

How have past challenges shaped your journey?

Lily: So, tell us Mike about a challenge that you've experienced, and how it has shaped your life.

Michael: We've alluded a little bit to the dysfunction that I experienced in my work. To be totally transparent, there were two different times that I went to organizations, colleges, and universities, where there was significant turnaround. Millions of dollars in results in positive turnaround, enrollment increase, hundreds of students, where my contract was not renewed or in one case I was asked to resign. For me, that just blew my mind.

There were multiple reasons for that; some of them had to do with the organization, and the leadership was not prepared for the work that would be required to accomplish the vision they had. Some of it had to do with my leadership posture. The structure that I created. The way that I worked with people, among other things. Some of it simply had to do with, I wasn't the decision maker, and other people who had great ideas went out on a position to implement those ideas.

I remember standing in the kitchen, in Clemson, South Carolina. Probably 7 or 8 years ago, now. My wife said to me — where I was telling her about the dysfunction I was experiencing and complaining, you know like we always do to our spouses and significant other. She said, "Mike, for about six months I felt like there's a part of you that's dying and I don't know if you're ever going to get it back." At that moment, in fact, I'll never forget her saying this, it's really become a part of our story. I realized that I was in a mess, and it was not only affecting my work life, but now I'm bringing that into our home and into our family. My first thought was, "If you told me that 6 months ago, it would have saved us a lot of pain or whatever."

Lily: You probably weren't ready to receive it 6 months prior.

Michael: She said, and that's probably true, but what she said to me was, "No, I wanted you to be able to process it yourself without added pressure from me." And I thought that was very wise on her part. Really from that moment, coupled with the things that I heard from Mark Miller and the things that I heard from Andy Stanley, I really became a student of my wife, my kids and that's where the vision for our work today was started. I want to help people. In fact, the way my daughter has said it, "We want to help people get the help they need even if they can't pay for it." And so, we're working with a lot of big companies that can pay for it to allow

us to help non-profits and even faith-oriented organizations get some of these same high-value resources even if they can't pay for it. So, it's significantly rewarding work, a lot of fun.

Lily: Wow, that's great.

Michael: Here's the thing, and this is a great quote for your listeners today too. For all of you that are listening, "We can never be great leaders until the mess becomes our message." We will never be a great leader until the mess becomes our message. And I think that's something that took me over 40 years to realize myself that I was running from the mess or trying to problem solve around the mess and life is not a problem to be solved; it's an adventure to be lived.

Lily: John Eldredge, what was his book that I read?

Michael: Wild at Heart.

Lily: Yes! Love that book.