, this is one of the things that I always ask every candidate that I interview, and it's this question, "As you look back over your career and all the wonderful things that you've done so far, what are the top 3 things that you're most proud of?"

Joe: *No, I think that's a great question to ask people. It really does is that something should pop right away. What pops with me is when I left the company after being the President of it for, I don't know, 5, 6, 7 years or whatever and being the General Manager for another 5 but when I left that company, it continued to be successful, and I thought that was the biggest compliment I could take. If I would've left and it would've failed, that would have meant that I really didn't develop people.*

Bryan: That's one of the, and that's what it all comes to, and that's why I included people development in the last section of my book because it all comes back to that is building out that team and helping through mentorships and developing people on your teams to get to that next level. I've had the privilege through my career. So, I'm a vice-President of quality, and I've had the privilege of helping other individuals within organizations, other food companies to reach that level as well, and I'm extremely proud of that.

Joe: *I have to ask you. How do you think your background in quality and risk helped you in management? I mean did that play a role that it really did assist you in management?*

Bryan: Every department within a company, Joe, has systems. Everybody has processes of how to do things. A lot of times within companies, you'll build up a legacy of things that were done in the past that are no longer required. Well, one of the things that I do in quality when I come into companies, that one of my expertise is really coming in and building out those structures and systems, and this goes back to the risk piece of it. To help companies cut through all that clutter, that's the philosophical side of it. Generally, when I go in within quality systems and overall processes within companies, I remove about 60% of the documentation from the quality systems because it's not needed. It's not focusing in on what does the customer want. How do we make sure that the food is safe? Is this through a right way to do it? Does everybody have realistic, understandable

expectations that are grounded in reality and those overall objectives? Tying these things altogether, which is why in this book I deliberately did not focus on quality because the quality is everything within a company. The quality department is, for lack of a better term, the conscience of the organization. We're the group who is saying "This is right. This is wrong. This is good. This is bad. But, if everything is working correctly, just like when you were the leader of your company, Joe, they are person who's coming to you and letting you know 'how things are going' and 'what's correct parameter of how things should be going'.

Joe: *The book just published, okay. What're your expectations of it? Why did you write the book? I mean you wanted to share the information you had and then did you express yourself but what're your expectations of the book?*

Bryan: Working within a role within a company you have a very limited scope of who I can teach this to. Through my company I'm able to do that to some extent as well, but I wanted to contribute more and give back this information to more people and seeing where it goes I'm absolutely convinced there're ways that when people read this book, and they apply it to how they're doing their job, I wouldn't be completely surprised when people get back to me and tell me how it actually works in other roles within other companies in industries that I know nothing about, so semiconductors or whatever. It's going to be fascinating, and the book's been out just a week now. It's number 1 in philosophers, and I put it in that category on purpose. And, it's also number 1 under management, I mean, sorry, number 6 for Team Development under Management. So, very proud of that, so hopefully we get the word out, and we're able to help as many people as possible.

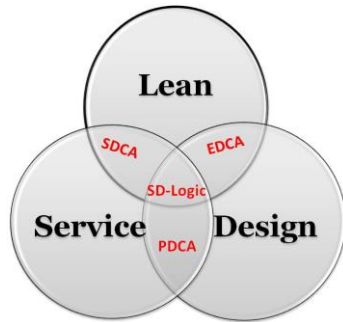
Joe: *Well, I would like to thank you very much for your time today on this, you know, cheery Saturday morning we have here. Bryan, what's the best way for someone to get a*

hold of you and learn more about what you're doing?

Bryan: Ah, yes, good points. So, the usual suspects are I'm on LinkedIn so Bryan Armentrout, so B-R-Y-A-N and my last name A-R-M-E-N-T-R-O-U-T. It's one of those names you get used to spelling. Facebook, my book, you can search for NewManagerMindset.com, and that will get you more information on what we talked about here today and, of course, Amazon.

Joe: *Well, that sounds excellent. This podcast will be available in the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 blogsite. So, thanks again, Bryan.*

Bryan: Well, thank you. Appreciate it.



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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